



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties  
under Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

**Combined sixth and seventh periodic report of States parties**

**Lao People's Democratic Republic\***

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\* The present report is being issued without formal editing.



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## **Part I: General Introduction**

### **1. Background**

The Lao People's Democratic Republic ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1981. Over the past years, the Lao People's Democratic Republic had submitted its combined first, second, third, fourth and fifth report. The report was examined by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 2005. In accordance with Art. 18 of the Convention, the Committee has requested the Lao PDR to submit the 6<sup>th</sup> report by September 2002 and the 7<sup>th</sup> report by late September 2006 in a combined report.

This combined 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> periodic report introduces the progress made in the implementation of CEDAW, reflecting development in various fields covered by the Convention:

- Part 1 presents general overview of the country's socio-economic development, including the situation and the status of the Lao women,
- Part 2 provides an assessment of the implementation of CEDAW from Article 1 to Article 16,
- Part 3 presents concluding remarks and recommendations.

This report is a result of numerous studies and consultations among various bodies and agencies, in particular, the Lao Women's Unions and the Lao National Commissions for the Advancement of Women at the central, provincial, district and village levels. A data collecting team was set up and trainings for the team members were organized as well as consultations with villagers and local people were conducted with a view to conducting an assessment and identifying problems and difficulties in the advancement of women. In addition, national and provincial consultative meetings were also held to engage all Government agencies, the UN system and NGOs in a joint dialogue.

The significant progress in the implementation of CEDAW has been recorded. The mechanism for the advancement of women has been reviewed and strengthened. The Constitution and laws related to the rights of women have been amended. There has been a gradual improvement in education and health sector. As regard education, the woman literacy rate has increased. Girls, especially those in the ethnic, remote areas now receive better education. In the health sector, the maternal and infant mortality rates have decreased. The role of women in family and the society has been constantly raised. Women's rights have been better protected. Women have more opportunities and are in a better condition to enhance their self-development as well as become more dynamic in the process of social development. More women participate in a decision making process. Women have access to credit, poverty reduction funds and land, thus enabling them to engage in business and play more important role in income generation of the family.

### **2. Development Situation in the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic**

#### **a) Population**

According to the 2005 Census, the Lao PDR has a population of about 5.62 millions, of whom 2.82 millions are female. This clearly indicates that women and men almost share equal number.

Since the 1995 Census, the population has increased by 1.04 millions people or 2.1 percent annually. The structure of the Lao population is young, about 50 percent of the population is under twenty. However, the number of young population under 15 has decreased from 44 percent in 1995 to 39 percent. Male and female working age population has also relatively increased.

The Lao PDR is one of the most multi-ethnic nations in the world. There are 49 official ethnic groups and 4 major language groups in the country: Lao-Thai accounts for 66.7 percent; Mon-Khmer 20.6 percent, Hmong-Mien 8.4 percent, Chine-Tibet 3.3 percent and others 1 percent.

The majority of the Lao population or about 67 percent are Buddhist, 1.5 percent Christian, less than 1 percent is Muslim and Bahai, and approximately 30.9 percent of the population believe in other religions.

## **b) Political Situation**

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a state of people's democracy. All powers belong to the people, by the people and for the interests of the Lao multi-ethnic people. It is a state governed by the rule of law. The right of the Lao multi-ethnic people as the master of the country are exercised and ensured through the functioning of the political system with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party as its leading nucleus. The people elect a body that represents their powers and interests called National Assembly. The election of members of the National Assembly is carried out through the principles of universal equal direct suffrage and secret balloting.

The Government of the Lao PDR consists of 13 Ministries and the Ministry-equivalent organs. The local administration is composed of 16 provinces and the Capital City, Vientiane, 139 districts and 10.292 villages.

The Lao Front for National Construction, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions, the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union, the Lao Women's Union and other social organizations are the organs to unite and mobilize all strata of the Lao multi-ethnic people in carrying out the tasks of protection and development of the country; to develop the right of self-determination of the people and to protect the legitimate rights and interests of members of their respective organizations.

Besides, there exist also a system of People's Court and Prosecutor. Currently, the Lao PDR has 63 laws and a number of resolutions and regulations. Since the last report, the National Assembly has adopted another 19 laws, amended the Constitution and a number of laws with a view to responding to the current development in the country.

In brief, the Lao PDR has a strong and secured political system and ensures political stability that has created conducive conditions for socio-economic development.

### **c) Economic Situation**

The economy of the Lao PDR is mainly an agriculture-based economy. The GDP per capita is \$US 491 in 2005. Between 2001 and 2005, the economy of Lao PDR grew steadily. The GDP growth rate was about 6.24% per year. The economic structure has substantially changed. Agriculture as share of GDP has declined gradually from 51,9% in 2000 to 45,4% in 2005, whereas the share of industry and construction has gradually increased from 22.4% in 2000 to 28.2% in 2005 and service was up from 25.7% in 2000 to 26.4% in 2005. In general, the investment in mining, hydropower, export of agricultural and industrial products and service is also on the rise.

Over the past 5 years, the total export has amounted to US\$ 1,83 billions, accounting for 7.1 percent increase annually while import has reached US\$ 2,86 billions representing a 4.9 percent annual increase on average. The Government's policy on international cooperation has led the country to gradual integration into the regional and international economy, and to more open markets for the Country's exports giving opportunities to the Lao PDR to export to more 40 countries. The Lao PDR has joined AFTA and undertaken necessary steps in the preparation for the WTO membership.

The international assistance also played an important role in the national socio-economic development. Over the past five years between 2001 and 2005, the total Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the Lao PDR was US\$ 935 millions averaging US\$ 187 millions per year. In addition, the contribution from the Government was about US\$ 115 millions. In the same period between 2001 and 2005, 585 foreign direct investment (FDI) projects accounting for US\$ 2.8 billions were approved.

### **d) Social Development**

Poverty in Lao PDR has been gradually reduced from 46 percent in 1992/1993 to 39 percent in 1997/98, to 33.5 percent in 2002/2003 and by 2005 it stood at 28.7%. It is expected to drop to 23 percent by 2010.

According to the 2005 Census, the unemployment rate was 1.4 percent compared to 2.4 percent in 1995. Life expectancy in 2005 was 63 for women and 59 for men while in 1995 it was 52 and 50 for women and men respectively.

The social development indicator has also been improved. The Government paid more attention on developing quality national education, creating opportunities and conditions that provide access to education for all, thus leading to eradication of illiteracy. In the health sector, in order to ensure good public health, the Government has developed and improved a comprehensive preventive and health treatment system, thus providing opportunities for all, especially mothers and children, poor people and people living in the rural and remote areas to have access to health care services.

The Labor Law has been amended. Trainers have been trained, vocational and skilled labor trainings were conducted. In additions, private sector has been encouraged to participate more in the skilled labor development.

### 3. General Situation of Lao Women

According to the 2005 Census, the Lao PDR has a total population of 5.62 millions, of whom 2.82 millions are women. This clearly shows that female and male population is almost equal. However, among the female population, 39 percent are at the age between 0-14, 57 percent are between 15 and 64, and about 4 percent are 65 or older.

Currently, there is no gender disaggregated data on poverty. However, the study has shown that women have played a greater role in food security and health care of the family. Poverty is mostly found in rural and remote areas, especially among women. They always work harder than men. According to the third survey on Lao expenditure and consumption in 2002-2003 (LECS 3), both men and women spent almost equal amount of time in agriculture. Women spent 2.3 hours while men did 2.5 hours per day. In addition, women spent 2.6 hours for household chores while men spent only 0.6 hours.

In general, although education of women has improved, the literacy rate of women is still lower than that of men. Only 63 percent of women are literate while the literacy rate of men is 83 percent. The school enrollment rate of girls is also lower than that of boys due to various causes such as family poverty, too many children in a family, lack of income and etc.

Over the past decades, the health status of women has generally been improved. The maternal mortality rate has decreased from 656 people per 100,000 births in 1995 to 530 in 2000, and to 405 people in 2005. Infant mortality rate has also dropped from 104 per 1000 infants in 1995 to 82 in 2000 and to 70 in 2005. Between 1995 and 2005, although the fertility rate has reduced from 5.6 to 4.6 per woman of the reproductive age, the rate still remains as the highest in South East Asia. The fertility rate of women living in rural areas is as high as 5.4 people compared with only 2.8 people for women living in urban areas.

The Lao women play an important role in the economic sector. They account for 52 percent of the overall labor force. Women involve in agricultural activities, income generation, small and medium sized businesses. Nonetheless, women still have limited access to credit and business information. Women usually engage in temporary and seasonal employment. The average wage of female labor is low in enterprises.

Due to their limited level of education and labor skills, women in rural areas have less chance to be employed. Because of economic reason, women aged from 17-45 with less education have to migrate to a neighboring country, especially to Thailand in order to seek employment, where some of them have been exploited while others are sold to prostitution. Some are infected with STD and HIV/AIDS. The adolescents moving from rural to urban areas are also at high risk of such infection.

Women make up less than 10% of the total number of ministers and directors general. However, the number of women in the National Assembly has gone up to 25 percent in the sixth legislature of the National Assembly. In the local administration, the role of women is still limited. For example, in 2006, only 4 out of the 139 district chiefs were women. There are only 132 female village

chiefs or 1.28% of the total 10.292 village chiefs, while deputy village chiefs accounts only for 4.11% of that.

## **Part II: Report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

### **Article 1: Definition of Discrimination Against Women**

*“Discrimination Against Women” means any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”*

The amended Constitution of 2003 clearly stipulates the policy of the Government on the promotion of gender equality without discrimination, which is reflected in some of the following Articles:

Article 8: *“the State pursues the policy of promoting unity and equality among all ethnic groups. All ethnic groups have the right to protect, preserve and promote the fine customs and cultures of their own tribes and of the nation. All acts creating division and discrimination among ethnic groups are prohibited; The State implements every measure to gradually develop and upgrade the socio-economic levels of all ethnic groups”.*

Article 35: *“All Lao citizens are equal before the law irrespective of their gender, social status, education, beliefs and ethnicity”.*

Article 37: *“Lao citizens of both genders enjoy equal rights in the political, economic, culture and social fields and in family affairs”.*

The Lao PDR has specifically defined the term “discrimination against women”, in the Prime Minister Decree, No. 26/PM, dated 06 Feb 2006, on the Implementation of Law on Development and Protection of Women, Article 2: *“discrimination against women is all forms of act creating division, exclusion or restriction toward women made on the basis of sex, depriving women of social respect for their rights, gender equality, human rights, freedoms in political, economic, cultural, social or any other field.”*

Article 13 of the Law on Development and Protection of Women stipulates that *“equal right of women and men means equal right to self-development. Women and men have the same value and opportunities in politics, economy, socio-culture, families, national defense and security and foreign affairs as stipulated in the Constitution and laws.”*

Article 177 of the Penal Law (2005) defines discrimination against women: *“any person creating discrimination, division, exclusion, restriction of the participation of women in political, economic,*

*cultural-social, and family affairs, on the basis of sex, that person shall be punished by one to five years of imprisonment, and shall be fined from 1,000,000 kip to 3,000,000 kip.”*

It is obvious that the definition of discrimination against women is very similar to that contained in CEDAW. The Lao PDR has amended the Constitution that provides a basis for the advancement of women, whereas the Penal Law clearly defines penalties for the act of discrimination against women.

## **Article 2: Obligations to Eliminate Discrimination**

*State parties condemn discrimination against women in its all forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and, to this end, undertake:*

*a). To embody the principle of the equality of men and women in all their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation if not yet incorporated therein and to ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the practical realization of this principle;*

*b). To adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women;*

*c). To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure through competent national tribunals and other public institutions the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination;*

*d). To refrain from engaging in any act or practices of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation;*

*e). To take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise;*

*f). To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women;*

*g). To repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women.*

The Lao National Assembly has amended the Constitution and revised a number of laws in order, *inter alia*, to prevent any discrimination. Article 29 of 2003 amended Constitution states, “[t]he State, society and families attend to implementing development policies and supporting the progress of women and to protecting the legitimate rights and benefits of women and children.”

Furthermore, in October 2004 the National Assembly adopted the Law on the Development and Protection of Women. This Law aims to promote and advance the role of women. The rights of women are widely reflected in many articles. Since its adoption, the Lao Government has disseminated and implemented this Law.

In 2006, the National Assembly adopted the amendments of the Labor Law that increases the retirement age for women in the field of production, business and services from 55 to 60 years, which is equal to that of men.

### Article 3: Development and Advancement of Women

*States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.*

The Lao PDR has recorded considerable achievements in the development and advancement of women, which can be reflected as follows:

The National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW) is an organization created by the Prime Minister's Decree N. 37/PM of 1 April 2003. The said Decree defines the following functions and activities of NCAW: assist the Government in studying and defining a national policy, comprehensive strategic plan for the promotion of the advancement of women in all respects; serve as coordinating point for all relevant agencies and bodies within the country and abroad in the implementation of policy on gender equality and elimination of all forms of discrimination against women". The Prime Minister Decree also defines that the main objectives and activities of NCAW are "to encourage, promote and protect the legitimate rights and interests of women in all fields: political, economic, social, cultural and family as provided for in the policy of the Party and Government, the Constitution and laws, as well as in various international instruments adhered to by the Lao PDR; to ensure the realization of those policies across the country with a view to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women". NCAW has the following main responsibilities:

1. Prepare a strategic plan, national policy on the promotion of the advancement of women in all fields to be submitted to the Government for consideration and adoption;
2. Recommend all sectors at the central and local levels and all concerned agencies to integrate gender into all aspects of their activities;
3. Advocate, disseminate and advise on the implementation of the Party's policies, the Constitution, laws and regulations of the Government, the international instruments concerning the legitimate rights and interests of women and the advancement of women.
4. Encourage and monitor the implementation by all institutions at the central and local levels of the Party's policies, the Constitution, laws and regulations of the Government, the international instruments concerning the legitimate rights and interests of women and the advancement of women;
5. Translate, edit the translation and publish the relevant international conventions, agreements, action plans concerning women;
6. Interact and coordinate with international organizations to seek financial, technical assistance and experiences for the promotion and the advancement and the protection of the legitimate interests of women;
7. Participate in national and international forums in order to closely follow the issues concerning the promotion of the advancement of women;
8. Prepare a national report on the implementation of CEDAW and international programs of action for consideration by the Government and submission to the concerned international

bodies accordingly; provide information on the Lao women to all concerned agencies within the country and abroad;

9. Encourage and seek financial contributions and expertise from individuals, judicial persons and social organizations in the country towards to the promotion of the advancement of women; prepare a yearly budget for its activities to be submitted to the Government for consideration.

In order to enable the NCAW to effectively perform its functions, the Prime Minister has issued an Order N.30/PM of 23 December 2004, instructing ministries, government institutions and local administrations to set up their own committees for the advancement of women. At the ministry level it is called ministerial committee for the advancement of women, at the ministry-equivalent organization, it is named ministry-equivalent committee for the advancement of women, and at the provincial level, it is called provincial committee for the advancement of women. These committees are mandated to coordinate the implementation of laws, policies and programs for the advancement of women within the sectors and the local administration concerned; they regularly report on their plans of activities and the implementation thereof to the NCAW. At the ministerial level, the Prime Minister's Order names a vice minister of the relevant ministry to head the ministerial committee. The ministerial committee for the advancement of women is composed of 5-7 representatives of the department of planning and budget, the department of personnel, the president of the ministerial women's union and a number of officials from the concerned departments of the ministry in question as appropriate so that the committee can fully discharge its functions. At the provincial level, a vice-governor of the province in question heads the provincial committee for the advancement of women.

NCAW attaches great attention to the development of its organizational structure. To date, 13 ministries, 16 ministry equivalent organizations, 16 provinces and the Capital City Vientiane have already established their own committees on the advancement of women. NCAW has improved its capacity, conducted seminars on national policy on the advancement of women and CEDAW. Since its establishment, it should be noted that the NCAW has grown more substantially.

NCAW has prepared a national policy plan on the advancement of women for the period 2006-2010, which is in line with the Beijing Platform of Action, the relevant international treaties and MDGs. This national policy plan aims at removing the obstacles to the advancement of women. It was approved by the Prime Minister on 30 January 2006. This national policy plan consists of five programs as follows:

1. Improve the participation of women in the implementation of the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy;
2. Promote opportunities for women and girls to be equal with men in education and other fields;
3. Improve healthcare services for women;
4. Increase the number of women in the leading positions of all levels; and
5. Strengthen the capacity building of national organizations concerned that deal with the protection of women and the promotion of the advancement of women.

The Government has given responsibility to the line ministries, organizations and provinces to draw up strategies and plans of action in order to mainstream gender equality into all sectors at the provincial, district and village levels under the leadership of NCAW. To date, a number of ministries have done so, while some are in the process of setting up a team responsible for gender mainstreaming, advocating and building related capacity for the government officials, collecting relevant information and documents and assessing gender mainstreaming in their own agencies. Sex-disaggregated data on poverty alleviation has started to be collected. Some units have conducted studies to identify problems that hinder women's role with a view to formulating strategic and action plans to address such problems. Some ministries have enhanced personnel development while taking into account gender equality. At the same time, policies, programs and projects that focus on gender equality have been improved. Advises and recommendations on how to design a gender related poverty eradication have been given to local women in order to ensure their participation in the project activities, including the expansion, management and services of such projects as well as in all trainings.

The Secretariat of the NCAW was established by the Decision of the Deputy Prime Minister, Chairperson of the NCAW, N.05/ncaw of 1 March 2004. The Decision defines the functions of the NCAW Secretariat namely, providing overall and direct supports to NCAW, undertaking studies and researches on policies, strategic plans on the advancement of women; coordinating among all relevant national and international bodies and agencies in the implementation of the action plan of NCAW. In addition, the NCAW has issued a Notification No. 51/ncaw of 18 October 2006 on the establishment of a subsidiary unit of the ministerial and provincial committees for the advancement of women. Such a unit has 3-5 members and functions under the direction of the respective ministerial and provincial committee for the advancement of women.

The Prime Minister has issued an Order N.12/PM on NCAW budget, which is the second category budget affiliated to the budget of the Prime Minister Office. The Order also instructs the Ministry of Finance to add a budget line for the advancement of women in the Government's budget, starting from the fiscal year 2007-2008 onwards. All of this points to the fact that the Government of the Lao PDR attaches great attention to the empowerment and advancement of women, and considers it as a matter of priority.

## **Lao Women Union**

Since its inception in 1955, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party has established the Lao Women Union (LWU). LWU is an organization equivalent to a ministry. It has an organizational structure that expands from the central to the grass-root levels. It is mandated to protect the interests of women and children by upholding its role in forging solidarity among the Lao multi-ethnic women, to educate women about their rights and national duties and to actively contribute to the implementation of national socio-economic development as well as to actively promote the implementation of policy on gender equality and the advancement of women with an aim to improving the living standard of all Lao people, particularly the Lao multi-ethnic women. In 2006, the Lao Women Union's 5<sup>th</sup> Congress reaffirmed the so-called "Slogan of Three Good" namely: "To be Good Citizen, To have Good Development and To build a happy Family". The number of the LWU

members across nationwide reached 1,011,595 making almost half of all Lao women in 2006. The LWU has expanded its organizational network across 399 villages, which did not have their own women unions before. Today, the LWU has made a great effort to mainstream gender perspective into all areas of work with a view to promoting the participation of women in decision making process at all levels as well as to carrying out the socio-economic development at the grass-root level through implementing the five-year plan on women development 2006-2010.

### **Implementation of the five-year development plan of LWU (2001-2005)**

To date, the number of female public servants has made up 39 percent of all public servants in the country. The proportion of women in the Party's organizations has also increased. There are 19,163 female members of the Party, which accounts for 13,44 percent of all Party members across the country, while in 2001 there were only 6,634 or about 12.1 percent. Four women have been elected members of the Party Central Committee, of whom one has been elected a member of the Party Politburo. There are 43 women holding high-ranking positions such as Party's deputy secretary general, member of standing committees and members of provincial party committees, Vientiane capital city, special zone, ministries and institutions at the central level. At the district level, 155 women were elected as members of district standing and party committees; 898 women have become heads or member of board of party cells.

Four female leaders have been promoted to district chiefs, two were promoted to deputy district chiefs and 132 women were elected village chiefs.

Four groups of sixty high-ranking officials of LWU attended leadership training courses in Vietnam. Twenty female officials had an opportunity to undertake their PhD or equivalent, 208 women have Master Degree or equivalent and one woman has been conferred a Professor and four are Associate Professors.

LWU has improved their counseling network, organized trainings to improve knowledge, technical skills on counseling for the LWU leadership and some technical officials from the central and local levels. LWU has already provided 6,129 counseling services, completed the construction of one Center for Counseling and Protection of Women and Children in Vientiane Capital City.

