



Lao People's Democratic Republic

National Review
Thirtieth Anniversary of the Fourth
World Conference on Women adopted
Beijing Declaration and
Platform for Action (1995)
(BPfA+30)



**National Commission for the Advancement of Women,
Mothers and Children**

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List of Abbreviation

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

NPAPEVAWC	National Plan of Action on Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Children
NSEDP	National Social-Economic Development Plan
PHC	Population and Housing Census
PRF	Poverty Reduction Fund
RMNCH	Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health
SASS	State Authority for Social Security
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDR	Special Drawing Rights
SMEs	Small Medium Enterprises
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SSO	Social Security Office
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VNR	Voluntary National Review

Section 1 – Highlights

The top five outstanding progress Lao PDR has made in the implementation of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) over the past five years includes: **1)** enforcement and strengthened operationalisation of the implementation of the national legal and regulatory frameworks on Gender Quality and Women's Empowerment, **2)** economic participation, employment and opportunity, **3)** access to affordable quality health care including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, **4)** quality education, training and life-long learn for women and girls, and **5)** Supports provided to rural women. Despite the achievements, there are also some challenges such as the lack of gender statistics, the shortage of human and financial resources for implementing BPfA, and the low level of understanding and acceptance of gender equality among the general public, especially those residing in rural and mountainous areas. The evolving forms of human trafficking also make it strenuous to implement BPfA in the country.

The review of BPfA+30 of Lao PDR follows the guidance note and the questionnaire format of the BPfA+30. This national review comes in timely as the country has recently submitted its Voluntary National Review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in July 2024 and concluded its mid-term review of the 9th National Social Economic Development Plan (2021-2025), mid-term review of other sectoral plans as well as Lao Social Indicator Survey III. Therefore, findings from these related documents, among others, form the basis of this review.

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

The review provides five top priorities for the next five years which include: **1)** equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice including on further work on political participation and representation, **2)** quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls, **3)** access to affordable quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, **4)** women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprises, and **5)** gender-responsive disaster risk prevention, reduction and resilience building.

To move forward and to turn these priorities into reality, key strategic pathways to address existing gaps and challenges for the implementation of BPfA in Lao PDR are: **1)** enhancing gender data collection and monitoring, **2)** capacity building and training, **3)** data accessibility and dissemination, **4)** further strengthening policy and strategic frameworks, **5)** enhancing greater international cooperation and support, **6)** addressing data gaps, **7)** greater implementation of economic empowerment initiatives, **8)** further strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, **9)** accelerating and promoting gender-responsive budgeting, and **10)** intensifying awareness raising and changing social norms.

Section 2 – Priorities, Achievements, Challenges and Setbacks

2.1 Most important achievements, challenges and setbacks

2.1.1 Enforcement and strengthened operationalisation of the implementation of the national legal and regulatory frameworks on Gender Quality and Women's Empowerment

Since 2020, the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers, and Children (NCAWMC) together with the Lao Women's Union (LWU) has been putting greater efforts on promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Laws, policies, and plans on gender equality and women's empowerment.

At the national level, effective implementation of the national legal and regulatory frameworks on Gender Quality and Women's Empowerment has been operationalised within:

- Fourth-Five Year National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (NAP Gender Equality 2021-2025)
- Second National Plan of Action on Preventing and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Violence against Children (NAPPEVAWC 2021-2025)
- Alignment with the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED 2021-2025) where gender equality and women's empowerment has been mainstreamed across all the Six Outcomes and articulated explicitly in Outcome 3.3 on socio-economic opportunities with 17 quantitative targets to assess in 2023 and 2025.

The NPAPEVAWC and NPAGE were officially endorsed by the Government of Lao PDR in May 2021 and the Prime Minister's Decrees on implementation of the plans were issued in September 2021.

At the sectoral and provincial level, the Government of Lao PDR has successfully integrated the Second National Plan of Action on Preventing and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Violence against Children (2021-2025) (NPA PEVAWC) and the Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025) (NPA GE) into the plans of all 18 provinces and 25 line/sector ministries.

The two NPAs, implemented through provinces and line ministries, will serve as a national roadmap for the Government's actions to promote gender equality and prevent and respond to violence against women over the next five years. They built on lessons learned from the implementation of previous National Action Plans, and integrated the Lao government's international commitments to promote gender equality and eliminate GBV, including obligations under CEDAW, the ICPD25, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the SDGs.

In addition, greater efforts have been made to ensure greater enforcement and increased public awareness of key regulations and laws, by emphasizing active dissemination and raising awareness across all organizations from central to local levels, including mass media to acknowledge and understand the work plans, international treaties, legislation relating to advancement of women, promotion of gender equality and elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. CAWMCs at all levels collaborate with the executive authority in their respective jurisdiction to actively strive for implementation of gender equality in their ranks. To date, the Lao PDR has adopted more than 158 laws, including laws related to the protection of women's rights. These laws related to the protection of women's rights have been approved and continuously developed, such as Law on State Budget, Penal Code, Civil Code, Law on Gender Equality. Since the Lao PDR has completed the combination the 8th and the 9th Periodic Report on the implementation of the CEDAW, the Lao PDR has adopted the Law on Gender Equality, which is an important law that defines gender equality and guarantees the protection of women's rights. In addition, the resolution of the NA, No. 19/NA/2021, has defined the Law Creation and Amendment Plan (2021-2025). Many laws in the field of protection and promotion of women's rights will be amended, such as the Law on Women's Union, the Law on the Development and Protection of Women, the Law on Civil Servants, the Law on Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises, the Law on Prevention and

Control of Infectious Diseases, the Law on Labor Safety and Health, the Law on Skill Development, Law on Employment, Law on Primary Health Care, Law on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control, Law on Health Insurance, Law on Social Security, Law on Education, Law on Vocational Education, Law on Higher Education, and Law on Sport.