LWU has carried out five programmes, 16 development projects in Vientiane Capital, in 16 provinces and in one special zone (formerly called Special Zone), or as a whole all in 55 districts and 1,826 villages. The main activities of the projects were to organize trainings on improving knowledge and capacity of women in the fields such as development of women and children, promotion of gender equality, anti-trafficking in women, domestic violence against women, basic health services, preservation and promotion of national and woman culture. They also focused on trainings on improving vocational-technical skills, provision of jobs and appropriate knowledge on technology, promotion of commercial production, reduction of hardship of women, provision of loans and revolving funds, promotion of handicrafts and agricultural work with a view to income generation for their families, thus gradually reducing poverty.

The Training Center for Lao women together with the Vocational Training Center has developed curriculum, handbooks and organized trainings of trainers for poor women in the area of culinary and hospitality, natural drying, sewing, beauty salon with an aim to enable them to have jobs, which would contribute to increasing their family incomes.

Since 1997, the Gender Resource Information and Development Center( GRID) under the supervision of LWU has played a vital role in advocating gender issue and the empowerment of women through raising awareness on gender, promoting knowledge on gender perspective analysis for government officials at all levels with a view to ensuring gender mainstreaming into all areas and programs. As a technical unit, GRID has set up a team of trainers to conduct trainings on gender issues. The team is consisted of 96 trainers of whom 60 are women and 36 are men including researchers from the central and provincial levels. The unit has conducted a number of trainings on gender perspective at all levels, where 4500 people attended of whom 2600 were women. Furthermore, GRID has also produced training materials and conducted researches and analysis on gender issues, as well as widely disseminated their successful outcomes, the information and database of which have been compiled and maintained 5 libraries of GRID and in the library of the National University of Laos. In early 2000, on the proposal of LWU, the Prime Minister's Office issued Notification, No. 0009/PM, dated 5 January 2000, on the application of sex disaggregated data in the general system of the National Statistics Center and in the socio-economic planning. In late 2004, the Prime Minister's Office issued an additional Notification on Guidelines for actual implementation of sex-disaggregated data. As a result, GRID and the National Statistics Center have disseminated the content of those Notifications as well as the importance of sex disaggregated data among concerned organizations in order to ensure the full implementation of this Notification and increased availability of sex disaggregated data. All this has reflected the attention attached to gender equality by the Lao Government. In addition, there are other social organizations that work to promote the advancement of women such as the Association of Lao Leaders' Spouses, the Lao Female Entrepreneurs' Association and the Lao Disabled People's Association.

LWU encourages the establishment and improvement of various associations such as the Association of Senior Female Officials, the Association of the Lao Female Entrepreneurs, the Female Dealer Association and other bodies. The Lao Disabled People's Association represents disabled persons of all ethnic groups throughout the country. It is mandated to improve the livelihood of persons with disabilities; protect and promote the rights of disabled persons of all ethnic groups, ensure their access to services and opportunities for self-development, family and full participation in the society as well as in the development of national prosperity. The main activities of the Lao Disabled People's Association include expansion of the Association's membership (establishment of provincial branches), promotion of income generation among disabled groups such as weaving, tailoring, farming, livestock as well as conducting a series of trainings on the rights and equality for disabled people, and encouraging disabled persons to undertake the study from primary to tertiary level.

The Lao Female Entrepreneurs' Association has been set up, later on it has improved its organizational structure and expanded its membership. The Association organized meetings, trainings

to exchange lessons-learnt and experiences as well as disseminated knowledge and information on marketing.

The Lao Government has revised the national policy on population and development in 2006 by focusing on women and children. The policy, among other things, allows a couple to determine how many children they want and birth spacing; promotes the reproductive right; aims to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates, to improve the capacity of various mechanisms in order to integrate gender perspective into all sectors, improve access by women of all ethnic groups to social services and reduce the cross-border labor migration and trafficking in human beings.

### **Women participation in drafting process of the Constitution and legislations**

Representing the legitimate rights and interests of women and children, the LWU executive committees at all levels have actively participated in the process of drafting and reviewing of the Constitution, legislations and policies concerning the legitimate rights and interests of women and children. They have taken the lead in coordinating and drafting the Law on Development and Protection of Women and Children, which was adopted by the National Assembly and then officially promulgated by the President of the Lao PDR in 2004.

The National Assembly has also attached attention to the promotion of gender equality through mainstreaming gender perspective in the work of the National Assembly. The number of female members of the National Assembly has increased. The female members of the National Assembly have improved their management and leadership skill, legal knowledge and expression capacity. However, there is still a need to continue to improve skills and capacity of female members of the National Assembly in a more systematic manner to enable them to participate and enhance their role in the work of the National Assembly. There is also a need to raise awareness among the officials and members of the National Assembly about gender perspective, improve their legal knowledge, particularly the gender perspective in various laws, to create a system for the information dissemination on gender issue within the National Assembly, and provide opportunities for the National Assembly members, especially the female members to have more international exchange of lessons learnt and experiences at the international level, to further improve their knowledge, capacity and skills in the deliberation of the National Assembly.

### **Article 4: Acceleration of equality between men and women**

*Adoption by State Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.*

*Adoption by State Parties of special measures, including those measures contained in the present Convention, aimed at protecting maternity shall not be considered discriminatory.*

The Lao Government has adopted some special provisional measures to ensure equal rights among men and women in each of the area as follows:

### **Equal participation in politics**

Article 3 of the Law on the National Assembly Election (1997) stipulates that “*all Lao citizens regardless of their sex, ethnical groups, faith, social status, place of lodging, profession, who are 18 years of age, have the right to vote; any one from 21 years of age has the right to be elected as a National Assembly Member.*”

During an election of the National Assembly, the election committee determines a targeted number of female candidates to be elected to the National Assembly and helps female candidates to improve their capacity. Therefore, there are 29 women being elected to the sixth legislature of the National Assembly, making up 25 percent of all members of the National Assembly.

The Party has paid attention to building up female leadership. In 2006 there were two female ministers, two female minister-equivalent, two female vice-ministers and seven vice-ministers equivalent. This indicates an improvement compared with previous years.

In addition, the NCAW strategy for the period from 2006-2010 defines targets for future leadership as follows: the number of female members of party executive committee at every level should account for 10%, female at leadership level of mass organizations and government agencies should be 20% and female leadership in the area of education, health, culture and business should account for 30%.

### **Education development for women 2001-2004**

The Government has taken interim special measures to improve education for women, particularly the Ministry of Education has implemented an education development plan for women for the period 2001-2004. As a result, the indicators of women education have been improved, for instance:

- The drop-out rate of female students in primary school decreased from 9.9 percent to 3.7 percent;
- Ratio of female teachers in the state secondary school increased from 43.9 percent to 44.8 percent and in the private secondary school went up from 20 percent to 36.6 percent;
- During 2001-2004, the enrollment gap between female and male students in vocational and technical schools still remained wide, but this gap has been significantly reduced from 28.6 percent to 10.4 percent;
- The Ministry of Education has continued to improve education system, provide financial supports, study kits and student uniforms to students in need and those in remote areas.

## Development of female human resources

In 2000 the Government formulated a Human Resource Development Strategic Plan for the period up to 2020. The Plan defines special policy measures aimed at further heightening the knowledge of women and ethnic groups.

### Article 5: Gender and Stereotype

*State parties shall take all appropriate measures:*

- a). To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieve the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women;*
- b). To ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases.*

Lao Government is deeply concerned about women's lower status in relation to that of men, particularly, of those who live in the rural areas of the country. In 2006, the LWU adopted a National Strategic Plan for the Promotion of Women's Advancement. During the period of 2001-2005, the LWU reviewed and improved materials, manuals, course programs for training in political theories, leadership in of women's unions, basic knowledge about gender equality, papers on historical evolution of Lao and international women and papers for technical and vocational trainings on various topics suitable for each targeted group. In addition, LWU has raised public awareness among LWU members, ethnic women, women of all strata and the public at large about international conventions relating to the rights and interests of women and children with a view to enabling them to deeply understand their rights and, thus protecting their own rights and interests, creating conditions for women to participate in the process of policy and decision making at all levels, as well as increasingly sharing the responsibilities in different sectors. The LWU has organized trainings on the Law on Development and Protection of Women and provided legal consultations for women.

Five Gender Resource Information and Development Centers established across the country have organized a series of regular trainings on gender. Now the centers provide training services to the public on many topics such as: gender awareness raising, gender-based planning, gender mainstreaming in different sectors, training of trainers on gender. These trainers will conduct training seminars on gender for officials from line ministries and various institutions across the country. The above mentioned seminars would help change traditional attitudes among government officials and general public towards gender issue. Besides, these centers have also organized seminars on gender issue for officials from the Ministry of Information and Culture and other ministries.

The LWU's media at all levels have actively carried out their duties. In collaboration with agencies concerned, the LWU's media has organized trainings for its staff so that they can improve the contents, techniques and formats of gender advocacy campaign by means of various writings, articles, photo exhibitions, women history exhibition, interviews of outstanding female personalities through

radio, TV, the LWU newspaper and others on the occasions of national important days with a view to disseminating the Party's policies, the State's laws and regulations, the culture and traditions of the Lao women and the nation, achievements of the Lao Women's Union and women of all ethnic groups. All this has provided all multi-ethnic women and social strata with access to more information about women activities that have increasingly expended.

In cooperation with LWU, the Ministry of Education is implementing basic education program (for girls), which has started since 1999 with an aim of encouraging parents to allow their children to go to school and providing opportunities for children, particularly, the ethnic girls and those in the rural, mountainous and remote areas to do so and to complete their basic education and continue to pursue their higher education. The Ministry of Education has integrated gender-based approach into the curriculum of primary education.

It is admitted that in the Lao society the stereotype still has an impact on girls in the family, school and society. In a family girls are expected to help mothers do a housework while boys are not. Men are considered as heads of families (about 90 percent of total number of families<sup>1</sup>). Therefore, men always represent the family in any meeting held by the authorities to discuss village development. Since women, especially ethnic women are illiterate; therefore, they cannot fully participate in the process of village development. Women are also restricted in terms of moving from one place to another by their tradition and custom that prevents them from working away from their villages.

Nevertheless, in general, the public awareness and attitude towards gender in the Lao society has improved.

#### **Article 6: Suppression of Trafficking in Women and Exploitation of Prostitution of Women**

*States parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.*

Exploitation of prostitution of women is an emerging problem and causes concern all over the world, as well as in the Lao PDR. The 2004 survey by the National University and Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare revealed that 35,7% of 4.235 women and children working in 73 service places in 12 cities of 4 provinces of the Lao PDR were deemed to be sexual service providers for clients. In the same case, 96,1% of interviewed women and children indicated that they were unaware of trafficking in women and children. Nevertheless, 7,9% of children showed that they had already been victims of human trafficking.

The main causes of the increase in prostitution include hard living conditions, lack of happiness in families, being cheated on the part of the victims. In addition, some girls and young women have to send money to support their parents. Financial pressure also forces them to earn extra

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 2005 Census.

income by working in restaurants, pubs and hotels as service providers, which often put them at risk of being sexually exploited by male clients.

Article 131 of Penal Code (2005) states *“Any person who makes a living by offering sexual service to other person shall be punished by imprisonment from three months to one year or be re-educated without imprisonment with a fine from 50.000 kip to 500.000 kip. Any person who assists or facilitates prostitution shall be punished by imprisonment from three months to one year or be re-educated without imprisonment with a fine from 300.000 kip to 1.000.000 kip.”*

Article 132 stipulates that *“Any person who makes profits from prostitution in whatsoever form shall be punished by imprisonment from six months to three years with a fine from 5.000.000 kip to 10.000.000 kip. In case the criminal has engaged in trade prostitution as an occupation or employed a female under eighteen years of age as prostitute, or forced a female under his/her guardianship to serve as prostitute shall be punished by imprisonment from three to five years with a fine from 10.000.000 kip to 50.000.000 kip.”*

Article 133 also refers to forced prostitution *“Any person who has forced other person to serve as a prostitute shall be punished by imprisonment from five to ten years with a fine from 10.000.000 kip to 20.000.000 kip. Any person has forced a child under eighteen years of age to serve as a prostitute shall be punished by imprisonment from ten to twenty years with a fine from 20.000.000 kip to 50.000.000 kip.”*

The Lao Government has made great efforts to collaborate with all sections of the society in order to combat and prevent negative phenomena in the society. At the end of 2004 the National Assembly adopted the Law on Development and Protection of Women. The law provides legal framework and measures to protect the legitimate interests of women and defines the obligations of the State, society and families in respect of the advancement of women and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, to prevent and combat trafficking in women and children, domestic violence against women and children. (National Commission for the Advancement of Women)

### **Trafficking in women and children**

The disparity in development between rural and urban areas, poverty and unemployment at villages are the main causes of the increasing migrant workers into urban areas and other countries. According to the current sources, many young Lao have migrated into neighboring countries to seek employment. Some of them have done so legally, but some illegally and sometimes with the help of outsiders, including parents or human traffickers. Many Lao nationals living along the borders are working in neighboring countries. This allows them to have income for their families, improve their living conditions and possibly to secure their better lives in the future.

According to the 2003 report on labor migration in Khamouan, Savanakheth and Champasak provinces, prepared by the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and the International Labor Organization, migrant workers accounted for 7% of the total population, of which 56% were women

and 44% were men. In the group age of 10 to 17 years old, there were more girl migrant workers than boys. Girls are at greater risk to fall victims of human trafficking and labor exploitation than their boy counterparts. Most migrant workers are among young (from 18-35 years old), accounted for as high as 74% of the total migrant workers.

According to the report of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, 60% of victims of trafficking were children aged between 12-18 and 35% were forced prostitutes, 32% became household servants, 17% worked in factories and 4% worked in fishery. Most of the victims were sold to Thailand. Beside this, the study found that migrants working in Thailand were aged between 15 and 25 and all of them were from poor families. The root causes for the migrant workers lie in the socio-economic reasons such as poverty of their families, family problems, being affected by negative impacts of modernization, etc.

The Lao law is stringent on trafficking in women and children. Article 134 of Penal Law (2005) defines trafficking in persons as *“Human trafficking is an act of finding or providing a hiding place for a person, delivering or receiving a person from inside or outside the country by cheating, threatening, coercing, imposing bondage of debt or by other forms of coercion, for the purpose of labor exploitation, prostitution, disseminating pornography and other things that are not in conformity with national cultural traditions, and for obtaining human organs or for other illegal benefits.*

*Such acts as mentioned above committed against children are also considered as human trafficking, even though they are committed without cheating, threatening, coercing, or imposing bondage of debt.*

*Any person has committed an act of human trafficking shall be punished by imprisonment from five to ten years with a fine from 10.000.000 kip to 100.000.000 kip and shall be confiscated of assets as provided in Article 32 of present law.*

*In case of recidivism, or organizing in group, or involving child victims or more than one victim, or the victim or victims are relatives of the criminals themselves, or are seriously injured, disabled or mentally impaired, the criminals shall be punished by imprisonment from fifteen to twenty years with a fine from 100.000.000 kip to 500.000.000 kip and assets shall be confiscated as provided in Article 32 of present law or face death penalty.*

*In case that the criminal act causes permanent disability, HIV/AIDS infection or death, the criminal shall be sentenced to life imprisonment and fined from 500.000.000 kip to 1.000.000.000 kip and assets shall be confiscated, or sentenced to death penalty as prescribed in Article 32 of the Law on Development and Protection of Women.*

The majority of general public is still unaware of human trafficking, especially its danger. The Court verdict is based on Article 75 of the Penal Law related to illegal immigration. Between 2005 and 2006, 382 cases of violence against women and children were resolved in courts. Of these there were 52 cases of rap, 160 cases involved husbands and wives, 69 cases of pornography, 15 cases of human trafficking and 13 cases of prostitution.

In cooperation with the international organizations and national agencies, the Lao Government is actively implementing 20 projects that directly and indirectly aim at combating human trafficking. The activities of these projects include formulation of policy on combating human trafficking, organization of seminars on human rights and trafficking in persons, enactment of the Law on Development and Protection of Women, drafting a new law for the protection of the rights and interests of children, dissemination of information on human trafficking and labor migration, provision of assistance to victims, fund raising activities, etc.

In 2005 the Lao Government and the Thai Government signed a bilateral agreement on combating trafficking in persons, particularly trafficking in women and children. The signing of the agreement has further enhanced the cooperation between the two countries in this field. From October 2001 to July 2007, the Thai Government has repatriated 951 victims of trafficking in persons to Laos, of these there were 6 children (aged less than 1 year), 34 boys and 911 women and girls.

To date, there are a number of organizations working to assist victims of human trafficking. They include Lao Women Union, Lao Youth Union (LYU), Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MLSW). Nevertheless, the lack of and limited related information, the Government is encountering difficulties in effectively combating this problem. The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare has developed a project to combat trafficking in women and children in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), which started in May 2000.

### **Domestic violence and rape**

According to the survey conducted by the Gender Development Group in 2003, 35 percent of 1.000 women suffered from emotional violence and 17 percent from physical violence. 15 women out of 1000 (or 1,6%) experienced sexual violence committed by their husbands. 19 women (1,9%) indicated that they were subject to violence during pregnancy. 25% were physically injured. Of the 57 cases, 14 cases resulted in injury that required medical treatment and 6 women were beaten to unconsciousness. Beside physical injuries, the violence also imposed an impact on women's mental health.

The survey reported that more than half of the victims of violence left their homes as they could not tolerate the violence. However, almost all of them returned to their husbands. In most cases of domestic violence, women looked for help from their family or village authority, who often advised them to stay with their husbands in order to identify responsibilities among husbands and wives and to try to improve their relations in the family.

Article 1 of the Law on Development and Protection of Women (2004) stipulates,

*“The Law on Development and Protection of Women is formulated to support and uphold women's status; to outline the basic contents; measures of development and protection of the legitimate interests of women; the responsibilities of State, society and families for women with a view to enhancing knowledge and capability; character; equality between men and women; to eradicate all forms of discriminations against women; to prevent and combat trafficking in women and children*

*and domestic violence; to create conditions for women to strongly and fully participate in the national defense and development”.*

Article 29 of the 2004 Law on Family defines “*A domestic violence against women and children is an act or omission committed by a person in the family which causes physical and/or mental harms to women and children and their properties in the family.*”

Article 128 of Penal Law (amended in 2005) defines an act of rape as follows: “*Any person who uses force or arms, soporific substances, drugs or other means against a woman, resulting in her unconsciousness for the purpose of rape shall be punished by imprisonment from three to five years with a fine from 1.000.000 kip to 5.000.000 kip*

*In case, the rape committed against a girl aged between fifteen to eighteen years old who is under his guardianship or in his medical treatment, the criminal shall be punished by imprisonment from five to ten years with a fine from 2.000.000 kip to 10.000.000 kip.*

*In case such an act of rape committed by several persons by way of in turn one after another, against a child under fifteen and causing physical injury or permanent handicap or death, the criminals shall be punished by imprisonment from seven to fifteen years with a fine from 5.000.000 kip to 15.000.000 kip.*

*In case the criminal commits an act of rape and kills, he shall be punished by imprisonment from fifteen to twenty years with a fine from 10.000.000 kip to 20.000.000 kip or by life imprisonment or by dead penalty. Any attempt to commit such crime shall also be punishable.”*

Article 129 of Penal Law (2005) provides, “*Any person who has sexual intercourse with a girl or boy less than fifteen years of age shall be punished by imprisonment from one to five years with a fine from 2.000.000 to 5.000.000 kip.*”

A study of text-books for primary education from grade 1 to grade 6 published by the Ministry of Education has shown that the textbooks contain gender bias. The Ministry of Education has, therefore, integrated gender equality into the new textbooks in order to ensure the balance of male and female role reflected in the text-book, which has been used as pilot textbooks since 2004. The new text-books reflect equal role played by boys and girls in a family daily routine activity, for example: girls and boys can play sports as well as do the household work.

Measures on combating pornographic films and magazines are very clear. Article 127 of Penal Law (2004) provides, “*Any person who has produced or widely distributed or deeply disseminated pornographic books, magazines, pictures, videos or other items undermining the national culture and tradition, shall be punished by imprisonment from three months to one year or be fined from 200.000 kip to 5.000.000 kip.*”

**Article 7: Political and Public life**

*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men the right:*

- 1. To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;*
- 2. To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;*
- 3. To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.*

The Lao PDR's Constitution and laws ensure gender equality as provided for in Article 37 of the amended Constitution. Article 36 stipulates “*Lao citizens who have reached the age of eighteen and above have the right to vote and those who has reached the age of twenty-first and above have the right to be elected, except insane persons, persons with mental disorder and persons whose rights to vote and to be elected have been revoked by the court.*”

In addition, the Law on Development and Protection of Women also provides equal rights, Article 14 states: “*The state ensures equal political rights for men and women, such as the right to vote and to run for election, to participate in public affairs, in the process of consideration and decision making on questions of national importance and to be appointed to appropriate positions in various organizations of the Party, Government, Lao Front for National Construction, mass and social organizations. Society and families shall create conditions for women to exercise all of the rights referred to in the present Article.*”

**Women as members of the political party**

Article 3 of the Constitution states “*The rights of multi-ethnic people to be the masters of the country are exercised and ensured through the functioning of political system with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party as its leading nucleus.*”

Among the 55 Members of the Central Committee of Lao People's Revolutionary Party, elected at the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, 4 Members are women. This is a positive development compared to previous Central Committee membership. Moreover, one of the women Members is also a member of the Politburo, the Party highest decision making body. To date, there are 22,012 female Party members or 12,1% of the total Party members nationwide.

**National Assembly**

The Lao PDR's Electoral Law, adopted in 1997, provides a basis for the increase of female deputies in the National Assembly. Article 7 of the Law states, “*It shall be ensured that the representatives of all social strata, of both sexes and of ethnic groups shall be included in the composition of the members of the National Assembly in appropriate proportion.*”

In order to better implement the Electoral Law, the LWU, in collaboration with the National Assembly, has conducted election campaign for women, pointing out the importance of involvement of women in National Assembly. In the 6<sup>th</sup> legislature of the National Assembly, there are 28 female members (25%) out of its 115 members and one of them holds the post of Vice-President of the National Assembly.

In order to implement the Gender Mainstreaming Plan within the National Assembly, adopted in 2004, training courses on gender equality for NA members have been organized, a number of National Assembly members are also attending study tours abroad in order to draw lessons learnt and experiences on the promotion of the advancement of woman parliamentarians from other countries.

### **Government of the Lao PDR**

The participation of women in the government has also increased, compared to the previous government. Now there are two female Ministers in the Government, while there was none in the past, two female Minister-equivalent, two female Vice-Ministers and seven female Vice-Ministers equivalent. In total, the number of women holding the ministerial post in the Government accounts for 13.6% while men make up 86.3% while women holding vice-ministerial post accounts for 22% and men 78%.

### **Local Administration**

The local administration is the State administration exercised by the local administration authorities. The local administration of the Lao PDR is divided into 3 levels, namely provincial, district and village levels. The country comprises 16 provinces and Vientiane Capital city, 139 districts and 10,292 villages.

Provincial governors are the heads of provincial authorities and the Mayor of Vientiane Capital is the head of Vientiane Capital Administration Authority. Provincial governors and the Mayor of Vientiane Capital are appointed, transferred or removed by the Lao PDR's President upon the request by the Prime Minister. The term in office of a provincial governor and the Mayor of the Capital is five years and may be reappointed no more than one additional term. The governor is the highest-ranking official at the provincial level.

Among the 16 provincial governors and the Mayor of Vientiane Capital, none is a woman. In each province there are also two vice-governors who are the direct assistants to the provincial governor. No woman is appointed vice-governor at this point of time. The provincial permanent secretaries comprise 1 woman and 17 men.

District chiefs are the heads of the district administration authorities, representing and responsible to the provincial and Capital authorities at the district level in the exercise of the district functions and powers and carrying out duties of the district administration. A district chief is appointed, transferred and removed by the provincial governor/mayor of the Capital. Each district chief has a five year term in office and may be reappointed no more than one additional term in the

same district. District chiefs are responsible for the application of the Constitution, laws, regulations and instructions from higher authorities.

A village administration authority's functions include the village administration affairs, economic, social and cultural development of the village, maintaining public security and order, preserves natural resources and environment in the village. A village administration authority is headed by a village chief. He is assisted with administration work by the village Deputy-chiefs and several village committees. A village chief is elected by the villagers and endorsed by the district or municipality chief. In case needs arise, a village chief may be appointed or dismissed by the district chief or municipality chief. Village chiefs are elected for a three-year term and may be reelected.

Village chiefs perform their duties in accordance with the direction given by the district chief. The village chief assumes the responsibility for the compliance with laws, regulations and instructions given by higher authorities. The village chief is also to maintain public security and order at the grassroots level and he is the mediator disputes between the villagers. Thus, the village chief is an important element in the Lao legal system. According to Article 2 of the Ministry of Justice's Solution on village mediation units, adopted in 2005, the main objective of the village mediation unit is to mediate disputes between villagers. The jurisdiction of the mediation unit covers disputes that are not very serious and not dangerous to the society. The unit also assists the village administration authority to enhance justice in the village, strengthening the right to self-determination of the citizens. It acts as the disseminator of laws and regulations in the village, encouraging the people of all ethnic groups in the village to respect and strictly comply with laws and regulations, and closely coordinates with the judicial and other bodies involved. Article 5 of the same resolution specifies that "the mediation unit is composed of the village chief, a member of the Lao front, a member of the women's union, a member of the youth union and the most respectful elder in the village".

A GRID survey conducted in Vientiane Capital and in 3 other provinces on the participation of women in village committees shows that apart from the village women's union, the number of women participating in village committees is extremely low: In the 93 surveyed villages, out of 302 village chiefs and deputy-chiefs, only 24 are women. The village youth union, a mass organization of young people aged between 15-35, however, have many female members, making up about 30.3%.

According to the statistics from the Department of Public Administration in 2006, the number of women in the leaderships of all levels is limited. None of the provincial governors was a woman. Among the village chiefs and deputy-chiefs, only 1.33 per cent and 3.13 per cent were women respectively. Comparing to the statistics in 2000, it had made a little progress: female village chiefs and deputy chiefs in 2000 were 1.2 per cent and 1.6 per cent respectively.

### **Problems and obstacles preventing women from political participation**

Despite significant progress made in terms of women's political participation at the central and local levels; there remain a number of factors that prevent women from political participation. According to a study conducted by the Gender Resource Information and Development Center

(2003), the factors that constitute the hindrance to women participation in various village committees are as follows:

Custom and traditional practices are considered one of the obstacles preventing women from participation in the political affairs. For example, it would be difficult for women to find jobs far away from home or to work at night, since the husbands are jealous and do not trust them or they perceive that it is traditionally inappropriate. The household work and the duty of child-rearing keep women at home and, therefore, they can spare only little time for their communities. As there has never been a precedence of female village chief, villagers in some rural areas believe that a woman is not able to be a leader and only men are capable. Villagers also consider that the leadership is a duty of men. 80 percent of those interviewed say that men are more suitable for leadership than women.

In general, a considerable number of women still lack knowledge and capability. If they are to be selected for further education, they usually refuse by referring to family matters. In public meetings women rarely speak. They feel unconfident, for instance, there are some cases where women won a village chief election but they refused to accept it and asked to be nominated as deputy-chief instead. In some villages, women's union committee say that they do not have the expertise and abilities in administration, management, planning and working in a systematic manner, while in others, women's union leader cannot read and write.

It is, therefore, recommended that the supervisors of village chief elections encourage more women to run for village chief election. It is recommended that the regulations on village chief elections be revised. If possible, the number of women candidates should be closer to that of men. The selecting candidates for a village chief should consult with all family members (who are eligible to vote), not just merely the head of the family. Trainings and dissemination of gender equality should be organized for district and village authorities. It is also recommended that the dissemination of the need for women's participation in village committees be made through mass media or other forms of spreading information. Village women's unions should be trained in organization of work and development planning.

The Government's policy for improving women's participation in the public administration may be summarized as follows:

- Develop a strategic plan for gender mainstreaming in order to increase women's participation, in particular to increase women's participation in development programming.
- Raise awareness about gender equality on the part of government officials in order to have a gender-based approach to local planning as well as to budget planning.
- Collect sex disaggregated data at the local level.
- Ensure that women representatives are included in the economic committees, pursuant to the Law on Local Administration.
- Improve the offices of legal advice for women.
- Gather information on offenses committed by women.
- Improve measures for more effective protection of the rights of women and children.

The Government is currently implementing a Project on Governance and Public Administration Reforms at both central and provincial levels. The main activities of the project include: further the decentralization process, improve the capacity of the local administrations and socio-economic development planning at the local level, improving public administration and poverty reduction. This project has incorporated gender-based approach into its activities: conducting assessment of gender; develop a plan for incorporation of gender-based approach into activities of government sectors; conducting training on gender issue for public servants and villagers; reviewing measures and principles for setting up district and village development funds so as to ensure that women have access to credits and those funds.

### **Article 8: International Representation and Participation**

*State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and, without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.*

The Lao PDR pursues a consistent foreign policy of peace, independence, friendship and cooperation. It practices a policy of multi-direction, multilateralism and multi-form of international relations; a policy of gradual open-up that suits the conditions and reality of the country; combines political and diplomatic relations with international economic cooperation. All this has upheld the role and reputation of the Lao PDR in the regional and international arena. By 2005, the Lao PDR has diplomatic relations with 121 countries. The number of Lao women working in the field of foreign services has increased, but a number of female Ambassador and Consul-General are still modest.

Article 13 of the Law on the Development and Protection of women provides that equal rights between men and women are defined in terms of quality in development of their personalities, and men and women are of equal values and entitled to the same opportunities in political, economic, socio-cultural activities, in a family, in national defense and security and in foreign affairs”.

Lao women are therefore entitled to representing the government in international affairs and participate in international organizations in an equal footing with men.

### **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

The number of women working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1999 was 84 and has gradually increased since then. By 2006, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has 703 officials, of which 559 are men and 144 were women. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs attaches importance to development of female staff, particularly, the capacity building of female diplomats to be equally capable as their male counterparts. At present and in the future, training of women staff will focus on upgrading their ideological knowledge and technical skills. To date, the Ministry has sent a number of female staff, which makes up about 30% of all female staff, on short and long-term trainings both at home and abroad with a view to upgrading their ability to work effectively at an international level. Despite such efforts, there are still a few women in various leading positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

There are a number of international organizations accrediting in Lao PDR, such as the United Nations, International Financial Institutions, Foreign Embassies and Non-Governmental Organizations. It has been discovered that currently there are 1216 Lao local staff working in the international agency offices in the Lao PDR, of which 546 are men and 670 are women while some of them are holding the positions of advisers and experts.

## **Article 9: Nationality**

*State Parties shall grant women equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their nationality. They shall ensure in particular that neither marriage to the alien nor change of nationality of the wife, render her stateless or force upon her the nationality of her husband.*

*State Parties shall grant to women equal rights with men with respect to nationality of their children. The acquisition or retention of nationality is therefore governed by the same normative principles. Article 2 of the Law on Nationality (amended in 2004) provides, “a person holding Lao nationality is a Lao citizen.” Article 4 provides, “a marriage or divorce of a Lao national and a foreigner or a stateless person shall not lead to the change of nationality of the Lao citizen. The acquisition or loss of Lao nationality of a spouse shall not lead to the change of nationality of the other spouse”.*

According to Article 9 of the Law on Lao Nationality, Lao nationality is acquired by: birth; naturalization; re-acquisition; or on the basis of other grounds as provided in Articles 11 to 14 of the present Law.

The Law on Lao Nationality provides equal rights to women in terms of making decision on their children’s nationality, regardless of how the mother’s acquisition of her nationality, whether by birth or by changing her nationality.

Persons in the following category shall be a Lao national by birth (Article 10 of Law on Nationality) “*Children who are born to parents holding Lao citizenship at the time of birth shall be considered Lao nationals regardless of whether they are born inside or outside the territory of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.*”

Article 11 of the Law on Nationality provides, “*If one of the parents is a Lao citizen, their child shall be considered a Lao national by birth if:*

- 1. They are born within the territory of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic; [or]*
- 2. They are born outside the territory of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic but both parents have at the time of birth permanent residence in the territory of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic or one of them has the same.*

*In case the child is born outside the territory of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and both parents have permanent residence outside the territory of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the nationality of the child shall be decided by the parents.*

*In case one of the parents is a Lao citizen and the other parent is a stateless, the child's nationality shall be Lao by birth regardless of their place of birth".*

Article 12 provides, *"A children born in the territory of the Lao People's Democratic Republic into stateless parents permanently residing in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and integrated into the Lao society and culture shall be able to acquire Lao citizenship if requested by their parents."*

Article 17 provides, *"Lao nationality shall be discontinued in cases that the holder relinquishes, withdraws and has permanently been abroad. A loss of nationality does not change the nationalities of the concerned person's spouse and children".* Article 19 provides, *"A person who has acquired Lao nationality may be withdrawn within five years from the day it is acquired upon the request of the government if it is found that:*

- 1. The acquisition of Lao nationality is not lawful;*
- 2. The individual concerned has dishonored his/her Lao citizenship, for instance, by committing an act of treason or causing harms to the nation.*

*The withdrawal of Lao nationality does not alter the nationalities of the person's spouse and children." Besides, Article 4 of this Law stipulates "a marriage or divorce of a Lao national and a foreigner or a stateless person shall not lead to the change of nationality of the Lao citizen. The acquisition or loss of Lao nationality of a spouse shall not lead to the change of nationality of the other spouse".*

Article 22 of the same Law provides, *" When the nationality of both parents have changed, by acquiring or relinquishing Lao nationality, the nationality of their children who are less than eighteen years of age shall change accordingly, except where the children have been lawfully married".*

Article 23 provides, *"If a parent have acquired Lao nationality while the other parent still holds a nationality other than Lao, the children may acquire Lao nationality upon the request of the parent holding Lao nationality; the children who are Lao citizens and more than fifteen years but less than eighteen years of age and have been lawfully married , may choose the nationality of either parent; if one parent has acquired Lao Nationality while the other parent is a stateless person, their children residing in the territory of the Lao People's Democratic Republic will be considered Lao citizens; if one Parent has acquired Lao nationality while the other parent is a stateless person, their children residing outside the territory of the Lao People's Democratic Republic may acquire Lao nationality upon the request of the parent holding Lao nationality".*

Article 24 provides, *"If a parent has relinquished nationality while the other parent still retains it, the children will retain Lao nationality".*

Article 25 provides, *"a foreign or stateless child who has been adopted by a Lao citizen shall be a Lao citizen; a foreign or stateless child who has been adopted by a married couple one spouse of whom is a Lao citizen and the other is a foreign national or a stateless person shall be given Lao nationality with the consent of the adoptive parents".*

Article 26 provides, “a child whose nationality is Lao and whose adoptive parents are foreigners or one of them is a foreigner while the other is a Lao national shall retain his/her Lao nationality. The child in question may relinquish Lao nationality upon the request of the adoptive parents; a child whose nationality is Lao and whose adoptive parents are stateless or one of them is a stateless and the other is a Lao national shall retain Lao nationality”.

The Standing Committee of the National Assembly approves the grant, withdrawal, relinquishment and re-grant of Lao Nationality.

## **Article 10: Education**

*The States Parties shall taken appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of women and men:*

*(a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;*

*(b) Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;*

*(c) The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programs and the adaptation of teaching methods;*

*(d) The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;*

*(e) The same opportunities for access to programs of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programs, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women;*

*(f) The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programs for girls and women who have left school prematurely;*

*(g) The same Opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;*

*(h) Access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.*

Education is an important priority of the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy. A policy on improving access to education and reducing the rate of women illiteracy, especially ethnic women has been adopted. The national education system includes formal and informal education. The formal education system consists of five levels: pre-school education, primary education, secondary education, vocational education and higher education.

The education management system at all levels is under the Ministry of Education. To date, in the education sector, there are 53.915 staff nationwide, of which 23.805 are women and 30.110 are men. There are 5.212 office staff, 1.642 are women. About 4.083 officials are at the central level, 1.704 of which are women. At local levels, there are Provincial Branches of Education and District

Offices of Education. There are about 17.080 educational officials at provincial level (6.953 are women, accounting for 40,7% and 10.127 are men making up 59,3%). The total number of district educational officials is 32.752 (women 15.148 or about 46,3% and men 17.604 or about 53,7%). The village chiefs, school management committees and principals are responsible for ensuring the availability of education in the villages.

Article 38 of the 2003 amended Constitution of the Lao PDR provides, “ *Lao citizens have the rights to receive education and upgrade themselves*“ , and Article 22 also provides, “ *The State attends to developing education and implements compulsory primary education in order to build good citizens with revolutionary competence, knowledge and abilities. The State and society attends to developing high quality national education, to create opportunities and conditions in education for all people throughout the country, especially people in the remote and isolated areas, ethnic groups, women and disadvantaged children. The State promotes and encourages private sector to invest in development of national education, and allows the opening of private schools in conformity with the State curriculum standards. The State in cooperation with the people builds schools at all levels in order to comprehensively systematize the education with the intention to extend it to the ethnic areas*”.

Article 3 of the Law on Education of the Lao PDR (2000) provides, “ *All Lao citizens, irrespective of ethnicity, race, sex, and social status, have the rights to education*” Article 5 also stipulates, “ *In developing education, the State pays attention to ethnic groups in the remote areas, women, disadvantaged and talented people*”. And Article 8 (2) of the same law provides, “ *Primary education is a basic general and compulsory education providing fundamental and necessary knowledge for students,*”.

### **Pre-school Education**

Nursery and kindergarten has been more widely developed in terms of the school facilities including class-rooms, teachers and pupils. In the school year 2005-2006, there were 1.087 nurseries and kindergartens throughout the country (of which 174 are private with 566 class-rooms). If compared to the year 2000-2001, the number of schools and class-rooms have increased by 233 or about 27,28 % and 789(total 2,094) or about 60,45% respectively.

In the same year, there were 2,882 teachers (2,865 are women, accounting for 99,41 % and 17 are men, accounting for 0.59%). In comparison to the year 2000-2001, the number increased by 623 or about 27,57%. Of this, the number of women teachers has increased by 615 teachers or about 27,22% of the total number of teachers. The average of nursery schools enrolment reached 10,6% (10,9% girls and 10,4% boys). There were 49,197 school children (24.880 girls (51%) and 24,317 boys (49%)), compared to the year 2000-2001, it increased by 12,087 pupils, accounting for 32.5%. On average, the ratio of teachers and of class-room to pupils is 1:17 and 1:23.5 respectively.

### **Primary Education**

Primary school is a primary general education that provides fundamental, necessary, compulsory and free education for all ethnic people from the age of 6. Primary education takes five years to complete. In 2005-2006, there were 8.654 public and private primary schools of which 116

were private and 10 were Buddhist temple schools. There were 3.829 full-grade primary schools, among which 11 were ethnic boarding primary schools. There were 335 primary school groupings with 28.389 class-rooms, of which 7.060 twin-class-rooms, and 21.329 single class-rooms. These figures reflect an inadequacy of teachers for classes.

In 2005-2006, the net school enrolment reached 83,9%(girls 81,2% and boys 86,5%). There were 891.881 students (of which 411.211 were girls, covering 46% and 480.670 were boys, covering 54%), among them there were 1.960 students of ethnic boarding school (of which 598 were girls, covering 30.51%). In private school, there were 23.236 students (of which 10.989 were girls, covering 47,11% and 12.337 were boys, covering 52,89%). The ratio of students to teachers is 32:1 and to a class-room is 31,4:1.

In comparison to the year 2000-2001, the number of primary schools has increased by 462 schools, accounting for 5,6 %, class-rooms have increased by 653 rooms, students have increased 61.994 (of which 34.468 were girls, covering 4,1 % and 27.526 were boys, covering 3.3 %). The rate of failing in final exams dropped from 19.7% to 18.3% in 2005 and the rate of drop-out also decreased from 11.8% to 9.4 %. In the school year of 2005-06, at grade one only, the rate of failure was 32.9 % (of which 31.9 % were girls and 33.7 % were boys). This has indicated that the target of 32.7% could not be attained. It is, therefore, necessary to find all ways and means to reach the goals of education set forth in the Program of Education For All. In the school year of 2005-2006, the number of primary students who sat for exams was 116.830, (girls 53.228 and boy 63.602) of which 109.074 or about 93,4% (girls 50.430 or 94,7% and boys 58.644 or 92,2%) passed the exams.

Despite the progress made, there exists a number of obstacles, such as unbalanced distribution of teachers; most of teachers in the remote highland areas have low qualification and are under standard; they are often recruited as volunteers or under contract or enlisted by the villagers<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, most of the schools were semi-permanent and temporary schools in a deteriorated condition. The learning and teaching environment was unfavorable, unattractive to students. As a result, the rates of failure in final exams and drop-out are high. Another great obstacle is a lack of adequate national budget allocation for education. Most of children at learning ages do not go to school, especially girls in remote rural and ethnic areas.

In order to improve girl education, the Government of the Lao PDR has adopted a plan for the promotion of primary education for girls, ethnic children and children in the poorest families (by encouraging, strengthening the capacity of district education, developing intensive education system to support target groups, such as, female and ethnic students and students from the poorest families, for example, providing teachers, particularly, female teachers, belonging to ethnic groups, food supplement program, co-funding for the building female dormitories, adjusting timetables to be suitable to agricultural production seasons and other activities in rural areas and adjusting timetables as to harmonize with girls' activities for helping their families and so on).

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<sup>2</sup> By "enlisted teacher" here is referred to a teacher that accepts the teaching of school children in a village in exchange for food and other things necessary for the living provided by the people.