2.1.2 Economic participation, employment and opportunity

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap (GGG) report places Lao PDR at 37 globally (out of 156 countries) and third among countries in East Asia and the Pacific (below New Zealand and Philippines, which are ranked globally at 4 and 17, respectively). In specific gender gap indices, Lao PDR's 2021 performance is very high for economic participation and opportunity (at 1). Notably, according to the GGG report, Lao PDR has one of the best economic gender ratios, at 91.5 percent, and has achieved gender parity in senior and managerial roles among professional and technical workers.

In 2021, the Government of Lao PDR through Ministry of Industry and Commerce carried out the Gender Study on Identification of Key Constraints affecting Women-owned and Women-managed Enterprises doing Business in Lao PDR. Based on data from 2018, the findings of this study highlighted that

- More women than men open businesses out of necessity because they need a source of income (31 percent of women, 15 percent of men) or were unable to find another source of income (65 percent of women, 34 percent of men).
- 60.2 percent of individuals who ran household businesses were female (39.8 percent for males), a significant increase from 2013 data (49.4 percent women, 50.5 percent men).
- 52 percent of female-owned firms were micro-sized (8 percent for male-owned firms), 45 percent were small (57 percent for male-owned firms), and 3 percent were medium (30 percent for male-owned firms).

The Lao Government pays attention to encouragement and finds importance of value-based equality of works to bridge the gap on wages between women and men, reflecting in

- Notice No. 829/PMO/2022 on the Guidance for Increase of Minimum Wages, instructing that “to increase minimum wages for workers from 1,100,000 Kips to 1,300,000 Kips”;
- Decree on Work Safety and Health No. 1026 of Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in 2019;
- (revised) Decree on Exporting Lao Labour Working Abroad, No.245/GOL/2020;
- National Strategy and Action Plan for People with Disability;
- Adopted and promulgated the National Social Safeguards Strategy No. 224/PM/2020
- Agreement on Standardized Skilled Labour as well as the Manual on National Standardized Skilled Labour
- the National Rural Employment Promotion Strategy 2021-2025 focusing on employment for women in rural.

The Lao Government attaches its importance to the promotion of women's access to financial services such as leasing to promote women entrepreneurship and reflecting in statistics of registration of different forms of enterprises; from 2019 to May 2022, 46.457 business units have been registered, out of which, 19.896 businesses are registered by women and 26.561 by men; the registration of enterprises and companies is divided into 3 sectors: service sector 5.492 (3.275 women), agriculture sector 2.598 (652 women) and trade sector 33.194 (17.836 women).

2.1.3 Access to affordable quality health care including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

From 2020 to 2024, Lao PDR has made significant progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in accessing to affordable quality health care including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. Some of highlights include:

Universal Health Coverage

- The National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme, launched in 2016, was expanded to cover 73.6% of the population by 2021, except for Vientiane Capital.
- The NHI scheme covers costs of treatment, drugs, hospitalization, consultation, and high-cost services, leading to increased utilization of health services.
- Most vulnerable groups like pregnant women and children under 5 are exempted from co-payments under the NHI, improving access to healthcare.
- The percentage of Model Healthy villages reach to 83% higher than targeted of 82%; and the Universal Health Coverage insured 94% of the total population which nearly targeted of 94.5%).

Maternal and Child Health

- The third National Plan of Action on Mother and Children (2021-2025) was launched in December 2021, with support from UNFPA and UNICEF. This demonstrates ongoing political commitment to maternal and child health.
- Lao PDR's 9th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2025) includes goals to further reduce maternal and child mortality and improve nutrition. Integrating maternal and child health into broader development plans supports sustainability.
- From last decade up till 2024, through the implementation of these key policy frameworks, maternal and child health outcomes have dramatically improved. The maternal mortality ratio fell by 78.7%, from 579 to 126 deaths per 100,000 live births - one of the fastest declines in the world. Under-5 child mortality also dropped from 86.3 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2008 to 49.3 in 2020. Skilled birth attendance increased from 43% in 2014-2015 to 64.4% in 2017, though still below neighbouring countries. The government has prioritized maintaining essential health services like antenatal care, facility-based births, and immunizations that were disrupted by COVID-19. However, there are some indicators in the area of health promotion of mother and child that need to be achieved as following:
 - The prevalence of underweight among children under 5 years of age to decline from 19 to 18%;
 - Increasing the percentage of all birth via operative vaginal delivery 79% lower than targeted of 81%;
 - Penta vaccination 86.6% lower than target of 95%;
 - Clean water consumption 90.1% lower than of 92%.
- A World Bank project (HANSA2) approved in 2024 will help Laos scale-up quality essential health services to those most in need and improve nutrition in rural areas.

Quality of Care

- In 2023, Laos adopted a new comprehensive Law on Health that establishes a framework for public health functions, coordinates health services, and paves the way for enhanced health legislation.
- The government has set up Quality of Healthcare (QHC) committees across the country and published the "Five Goods and One Satisfaction" (5G1S) standards and indicators - the country's key quality of care policy.