## Secondary Schools

Secondary school is an educational stage after primary education which provides basic knowledge leading up to higher education or relevant employment. Secondary education includes two parts: the first part known as lower secondary school, which requires 3 years to complete and the second part known as upper secondary school, which requires also 3 years to complete.

Secondary education is generally growing. In 2005-2006, there were 980 secondary schools across the country (of which 38 were private) with 8.058 class-rooms. The total number of secondary students nationwide was 390.641, of which there were 168.557 girls and 222.084 boys; among them 5.390 students (2.501 girls and 2.889 boys) were in the private schools. The proportion of girls in the secondary school accounted for 43%. In the lower secondary school there were 243.131 students (girls 106.088 and boys 137.043). The enrolment rate is 51,7% (girls 46,2% and boys 57%) of the total number of students completed primary school. The upgrade rate is 85%, repetition rate is 3,0% (girls 1,8% and boys 3,9%) and the dropout rate is 12% (girls 11,9 and boys 12,1%).

The number of students of upper secondary school were 147. 510 (girls 62.469 and boys 85.041). The enrolment rate is 34,5% (girls 29,5% and boys 39,4%) of the total number of students completed lower secondary school. The upgrade rate is 88,8%, repetition rate is 16,0% (girls 0,8% and boys 2,2%) and the dropout rate is 9,6% (girls 8,1 and boys 10,7%).

The total number of secondary school teachers was 15.132 of which 6.527 were female (43,13%) and 6.605 males (56,87 %). Among this 253 were private school teachers of who 98 were female (37,73%) and 155 male (61,27%). The ratio of students to teachers at secondary school was 25:8, while at lower secondary school the ratio was 45:8 and at upper secondary school was 53:6.

According to 2005 census, 6% (5,4% for female and 6,9% for male) of the population of 6 years of age and over have completed lower secondary education and 5% (4,1% for females and 6,2% males) have completed upper secondary education.

The Government has a policy of promoting general education for the ethnic groups. By the year of 2005-2006, there were students of primary and secondary ethnic boarding schools as follows: the number of primary school pupils (grade 1 to 5) were 711, of which 156 were girls; secondary school students were 6.035, of which 1.873 were girls and 4.162 were boys; There were 490 teaching and other staff, of which 257 were women and 233 were men; There were 395 teachers, of which 201 were women and 194 were men.

The enrolment rate of secondary school students has increased from 46,7% in the year 2000-2001 to 51,7 % in the year 2005-2006 (46,2% for girls and 57,0% for boys). The difference between the enrolment of girls and boys was 10,8%. The net enrolment of upper secondary school students has increased from 22,7% in the year 2000-2001 to 34,5% (girls 29,5% and boys 39,4%) in the year 2005-2006. To date, the number of students both girls and boys who have completed lower and upper secondary schools has increased.

The number of students of both lower and upper secondary who can move up to higher classes have increased in comparison with that of the year 2000-2001, and the drop-out rate has decreased. The repetition rate of lower secondary school students has increased from 2.9 in 2000-2001 to 3.0 in 2004-2005 whereas the repetition rate of upper secondary school students has decreased from 1,7% in 2000-2001 to 1,6% in 2004- 2005.

The Government of the Lao PDR attaches importance to and has adopted a special policy on promoting education for people of small ethnic groups and in the remote areas by building up ethnic primary and secondary schools in all provinces throughout the country in order to provide them with opportunities to study.

Although the secondary education has been expanded, it has not been able to respond to the real needs, especially in the remote areas. Pupils who have completed primary school could not further continue their study. Furthermore, there was a shortage of teachers. Consequently, the teachers had to teach more hours and many subjects. School facilities are insufficient, tables and chairs are limited and in bad condition, class-rooms are clouded and teaching equipment is inadequate.

The Government has now adopted some measures to address the challenges of the secondary education. For instance, to establish secondary school networks that would increase access to education for ethnic children, girls and boys in rural remote areas, to undertake measures to respond to the need for further education of pupils who complete primary education; to reduce the drop-out rates, particularly in rural areas. This undertaking includes the improvement of quality and consistency, building capacity of the provincial education departments to be able to look into the education issue of students, allocation of women ethnic teachers, provision of supplementary food programs for students, contribution of funds for the construction of women dormitories and etc.

## **Literacy**

According to the Population and Residence Survey Statistics in 2005, it is indicated that 73 out of 100 are literate. The highest literacy rate (89%) is recorded in the urban area and the lowest (54%) is in the rural area where there is no road access. On nationwide average, the literacy rate of male population aged from 15 years-old is higher than female. The rate is 83% for male and 63% for female.

The rate of literacy among the ethnic groups with small population is 55%. In comparison to the literacy rate of the Lao ethnic group, which stands at 85%, it is considerably low. The literacy rate for female ethnic group with small population is 41% while for the female Lao ethnic group the rate is 79%. For male ethnic group with small population, the rate is 70% while the rate for the Lao ethnic group is 91%.

## **Non-school System**

The non-school system consists of classes and levels of education like school system, which is set up to make teaching services available for the people who do not have opportunities to continue

their education or can not continue their education in school system or for the people who have permanent jobs.

In the academic year of 2004-2005, there were 23.264 trainees of primary schools (12.209 women and 11.055 men). To date, there are 22 districts, which declare completion of primary school through training courses in the country. There are 374 trainees who have finished the first level of secondary schools (85 women and 189 men) and 3.118 trainees who have finished the last level of secondary school (880 women and 2.238 men).

By now (2005), 302 Community Education Centers have been set up, in comparison with the year 2000-2001, it has been increased by 126 centers. These centers serve not only as studying centers, but they are also used as basic vocational training center for the general public. By the year 2005, 4.879 people have been vocationally trained ( 2.245 women and 2.634 men). In 2005, there are 38.000 people being trained at primary school level, 5.000 people being trained at vocational school level, 2.500 people being trained at the first level of secondary school and 5,000 people being trained at the last level of secondary school.

The Lao Government endeavors to develop non-school system and vocational education with a view to promoting the literacy of the people through trainings at primary, secondary, and vocational school levels in different fields. There are more women who are successfully trained at primary school level than men, whereas there are less women who are successfully trained at secondary school level than men which is less than 30%.

### **Teachers Training**

By the year 2004-2005, there were 10 pedagogic institutes throughout the country, of which five institutes for college level, three for primary and kindergarten levels, one for art teachers, and one for physical education. There are 15.378 students( 7.685 women (50%) and 7.693 men). Besides, various pedagogic institutes were also promoting special courses for instance English language courses in the afternoon and evening, which accommodate 7.059 students (3.270 women and 3.789 men) for the school year 2005-2006.

There were 561 teachers at pedagogic institutes (228 women and 333 men). For the school year 2005-2006, there were 5.772 (2.960 women, 2.812 men) graduates as teachers. Of this, there were 148 ethnic teachers (98 women or 66%). But the capacity to allocate new teachers on the job was about 2.950 people per year, which could not meet the real needs of the country. Therefore, there has to allocate contracting teachers who have not properly been trained as a teacher to work in primary schools. In secondary schools, 7.210 unqualified teachers or about 49% of all secondary school teachers, have been recruited to fill the gap.

The number of women and men studying at pedagogic institutes is equal. The number of teachers at pedagogic institutes for the year 2000-2001 has increased by 104 people (36 women and 68 men). The proportion of primary and secondary school teachers who are considered below standard is still considerable. The allocation of new teachers does not meet the real needs of the

country. Moreover, teachers are still encountering difficulties related to living condition, salary as well as insufficient investment in education by the Government.

### **Vocational Education and Vocational Training**

In 2005-2006, there were 51 technical and vocational schools, in which 21 were under the management of the Ministry of Education; 14 were private schools and 16 schools were directly managed by other Ministries. There were 25.327 technical-vocational students throughout the country (9.797 women and 15.530 men). There were 22.652 technical students ( 8.966 women and 13.686 men) and 2,675 vocational students (831 women and 1.844 men). There were 1.513 technical and vocational teachers both in the public and private sectors (466 women and 1.047 men), in comparison with 2000-2001, it has increased 918 teachers (301 women and 617 men).

In comparison with the year of 2000-2001, the number of technical and vocational schools have increased to 28 schools. Women students of these schools accounted for 38,68 % while men made up 61,32%. This indicated that there was still a big gap between women and men. The proportion of female teachers (30.79 %) is very low compared to that of men (69.21%). However, the number of female teachers, in comparison with the year 2000-2001, has significantly increased from 165 to 466 teachers.

### **Higher Education and Universities**

In the country, there are 3 universities, namely the National University of Laos in Vientiane Capital City, Champasack University and Souphanouvong University in Luangprabang as well as 27 private colleges. In the year 2005-2006, across the country there were a total of 48.847 students (18.776 or about 38,41% were women and 30,071 or about 61,6% were men) studying at these universities and colleges. Off these, 15.126 students (6.883 women and 8.243 men) study at private colleges.

Apart from this, there are special graduate courses at graduate diploma and bachelor degree (afternoon and evening courses) in various faculties of the National University and other institutions, which are attended by 12.249 students (6.812 women and 5.437 men). The Universities including Champasack and Souphanouvong have 1.184 teachers, of which 406 are women ( 34,3%) and 778 men (65,7%). The ratio of students to the country population has increased from 647/100,000 people to 845/100,000 people in the academic year of 2004-2005. According to the 2005 Census, 3,5% of women and 7,2% of men nationwide have received higher education.

In addition to the number of students in the country, about 956 students( 281 women and 675 men), military servicemen, policemen and government officials have been sent to study abroad in 37 countries, especially, in Vietnam, China, Japan, Australia and Thailand. Out of students who currently study abroad, 513 students received scholarships(138 women and 375 men), 260 students received project funding ( 87 women and 173 men) and 183 students( 56 women and 127 men) are self-funded.

In general, the Government of the Lao PDR has built 2 more universities in Champasack and Luangprabang provinces in order to provide students with opportunities to higher education. In comparison to the year 2000-2001, the number of university students has increased to 9.982 people (3.330 women or 55,45 % and 6.652 men or 60,01%). However, the proportion of female students in comparison to male student is still low, about only 34,48 %. The lower proportion is also applied to the number of female students studying abroad, for example, of 33 PhD students, female students account only for 27% and of 255 MA students only 27% are women and of 67 BA students, only 34% are women, while of 8 students undertaking technical and vocational courses, 50% are women.

### **Problems and Obstacles**

According to the data collection, there are many factors that hinder equal access for women and girls to education such as:

- Tradition reserves that girls have to stay at home to take care of siblings and help the family to do household chores. In the rural areas, where the ethnic groups live, some ethnic groups empower men, so due to cultural bias, girls are not encouraged to study. Young married women who have children have less opportunity to go to schools.
- In the rural areas where the majority of population are illiterate or with low education, it is difficult for parents to understand how important education is and how to advise their children to go to schools.
- The access to education service is also an essential factor for the girls to go to schools, especially for the girls who belong to the ethnic groups living in the remote and isolated areas, because they are discouraged by many reasons to go to schools, which are distanced from their villages. At present, about 1/3 of villages nationwide do not have primary schools.
- The condition of schools does not attract girls to attend schools (especially girls from small ethnic groups) such as lack of female students or those from the same ethnic group, school-buildings, toilets, playing yards etc.
- The main cause that deters girls from going to schools is said to be family poverty (lack of school outfits and means of transportation to school).
- Lack of labor force makes boys and girls leave schools in order to help their parents to earn a living.
- Villages are scattered, the program of permanent occupation is still incomplete, villagers are moving around from one to another place, schools in villages are primitive, some villages have no school or schools without teachers.

- School holiday does not come at a harvest time. Uneducated parents do not understand the importance of education; many graduates have difficulty in finding jobs etc.
- For some students, the ability to continue their education at secondary schools would depend on the support of their family and further education at vocational education, universities would also depend on quotas of the Government and the studying performance of the students themselves.

Measures undertaken to address the problems are as follows:

- Female and male students have been provided with equal education opportunities. They are allowed to study in the same class, by the same curriculum and with the same qualified teachers without any discrimination.
- By eliminating conservative perception, women are provided with opportunities to take part in learning and teaching process. Woman Unions have been involved in all implementing plans. In some provinces, gender perspective has been mainstreamed into the curriculum of formal and informal education, the contents of the curriculum and pictures in school books have been adjusted to reflect gender equality.
- Training courses on gender issue have been conducted for officials from provincial education authorities as well as school teachers so as to enable them to integrate gender perspectives into their teachings with a view to building awareness among students about the special attention to women and ethnic people. Furthermore, awareness among students about the rights of the child has also been disseminated.
- Boys and girls have equally been granted scholarships for the primary and secondary education. In some provinces, according to the policy of ethnic school, scholarships are divided equally among male and female students, for example, in Luangprabang province, two scholarships are given to each district on the principle of one female and one male. Pedagogic schools for women and ethnic people in Xekong province provide a scholarship of 150 US dollars per year to each village community.
- Family planning is included in the curriculums of secondary schools such as Population Studies, Citizen Studies and Healthcare in the Reproductive Age.
- Prior to each academic year, people are notified and encouraged to bring their children who are of school age to schools.
- For those who are often absent from schools, teachers would consult with their parents and encourage the parents to help and advise them to regularly go to schools.

- Some villages have taken special measures by providing that if a family does not send its children to school, that family would not be allowed to stay in that village.

### **Government Strategy to Ensure the Opportunities to Equal Studies for Genders**

According to the reality and basic problems of education of the women, the Government is trying to encourage and promote women in all classes and ages to increasingly acquire education. To achieve objectives and goals set by the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women, education sector has studied and set a specific strategy to fulfill its 2 main tasks as follows:

1. Creating favorable conditions for women to acquire education.
2. Conducting training courses for women with knowledge and ability.

Referring to the Socio-Economic Plan of the country, the Millennium Development Goal (MDG), Education For All (EFA), National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategies (NGPES), and the achievements and shortcomings of the education development for women in the previous years, the education sector has set up the strategy for the development of education for women for the year 2005-2010 with the following targets:

1. Increasing the school attendance of girls to be equal with that of boys in which:

- The rate of enrolment of kindergarten schools has been increased from 10.9% in 2005-2006 to 16% in 2010.
- The net enrolment rate of school girls of the primary education has been increased from 81.2 % in 2005-2006 to 89% in 2010, the net rate of new enrolment of the 1 grade of primary school has been increased from 65.6 % to 100% during the same period.

2. Creating favorable conditions to decrease the percentage of the remaining in the same class and dropping out of the school girls at least 2% and 3% respectively per year.

3. Increasing the enrolment of the school girls of the lower secondary schools from 46.2% and of the last level of the upper secondary school from 29.5% in 2005-2006 to 63.4 % to 35.5% respectively in 2010.

4. Trying to eliminate illiteracy of women in all target groups with the age from 15-24 years-old 74.7% in 2003-2004 to 90% in 2010; with the age of 15-40 years-old from 77.5% in 2003-2004 to 88% in 2010; and with the age from 15 yeas-old from 71.3% in 2003-2004 to 80% in 2010; each of the target groups must have women covering 50% at least.

5. Conducting training courses at primary school level for approximately 40,000 people, and vocational training about 8,000 people, in which women cover 60% of the trainees.

6. Increasing the percentage of school girls who attend higher education and universities from 30% in 2003-2004 to 40% in 2010.

To meet these goals, the Government has set the plan to consistently increase the percentage of the national budget allocation in the development of education from 11.6% in 2005 to 16% in 2010.

## **Article 11: Employment**

*1 To take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of women and men, the same rights, in particular:*

*(a) The right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings.*

*(b) The right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment and the provision of priority to women.*

*(c) The right to free choice of profession and employment, both in public and private sectors, including working in the country and in a foreign country.*

*(d) The right to getting promotion according to working regulation, increasing of salaries, safety in working place which women and men need different working condition; the right to be equally upgraded knowledge and capacity such as participating in training course and be retrained according to the change of responsibility, lessons learned from the study tours; the right to attending monthly party's meeting and equal upholding the leading roles; the right to access to sources of modern data and information and catching up with the national and international situations.*

*(e) The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work.*

*(f) The right to social security, particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave.*

*(g) The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction.*

*2. In order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work, States Parties shall take appropriate measures:*

*(a) To prohibit, subject to the imposition of sanctions, dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy or of maternity leave and discrimination in dismissals on the basis of marital status.*

*(b) To introduce maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits without loss of former employment, seniority or social allowances.*

*(c) To encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of childcare facilities.*

*(d) To provide special protection to women during pregnancy in types of work proved to be harmful to them.*

*3. Protective legislation relating to matters covered in this article shall be reviewed periodically in the light of scientific and technological knowledge and shall be revised, repealed or extended as necessary.*

## **The Equality before the Law between Women and Men in Employment**

Article 39 of the Constitution of the Lao PDR amended in 2003 stipulates that: *“Lao citizens have the rights to work and engage in occupations which are not contrary to the laws. Working people have the right to rest, to receive medical treatment in times of illness, to receive assistance in the event of incapacity or disability, in old age, and in other cases as provided by the laws.”*

Article 8 of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women mentions of women basic development as the followings: *“The physical , moral, educational, vocational and skilled labour development.”*. Skilled Labour development is also specified in Article 12 of the same Law: *“The vocational and skilled labour development is the creation of favourable for women to be vocationally trained, to upgrade skilled labour and enrich the experience of working, to have labour principle in order to employ women as men in the society.”*

Article 15 of the same Law also stipulates that *the Government has the policy to promote and encourage women to have the right to make the production, to do business, and to provide service according to the Laws, and to have the right to choose the jobs, be employed, be paid and be subsidized from work.*

Article 3 of the amended Labour Law has set out *“the principle of ensuring mutual benefit between employers and employees without discrimination on the basis of race, colour, gender, religion and socio-political status.”*

Article 30 of the amended Labour Law stipulates that: *“An employer does not have the right to terminate an employment contract or force an employee to stop work where the concerned employee is a woman who is pregnant or who has given birth, and the postnatal period is less than one year.”*

Article 45 of the amended Labour Law sets for equal rights to be remunerated: employees who provide equal quantity, quality, and value of work are entitled to receive equal salaries or wages without any discrimination as to gender, age, nationality or ethnicity.

Article 38 of the Labour Law stipulates that: *“An employer is prohibited from employing and authorising female workers to work in those sectors that involve heavy work, work that is required to stand for a long period of time and other works as stipulated in article 16 of this Labour Law. In such cases, employer shall transfer concerned workers to other temporary works. During this period, concerned workers are entitled to full salaries or wages for no more than three months. For a period of more than three months, concerned workers shall be remunerated according to the new work. Female workers who are pregnant or whose child is less than 1 year are not allowed to work overtime or during holidays”.*

According to Article 58 of the amended Labour Law: *“All labour units must establish a mandatory social security system by paying contribution to the social security fund pursuant to the social security regime established by the government.”* The private social security fund has operated since 2001 and to date, there have been 27,877 people (16,479 women and 11,398 men) involving in this fund. As for

government officers, social security fund has operated since 1996 and up to the year 2005, there were 7,530 people contributed to this fund. However, no data and information that specified how many women and men accessed to this service was collected by the Department of Social Security.

Article 39 clearly states that: “Before and after birth delivery, female workers shall be entitled to at least forty two days of maternity leave with full pay at the normal salary as when they were working from their employers or from the social security fund if contributions have been fully paid to this fund. In the case that a female worker is sick -this must be certified by a doctor- as a result of birth delivery, such worker shall be authorised to take additional leave of at least thirty days with payment of fifty percent of her salary or wage. During the twelve-month period after birth delivery, the worker has the right to rest one hour per day in order to feed or take care of her child and to bring her child to have vaccinations as regulatory. In the case that female worker suffers a miscarriage, she is entitled to a period of leave as determined by a doctor with normal payment.

Article 40 of the Labour Law provides that: “A female worker shall, on birth delivery, be entitled to an allowance of at least sixty percent of the minimum wage established by the government, to be paid by the employer or by the social security fund, if contributions to the social security fund have been fully paid. Where female worker gives birth to two or more children at once, she shall receive an additional allowance of fifty percent of the maternity allowance. In the case of a miscarriage certified by a doctor, female worker is entitled to this same allowance.” The Lao People’s Democratic Republic resets the retirement age for women from 55 to 60 years old to be equal to that of men. Women are also entitled to retirement at 55 years old and with 25 year of service.

### **Women in the Public Service**

According to the 2005 Population and Residence Survey, there were 168,388 civil servants in which 31% were women. In comparison with the 1995 population census, there were 130,500 female civil servants or 27% of the total civil servants, this represented an increase of 4%.

### **Women in the Labour Market**

According to the 2005 Population and Residence Survey, Lao women consist of 50% of population and 50% of all labour forces. 2,776,712 Lao citizens (66.6%) work in economic sector and 1,351,696 people (32.4%) in non-economic sector. 37,820 people (1.4%) in the economic sector are unemployed. About 49% of the total number of women are at the age of labour force. The 2005 survey indicated that the number of unemployed women is low (0.7% of all labour forces in the country), and the number of male and female labour force in urban area is similar, which consists of 373,753 men (52.58%) and 336,998 women (47.41%). Those labour forces are mainly self-employed agricultural sector and family work. According to the collected data, the percentage of women working for their own families without payment is higher (71%) than that of men (29%).