- Health service delivery reforms have been in operationalisation including improving accessibility and the referral system, with a focus on primary health care. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a \$45 million financing package in 2023 to help strengthen quality health care in 16 districts across 10 provinces.
- The Government has been operationalised a patient feedback mechanism and complaints management policy developed in 2019, and finalised the organizational arrangements, accreditation steps, and criteria for Dok Champa, which is set to be the country's hospital accreditation scheme.
- Ministry of Health has recently developed new guidelines for incentives for human resources for health as well as job descriptions for healthcare workers.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

- Lao PDR has integrated gender equality and women's empowerment in national frameworks, scoring 96 out of 100 on SDG Indicator 5.6.2 which measures access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- In 2021, the Government of Lao PDR endorsed the National Strategy and Action Plan for Integrated Services on Maternal, Newborn, Adolescent and Child Health 2021–2025 to address gaps in equitable and quality services.
- The Ministry of Health also endorsed the "Agreement on the management of gestational surrogacy and induced abortion", improving access to safe abortion services.
- Efforts are being made to address high rates of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy in remote communities through community engagement and youth-friendly services
 - the Mother and Child Health Centre, Ministry of Public Health has prioritized to increase family planning services, extend the youth friendly services and provide cervical screening as well as STI treatment by guaranteeing the quality, people's satisfaction, access to information on family planning, and create the environment where people can make their own decision to choose the alternative services especially for women and youth in modern family planning (contraception methods)
 - The family planning services have been rolled out by focusing on health education such as Nang Noi mobile application and brochures, to raise awareness and understanding of the reproductive health among the youth as well as the STIs prevention.
 - At the present, there is recording and reporting on family planning collected from target young people receiving family planning service, which also includes information from the public and private sector.

However, challenges remain in measuring and improving the quality of care, especially in reaching remote communities. Continued investments and support from international partners will be crucial to sustain progress and achieve universal health coverage by 2025.

2.1.4 Quality education, training and life-long learn for women and girls

The Government of Lao PDR considers education as a priority in human resource and human capital development. Some of key highlights on quality education, training and life-long learning for women girls include:

Education

- Lao PDR has made significant progress in primary education, with a high net enrolment rate of 98.7 percent.
- However, literacy rates among young women aged 15-24 are lower than those of their male counterparts, at 69 percent and 77 percent, respectively.

- One in five girls drops out of school, and one in 20 has never attended school due to lack of social protection.
- The Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) creates conditions and measures to support equal access to education for all, especially girls and women, by extending opportunities to disadvantaged groups.

Mainstreaming Gender Perspectives

- MOES mainstreams gender perspectives, sex education, living skills, reproductive health, and gender teaching-learning intervention within STEM subjects at secondary and higher education levels.
- This aims to enhance knowledge, capacity and perceptions for equal learning between female and male students.
- MOES also promotes basic knowledge of gender equality and makes students aware of respecting rights and eliminating discrimination against women.

Lifelong Learning Decree

- In 2020, the Government issued Decree No. 208/GOL/2020 on lifelong learning to ensure all Lao citizens, regardless of gender, access to all forms of education.
- The decree reflects the government's commitment to support all citizens to access the education system by providing resources and incentives for lifelong learning.

Addressing Dropouts

- MOES issued Decision No. 4099/MOES/2020 to address student dropouts, assigning authorities to collect data on at-risk students and encourage them to continue education until completion of compulsory education.
- School principals are tasked with following up and mobilizing out-of-school children to register and continue their education.
- Teachers are assigned to provide supplementary classes for students to keep up with their peers.

Measures During COVID-19

- MOES assigned departments to study appropriate teaching-learning methods during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure continuity of education.
- The 2021 school enrolment statistics from pre-school to secondary education show little difference between boys and girls, but gender gaps persist in vocational education.

Vocational Education

- The gender equality index in vocational education is satisfactory, with more female students than male students at the certificate level.
- MOES introduced 19 courses at levels 1 and 2 for disadvantaged youth training, with 52.92% of the 1,801 scholarship recipients being women.
- Allowances are provided to poor students in priority vocational courses, with 60% of basic business trainees being women.

Higher Education

- The gender equality index in higher education shows a significant gap, with the index declining from 0.65 in 2016 to 0.14 in 2020 at the PhD level.

- However, women's education leadership in decision-making positions is being promoted at the university level, along with qualification enhancement and training for women staff and teachers.
- Efforts are being made to encourage women students to access STEM subjects at the same rate as male students.

Lao PDR has made progress in promoting equal access to education for women and girls, particularly at the primary level. However, challenges remain in addressing gender disparities in literacy rates, dropout rates, and access to higher education and vocational training, especially in STEM subjects. The government has taken measures to mainstream gender perspectives, promote lifelong learning, address dropouts, and support women's education leadership. Continued efforts are needed to ensure equal opportunities and outcomes for women and girls in the education system.

2.1.5 Rural women

Poverty Reduction and Rural Development

- The government attaches importance to reducing poverty and the discrepancy between urban and rural areas. The poverty rate has decreased from 46% in 1992 to 18% currently.
- However, the poverty rate in rural areas is still three times higher than in urban areas. The development of infrastructure in rural areas is necessary to improve people's livelihoods and ensure equal access to public and private services. especially empowerment of women in the rural areas in decision-making, especially at village level.

Women's Empowerment in Decision-Making

- In addition to the support and creation of enabling conditions for women in decision-making positions as provided in the Lao women's development plan and gender-equality action plan,
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) leads advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns to encourage women in all fields of work, covering 3,354,151 people (1,259,769 women).
- Out of 10,431 decision-making positions, 3,262 are occupied by women (1,185 civil servants and 9,246 farmers).
- Training of trainers on gender planning and nutrition has been conducted for 14,903 people (588 civil servants and 14,150 farmers).

Rural Development Challenges

- The main challenges in rural development are soil degradation, livestock diseases, and unexploded ordnance (UXO), which make land unsafe for agriculture.
- The government organizes seminars and awareness-raising campaigns on various topics related to rural development and poverty eradication.

Access to Economic Resources and Capacity Building

- The government has increased women's access to economic resources, such as agricultural and livestock land, in 23 districts and 211 villages, covering 15,550 families (311,100 people, 53.66% women).
- Farmers in poor areas have received loans and funding to engage in production, cultivation, livestock, and fishery in 115 districts and 1,964 villages (69,505 families, 50.98% women).
- Capacity building has been provided for 121,260 farmers (89,422 women) to become local experts in cultivation, livestock, and fishery.

UXO Clearance and Healthcare for Rural Women

- The government has integrated UXO clearance into the 9th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2025).
- From 1996 to 2022, UXO risk awareness campaigns covered 4,015 villages with 4,407,461 participants. 17,132 sites have been surveyed for UXO, and 77,077.62 hectares have been cleared.
- Health workers provide information on women's and children's health, prenatal care, childbirth, postpartum care, and family planning to rural communities.
- Rural women can receive prenatal care and give birth free of charge at public health facilities and use the Health Insurance Fund for hospital treatment.

2.2 Top five priorities over the past five years (2020-2024)

From 2020 till 2024, the top five priorities for accelerate progress for women and girls in Lao PDR include: (1) Promotion of political participation and representation, implementation and enforcement of approved laws, and continuing strengthening legal frameworks (2) Building women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprise, (3) the provision of quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls, (4) the improvement of access to healthcare including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and (5) Empowering women in sectors/at the community level.

2.2.1 Promotion of political participation and representation, implementation and enforcement of approved laws and continuing strengthening legal frameworks

The Government of Lao PDR focused its significant efforts to promote gender equality and combat discrimination against women through legal and policy frameworks, implementation of the SDGs, the role of the NA, adherence to international human rights conventions, raising legal awareness, and the efforts of the LWU. Some key highlights for the past few years are as follow:

Legal and Policy Frameworks

- Domestic laws related to women's rights and equality have been promulgated, such as the Penal Code (2017), Law on Gender Equality (2019), and Civil Code (2020).
- The implementation of promoting gender equality and combating discrimination against women is carried out in parallel with the National Socio-Economic Development Plans (NSED), especially the 9th NSED (2021-2025).
- Various strategies and plans have been adopted to promote gender equality, including the LWU's Vision 2035, Strategic Development Plan for Lao Women to 2030, and Lao Women's Development Plan (2021-2025).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- The Government has incorporated sustainable development indicators related to gender equality into the 9th NSEDPs.
- The National Steering Committee on Implementation of the SDGs adopted the National Roadmap and Communication Strategy on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for SDGs in 2019, which includes objectives related to integrating SDGs into the national education curriculum and raising awareness about SDGs across various stakeholders (girls, boys, women and others).

Role of the National Assembly (NA)

- The NA and People's Provincial Assemblies (PPAs) play an important role in protecting women's rights and promoting gender equality.

- From 2019-2022, the NA and PPAs organized more 455 dissemination workshops on gender equality and combating discrimination against women, with 55,588 participants (44.2% women).

International Human Rights Conventions

- Lao PDR attaches importance to implementing obligations under international human rights conventions, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- The NA approved the Law on Treaty and International Agreements in 2017 and enforcement of this Law has been on-going, which defines principles and measures related to the implementation of treaties and international agreements.

Raising Legal Awareness

- The Ministry of Justice has created content on legal knowledge related to women's rights and interests, with radio and television programs in Lao and ethnic languages.
- Legal knowledge has been disseminated to 10,837 villages, 1,264 village groups, schools, and other places, reaching a total of 2,832,763 participants (32.9% women).
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has conducted dissemination workshops on human rights treaties and UPR recommendations for central and local authorities, educational institutions, and members of the NA and PPAs from 2018 to 2024.

Lao Women's Union (LWU) Efforts

- LWU leaders at all levels have focused on disseminating the constitution, laws, international conventions, rules, regulations, and three-good competitions to 9,596,276 participants (22.3% women) from 2018 to 2022.

2.2.2 Building women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprise and developing women's workforce and professions

The Government also has a plan to formulate a new law on labour and social welfare (according to the plan for revision and formulation of laws of the National Assembly 2021-2025) such as the draft Law on Labour Hiring, draft Law on Labour Skills Development that has been considered at the National Assembly's Session in 2023, draft revised Law on Social Protection that will be considered the National Assembly's Session in 2024 and the draft Law on Social Services that will be considered the National Assembly's Session in 2025.

The Government has also been putting great efforts to improve women's access to formal employment through vocational training and skills development, promoting employment in economic sectors, implementing a National Strategy for rural employment, improving recruitment services, and disseminating and monitoring labour laws.

Vocational Training and Skills Development

- The government encourages public and private technical and vocational colleges to train and develop skills in different occupations according to the five-year plan (2016-2020).
- During this period, 419,642 people (44% women) were trained, including:
- 120,497 people (61.7% women) for the agriculture sector
- 101,043 people (27.5% women) for the industrial sector
- 197,724 people (55.4% women) for the service sector

Promoting Employment in Economic Sectors

- The government has supplied 559,533 laborers (43.5% women) into domestic and international markets.

National Strategy for Rural Employment

- The Lao Government also approved the National Rural Employment Promotion Strategy 2021-2025 in 2021 which focusing to create employment for women in rural.

Improving Recruitment Services

- The government has improved recruitment service networks at the central and provincial levels to become more effective.

Disseminating and Monitoring Labour Laws

- The government has been disseminating and monitoring the implementation of the Labor Law in labour units.

The Government has made efforts to promote women's employment and protect workers' rights through labour inspections, legal advocacy, and dissemination. The government has also implemented social protection and health insurance schemes to ensure the protection of workers' rights and interests. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government provided social welfare payments to support workers affected by unemployment.

Labour Inspection, Legal Advocacy and Dissemination

- The government conducted labour inspections, legal advocacy, and dissemination for 13,417 business units across the country, with a total of 422,200 workers (37.3% women).
- 1,087 businesses with more than 50 workers were supported and approved to apply their internal rules in compliance with laws.