## **Women in Lao Society**

In Lao society, household work is not considered as a profession. Thus, the Government has a policy of developing labour skills in household work for Lao women who shall have the opportunity to seek for employment according to their abilities until the government creates job opportunity for those who perform household work.

## **Women in the Business Sector**

In the Lao PDR, employment in the field of export and small-size business has increased due to the rise in importation. The employment in the garment sector had increased from 17,200 people in 1998 to 26,000 people in 2004. Workers in the garment factories are mostly between the age of 18 and 25 years old. 80% of all labour forces are women that come from the rural areas. Worker wages are based on their production. Wages differ from US\$25 to \$30 per month for new employees and US\$100 per month for head of the unit. While these employment wages are perceived as low, however, they represent consistent earnings and new working experiences for young female workers from rural areas. Many of them could purchase commodities that they have never had such as: modern clothes, accessories, cellular phones and others. 74% of workers in the garment factories who were interviewed in 2005 had sent money back home from US\$10 to \$70 per month.

Working conditions in garment factories are in the urban setting. Working period is long, has no free time, is in crowded environment, short resting time. Employees work for 6 days per week, 8 hours per day including overtime which is not voluntary. The job changing ratio is 35% per month or more than 60% per year. In 2005, 50% of the interviewed workers indicated that they would return to their village to work on the rice field or to do their own business.

The Lao Government has paid attention to improve working conditions for those workers by strictly overseeing the employment policy of employers, by assisting and providing advices and disseminating information about associated risks in the workplaces.

In 1999, there were 37,075 workers in the field of mining, handicraft, electricity and water supply, of which 54% were women and 46% were men; about 70% among these workers were production workers, 13% were technician, 10% were administrative people and 7% were seasonal and temporarily workers. Production workers were more in the garment sector, which included 85% of women. Excluding the garment sector, female workers in the production industry were approximately 33%, and men were 67%.

Although there were many women in the industrial field with equal education and qualification as men, most of them worked in low position and were not managers or decision makers. According to the survey, numbers of female workers were high in the position of production work, temporary and seasonal work. There were more seasonal and temporary workers in the field of non-metal production (brick and tile industry) and metallic industry than other industries. There were 800 female labours in these enterprises out of 1559 workers. According to the survey of enterprise units in 2004 (with labour

force of more than 5 people), there were 98,483 workers in 1629 enterprise units of which 46.3% were women and 53.7% were men.

The difference in salary, wages and other income is perceived as normal for women and men. The average wages of female workers in the garment and textile industries are lower than the wages of men. The wages in mining industry are higher than other industries. In 1999, male workers received 2,66 million kips and women received 1,41 million kips per year. This was due to the wages of female workers in the garment industry were lower than the wages of male workers in other industries. According to the research of the Information Centre on Gender for the Development of Women and International Trade conducted in 2006, it was indicated that the average income of female and male workers in enterprise was 491,666 kips per month and 740,000 kips per month accordingly. The reason why women received less salary than men was that men were more skilled, and women could not travel and do business like men.

According to the result of research of the Information Centre on Gender for the Development of the Assessment and the Gender Implementing Plan in the Legal and Political Science Faculty in 2005, it was shown that the monthly salary of men and women officials were 437.823 kips and 410.373 kips respectively. The Government salary system does not discriminate against women, but is based on qualification and work experience. Nevertheless, men had more income than women. For example, most men receive post remuneration and married men whose wife is not civil servant receive additional allowance whereas in the case of married women, they are not eligible to the same benefit.

According to the expenditure and household consumption survey in 2002/2003 (LECS3), 28% of Lao households had their own family business. There were 63% of all households in the urban areas and 17% in the rural areas. Some households have incomes from business by creating earning activities. Such situation is found in the rural areas where weaving can generate income but their business is not registered. The households engaged in such business comprised 46% (68% in the urban areas and 38% in the rural areas), in which 53% were women and 47% were men. Family business is a small scale business in which average income was about 3 million kips per month, 5 million kips in the urban areas and 1 million kips in the rural areas.

The Government of the Lao PDR recognizes that the investment in the small-scale business provides employments and new opportunities for women and increases families' income. The Lao Women's Union is working with the businesswomen under "The Project on the Promoting of Women in the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction." This Project aims at enriching vocational knowledge and providing credits to increase their incomes and helping them to be more aware of their legal rights.

However, women holding the positions of business directors and managers are still in small number. The National Chamber of Industry and Commerce predicts that more women hold high decision-making positions in private business, however they receive half the salaries of the men in the same positions.

## **Labour Movement to Foreign Countries**

In the middle of 2004, there were 181, 614 Lao labour legally registered in Thailand, in which 55% were women, and 45% were men. The data of the year 2004-2005 received from 15 provinces throughout the country showed that there were 56,644 Lao workers illegally working in foreign countries, in which 29,162 (51.5%) were women. Lao workers sent to Thailand are not highly skilled labour. They work in construction, agriculture, fishing and factory. Lao Female workers engage in domestic work, hotel janitor services, waitress, garment and food manufacturing factory. Most of these works are defined according to the International Labour Organization as the 3D work “Dirty, Dangerous, and Difficult.” The labour movement to foreign countries has dual impacts. The positive impacts are that labour generates income and send money home. The data indicate an amount of US\$ 500 to US\$666 per year/per person. In this regards, Lao female worker are more likely to send money home than male worker despite the fact that they earn less money. The negative impacts of the labour movement to foreign countries are: the discrimination and unfair treatment of labour and the trafficking of women and children. In addition, blood testing showed that temporary Lao Labour in foreign countries has high risk HIV/AIDS infections.

The Governments of the Lao PDR and Thailand signed the Memorandum of Understanding in 2002, which granted Lao workers to legally work in Thailand. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in cooperation with the Employment Company assisted and legally sent Lao workers to work in foreign countries. In 2006, 12,055 workers were sent to foreign countries of which 67% were women.

## **Gender Role in Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs)**

In 2004 GRID has conducted a study on gender role in SMEs, by interviewing 150 businesswomen and 100 businessmen in five provinces. The findings are as follows: Women owned businesses are smaller than those of men in terms of assets, capital and benefits. Many of women face the constraints in movement. Furthermore, the traditions do not allow them to work or do business far from home. Business registration is a long and complex process. In addition, businesswomen have more difficulties in following such procedure because of their low education, their constraints in movement and time, their lack of confidence in legal matters and documentation. Women are assigned to many domestic works. Moreover, businesswomen are deprived of access to data and information on policies, laws and regulations. They need advice on marketing and technology. Villagers especially women require more knowledge and perspectives on the business development, marketing, business opportunities, accountancy, and entrepreneurship.

Therefore to promote the participation of women in SMEs activities, banking procedures should be improved, SMEs credit schemes for women and disadvantaged groups must be provided. Over the past years, the Government has taken steps to support private sectors in abolishing some rules; improving access to SMEs capital source, to business development services such as training, information dissemination, consultancy; access to markets and technology.

## **Knowledge Upgrading by Conducting Training Courses for Businesswomen**

In January 2006, training course on the development of business women for 16 members of the Executive Committee of Business Woman Association at central business was conducted by JICA. The Vocational Training Programme has been operated for more than three years (2001-2003) by the Lao Women's Union and APHEDA (the Trade Union of Australia). Most of its activities (70%) are conducted in Vientiane, and the others are in Luang Prabang.

This Programme expanded in three provinces has been jointly implemented with the Lao Women's Union in using the provincial training Centers. The training courses are conducted in various fields such as: beauty (four months), sewing (four months), cooking (two weeks) and handicraft.

The report on SMEs development in the Lao PDR in April 2005 indicated that women were more involved in businesses utilizing traditional skills such as weaving, cooking, etc. Nevertheless, the trend of women participate in new sectors are increased including in construction and plumbing sector. Women living in the urban areas are less empowered as they are engaged mainly in household work whereas women in the rural areas are more empowered as they are the main labour force. Not only do they work hard in the rice fields, but also they take care of the family. They are more involved in the family decision making than women in the urban areas. On average, 85% of women in the rural areas work hard in the family, especially ethnic women.

## **Handicraft Group**

The Lao Handicraft Group (in which 60% are women) is a cooperation project of the Lao National Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Koblenz of Germany, JICA and JETRO of Japan and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of the Lao PDR.

This project is implemented in schools, trade exhibition centers and in seminar format. Together with similar handicraft development projects, this project helped Lao craftsmen and artists to develop traditional skills such as weaving, silk making, ceramics, bamboos, wood production, handmade paper, silver and decoration items. This project also encourages Lao craftsmen to develop business skills in order to increase their income. In addition, the project improves their skills through handicraft exhibitions and the Annual National Handicraft Day.

## **Article 12: Equality in Access to Healthcare**

- 1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of healthcare in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those relating family planning.*
- 2. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 1 of this article, States Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation.*

Article 3 of the Law on Hygiene, Sanitation and Health Promotion (2001) states, “[e]very Lao citizen shall, irrespective of ethnicity, sex, age, economic and social status, have the right to access to healthcare and has the duties to take care of his/her own health, family and society, to contribute to the work relating to hygiene, sanitation and health promotion.” Article 26 of the same Law also grants to women and children the right to access to vaccination at the prescribed time and place according to the regulations.

Article 30 of the same Law states, “[h]healthcares of mothers and children is a main policy of the State and is a central focus of the public health sector and also a duty of all, especially the father of the children. Women and children have the right to access to healthcare in accordance with the policy of the State, including hygiene, sanitation, health promotion, treatment and rehabilitation before marriage, during pregnancy, before and after the delivery of a baby. As for the children, they shall be taken care of in all cases, including twins and irregular children since birth to the schooling, young and reproductive age so that mother and child have a good physical, mental, emotional and social health.”

Young and reproductive women must have health checkups and get vaccinated according to regulations. During pregnancy, the women must have her health checked, receive prenatal care and monitoring. If a risk is detected, precautionary measures shall be taken, and heavy works shall not be performed. Before and after giving birth, mother must have an appropriate rest time according to the law. The delivery must take place in a hospital, health center or at home, and there must be a medical doctor or traditional doctor take care of the delivery. During pregnancy and postnatal, the mother must receive sufficient nutrition.

A new born baby shall mainly receive breast feeding and complete vaccination. To ensure the health of the mother, birth-spacing should be respected.”

Article 22 of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women states that “*The State recognizes the importance to protect the health of mothers and children.. Families have the obligation to take care of mothers and children to ensure their good health. Women, especially girls, young women, women of reproductive age, and women in remote areas, have the rights of medical treatment, examination, and vaccination according to the regulation. During delivery, there should be a medical staff or birth assistant, as appropriate. It is prohibited for individuals or organizations to force a pregnant woman to deliver her baby in the forest, or in a remote place; it is prohibited to hurt women and children because of superstitious beliefs or other reasons. During child birth period or sick period of the wife, the husband has the right to take leave in order to take care of his wife and child according to the regulations In addition to the special rights and benefits mentioned above, women shall have other rights and benefits as provided under laws and regulations.*”

In the public health sector, the Lao PDR has made considerable achievements over the past 15 years, especially the maternal and infant mortality have been decreased, the number of underweight children has been reduced and more children have received vaccination.

Despite the fact that more people have received clean water and vaccination, the disparity between urban and rural areas in terms of health care still continue. Although the maternity rate has reduced, it is the highest in the region. Such rates in the urban and rural areas vastly vary. Like in the education sector, the more remote the place the bigger lack of healthcare is and the gaps between cities and non-accessible areas are widening. Similarly, the access to health care by ethnic groups is limited particularly the matters affecting women who look after the health of the family members and have reproductive health.

The average of maternal mortality rates as of 2005 had reduced from 530 to 405 per 100,000 new born babies. The rates are considered high in the Lao PDR (Census 2005). In addition, the mother mortality rates in urban and rural areas were in disparity, 170 and 580 per 100.000 respectively (2000). This was because of giving births at home without midwife assistance in rural areas. This also resulted in deaths of newborn babies. According to the available information, almost 90% of women in the rural areas gave births to their children at home while only 25 percent of women in the cities did so. Although the rates of giving births at home in all 3 areas, namely high-land, slope and low-land areas were high, the highest one was that of women living in the high-land areas, which covered 87 %.

Since 2001, public health network has been improved and expanded. There have been four hospitals at central level, four regional hospitals and five health care centers. At provincial level, there have been 16 provincial hospitals, 126 district hospitals. At community level, 742 community health services have been set up covering 742 communities and 3728 villages. Besides, 5425 medical kits have been distributed to villages, extending public health networks to cover 96% of all villages in the country. In terms of medical personnel, 14077 village medical volunteers, 5034 midwives and 502 village nurses have been recruited.

There are six pharmaceutical factories in the country, producing 634 different kinds of medicines and there are three traditional medicine factories, producing 62 kinds of traditional medicines. Medicines made from medicinal plants have been increasingly produced. The pharmaceutical factory No.2 has been able to produce 52 kinds of medicines from medicinal plants; the factory No.3 produces 10 kinds of medicines from medicinal plants, 7 of them not only for domestical consumption but also for export. According 1993 record, the domestic pharmaceutical production had been able to cover 48% of the demand. In addition to public sector, there have been 254 private clinics, 1878 pharmacist shops, 108 of them are in Vientiane Capital. The private health sector has significantly contributed to general health care efforts.

Over the past five years, people have received evidently considerably good quality health treatment. The mortality rates of infants under 1 decreased from 104 (in 1995) to 70 in (2005) per 1,000. Children under five mortality rates reduced from 142 (in 1995) to 98 (in 2005) per 1,000. This improvement is due to the fact that children under 5 years old have received vaccination. The fertility rates reduced from 6.7 (1993) to 4.5 (2005). Those who have applied family planning accounted for 40% in 2005 whereas no records were available before that year. Against malaria, in 2004, 2.9 million bed nets were impregnated, resulted in infection of only 13.5 % and died from malaria was 3%. Tuberculosis suffering accounted for 144/100,000. In respect of clean water, in 2005 clean water

supply covered 67%. The life expectancy had increased from 49 in 1995 to 61 in 2005, 63 for women and 59 for men.

According to the Records of the Ministry of Public Health, more than 60% of children under 5 years old have received vaccination. Presently, most Lao population has received vaccination. Anti-dengue fever project covers 72% of the population and the number of people who use mosquito nets has increased. However, the IMR and CMR were still high in rural remote areas where access to health care services is limited. (MoH, 2001)

According to the information collected in 2004 and 2005, there were 662,829 persons received family planning services. In 2000, according to the fertility and birth control survey, the first marriage and first birth giving records showed that people of 15-24 years old got married and had children at younger ages than previous generations. The observing the changes to gender indicators (ages of the first marriage) is important to the determination of fertility, mother mortality rates and birth spacing control in the future.

The family planning/birth spacing control projects, mother safety projects and child care projects in provinces, districts, and villages have benefited 203,436 women and men. The government's plan for mother protection by implementing the above-mentioned projects is to achieve 25% reduction in mother, infant, and children-under-five mortalities. Men are also required to participate in those projects in order to have a better understanding of women's rights and gender roles. In 2002, it was found that 337 women had gone through sterilization while none of men did. The results of a survey conducted by the Ministry of Public Health in 2002 show that 17,482 men (85%) used condoms, and 94,898 women (47%) applied contraceptive pills, 69,123 applied contraceptive injection and 21,587 had an ultra device put in.

Access to health care services remains a challenge, particularly in the rural areas. As mentioned earlier, health indicators in Lao PDR mark the lowest standard in the region. The mother and infant mortality rates are high. The gaps between rural and urban areas in respect of access to health care are huge. The causes are ranging from the lack of healthcare centers and health care staff in the rural areas to poor infrastructure.

Geographic location has been an important factor determining access to health care services. According to the census in 2005, only 8% of villages had had health care services. According to the information from LECS 3, in Lao PDR, the average traveling time from a village to a healthcare center is 92 minutes. People in rural areas spend 108 minutes to get to a health care service while people in urban areas spend 19 minutes to do the same. Similarly, people in high mountainous areas spend 3 hours to get to a health care center while people in the plane areas spend about 48 minutes. In the rural areas where villages are inaccessible by road, 20% of the population spends 8 hours or more to get to a nearest hospital and only 30% are able to have access to a pharmacy in the villages (LECS 3). About 15% of those who have temporary health problems seek treatment in health care services, 20% of which in urban and 10% in rural areas where access by road is difficult. The difficulty to reach the service places and lack of medical services at near-by places are the important obstacles preventing villagers from using health services.

As illustrated above, almost people in high land areas are non-Lao-Tai groups. The figures show that access to health services is limited. The difficulties to reach a health center prevent Lao women of the four ethnic groups from seeking medical treatment. Among them, Chino-Tibetan women cover highest percentage (38%) (LECS3). In addition, there are more women than men telling that they do not seek health care treatment because of the difficulty of finding a health care center.

Financial issue is another difficult factor barring people from seeking treatment at a hospital, especially, the costs of transportation and treatment. In this situation, very often people have to borrow money, sell their very dear properties or assets to pay for medicines when they are sick. Particularly, this often occurs to women more than men. Lao-Tai women spend more money for health services than their men counterpart - about 8%. The reason why women go for treatment more than men do may be that women need to take care of their reproductive health.

### **Quality of Health Service, Traditional Understanding of Health Care and Language Obstacle Influence Behavior and the Needs for Health Service, especially among those Belong to Ethnic Minorities**

In general, the ethnic groups' understanding about health has been influenced by their beliefs, traditional practices and environments, which have been handed down from their ancestors. For Mon-Khmer, the reliance on spirit (kill animals to offer the spirit) is the first option for healing their illnesses. This is because of the lack of access to health care services. Only in very serious cases, treatments in hospital may be an alternative. The long distance from a village to a hospital is a major obstacle to their choice of seeking treatments in a hospital, especially for poor families. For Hmong-Iwmien, according to available information, traditional treatment is the first option, since the elders (mostly women) are experienced in treatment with traditional medicines. The survey on first-aid treatment in 1999 showed that money had been the main obstacle to ethnic households to have access to health care services.

In rural areas, the quality of public health services is still poor, affecting people's health care efforts. Since many doctors do not speak the ethnic languages, the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Education have created a three-year training program for nurses. During the period from 2002 to 2006, two training courses were completed. In the first course, 87 students completed and were employed to work in community health services. In the second course, there were 131 students, who were in internship at district hospitals, before being assigned to work in different community health services in accordance with their contracts.

In addition, in the southern part, training health care personnel had begun with the same program in a view to provide health care personnel for community health care services in the southern provinces. These training courses would help better serve the ethnic communities in the future. Besides, some information indicates that the demand for medical treatment depends on the understanding and knowledge about the utilization of medicine on the part of the ethnic people (LECS 3).

According to the interviews in the field, it appears that there has been an increase in access to health care information on the part of women. They have been benefited from public health officials who

have been assigned to disseminate health care information to the people and communities about 1 to 4 times a year. They also have access to health information through the media, for example, radio and TV programs. Despite these information providing facilities, people remain ignorant. The biggest obstacles to have access to information, education and health care include illiteracy of Lao language, low level of education, some backward customs, beliefs in superstition and their location in rural remote areas.

The strategic Plan of Public Health for the period run up to 2020 contains four fundamental tasks, namely:

- First, to develop adequate public health service networks and ensure equal access to health care services for all;
- Second, to develop a comprehensive public health service system;
- Third, to provide basic public health services; and
- Finally, to promote self-reliance in public health services.

The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy aims at the alleviation of poverty in the country with focus on the 47 poorest districts, prioritizing public health affairs, which includes the expansion of public health service networks to rural areas. The objectives of capacity building are aiming at training and upgrading medical personnel from the level of nurse to those of postgraduate degrees, emphasizing on the promotion of medical personnel from different ethnic groups, ensuring gender equality and encouraging, with incentives, medical volunteers in remote areas where living conditions are extremely hard. In addition, the Strategy also focuses on taking care of the health of the rural mothers and children.

### **The Rate of HIV/AIDS infection is relatively low, but the spread of the virus is on the rise**

According to WHO/UNAIDS (2004), CHAS (2005), the rate of HIV/AIDS infection in Lao P.D.R is 0.08 percent, which is relatively low if compared to those in neighbouring countries. The HIV virus was found for the first time in Laos in 1990 and AIDS in 1992. About 1,470 people have been infected with HIV/AIDS and about 279 people are found HIV positive in their blood (UNAIDS) and 556 people have died of AIDS. 62% of people with HIV/AIDS are male and 38% are female. More than half of the people with HIV/AIDS are between twenty to thirty-nine years old. Of the infected, 95.1% have been infected through sexual intercourse, 0.7% through man homosexual intercourse; 3.6 per cent from mother to child; 0.3 through blood infusion; and 0.08 because of drug abuse.