Social Protection and Health Insurance

- As of now, social protection coverage includes:
- 125,163 persons (38.6% women) in various sectors
- 12,084 in the public sector (32.2% women)
- 100,799 in the private sector (36.3% women)
- 12,280 voluntary (64.2% women)

2,949 labour units have registered and contributed, covering 339,272 workers (45.1% women), including:

- 178,570 workers from the public sector (47.1% women)
- 142,397 workers from the private sector (43.2% women)
- 18,305 voluntary workers (41.9% women)

The social protection scheme offers healthcare for 798,363 people (51.5% women), including:

- 491,898 in the public sector (51.5% women)
- 306,465 in the private sector (51.5% women)

COVID-19 Response

- Since the outbreak of COVID-19, 1,107 labor units have been granted social welfare payments during unemployment, covering 72,641 people (68.4% women).

The Government of Lao PDR has made efforts to promote women's empowerment by improving their access to funding, expanding social protection coverage, raising awareness on social protection, and promoting women's access to financial services. These initiatives aim to support women's entrepreneurship and economic participation.

Promoting Women's Access to Funding

- The Bank of Lao PDR, in collaboration with the Rural Micro-Finance Inclusion for the Poor Project supported by GIZ, conducted training on strengthening gender equality for the banking sector.
- The Department of Financial Institution Supervision organized meetings to provide financial knowledge for 587 villages with 3,859 participants (50.29% women).

Expanding Social Protection

- The government adopted a social protection strategy in 2020 and implemented a project to provide benefits for pregnant women and pre-school aged children in poor districts of Attapeu and Savannakhet provinces.
- From 2016-2020, the coverage rate of social protection reached 312,175 people (46.1% women) with a total of 744,735 eligible people (51.4% women).

Raising Awareness on Social Protection

- The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare raised awareness and understanding of social protection through various channels to increase the access rate, especially for women migrant workers.
- The government allocated 3% of the total state budget expenditure to social protection, focusing on the vulnerable workforce in agriculture, fishery, and labor-intensive sectors with low wages and limited access to labor representatives and social protection.

Women's Access to Financial Services

- From 2019 to May 2022, 46,457 business units were registered, with 19,896 (42.8%) registered by women and 26,561 (57.2%) by men.
- The registration of enterprises and companies was divided into three sectors:
 - Service sector: 5,492 (59.6% women)
 - Agriculture sector: 2,598 (25.1% women)
 - Trade sector: 33,194 (53.8% women)

2.2.3 Provision of quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls

Some key examples of the provision of quality education, training, and lifelong learning for women and girls in Lao PDR from 2020-2024 are as follows:

Mainstreaming Gender Perspectives in Education

- The Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) mainstreams gender perspectives, sex education, living skills, reproductive health, and gender teaching-learning interventions within STEM subjects at secondary and higher education levels to enhance equal learning between female and male students.
- The government issued Decree No. 208/GOL/2020 on lifelong learning to ensure all Lao citizens, regardless of gender, access to all forms of education.

Improving Primary and Secondary Education

- The MOES completed the improvement of pre-school education programs and curricula, focusing on gender perspectives and non-discrimination of women.
- The survival rate at the primary education level increased from 79.6% in 2016 to 82% in 2020, with girls outperforming boys (84.5% vs 79.8%).

- Living skills, sex education, and reproductive health were incorporated into the new curriculum for grades 1 and 2.

Vocational and Higher Education

- The gender equality index in vocational education at the certificate level increased from 0.37 in 2016 to 1.24 in 2020, with more female students than male students.
- The MOES introduced 19 courses at levels 1 and 2 for disadvantaged youth training, with 52.92% of the 1,801 scholarship recipients being women.
- At the bachelor's degree level, the gender equality index increased from 0.84 in 2016 to 1.06 in 2020, indicating progress towards gender parity.

Promoting Education in Remote Areas

- The government constructed 30 new school buildings with separate toilets and dormitories for girls and boys in remote areas.
- Allowances were provided to 3,235 lower secondary students (53.48% girls) and 1,200 upper secondary students (78.33% girls) in remote areas.

Addressing Dropouts and Promoting Literacy

- The MOES issued Decision No. 4099/MOES/2020 to address student dropouts, assigning authorities to collect data on at-risk students and encourage them to continue education until completion of compulsory education.
- Eradication of illiteracy was organized for 5,036 people aged 15-40 (53.1% women), and supplementary classes were provided to 10,071 people (52.6% women).

While significant progress has been made in improving access to quality education for women and girls, challenges remain in addressing gender disparities at higher levels of education, particularly in STEM fields. Continued efforts are needed to promote gender equality and ensure equal opportunities for women and girls in the education system.

2.2.4 Improvement of access to healthcare including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

Some key examples of the improvement of access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, in Lao PDR from 2020-2024 are highlighted below:

Expanding Universal Health Coverage

- The National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme, launched in 2016, has expanded to cover 73.6% of the population by 2021, except for Vientiane Capital.
- The NHI scheme covers costs of treatment, drugs, hospitalization, consultation, and high-cost services, leading to increased utilization of health services.
- Most vulnerable groups like pregnant women and children under 5 are exempted from co-payments under the NHI, improving access to healthcare.

Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

- In 2021, Laos endorsed the National Strategy and Action Plan for Integrated Services on Maternal, Newborn, Adolescent and Child Health 2021–2025 to address gaps in equitable and quality services.
- The Ministry of Health also endorsed the "Agreement on the management of gestational surrogacy and induced abortion", improving access to safe abortion services.
- UNFPA supports the government to improve quality and use of integrated SRHR services, particularly among vulnerable groups like ethnic minorities and young people.

Reducing Maternal and Child Mortality

- Maternal mortality has declined by 78.7% from 579 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 126 in 2020, one of the fastest falling rates in the world.
- Under-5 child mortality has fallen from 218 per 1,000 live births in 1978 to 44 in 2020, a major achievement.
- A World Bank project (HANSA2) approved in 2024 will help Laos scale-up quality essential health services to those most in need and improve nutrition in rural areas.

Improving Access to Healthcare in Rural Areas

- Health workers of health centers, village volunteers and village facilitators reach out to rural communities to provide information on women's and children's health, prenatal care, childbirth, postpartum care, and family planning.
- Rural women can receive prenatal care and give birth free of charge at public health facilities and use the Health Insurance Fund for hospital treatment.

While significant progress has been made in expanding universal health coverage, improving sexual and reproductive health and rights, and reducing maternal and child mortality, challenges remain in ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare, especially in remote communities. Continued investments and support from international partners will be crucial to sustain progress and achieve universal health coverage by 2025.

2.2.5 Empowering women in sectors/at the community level

Some key examples of empowering women in sectors and at the community level in Lao PDR from 2020 to 2024 include:

Promoting Women's Access to Funding and Financial Services

- The Bank of Lao PDR, in collaboration with the Rural Micro-Finance Inclusion for the Poor Project supported by GIZ, conducted training on strengthening gender equality for the banking sector.
- The government promoted women's access to financial services such as leasing to promote women entrepreneurship. From 2019 to May 2022, 46,457 business units were registered, with 19,896 (42.8%) registered by women.

Expanding Social Protection Coverage

- The government adopted a social protection strategy in 2020 and implemented a project to provide benefits for pregnant women and pre-school aged children in poor districts of Attapeu and Savannakhet provinces, supported by the Embassy of Australia and UNICEF.
- From 2016-2020, the coverage rate of social protection reached 312,175 people (46.1% women) with a total of 744,735 eligible people (51.4% women).

Empowering Women in Agriculture and Rural Development

- The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) conducted advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns to encourage women in all fields of work, covering 3,354,151 people (37.6% women).
- MAF increased women's access to economic resources, such as agricultural and livestock land, in 23 districts and 211 villages, covering 15,550 families (311,100 people, 53.66% women).
- Capacity building was provided for 121,260 farmers (73.7% women) to become local experts in cultivation, livestock, and fishery.

Promoting Women's Participation in Decision-Making

- Out of 10,431 decision-making positions in MAF, 3,262 (31.3%) are occupied by women (1,185 civil servants and 9,246 farmers).
- Training of trainers on gender planning and nutrition was conducted for 14,903 people (588 civil servants and 14,150 farmers).

Addressing Violence Against Women and Children

- The government produced advocacy materials on gender equality and materials to encourage women and girls to enroll and stay in school until completion of compulsory education.
- Awareness-raising and training on gender equality were provided for youths at the secondary education level to prevent violence against women.

While significant progress has been made in empowering women at the sector and community levels, challenges remain in ensuring equal access to resources, services, and decision-making positions. Continued efforts and investments are needed to promote women's economic empowerment, social protection, and participation in all aspects of society.

2.3 Specific actions to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of groups of women and girls in marginalised situations

Specific actions taken in Lao PDR from 2020 to 2024 to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of groups of women and girls in marginalized situations:

Education and Training

- **Mainstreaming Gender Perspectives:** The Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) mainstreamed gender perspectives, sex education, living skills, reproductive health, and TIP in learning curriculums to enhance knowledge, capacity, and perceptions for equal learning between female and male students.
- **Decree on Lifelong Learning:** The government issued Decree No. 208/GOL/2020 on lifelong learning to ensure all Lao citizens, regardless of gender, access to all forms of education.
- **Virtual Education:** MOES opened semesters virtually country-wide due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was different from other semesters, resulting in the suspension of study in many pandemic areas.
- **Teacher Development:** The government improved legislations related to teacher development and allocation, focusing on management decentralization to education facilities and local levels, providing teacher-replacement systems to substitute lost teachers.
- **Teacher Training:** The government reformed the teacher training system and formulated the Law on General Education, defining rights and duties of parents more clearly.
- **Capacity Building:** Capacity was built for talented-ethnic schools and special schools.
- **Data Collection:** Data was collected on teacher requirements from each locality, vocational colleges, and national universities to follow up on graduates.
- **Private Sector Engagement:** The government promoted private sectors' engagement in education development at all fields.

Providing healthcare for rural women:

- Health workers of health centers, village volunteers and village facilitators reach out to rural communities to provide information, especially the knowledge of how to take care of women's and children's health in the community such as hygiene, sexual health, nutrition, care during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum care, including care for babies and family planning;
- For rural women to receive a prenatal care and give birth with free of charge at public health facilities;

- In case of treatment at hospitals, women can use Health Insurance Fund;
- For women who not ready to have children, the family planning services shall be provided with free of charge and they can choice with short term, long term or permanent methods;
- Increased the outreach to youth, especially women youth in rural areas to provide knowledge through different means.

Empowerment and Economic Opportunities

- Access to Funding: The Bank of Lao PDR, in collaboration with the Rural Micro-Finance Inclusion for the Poor Project supported by GIZ, conducted training on strengthening gender equality for the banking sector.
- Social Protection: The government adopted a social protection strategy in 2020 and implemented a project to provide benefits for pregnant women and pre-school aged children in poor districts of Attapeu and Savannakhet provinces, supported by the Embassy of Australia and UNICEF.
- Vocational Training: The government introduced 19 courses at levels 1 and 2 for disadvantaged youth training, with 52.92% of the 1,801 scholarship recipients being women.
- Allowances and Scholarships: Allowances were provided to 3,235 lower secondary students (53.48% girls) and 1,200 upper secondary students (78.33% girls) in remote areas.

Community Engagement and Awareness

- Advocacy Materials: The MOES produced advocacy materials on gender equality, published booklets of Vision to 2030, and published posters with 7 categories, especially materials to encourage women and girls to enroll and stay in school until the completion of compulsory education.
- Awareness-Raising Campaigns: The government conducted advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns to encourage women in all fields of work, covering 3,354,151 people (37.6% women).
- Training and Competitions: Training was provided for youths at the secondary education level to prevent violence against women, and competitions were conducted for student clubs to write short stories about gender equality.