The prevention of HIV/AIDS has been one of the objectives of the Government's Poverty Eradication Programme, provided in the NGPES. The rates of HIV/AIDS spread among women tend to increase, according to NCCA (2003). The number of women infected with HIV/AIDS increase at an average rate of 8% a year. In 1995, of those people who have been infected with HIV/AIDS, women were accounted for 33% while the new statistics indicates that women are accounted for 60%. It can therefore be concluded that the number of women infected with HIV/AIDS is on the rise (NCCA 2006).

Notwithstanding the public dissemination of information on HIV/AIDS, the studies show that the awareness of HIV/AIDS is high but the knowledge about it is still limited (PSI 2000). For example, 23% of those who have been interviewed tell that they do not know that HIV/AIDS can be infected with blood. More than a half of them do not know that it can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy and milk feeding. In addition one-third of those who frequently have sexual intercourses do not use condoms.

### **For many reasons, women are at risk of AIDS**

The study in three provinces in 2000-2001 shows that women working in entertainment places are at risk of AIDS infection. About 0, 9% of women working at such places have been infected with HIV and only 22% of them told that they have protected themselves by using condoms. Besides, women working in entertainment sector, people traveling a lot such as drivers, police, soldiers and migrant workers are at risk of disease infection because they often have unsafe sexual intercourses. Poverty ignorance, sexual abuse, trafficking in person and migration of labor for employment or business are the main causes of women and girls being at risk to HIV/AIDS. Some practices that are handed down from generation to generation remain obstacles to safe sexual intercourses.

### **Problems and challenges**

- The rates of AIDS infection among girls serving in entertainment places in some provinces increased from less than 1% in 2001 to about 4% in 2004.
- The rates of sexual disease infection among girls serving in these places and their clients are still high.
- The number of girls and clients in such places are increasing.
- The knowledge about AIDS and other sexual diseases among girls serving in entertainment places remains low.
- Migration and changing places of work of girls serving in entertainment places.
- The rate of using condoms among girls in entertainment places is still low.
- Drinking and using drugs are the causes of sexual relations and increase the possibility of having unsafe sexual intercourses.
- The combat against AIDS has not been adequately and comprehensively campaigned.

### **The government of Lao PDR is making every effort to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS**

The government of Laos formulated a Strategic Plan and Plan of Action to combat HIV/AIDS for the period 2000-2005 which had been coordinated by the office of the National Committee against HIV/AIDS (NCCAB). In December 2001, the Ministry of Public Health adopted a new policy on AIDS and other sexual diseases to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. The government has promoted the Educational Project of “Friends teaching Friends”, vocational training and activities for raising awareness with the supports of UNAIDS Programme. The Committee on Fund Raising for combating AIDS has been established. Its main task is to mobilize resources and distribute them to the provinces and government agencies as to enable them to combat the spread of the disease. Besides, the Minister of Public Health has also called for a comprehensive development, particularly health care services

for mothers and children and vaccination; and called for developing a system of decentralized management as to provide communities an easy access to health care services and develop health information system with a view to better serving the community and people.

### **Article 13: Economic and Social Benefits**

*State parties shall take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular:*

- 1. The right to family benefits;*
- 2. The right to bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit;*
- 3. The right to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life.*

### **Women's Right to Benefits from Families**

Article 2 of the Family Law provides, “*the equality between men and women in a family is secured in that women and men have equal rights in all aspects of family relationship. The existence of family relationship does not depend on birth, economic and social status, race and ethnic origin, culture, occupation, religion, residence and so on*”.

Article 13 provides, “*in a family, the husband and wife are equal in all aspects of family life. The couple shall decide together matters in the family. They shall love, respect, take care and assist one another, look after and educate their children ad their family to become family of unity, happiness and progress*”.

Article 20 of the law on the Development and Protection of women provides, “[*a*] *woman has rights and interests in the family as follows: during her pregnancy or when their child is younger than one year old, the husband may not request a divorce. In case a divorce is allowed, the wife has the priority to request that the child be with her. In case that a couple having sexual intercourse or the girl partner is pregnant before they get married and the boyfriend refuses to marry the girlfriend, the girl is entitled to claim compensation and maintenance from the boyfriend until the child reaches the age of 18. The mother has the right to represent her coming child in succession and maintenance of property.*”

According to the 2000 Decree on Social Security Scheme for People Working in Enterprises, Article 36 provides, “*a female member who cannot work during her pregnancy or within six months after giving birth to a child, she shall be entitled to the same benefits as the case of illness, as provided in Article 37 of the Decree*”. Article 43 provides, “*a female member of the social security scheme who is on leave for her pregnancy, after giving birth to a child, or miscarrying or adoption of a baby shall be entitled to the benefits provided for giving birth to a child by the Authority of Social Security*”.

Article 47 provides, “*a female member, or wife of a member of the social security scheme has given birth to a child or has adopted a child whose age is less than one year shall be entitled to a bonus provided for the case of giving birth to a child regardless of the birth place. The bonus shall be equal to 60% of minimum salary per child*”. Article 48 also provides that in case of a member dies, the Authority of Social Security shall pay in lump sum for the funeral which is equal to his/her six month

benefit from the Fund. If his/her spouse dies, the member shall receive an amount of money equal to three-month benefit from the Social Security Fund.

Article 47 of the Decree also provides further that members who have reached 60 years of age shall be entitled to retirement. In special case, a member who has reached 55 years of age may be also entitled to retirement benefits.

The Authority for Social Security has made a progress in serving working people. Now social security funds both in public and private sectors have been established for men and women who are wage earners (for detail information see preceding paragraph in Article 11).

### **Women's Rights to Bank Loans, Mortgages and other Forms of Financial Credit**

Article 46 of the Law of Contract (1990) provides, “*a contract on borrowing money is an agreement concluded by the parties to the contract under which the lending party shall give the money or other form of property to the borrowing party and the borrowing party shall return the money or other form of property of the same amount and quality as the borrowed property to the lending party at the time specified in the contract.*”

The sources of credit in rural areas, especially in remote areas where are far away from national road system are from families, friends and private money lenders (covers 33%) the amount of loans are small, suitable for use in the family during the farming seasons of the year. A half of the indebted families have borrowed money in short terms without exact rates of interests. Informal lending institutions provide only 15% of the demand. Material suppliers and money lenders are also significant sources of credit for farmers, the interest rates of which are very high, ranging from 42-73% a year. Most of the farmers who have sought these sources of capital are those families who urgently need the money for farming and for their daily subsistence.

Women seldom borrow money from formal monetary institutions and they are confident to approach to the banks. Traditionally, they feel shy to borrow money because borrowing money means being indebted<sup>3</sup>. They are shy to go to a bank for borrowing money since they are not familiar with the bank procedures and formalities, and eventually such task will fall on their husbands to accomplish. Furthermore, most women do not know that they can use their land title certificates as a guarantee for borrowing money from the bank.

Therefore, many women borrow money in their husband's names since their husbands are generally literate and understand the legal rights and obligation concerning the borrowing money, including the repayment of the money borrowed. Traditionally, being indebted is shameful so women dare not go to the bank for borrowing money because they are afraid that people would disclose their debts. As a result, they often resort to private money lenders for borrowing money, which are not very difficult and complicated as borrowing from systematized and established financial institutions such as banks or saving and credit groups.

<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, indebtedness is an expression of poorness. Borrowing money is therefore a shameful act.

The Lao Women's Union has established and is implementing Lending and Saving Projects at village level, Revolving Development Funds for women groups, Saving Groups and Village Development Funds. This measure is being carried out in Vientiane Capital, provinces, Ministries and in a number of central agencies. So far, progress has been made in the operation of these financial establishments. Funds have established in 44 districts, 616 villages and participated by 210,546 villagers, attracting a capital of 53,666,491,760 kip. The most successful story is the case of the Capital of Vientiane. Such Funds have provided funds to families for their production, cultivation, animal raising and small business.

The successes of the Lending and Saving Projects, Saving Groups, Village Development Funds have resulted in the improvement of the financial status and quality of life of women, their families and the society as a whole, and in the mobilization of ideas, intellects, resources from individuals and organizations for production and assistance one another in time of needs. A number of women in villages have the knowledge of and experiences in financial management. They can act as trainers for women, as to improve the organization of women's union at village level.

### **Women's Right to Recreation, Sport and Cultural activities**

Article 16 of the Law on women's Protection and Development provides, “[the] State promotes and creates favorable conditions for women to exercise the equal rights with men in respect of social and cultural activities such as the right to participate in cultural-social, artistic, sport, educational, health activities and in scientific, technical and technological studies and researches. Families and society create conditions and opportunities for women to participate in such activities as mentioned above”.

Girls are provided equal opportunities with boys to participate in sport and sport education. There are 373 sport trainers in the country, 38 of which are women. In primary and secondary school, equal opportunities are open to both male and female students to participate in sports and games. Both male and female students enjoy the same teaching curricula and programmes and they play together in such games as soccer, volleyball, badminton and other sports that can be played in pairs.

According to statistic data provided by the National Committee for sports, after classes, about 6400 boys and 3100 girls go running for exercise during their spare time and according to the same sources of information, women and girls like playing basketball and volleyball during their spare time while men and boys like playing soccer, karate and Lao boxing. In the End of Buddhist Lend festival in 2005, 260 men and 158 women joined the National Boat Racing. In SEA Games 2005 in Philippines, there were 13 sportswomen and 54 sportsmen participating in the Games.

### **Article 14: Women in Rural Areas**

1. *State Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non- monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.*

2. *State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:*
  - a. *to participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;*
  - b. *to have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counseling and services in family planning;*
  - c. *to benefit directly from social security programmes;*
  - d. *to obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;*
  - e. *to organize self- help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self employment;*
  - f. *to participate in all community activities;*
  - g. *to have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;*
  - h. *to enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing agitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.*

### **Alleviation of Poverty for Women in Rural Areas**

In early 2002, the Government adopted the Decree No. 13/PM, re-organizing the Central Committee on Rural Development, by entrusting the Ministry of Agriculture, as the Coordinating organization, to coordinate the work of rural development with other Ministries and agencies concerned through out the country.

There were 61 development points/areas in sixty different districts in 2002, covering 970 villages and 62 972 households with a population of 367 248, in which women were 178,882. The Government investment over the past 5 years accounted for 184.17 billion kip in 1, 454 projects.

The Government has also established a National steering committee on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication. The policy on comprehensive rural development has been implemented extensively throughout the country. In every province and district, there have been several designated intensive development areas/points, and many of them have become a model for comprehensive rural development and have become economic and cultural centers in their own rural remote and mountainous areas, bring about changes to the profiles of the rural areas.

Personnel specialized in rural development at central and local levels have been trained and village development volunteers have been enlisted in intensive development areas. Vocational trainings have been organized for people in such areas. The comprehensive development projects have been implemented in 15 provinces, 39 districts, covering 127 villages and 9171 households.

The Poverty Alleviation Fund, established by the Government and the World Bank with the Ministry of Planning and Investment (formerly the Committee for Planning and Investment) acting as executing agency, begun to operate in 2003.

The Fund has funded 1212 projects in 20 districts of 5 provinces, covering 1913 villages in 239 intensive development areas. These projects have encouraged the active participation of women and they have responded accordingly.

Since 2000, the Government has set up 14 projects dealing with elimination of opium cultivation by offering the people alternative paths of leading their lives. In addition to the 8 opium addict treatment centers, the Government has, through these projects, exerted its efforts to train people regarding knowledge and skills in cultivation, animal raising and handicraft. The Fund has also lent its supports to the promotion and encouragement of agricultural and handicraft production for commercial purpose. Revolving Funds, Rice Banks and medical kits for first aid have been set up.

Rural development is the hardcore of the government's efforts for poverty eradication, since the poverty in rural areas is the issue number one to which Government needs to pay its attention and it is the key issue needs to be addressed in economic development of the Lao PDR as a whole. This matter has been taken seriously because, according to the census in 2005, 73 percent of the population lives in rural areas while 27 percent in urban areas.

In the Lao PDR, women play a very important role in rural development. Women take responsibility for major parts of the work in agricultural sector and they provide greater source of labor for rice production than their men counterpart. Rice cultivation is the main means of making the living in rural areas. According to the 2005 census, 76 percent of men and 81 percent of women in the rural areas worked in the rice field. Women waste so much of their time for collecting firewood and food in the jungle. At present about 79% of house holds use firewood as main source of energy for their cooking (census 2005).

### **Rural Women's Right to Have Access to Public Health Care Facilities**

In Lao-Tai and Mon-Khmer groups, women use both modern and traditional health services more often than men about 1-3 times. The rate of using health care services by Hmong women is a little higher than that of men, although this ethnic group seek treatments in hospital less than the Lao-Tai or Mon-Khmer do; and Mon-Khmer women have been taken care of their health in hospital at a bit higher rate than that of men, while Hmong women and men every year use health service in hospital almost in an equal footing. Such situation of access to health care creates difficulties for women, since they not only have to look after themselves but they also have the duty to look after their family members. Besides, qualified health personnel often move to find employment in urban areas.

The aggregate fertility rate in Lao PDR is 4.5 (survey 2005). The fertility rate in the urban areas is lower than that in the rural areas. In average, a woman in urban area has one child less than a woman in rural area (NSC, 2005). The average number of children born in the country is 2.2. There are differences between different age groups. It ranges from 0.1 children among women at the age of between 15 to 19 years old to 4.5 children among women at the age between 45 to 49 years old. In the provincial level it ranges from 1.3 in Vientiane Capital to 2.9 in Hua Phan province and former Special Zone, and from 1.6 in urban areas to 2.7 in rural areas where no road access. The survey also shows that the fertility rates have reduced according to the levels of education and different ethnic

groups. The higher the level of education of women the lower the number of children would be. Less than 5% of women who have finished secondary education have more than four children, compared to 28% of women who have never gone to school. An educated woman tends to have children later in life. In comparison of different ethnic groups the number of children per woman also varies from one ethnic group to the other. For the part of Lao and Leu, the average number of children born are very close, 1.9 and 1.8 children per woman respectively while Hmong have 3.1 children per woman.

### **Rural Women's Right to Education**

The 2005 census shows that the literacy rate in Lao PDR is 73% meaning that 73% of the population aged 15 years old onward can write and read. The highest literacy rate is in Vientiane Capital City, which is 92% of population from the age of 15 years old onward can read (female 88%; male 95%). Male literacy rate is 82% and higher than that of women, which is only 63%. The literacy rates also vary from urban areas to rural ones. In urban areas the rate is 89% (female 84.5% and male 94%). While in rural areas the literacy rate is nearly 65% (female 54% and male 77%) rural areas where no road access, the literacy rate is 54% (female 41% and male 67%).

The eradication of illiteracy for targeted groups from the age of 15 years onward in the 2004-2005 academic year should reach the target of 50000 people, having attained 38,265 people (female 19,206 male 19,059) accounted for 76, 57%. So far the plan of eradication of illiteracy has been achieve 73%.

The rates of enrollment of both girls and boys between 6-10 years old in rural areas to which no road access are very low, only 53%. If compared to the central part, the difference is up to 36%, for girls the difference increase to 41%. The enrollment rates of children of between 11 to 15 years are also different greatly. Comparing average rates, in rural areas to which no road access, the difference is 16% in rural areas which no road access, the enrollment rates of females are very low, only 49% if compared to females in rural areas, the difference is up to 38%.

### **Women in Agricultural Sector**

In Lao PDR, most of the population lives in rural areas, about 73%. Agriculture is the main source of making the living for about 78.5% of the population, 76% of which are men and 81% are women.

In general, there are slightly differences between different parts of the country in respect of agriculture. Farmers in Laos are mostly subsistent producers, earning very low incomes. The largest number of farmers is in Saravanh Province, about 93%, and the smallest is in Vientiane Capital City, about 35%.

According to a consumption survey conducted in 2002/03, average earning income generated from agriculture of a household is 4.404.000 a year, (or about \$514 a year calculating at an exchange rate of 1/10.500). Average income of a household in rural areas is 6.316.000kip a year (or about \$601 a year). However, in urban areas the rate is 2.624.000kip or \$250 a year).

Eighty-two percent of women working in economic field are farmers, most of them producing for subsistence. In urban areas, women workers working in the field of agriculture cover 47%. There tends to be gender equality in the production of rice and other foodstuff as well as in livestock, in which women do repeated and time consuming jobs while men do heavy and time-saving work.

Mostly, the jobs done by women and children are those in the home, vegetable gardening, collecting food and firewood in the forest.

The Ministry of Agriculture has undertaken activities for gender-mainstreaming in agriculture which include four areas of work:

1. food production,
2. production of goods,
3. Elimination of slash and burn-farming and providing alternatives to this method of farming, and
4. sustainable management of forestry resources.

It has gender-mainstreamed in programs and projects from central levels down to villages and households. Seminars and workshops on gender mainstreaming have been organized for 54 officials (15 women and 39 men) at the levels of Director of the Ministry of Agriculture and Provincial Department of Agriculture. It has also organized 265 training courses for central and provincial officials in 45 topics with 11,325 participants, 517 of which were women. Gender mainstreaming has been incorporated into the substantive contents of the training programs in sustainable forestry development as well as in rural development projects.

### **Rural Women's Access to Credits and Loans for Agriculture**

Informal lending is an important financial source for rural villagers. The Village Revolving Funds (VRFs) are local financial institutions that provide services along-side with the financial institutions in the formal system. VRFs are free of government taxes and duties, without regulations. Village Revolving Funds are administered and operated by groups of local people with coordination with civil society and financial organizations. Generally, VRFs receive contributions from donors or non-governmental organizations. With such contributions, the VRFs have established over a thousand rice banks. The Funds have been able to provide loans to about 15% of rural villages, and rapidly increased over the last ten years. There are 1,640 VRFs in Lao PDR, providing loans in cash and in kind. These funds are to support income generating or food security activities as well as to support the improvement of products for both consumption and commercial purpose. VRFs are therefore suitable to business activities in the rural areas.

In addition, the Rural Development Programme has established livestock banks and credit funds for providing loans to members of communities. The Lao Women's Union has cooperated with international organizations and non-governmental organizations. The terms and procedures for settlement (loans) vary from donor to donor. The repayment may be in kinds or in cash with or without interests, in whole or in parts and so on.

In general, men, as bread-winner, often represent the families to participate in meetings concerning loans and credits and it is normal for men to decide on women's behalves in respect of their activities ( for example: raising pigs, chicken and knitting/sewing). Both sides are happy with such roles played by men and women, since they perceive that women's engagement in income earning activities is for the families and so is men's borrowing money on women's behalves. The husband acts as the head of the family and the wife acts as the deputy head. Moreover, women of some ethnic groups cannot give their comments just because they are illiterate and have limited skills in participating in a village meeting.

Female members of rice bank committees play a lesser role in decision making related to banks and VRFs for raising small livestock. Many NGOs promote rice banks, which are one of the rural development measures in Lao PDR. Mostly, they establish rice banks, train members of local committees, assistance with rice and build rice storages. When a family runs out of rice they may borrow rice from the rice bank. According to the terms and conditions laid down by the NGOs, a rice bank is required to establish a committee of three, one of which is female who is a member of the Village Women's Union. She will be in charge of accounting work.

Largely, the committee of a rice bank cannot carry out its jobs in accordance with the terms and procedures laid down by the NGO concerned. For example, the female member plays a lesser role in decision making. Hence, village headmen (often men) control all the banks' work. Due to the fact that the number of rice banks is limited and cannot meet all families' needs, it is necessary to have borrowing regulations in a view to assisting those families who badly need the loans. For example everyone may borrow money from a rice bank, except those families who have already enough rice. In addition, the regulations are also based on the number of members in a family, for instance, with more children and young people, the loan will be much more necessary than other families with more adult members.

Families whose heads are women without husbands (widow, divorced or very old woman) are in target group too. Since women are main labor forces for raising small livestock, such as poultry and pigs, they should be given loans for their businesses. However, when NGOs come to help promote business of raising animals like poultry and pigs, it turns women's jobs into "formal work". As a result, it requires men to share the responsibility with women as well.

In addition, women rarely participate in the management of VRFs for raising small livestock. For this reason attention needs to be paid to women's contribution to the implementation of Micro-Financial Projects in high land areas, particularly in the areas live ethnic groups, because women play a key role in animal raising, especially in preparation of animal food and feeding them. Although it is said that women raise small livestock, men represent the families to borrow money. Hence, as the families' head, men represent their families at meetings.

### **Rural Women and Land Reform**

Women and men have the right to equal access to land, in practice, however, tradition is the main obstacle to such access. Under the Law of Lao PDR, both men and women have the same right to

land. In practice, however, traditional way of succession dominates the law enforcement. For Lao-Tai group follow also patriarchal tradition, meaning that a majority of men have the right to control properties. According to the traditional practice, parents will share out the property to everyone in the family. The child who looks after the parents may have the parents' shares. The youngest daughter/son often does this.