Infrastructure and Support

- School buildings: Thirty new school buildings with separate toilets and dormitories for girls and boys were constructed in remote areas.
- Renovations: School buildings, classrooms, dormitories, toilets, and safe shower rooms were renovated, and kitchens, vegetable gardens, and husbandry were constructed to support the livelihoods of female and male students.
- Dormitory management: The MOES issued Regulation on Dormitory Management for secondary education to avoid school dropouts and prevent sexual assaults

2.4 The impacts of the confluence of different crises

2.4.1 COVID19 and UXO

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated long-standing gender inequalities in Lao PDR, with women and girls facing disproportionate impacts across areas. The government and partners recognize the need for sustained, gender-responsive efforts to mitigate COVID-19's disproportionate impacts on women and girls and to get progress on gender equality back on track. Addressing these issues is seen as critical for an inclusive and sustainable recovery. Key impacts of COVID-19 on gender equality and women's empowerment in Lao PDR from 2020-2024, as well as priority actions and strategies to address them are highlighted as follow:

Key Impacts:

- Increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual exploitation, especially during lockdowns and movement restrictions. There was an increase in hotline calls about rape, child sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, and sexual exploitation.
- Disruptions to essential health services, including maternal and sexual/reproductive health services for women and girls.
- Disproportionate economic impacts on women, including job losses and reduced incomes, particularly for those in informal sectors.
- Increased unpaid care work and household responsibilities for women.
- Decreased school attendance for adolescent girls.
- Setbacks in hard-won gains in areas like girls' education enrollment rates.

Priority Actions and Strategies that the Government has been paying greater attention to are:

- Strengthen GBV prevention and response services, including hotlines, counseling, and safe shelters.
- Ensure continuity of essential health services for women and girls, especially maternal and reproductive health.
- Implement gender-responsive social protection and economic recovery measures targeting women, especially in informal sectors.
- Support women's entrepreneurship and access to finance to rebuild livelihoods.
- Address increased care burdens through policies on childcare, elderly care, etc.
- Targeted efforts to re-enroll girls in school and prevent dropouts.
- Collect gender-disaggregated data to inform policies and track impacts.
- Integrate gender perspectives into all COVID-19 response and recovery plans.
- Strengthen multi-sectoral coordination on gender issues across government, civil society, and development partners.
- Continue implementing national action plans and strategies on gender equality and ending violence against women and children.
- **Unexploded Ordnances:** The presence of unexploded ordnance (UXO) in Lao PDR has significant impacts on gender equality and women's empowerment from 2020 to 2024:
 - UXO contamination disproportionately affects women and girls, as they are more vulnerable to the risks of UXO due to their roles in household chores, farming, and collecting firewood and water in rural areas. This limits their mobility and access to education and economic opportunities.
 - Women's participation in UXO-related activities, such as clearance and risk education, has been limited. To address this, the Government aims to increase women's engagement and participation, with a target of having 1 or more female clearance teams by 2025.
 - The Lao government's National Strategy on Mitigation of Disaster Risks (2021-2030) emphasizes the empowerment and engagement of vulnerable groups, including women, in disaster risk reduction efforts. However, the extent to which this has been implemented in the context of UXO is unclear.

- UXO contamination can exacerbate existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities. For example, women may be more likely to take on additional unpaid care work if family members are injured by UXO, further limiting their participation in education and economic activities.
- Addressing UXO contamination is crucial for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in Lao PDR. The government's commitment to SDG18, "Lives Safe from UXO," and its efforts to align UXO sector plans with national gender equality strategies are positive steps.
- However, more needs to be done to ensure that women actively participate in UXO-related decision-making, have equal access to UXO clearance and risk education, and are supported in their roles as caregivers and community members affected by UXO. Integrating gender considerations into UXO planning and programming, and increasing women's representation in the UXO sector, will be key to achieving sustainable development and empowering women in Lao PDR.

2.4.2 Food and fuel crisis

During the past five years, food and fuel crises, in addition to the existing challenges, have had significant impacts on gender equality and women's empowerment in Lao PDR. Key highlights on the impact and how the Government responded are summarised below:

Economic vulnerability and livelihoods

- Food insecurity has exacerbated economic vulnerabilities for women, particularly those in rural areas who are heavily dependent on agriculture. Women often engage in subsistence farming and informal labour, which are highly sensitive to food price fluctuations and crop failures.
- Women's access to financial services is restricted due to lack of land ownership and collateral, which hinders their ability to invest in agricultural tools and technologies that could mitigate the impacts of food insecurity.

Health and nutrition

- High rates of malnutrition, particularly among children and pregnant women, have long-term health implications. In provinces like Sekong and Salavanh, chronic malnutrition rates are alarmingly high, affecting women's health and their ability to work and care for their families.
- Women bear the brunt of increased care responsibilities due to malnutrition and health issues in their families, limiting their time and opportunities for economic and educational activities.

Social and educational impacts

- Economic pressures from food insecurity have led to higher dropout rates among girls, particularly in rural areas. This setback in educational attainment limits future opportunities for women and perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality.
- Economic stress and food insecurity have been linked to increased domestic violence. Women facing food insecurity are at higher risk of experiencing GBV, which further undermines their empowerment and safety.

Agricultural participation and land Rights

- Women's contributions to agriculture are often undervalued, and they are typically involved in unpaid household and off-farm labor. This division of labor increases their workload without corresponding economic benefits.

- Limited access to land titles restricts women's ability to secure loans and invest in climate-smart agricultural practices. Secure land tenure is crucial for enhancing women's resilience to food insecurity.