Among other ethnic groups, particularly Hmong-Iuwmien and Khmu( Mon-Khmer), the succession of land follows the father's line. The family name and property of a family of these groups will be succeeded by the son(s), and the wife depends on the husband. For example, she has to move to her husband's home after getting married. Men are considered as the "owners and administers" of land. For women, on their part, generally do not have the right to succession of land from their parents (GRID 1997).

In 1998, GRID and NSC jointly conducted a survey on women's access to land in Laos. The result shows that the names on a land title certificate and the original "owners" of the land are different. As can be seen from figure 1 and 2, only 16% of land title certificates are in wives' names while 40% of those pieces of land have been acquired by way of inheriting from wives' parents. 58% of the land title certificates are in the names of husbands, but only 18% of those pieces of land have been acquired by way of inheriting from the husbands' parents. A reason for this situation may be partly because women do not have the knowledge of and have no access to information of land rights. In addition, there are other reasons such as women belonging to ethnic minorities are illiterate, not able to read and write Lao language, the gender's differences in respect of traditional land right, and lack of self-confidence on the part of women. Another reason is that the general view of the society considers men as heads of the families. Therefore, their names should appear in such documents.

Since 1990, the Lao Governments has set up and implemented a land titling project: Land Titling Project phase 1 and Land Titling Project phase 2, with the objective of providing land titles for people in urban areas, urban vicinities and rural/agricultural areas. Lao Women Union plays an important role in implementing such a project, participating in the implementation of the Project activities such as organizing meetings in villages, dissemination of information, raising awareness of the advantages of a permanent land titles and the rights of men and women to the use of land. At the same time, the Lao Women's Union at district and village levels also plays an important role in increasing the number of women's land titles. According to a socio-economic study in 2004, the land Titling Project Phase I made a great achievement by providing land titles to an increasing number of women. In the Land Title Project Phase II, the Lao Women's Union has also continued to represent women in Land Policy making and actively participated in monitoring the implementation of the Land Titling Project.

According to the verification and issuance of land title certificates in conformity to the law, it can be seen clearly that number of female ownership is greater than that of men, if compared to the figure before the Land Titling Project as illustrated in the table I the annex.

## **Women's Access to Clean Water, Irrigation and other infrastructures**

The result of the 2005 census shows that about 35% of individual households have had access to clean water (water supply, water from the well/tapping underground water). Over the last ten year, access to clean water has been improved, the number of households having access to clean water have been more than double. In the 1995 census there was only 15%. Comparing between provinces, cities and rural areas, the differences are very big, 67% of households in cities have access to clean water, while only 27% of households in rural areas which are accessible by road have access to clean water, and 13% of rural areas to which no road access have access to clean water.

## **Measures for Elimination of Discrimination Against Rural Women**

Lao women play a very important role in agriculture and other economic activities. They also bear the basic responsibility for food and take care of their household members' health. The government is well aware that without the contribution of women, especially women of poor ethnic groups, the targets of poverty alleviation and the improvement of indicators of national education, health and population would not be achieved as set forth.

The government is therefore taking firm step in all key economic sectors by way of implementing National Plan of Action to assist poor women to participate in the economic activities, improve access to basic services such as education, public health and resources for main production: expansion of services that assist them to participate in basic decision making process and include their needs into the national development policy.

The promotion of gender equality is an important national effort, which is reflected in Articles 22 to 24 of the 2003 Amended Constitution and in the adoption of many international instruments, such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the recent establishment of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women. The guarantee of equal access to basic services and production resources is gender equality-the basis of justice-, efficiency (poor women are valuable resource) and effectiveness (the support provided for women is necessary in the implementation of National Policies on Elimination of slash and burn-farming, opium cultivation and National Policies on education, public health and population). Under the guidance of the newly established National Commission for the Advancement of Women, it is expected that each ministry will develop its own strategies and plans of action for the promotion of gender equality at the national, provincial, district and village levels. Some ministries have begun to integrate gender role by undertaking the following actions:

- Establish a high level working group on gender equality;
- Collect gender-disaggregated data relating to poverty alleviation and other national goals;
- Use these data to have the general picture of gender role or to assess gender role in each sector;
- Develop a strategy plan on gender role and an action plan on issues and problems related to women's participation in the concerned sectors in view of ensuring fairness;
- Organize workshops, trainings and capacity-building on gender role;

- Improve gender role and ensure a proportionate representation of ethnic officials at all levels;
- Review the gender role in all new policies, programmes, and projects;
- Consult with local women in the formulation of new projects relating to poverty alleviation and ensure their participation in the implementation of these projects, including expanded services and trainings.

### **Rural Women and Access to Health Care Services and Family Planning**

Although the actual health services network is adequate from the central to the localities, yet it has not reached many villages in the remote areas; even in the areas where services are available, their quality remains low.

In 2005, the government has planned to expand more than 80% of basic health services to reach villages throughout the country especially the rural and poor villages to have access to primary health services, hospitals and health centers, pharmacies, public and private health clinics. 80% of the rural areas need to have health service staff, first-aid kits, the village's health committee. In the district hospitals and health centers, health service staff and health equipments are required. To achieve the objectives of expanding primary health services, the government needs to:

- Evaluate and draw lessons from the basic health care projects and other projects implemented so far;
- Strengthen district health service system by focusing on incentive policies to motivate the medical staff working in the remote areas, in particular among female, and ethnic medical staff;
- Improve and expand basic health services from the provincial to the village levels by:
  - establishing village health service committees in all villages throughout the country. This committee should include more female members to help promote hygiene to the villagers on a regular basis.
  - setting up 100 new health centers-in 2005 there were 604 centers- and 213 new centers by 2010. The goal is to have 917 centers throughout the country by 2010.
  - improving quality and expertise of 3 regional hospitals to become the 2<sup>nd</sup> or the 3<sup>rd</sup> connected hospitals. This means that they have to be able to promptly solve urgent problems. The regional hospitals must be able to provide teaching and training programs to the provincial and district health officers, including providing technical supports and assistances.
  - improving the provincial hospitals to become the 2<sup>nd</sup> connected hospitals in providing health services. This is to create favorable conditions for villagers to use health care services. The provincial hospitals must be able to provide immediate surgery, birth surgery, safe natural birth given process, bone surgery, and stomach surgery. These are expected to be upgraded in 16 provincial hospitals.
  - improving district hospitals to become primary connected hospitals, particularly in developing and poor areas. Therefore, the district hospitals must be the front center on prevention, treatment and rehabilitation and to provide primary medicines necessary in

- the grassroot levels (health centers and villages) in the areas of their responsibility. In addition, they must be able to treat some alternative diseases.
- Encourage the participation of women together with men in expanding basic health service network in the remote areas.
    - The Lao Women Union is assigned to implement certain projects such as reproductive health, birth spacing, and other nutrition projects.
    - Village health committee should increase female members and train them to be trainers in their responsible areas to practice the 3 principles of hygiene (drink boiled water, eat cooked food, wash hands, use rest room). In addition, mosquito nets, especially medicine dyed nets should be recommended for use when sleeping both at home and at their rice fields. Villagers should be advised to go to the health centre for vaccination, to use iodine salt in food cooking, and to use condom for birth control and protection from HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.
    - Encourage both women and men to participate in decision making and to share responsibility.
    - Ensure the participation of women in health care services network at all level.

### **Measures to Ensure Women in Rural Areas on Formal and Non-Formal Education.**

In education sector, the Government has set out a programme to implement the national strategic plan on the development of women as follows:

#### **1. Create conditions for women to access education opportunities**

- Promote education development at the kindergarten level and increase girls' school enrollment equal to that of boys;
- Promote equal primary school enrollment of girls and boys of the school age; and create conditions for parents and guardians, particularly in the rural and ethnic areas, to send their children to school.
- Establish different models of teaching and learning strategies to encourage women/girls to study and eradicate women's illiteracy in poor areas.
- Improve community education centers and education development centers to enable women to advance their education and participate in vocational training relevant to the promotion of the family's economy and living standards.
- Improve secondary school networks in the poor areas and create good relationships between families, promote friend-family relationship to help female students studying in other villages far from their home.
- Improve capacity of polytechnic and technical schools in each area to provide dormitories for female students from provinces and rural areas in order to increase their school attendance rate.
- Create opportunities to reduce the gaps between localities and provinces, and between sexes and ethnics; establish ethnic boarding schools in some provinces.
- Increase capacity of higher educational institutions in every part of the country with dormitories for female students through the support of the government fund. Encourage the private sector and communities to increase their contributions; particularly in the

promotion of friend-family relationships to help female students during their home stay period.

- Encourage married or working women to return to school and upgrade their knowledge.
- Continue to encourage teachers, school directors and educational administrators at every level to pay attention to gender issues and create good environment for children.
- Give priority to developing and training female teachers in rural areas and remote ethnic areas.

## **2. Education and Training for Women**

- Monitor and collect the number of female teachers and assign them to appropriate positions at each locality.
- Increase the percentage and qualifications of female teachers at all levels and in all fields as well as define the required level in order to promote female teachers/staff to positions and responsibilities in the educational management at all level.
- Establish criteria and conditions to encourage women/female students to have higher education and to enhance their knowledge and skills in accordance with their assigned positions and responsibilities at each level in both government and private sector.
- Improve regulations on the selection of staff, especially the selection of female staff and students for short-term and long-term training in order to ensure the appropriate percentage of women's participation.
- Expand teacher training for ethnic women in areas where educational level remains low.
- Improve illiteracy eradication activities and provide basic vocational training for women in poor villages so that they could contribute to economic development and generate income as well as improve living standards of poor households.
- Create regulations for increased attendance of female students in vocational and management training; and create favorable conditions to employment opportunities upon completion of their training.
- Improve the quality and quantity of vocational training system for female workers, technicians, engineers, managers and businesswomen in order to increase the representation of women in job division according to the labour market.
- Improve knowledge and abilities of female staff and teachers on human resource management, fund management, and strengthen their abilities to allow them be appointed to management positions at all levels, in particular, as school directors.
- Improve the existing regulations and policies; create favorable conditions and appropriate policies for female staff and teachers to play an important role in management system of each sector from the central to local levels.

## **3. Encourage Women to Have Education and Trainings**

- Create conditions for disadvantaged girls to access to education; create opportunities for female students in poor areas by providing dormitories or host families to support them during their study; provide support to schools far from the village to have dormitories, in particular in rural and ethnic areas with high percentage of repetition and dropout.

- Promote and encourage the whole society to be cognizant of the importance of women's education; Create conditions to increase the role of women in the education of their children, family management, making a living, running a business and the administration of the State and society.
- Mobilize and promote abilities of female educational staff at the provincial and district level to improve academic curriculum to meet the needs of the communities and set appropriate schedule in accordance with the production seasons in order to encourage regular school attendance of female students.
- Assist the community to acknowledge to linkage between poverty and regular household chores; and seek solutions the existing problems in order to create confidence for parents and guardians in sending female children to school.
- Conduct research and analysis on various topics related to gender promotion in educational activities to serve as references in systematically planning for women development. To achieve these goals, the government has planned to increase the government budget for educational development from 11.6 % in 2005 to 16% in 2010.

### **Measures to Ensure Rural Women's Access to Credit and Technology**

The improvement of the finance and banking sectors is a necessity for sustainable growth. The very concerned issue is the financial management in rural areas which needs improving. At present, only a small number of farmers can access to such social services. However, as a result of the improvement of transport and communication network and the increased capacity of the banking system, it is most likely that the financial management system will expand as well. The Agricultural Promotion Bank will ultimately turn into an independently marketing rural financial institution. The rural financial and micro-finance institutions will operate within the regulations and policies formulated by the Bank of Lao PDR. There will be various forms of support to the micro-credit institutions. Rural credit and micro-credit strategies as well as the programme's action plan are in the preparation stage. The main objectives of the future strategy and action plan on rural credit and micro-credit are the followings:

- Support market reforms.
- Create a legal framework for sustainable micro-credit institution.
- Ensure the independency of micro-finance institutions in determining interest rate and other business decisions.
- Organize a forum on micro-finance institutions.
- Improve organizational structure of the Agricultural Promotion Bank to become an independent rural financial institution. However, the micro-finance project has also encountered with a range of problems such as:
  - Only small portions of rural people have access to the credit service.
  - Credits for irrigation, roads linked to rural areas, agricultural production warehouse, processing materials and others are still limited.
  - Lack of guidelines and loan procedures.
  - The financial institutions have limited experiences in the management of microfinance projects.

-Only a small number of borrowers (farmers and small and medium-scale investors) have experiences in financial management.

Having advanced technology is a potential in increasing the production of fruits, vegetables and animals. Internal researches will obviously increase the production. Therefore, according to the agricultural development plans, the government will:

- Develop a comprehensive development system for technology transfer on agricultural and forestry production, in particular in the mountainous areas.
- Ensure researches and service promotion appropriate to the actual needs.
- Expand research projects and do simulation in the field with farmers.
- Introduce protection methodology for domestic products after harvesting and processing for families and communities.
- Develop technology in different zones and rural areas.
- Develop appropriate technology for the improvement of animal raising.
- Develop technology for fish raising in ponds, including pond management, feeding and increase fish species.

### **Measures in Business Promotion**

The government has implemented the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy, which ensures the participation of rural women in income generation activities, in particular in the small business promotion through the following measures:

- Cooperate with concerned sectors to reduce the steps in business registration, issuance of licenses and collection of tax from small-sized businesses.
- Provide facilities for small-sized businesses in the border and free trade areas.
- Improve market information through radio, internet and other media technologies for small-sized businesses, in particular in the weaving field.
- Coordinate with the Bank of Lao PDR and the Agricultural Promotion Bank, the Lao Women's Union and international organizations in order to improve credit access by the small-sized businesses and develop a fund saving group for ethnic women.
- Increase women's participation in the management of the Association of small-sized businesses.

### **The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy**

The Lao PDR has developed a National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy and therein has given a priority to gender mainstreaming. The Government has taken well defined actions in the main sectors of the economy and has created a national programme to support poor women, improve their access to basic services such as education, healthcare and production resources, promote their participation in the fundamental decision making and include their needs in the national development policy. Following the recommendations of the Lao National Commission for the Advancement of Women, major ministries began integrating gender perspective into the ministerial work through:

- Setting up a high level working group on gender roles to be responsible for coordination in collecting and making assessment of sex-disaggregated data on poverty alleviation, identifying and monitoring gender issues and the poverty alleviation goals, target groups and indicators, seeking investments in making policy and programmes on gender development, establishing a committee to be responsible for conducting a study on gender issues in all sectors;
- Collecting sex-disaggregated data on poverty alleviation and other development goals of the country;
- Using the collected data to create a general picture on gender roles or to assess the gender situations in all sectors;
- Making a strategic plan and a gender mainstreaming plan to identify main topics and issues regarding the participation of women in all sectors, defining specific methods for implementation and creating workable indicators;
- Organizing trainings on gender issues and capacity building for staff;
- Improving gender roles in all sectors.
- Reviewing the policies, programmes and projects on gender issues in order to ensure their successful implementation.
- Conducting consultations with women living in localities in designing new project relating to poverty reduction and ensuring their participation in such projects, including their access to promotion and training services.

### **Article 15: Equality before the Law and in Civil Matters**

1. *The government shall accord to women equality with men before the law.*
2. *The government shall accord to women, in civil matters, a legal capacity identical to that of men and the same opportunities to exercise that capacity. In particular, they shall give women equal rights to conclude contracts and to administer property and shall treat them equally in all stages of procedure in courts and tribunals.*
3. *The government agreed that all contracts and all other private instruments of any kind with a legal effect which is directed at restricting the legal capacity of women shall be deemed null and void.*
4. *The government shall accord to men and women the same rights with regard to the law relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile.*

### **Equality of Women and Men before the Law**

Articles 35 and 37 of the Lao Constitution state that men and women have equal rights and duties before the law. Article 2 of the penal law specifies that “*An individual can only be charged with and punished for an offence based on intentional or negligent acts deemed dangerous for society as defined in this law and [can be punished] only when a decision is rendered by a court.*” Article 4 of the People’s Court of the Lao PDR (2003) also states that “*All Lao citizens are equal before the laws and the courts, irrespective of their gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, language,*

*educational level, occupation, beliefs, place of origin or other factors. Lao citizens have the right to take an action to court on issues pertaining to any action that affects their lives, health, rights and freedoms, dignity or properties.”*

The Penal Law provides for reduced criminal responsibilities of women in special circumstance. Article 31 of the 2005 revised Criminal Law stipulates that “*Circumstances conducive to the reduction of penal responsibilities are when an offender is less than eighteen years old; and a female offender is in the state of pregnancy.*” Article 32 of the same law mentions that “*It is forbidden to inflict a death sentence on offenders who are less than eighteen years old at the time of the offence, and on women who are in the state of pregnancy at the time the offence is committed, when the court makes its decision, or when the sentence is imposed.*” Article 36 also states that “*The sentence of house arrest may not be imposed on offenders who are less than eighteen years old and on women in the state of pregnancy or women in custody of small children who are less than eight years old at the time the offence is committed.*”

Article 126 states that “*A married person having sexual relations with a third person shall be punished by three months to one year of imprisonment or by re-education without deprivation of liberty and shall be fined from 500,000 Kip to 5,000,000 Kip. The partner in adultery shall be punished on the same charges.*”

Article 127 states that “*any person failing to care for minor children, parents in poverty, or a disabled or sick spouse in accordance with a court decision shall be punished by public criticism and shall be fined from 300,000 Kip to 3,000,000 Kip.*”

Article 21 of the Law on Development and Protection of Women states that “*Pregnant women, who have committed a crime, shall not be sentenced to life imprisonment ...*” and “*It is forbidden to inflict a death sentence .... on women who are in the state of pregnancy at the time the offence is committed, when the court makes its decision, or when the sentence is imposed.*”

In short, the Lao PDR ensures equal rights of men and women which are reflected in the Constitution and Laws of the Lao PDR. Practically, women and men have access to legal service, although the percentage of women working in the legal area is lower than that of men.

The National University of Laos has improved legal education in which one of the important activities in this field is to integrate gender training into the curriculum for the students majoring in Administration and Law. A strategic plan and an action plan on gender mainstreaming have been established and integrated into the curriculum of Administration and Law, particularly human rights studies including CEDAW. GRID has organized gender trainings for legal officers and judges throughout the country. As a result, judges have increased their knowledge and understanding on gender perspectives, the examination of cases and sentences is delivered in accordance with gender situation and without discrimination based on sex.

## Equality of Women and Men in Civil Matters

Article 17 of the Law on the Protection and Development of Women states specifically on the inherit heritage by children that *“Daughters and sons have equal rights to inherit heritage.”* Article 20 of this law also mentions that *“When the wife is pregnant or when the newly born child is less than one year old, the husband is not allowed to request a divorce. However, the wife has the right to do so; In the event of divorce, the wife has priority regarding custody of the children; If sexual relations occur between a man and a woman and if [either] the man does not marry the woman or they have a child before marriage, the woman shall be entitled to claim compensation from the man and she shall also have the right to request for expenses for child care until the child reaches 18 years of age; In the event of the division of an inheritance, a mother has the right to represent her unborn child to inherit and manage such inheritance.”*

## Equality of Women and Men in Settlement and Choosing Place of Residence

Article 40 of the 2003 amended Constitution states that *“Lao citizens have the freedom of settlement and movement as provided by the laws. Article 14 of the Family Law states that the husband and wife have the right to engage in political, economic, cultural and social activities. The choice of the family’s place of residence is jointly decided by the married couple.”*

In reality, due to the fact that the Lao PDR has 49 ethnic groups, family structures and marriage traditions are diverse. In settlement, the Low-Land ethnic group, the majority of the population, has their living culture that generally follows the wife’s family pattern, and it is common for the youngest child to inherit land property from parents. According to the tradition, the new married couple lives with the wife’s parents. This means that the married man leaves his family to live with his wife’s relatives. For Khmou ethnic group, living culture follows the families’ pattern of both husband and wife but practically family’s life is husband family-oriented. A new married couple may live with the wife’s family and later moves to the husband’s family. In the Lao-Sung ethnic group, the family is more husband-structured. The son has the right to inherit land, and the daughter has to leave her family to live with her husband.

At the present time, however, the tradition of settlement of married women has changed, especially in the cities. The movement of a married couple does not depend on the parents inheritance. Some couples move out from their families after the marriage or move to live with the family of husband or wife depending on the conditions. This positive trend is not anymore determined by tradition.

## Article 16: Equality in Marriage and Family Law

*1. State parties shall take all appropriate means to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on the basis of equality of men and women:*

- a). The same right to enter into marriage;*
- b). The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;*

c). *The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;*

d). *The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education, and means to enable them to exercise these rights;*

e). *The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, warship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;*

f). *The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation;*

g). *The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.*

2. *The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.*

The Government pays attention to the equality between men and women in marriage and family relations which are reflected in its policies and laws. Article 11 of the Family Law deals with the consideration and registration of marriage that “*a couple having the intention to marry must submit a written request to the family registrar officer. If it appears that the couple meets all required conditions, the family registrar officer shall invite the concerned persons to register their act of marriage in the presence of three witnesses.*”

Article 17 of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women provides that “*Men and women have the right to marry at eighteen years of age. In special and necessary cases, this limit may be lowered to less than eighteen years of age but not less than fifteen years of age. Marriage must be based on mutual consent from both sides without coercion from any side or individual. A husband and wife have equal rights in discussion, decision making, and having common agreement as regards to their place of residence, employment, having children and other matters. A husband and wife must love, respect and support each other, bring up and educate their children together. They must build their family to be a cultural one, full of concord, happiness and progress. Daughters and sons have equal rights to inherit property and to receive education as provided under the laws.*”

Article 20 of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women: “*Women have rights and interests in the family as follows: When the wife is pregnant or when the newly born child is less than one year old, the husband is not allowed to request a divorce. However, the wife has the right to do so; In the event of divorce, the wife has priority regarding custody of the children; If sexual relations occur between a man and a woman and if [either] the man does not marry the woman or they have a child before marriage, the woman shall be entitled to claim compensation from the man and she shall also have the right to request for expenses for child care until the child reaches 18 years of age<sup>4</sup>; In the event of the division of an inheritance, a mother has the right to represent her unborn child to inherit and manage such inheritance.*”

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<sup>4</sup> Readers may wish to refer to Article 8 of the Family Law for more information on these spousal obligations.

Article 20 of the Family Law deals with causes of divorce and provides the equal right of divorce for men and women. Article 22 states further that *“Husband does not have the right to ask for divorce during his wife pregnancy or when a newly born child has not yet reached the age of one year.”* Article 20 of the Law on Development and Protection of Women has a similar provision. Article 23 stipulates on the custody of children that *“If a husband and wife do not agree on the custody of children after divorce, the court shall decide whether the father or mother shall have custody taking into consideration the children's interests.”* Article 24 provides the equal right to spouses in demanding for child maintenance after divorce.

Article 28 of the Family Law states on division of property between married couple after divorce, *“Initial assets shall remain the property of their owner; matrimonial property shall be equally divided between married couple unless the husband or wife is responsible for the break of the matrimonial relationship or for damage to the matrimonial property. The wrongdoer shall only receive one third of the matrimonial property, and in the event that minor children remain with one parent, that parent may receive a bigger share according to the court's decision.”*

Article 33 of the Family Law on parents obligations to protect children’s rights and interests state that *“Parents have equal rights and obligations to protect their children’s rights and interests.”* And Article 35 extends the content of equal obligations of parents to cover their child as well: *“Parents have the obligation to care of their minor children or [for children who], having reached maturity, are unable to work. Obligations to care for children must be met regardless of whether the parents are still living together or divorced.”*

Article 37 of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women stipulates that *“Domestic violence against women and children is a problem which is dangerous to the society, impacts on families, causes lack of warm family environment, [and causes] family separation, which makes it impossible for women and children to live in the family, creating a potential cause for them to become victims of trafficking, drug addiction, and prostitution. To combat domestic violence, the administrative authorities, the Lao Front for National Construction, mass organizations, and social organizations shall pay attention to the dissemination of information to and the education of families to be harmonious and to have gender equality, aiming at ensuring that the institution<sup>5</sup> of the family is stable, happy and progressive.”*

Article 41 of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women: *“The family should promote and support and provide opportunities to women and children for self-development in all aspects, [and] to enjoy equality, rights, and benefits. In addition, the family has an obligation to protect women and children from trafficking in women and children, as well as domestic violence.”*

Article 51 of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women states that *“Any person who does not assist the victims of trafficking in women and children or of domestic violence in severe cases, where he or she is capable of giving such assistance, is punishable in accordance with Article 86 of the Penal Law.”*

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<sup>5</sup> In the sense of the abstract concept of the family.

Articles 35 and 37 of the Constitution of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2003) provide for the equal rights between men and women in the political, economic, cultural, social and family affairs. Moreover, it is stipulated that attention shall be paid with regard to their legal rights and economic and social opportunities. This policy creates favorable conditions for the Lao people on deciding to have children or not and to adopt space birth of children according to the economic and social conditions of the spouse. Therefore, this policy contributes to improving the quality of life and ensures that the increase in population is stable and proportionate to the level of socio-economic development.

Article 14 of the Family Law mentions on spouses' right to engage in activities that *"the husband and wife have the right to engage in political, economic, cultural and social activities."* Article 15 states that *"the husband and wife have the right to choose either the husband's or the wife's family name or to keep their respective original family names."* Article 31 also stipulates that *"parents have the right to choose their children's names according to their preferences and upon mutual agreement. The children's family name shall be the same as their parents if the latter bear the same family name. If the parents have different family names, the children may use either their father's or mother's [family name] with their parents' approval. In the event that agreement can not be reached, the children shall use the family name determined by the court."* The equal rights of spouses on the property are also stated in Article 37 of the 2003 Constitution and are codified in Article 20 of the Law on Property (1990). Article 26 of the Family Law stipulates that *"matrimonial property refers to property acquired by the married couple in common during their marriage, except for personal items of low value. Each spouse has equal rights over matrimonial property regardless of who actually acquired the property. That is not matrimonial property owned by the husband or wife before their marriage or acquired through an inheritance or grant made specifically to the husband or the wife after marriage."* Article 27 of Family Law states that *"each spouse has equal rights over matrimonial property regardless of who actually acquired the property. Each spouse has the rights to use matrimonial property in accordance with the requirements of the family. However, both spouses must agree to any exercise of the right of usufruct or disposition in respect of matrimonial property."*

Article 6 of the Law on Heritage and Basis of Inheritance (1990) does not provides for the difference of rights between girls and boys in the inheritance of heritage. But the Law specifically states that *"relative of horizontal lineage older and younger brothers, sisters or, paternal uncles and aunts, maternal uncles and aunts or nephews and nieces have the right to inherit heritage if the owner of the heritage has no child, no spouse."* Article 43 of the same law grants the equal rights to men and women in appointing executors of will. Article 17 of Law on Development and Protection of Women specifically states on children's inheritance heritage that *"daughters and sons have equal rights to inherit heritage."*

### **Part 3: Conclusion, Issues and Obstacles, and Recommendations**

#### **3.1 Conclusion**

1. The Lao Government has always concerted all its efforts in the implementation of CEDAW in order to promote the advancement of women and protect the interests of the Lao women of all ethnic groups. The concerned units have been proactive in the implementation of CEDAW in accordance with the characteristics and the reality in the Lao PDR.

2. The LWU and the CEDAW implementing mechanism, the LNCAW, have strengthened their capacity to integrate gender perspectives into all sectors. The strategic plan for gender mainstreaming and the advancement of women has been included in the national socio-economic development plan.
3. The Constitution and a number of laws have been amended to bring attention to and compile with the rights of women. Trainings on how to fully incorporate and transpose CEDAW provisions into national legal processes have been conducted.
4. The education and public health sectors have been gradually improved. With regard to education, the literacy rate of mothers has increased. Girls, particularly in ethnic and remote areas are receiving better education. As for health, the maternal and infant mortality rate has decreased.
5. The role of women in the family and the society has increased. Women enjoy better protection of their rights, and have increased opportunities and favorable conditions for self-development. They are actively contributing to the development of the society.
6. More than ever, women are participating in decision-making at all levels of society. The electorate has chosen more women than ever before to the National Assembly. The government has appointed an increasing number of women to high-ranking positions.
7. The Government has adopted measures to enable women to have access to credit, poverty reduction funds and land. As a result, more women are engaging in business and taking on tasks related to the family's income generation.
8. The dissemination of CEDAW has been carried out through the media and meetings related to CEDAW. According to an assessment, officials of all levels have increased their awareness and understanding of CEDAW.

### **3.2 Issues and Obstacles:**

Although the Lao PDR has made progress in many aspects in the implementation of CEDAW, it has been faced with the following challenges:

1. Stereotype attitudes and detrimental traditions still exist in the society. These changes will require much more to find solutions.
2. The enforcement of laws concerning women is not strong enough as there remain loopholes between principles and practice.
3. The mechanisms for the advancement of women, especially concerning staff expertise and the limited budget, are not sufficiently strong.
4. Government officials have limited awareness and understanding of CEDAW and of gender mainstreaming.
5. Women have limited access to legal information, making it difficult to protect themselves about their legal rights.
6. Villagers, especially the poor, do not have the opportunities for self-development; they do not have access to the socio-economic services such as self-help funding, education, health care, etc.

### 3.3 Recommendations

- 1 Adopt measures and undertake activities to raise awareness of gender roles in the whole Lao society, aiming at bringing about change in behavior, the eradication of negative attitudes, inappropriate traditions and practices that treat one sex as being inferior to another.
- 2 Build capacity within all sectors at the central and local levels with regard to gender mainstreaming.
- 3 Design measures for law enforcement in reality. Create conducive factors for women to be able to access legal services.
- 4 Further improve the mechanisms and institutions engaged in the promotion of the advancement of women so that they can liaise with all sectors with regard to gender mainstreaming and the implementation of CEDAW.
- 5 Adopt measures to increase the participation of more women in development and decision making on the basis of equality with men so as to increase more women in the leaderships of all levels, from the central to local levels.
- 6 Organize training activities to raise awareness and understanding of CEDAW among Government officials of all levels.
- 7 Improve the methods of dissemination of information on CEDAW through media aimed at raising gender roles in development.
- 8 Continue to lift up the level of female education and to ensure that more girls attend school.
- 9 Facilitate the access by women, especially disadvantaged women to health care services.
- 10 Create employment for women, especially make the work of housemaids become an economic value.
- 11 Improve access by women to economic opportunities such as production capital, market information, production technologies, etc.
12. Develop capacity for the monitoring and reporting on the implementation of CEDAW.

**ANNEX: Sex-Disaggregated Data****Table 1: Members of the National Assembly according to legislatures**

Elections	Total	Female	Male
First legislature ( 1975-1989)	54	4(8,8%)	41(91,2%)
Second legislature (1989-1992)	79	5(6,3%)	74(93,7%)
Third legislature (1992-1997)	85	8(9,4%)	77(90,6%)
Fourth legislature (1997-2007)	99	21(21,2%)	78( 78,8%)
Fifth legislature ( 2002-2007)	109	25( 22,9%)	84( 77,1%)

Source: The National Assembly, 2007

**Table 2: Gender Data on State and Village Leader as of 2006**

Position	Total number	Female	Male
Ministers and Equivalent	22	3 ( 13,63%)	19 ( 86,3%)
Vice Ministers and Equivalent	27	6 ( 22%)	21( 78%)
Directors General	156	23 ( 15%)	133 (85%)
Deputy Director General	304	43 ( 14%)	261 ( 86%)
Provincial Governors, Vientiane Capital City Mayor	17	0	17 ( 100%)
Provincial Deputy Governors	29	0	29( 100%)
Directors	529	93 ( 18%)	436 (82%)
Deputy Directors	576	141( 24%)	435 ( 76%)
District Chiefs	139	3 ( 2,9%)	135 ( 71,1%)
Deputy District Chiefs	217	6 ( 2,8%)	211 ( 97,2%)
Village Chiefs	10,292	132 ( 1%)	10160 ( 99%)
Deputy Village Chiefs	16,171	666( 4%)	15,505( 96%)

Source: PACSA, 2006

**Table 3: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Officials posted abroad in 2006  
(24 countries)**

	Description	Total number	Female	Male
1	Diplomats	124	22	102
2	Ambassadors	22	0	99
3	Staff of international organizations	03	01	02
4	General Consuls	05	01	04

Source: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007

**Table 4: Enrollment of students aged 6-10 and 11-15 in the urban and rural areas**

Urban/Rural Areas	6-10 years old			11-15 years old		
	girls	boys	Total	girls	boys	total
Urban areas	91	88	69	87	90	88
Rural areas with roads	72	75	74	71	82	76
Rural areas without roads	50	56	53	49	71	60
Total	70	73	72	70	82	76

Source: LECS, 2002-2003

**Table 5: Number of Primary School Teachers in the Country, 2005-2006**

Description	Number			Percentage	
	Total	Female	Male	Female	Male
Total of Teachers	27,776	12,999	14,777	46,79	53,21
Monk Teachers	29	0	29	0	100
Private Teachers	789	602	187	76,39	23,72
Introductory Teachers	489	58	431	11,86	88,14
Teachers Graduated under the System 11+1 and 8+3 and without having undergone teacher training	12,808	4,945	7,863	38,6	61,4

Source: The Ministry of Education: Report 2005-2006

**Table 6: Average Enrollment in Primary Schools, 2004-2005**

Description	Total	Female	Male
Rate of Total Enrolments	124,9	119,2	130,4
Net Enrolment of Children aged 6 years old	66,4	65,2	67,1
Net Enrolments of Children, 6-10 years old.	83,9	81,2	86,5
Moving up to Higher Grades	72,4	73,4	71,5
Repeating the same grades	18,3	17	19,3
Dropout	9,4	9,6	9,2

Source: The Ministry of Education: Report 2005-2006

**Table 7: Sex Disaggregated Number of Secondary School Students, 2004-2005**

List	Total	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage
Lower secondary school	243,131	106,088	43.63	137,043	56.37
Upper secondary school	144,510	62,469	42.34	85,041	57.65
Total	390,641	168,557	43.15	222,084	56.85

**Table 8: Rate of the Enrolment of Secondary School Students**

Description	Total	Female	Male
<u>Lower Secondary School</u>			
Net enrolment	51.7	46.2	57
Moving to higher grades	85	86.3	84
Dropout	12	11.9	12.1
Repeating the same grades	3	1.8	3.9
<u>Upper Secondary School</u>			
Net enrolment	34.5	29.5	39.4
Moving to higher grades	88.8	91.0	87.1
Dropout	9.6	8.1	10.7
Repeating the same grades	1.6	0.8	2.2

Source: The Ministry of Education: Report 2005-2006

**Table 9: Students of Colleges and Universities and Colleges, 2005-2006**

Educational Institutions	Number of students			Percentage	
	Total	Female	Male	Female	Male
National University of Laos	26,814	9,250	17,564	34,5	65,5
Champasack University	3,249	1.267	2.162	36,9	63,1
Souphanouvong University	2,042	726	1,316	35,6	64,4
Private Colleges	15.126	6.883	8.243	45,5	54,5
Others	1,436	650	786	45,3	54,7
Total	488.847	18,776	30,071	38,4	61,6

Source: The Ministry of Education: Report 2005-2006

**Table 10: Students of the National University of Laos, 2005-2006**

Grade	Total	Women	Percentage	Men	Percentage
Master degree	109	23	21	86	79
Graduate diploma	2148	62	42	86	58
Bachelor	20,622	8,155	39	12,467	61
Diploma	6,192	1,095	17	5,097	83
Total	27,071	9,335	34,48	17,736	65,52

Source: The Ministry of Education: Report 2005-2006

**Table 11: Illiteracy rates as disaggregated according to age and sex**

Sex	Age 15-34	Age 35-49
Female	25,88%	35,7%
Male	13,54%	17,25%
Combination	19,78%	26,49%

Source: Census, 2005

**Table 12: Enrollment of children aged 6-10 and 11-15 years**

Region	Male	Female	Total
<b>Net enrollment of children aged 6-10</b>			
Northern part	67	61	64
Central part	78	78	78
Southern part	73	69	71
<b>Net enrollment of children aged 11-15</b>			
Northern part	80	63	71
Central part	86	77	82
Southern part	75	66	71

Source: LECS, 2002-2003

**Table 13: Employees as classified into 7 Groups**

Code	Types of Employees	Employees	Women(%)	Men(%)
01	Government	168 388	31	69
02	State Enterprise	11 446	33	67
03	State-Private	121 786	40	60
04	Private	19 486	27	73
05	Employers	7210	31	69
06	Own Business	1 149 906	32	68
07	Family Work without Payment	1 260 671	71	29
	Total	2 738 893	50	50

Source: Census, 2005

**Table 14: Direct employment by export and sex (2002-2004)**

Exports	Direct employment ( total )	Women (%)	Women	Men
Agriculture and forestry products	227.000	50 ( approximate )	138.500	138.500
Lao labour in Thailand	250.000	55	137.500	137.500
Cloths	26.000	80	20.800	5.200
Wood products	20.000	10 ( approximate)	2.000	18.000
Handicrafts	20.000	70 ( approximate)	14.000	6.000
Foreign tourists	18.000	50	9.000	9.000
Total ( percentage )	611.000		321.800 ( 52,7)	289.200 (47,3)

Source: 3<sup>rd</sup> National Human Development Report: International Trade and Human Development, 2006

**Table 15: Number of business leaders in the Lao PDR**

Type of Business	Men	Women	Total
Executive Committee of the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry	15	3	18
Garment and Textile Association	44	22	66
Lao Handicraft Association	39	60	99
Lao Food and Utilities Group	43	17	60
Lao Construction Materials Group	24	8	32
Assembly Industries Association	17	0	17
Vehicle Spare Parts Group	45	12	57
Pharmaceutical Group	14	3	17
Hotels and Restaurants Association	31	12	43
Fuel and Gas Group	17	2	19
Coffee Exporters' Association	16	2	18
Lao Wood Products	10	2	12
Agriculture Processing Group	11	1	12
Electricity Construction and Installation Group	7	0	7
Salt Manufacturers' Group	5	0	7
Construction Business Group	35	1	36
Furniture Group	17	12	29
Processing Industry Group	27	2	29

Source: Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2006

**Table 16: number of giving birth at different places in 2004 and 2005**

	Description	Number of persons giving births
1	Women giving births to children at hospital	41.521
2	Women giving births to children at home without the assistance of midwives	36.066
3	Women giving births to children at home with the assistance of midwives	36.578
Total number		114.165

Source: The Ministry of Public Health's statistics 2004-2005

**Table 17: Immunization rates**

	Description	Percentage
1	Polio vaccination	39%
2	Vaccination against tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis	38%
3	Measles vaccination	31%
4	Vaccination against tuberculosis	51%
5	Vaccination against female tetanus (15-49 years)	25%
6	Vaccination against maternal tetanus	27%

Source: The Ministry of Public Health's statistics, 2005

**Table 18: villages, families and individual using impregnated bed nets**

	Description	Number of villages
1	Villages using impregnated bed nets	19.831
2	House holds using impregnated bed nets	514.790
3	Individuals protected by impregnated bed nets	3.326.747

Source: The Ministry of Public Health's statistics, 2004 and 2005

**Table 19: women using family planning**

	Methods of family planning	quantity
1	Using the pills (combination)	236.509
2	Using the pills(single)	132.350
3	Using injection	132.552
4	Using condoms	180.552
5	UD(ultra device)	78.249
6	Sterilization	1.667
Total		662.829

Source: The Ministry of Public Health's statistics, 2004 and 2005

**Table 20: Statistics of participants of various forms of sport in 2005**

Type of sport	Men	Women
Football	391	140
Volleyball	175	127
Table tennis	66	40
Lao boxing	69	-
Cycling	24	18
Tennis	40	19
Swimming	19	15
Taekwondo	67	62
Beach/sand volleyball	15	9
Total	866	430

Source: The National Sports Committee, 2006

**Table 21: Land Title Certificates Signed and Stamped**

Provinces/ Capital city	Land title certificates which have been signed and stamped						
	Male	Female	Property acquired during marriage	Joint ownership	Legal person	State property	Total
Capital City	32,161	45,202	28,226	7,326	139	14,851	127,905
Savanaket	12,809	24,441	13,657	6,764	2	4,998	62,671
Champasak	13,132	20,571	13,081	1,483	9	5,324	53,900
Luan rabang	6,236	6,046	10,446	1,215	4	4,394	28,361
Vientiane province	11,925	18,656	12,535	1,122	1	2,433	46,490
Khammuan	3,547	6,558	4,284	583		1,624	16,601
Borikhamxay	2,101	2,462	5,091	73	1	682	10,410
Sayaboury	3,369	7,594	6,259	366	2	1,362	18,952
Saravan	2,055	3,439	3,408	35	28	265	9,230
Total	87,335	135,269	96,830	18,967	186	35,933	374, 520

Source: The Land Titling project, Ministry of Finance, 2006

**Table 22. Legal officers in the legal system in Lao PDR in 2006**

	Total	Male	Female
Personnel of the Ministry of Justice	164	113	51
Personnel at Provincial level	330	243	87
Personnel at District level	323	179	44
Personnel of the People's Supreme Court	19	17	2
Personnel of the Provincial Courts	86	78	8
Personnel of the District Courts	168	157	11
Personnel of the Office of Supreme People's Prosecutor	100	78	22
Personnel of the Office of Appellate Prosecution for the Central Region	22	17	5
Personnel of the People's Provincial Prosecutor Offices, Vientiane capital city	251	187	64
Personnel of the People's District Prosecutor, Vientiane capital city	242	211	31
Personnel of the Office of Military Prosecutor	115	110	5

Source: The Ministry of Justice, the People's Supreme Court, the Office of the Supreme Prosecutor, 2006-2007.