Priority actions and strategies that the Government has been paying greater attention to are:

- Ensure equal access to land titles and financial services to enable women to invest in agriculture and improve their economic resilience.
- Recognize and value women's contributions to agriculture, and provide support for their involvement in sustainable farming practices.
- Improve access to infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and markets to enhance women's economic opportunities and reduce their workload.
- Develop social protection programs that specifically address the needs of women, including cash transfers and food assistance.
- Promote women's involvement in local governance and natural resource management to ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes.
- Support the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices that are tailored to the needs of women farmers.
- Educate women and communities about nutrition and healthy eating practices to combat malnutrition.
- Provide support for women entrepreneurs and small businesses to enhance their economic independence.
- Improve services and awareness programs to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, ensuring women's safety and empowerment.

2.4.3 Climate crisis

Women are disproportionately affected by climate-related disasters, which exacerbate food insecurity. Their limited participation in local natural resource management further reduces their resilience to such impacts. Therefore, integrating gender perspectives into climate change and disaster risk reduction strategies is essential to ensure that women can equally benefit from risk-informed development. From 2020 to 2024, Lao PDR has made significant efforts to promote women's engagement and empowerment in addressing climate change and disaster risk management:

- The government has implemented key legislations and policies, such as the Law on Gender Equality (2019), the Law on Disaster Management (2019), and the Decree on the Organisation and Operations of Disaster Management Committee (2021), to ensure women's representation and participation in decision-making processes related to climate change and disaster risk reduction.
- The National Strategy on Mitigation of Disaster Risks (2021-2030) specifically emphasizes the empowerment and engagement of vulnerable groups, including women, girls, pregnant women, mothers with babies, rural communities in remote areas, and poor people.
- The Disaster Management Fund was established in 2020 to provide emergency support, repair infrastructure, and restore livelihoods affected by disasters, enabling women and other vulnerable groups to contribute to the nation's protection and development.
- The restructuring of the Disaster Management Committee at central, provincial, district, and village levels has improved its relevance and implementation capacity. The government has built the capacity of these committees by training 577 participants (283 women) and conducting

disaster management simulations at the national and sub-national levels with 150 participants (45 women).

- To prepare for potential disasters, Lao PDR has focused on communicating this work, reviewing disaster mitigation plans at the village level, and disseminating the piloting project of warning systems through communication networks for Village Disaster Prevention and Control Committees with 1,572 participants (485 women).
- The government has also promulgated two National Programs (2021-2025) to contribute to climate change adaptation and disseminated these programs to all concerned parties and provinces across the country.

These efforts demonstrate Lao PDR's commitment to empowering women and promoting their participation in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, as well as ensuring that vulnerable groups are included in the country's development and protection strategies.

2.5 Top five priorities over the next five years (2025-2029)

2.5.1 Equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice including on further work on political participation and representation

Legal and Policy Frameworks

- Continue to enhance and enforce laws that promote gender equality and non-discrimination, such as the Law on Gender Equality and the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2021-2025). Ensure these laws are effectively implemented at all levels of government and across all sectors.
- Identify and amend existing laws that may inadvertently perpetuate gender discrimination. This includes ensuring that new laws and policies are gender-sensitive and inclusive.

Access to Justice

- Expand gender-sensitive legal aid services to ensure that women, particularly those in rural and remote areas, have access to justice. This includes training legal professionals on gender issues and increasing the availability of legal aid.
- Strengthen mechanisms to prevent and respond to GBV, including the implementation of the National Plan of Action on Preventing and Eliminating Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children.
- Enhance support services for survivors of violence, such as shelters, counseling, and legal assistance.

Political Participation and Representation

- Aim to increase the proportion of women in political and decision-making positions. Targets include having at least 30% female members in the National Assembly and increasing women's representation at provincial and district levels.
- Provide training and capacity-building programs for women to enhance their leadership skills and encourage their participation in politics and governance.

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

- Foster collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, international partners, and the private sector to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. This includes leveraging resources and expertise from various stakeholders to support gender-related initiatives.
- Engage local communities in gender equality efforts to ensure that interventions are culturally appropriate and effectively address the needs of women and girls at the grassroots level.

2.5.2 Quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls

Key Focuses for Lao PDR on Quality Education, Training, and Lifelong Learning for Women and Girls from 2025-2029 are:

Strengthening Legal and Policy Frameworks

- Strengthen and enforce laws and policies that promote gender equality in education. This includes revising existing laws to eliminate any discriminatory practices and ensuring that new policies are inclusive and gender-sensitive.
- Continue implementing and updating the National Action Plan for Gender Equality to address educational disparities and promote equal opportunities for women and girls.

Improving Access to Education in Rural and Remote Areas

- Invest in building and upgrading educational facilities in rural and remote areas to ensure that girls have access to safe and conducive learning environments.
- Develop and implement programs specifically aimed at increasing educational access for girls from ethnic communities, who often face additional barriers to education.

Enhancing Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning Programs

- Expand vocational training programs to equip women and girls with skills that are relevant to the labor market. This includes partnerships with the private sector to ensure that training programs are aligned with industry needs.
- Strengthen non-formal education programs, including adult education and community learning centers, to provide lifelong learning opportunities for women who missed out on formal education.

Promoting Gender-Sensitive Curricula and Safe Learning Environments

- Integrate gender-sensitive content into school curricula to promote gender equality and challenge stereotypes. This includes training teachers to deliver gender-sensitive education.
- Implement measures to ensure that schools are safe spaces for girls, free from violence and harassment. This includes establishing clear policies and reporting mechanisms for addressing gender-based violence in schools.

Increasing Awareness and Advocacy on the Importance of Girls' Education

- Conduct nationwide campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of girls' education and the benefits of educating women and girls for the broader society.
- Engage community leaders and parents in promoting girls' education and addressing cultural barriers that may prevent girls from attending school.

Addressing Economic Barriers through Scholarships and Financial Support

- Scholarship Programs: Provide scholarships and financial support to girls from low-income families to reduce the economic barriers to education. This includes covering costs related to school fees, uniforms, and learning materials.
- Conditional Cash Transfers: Implement conditional cash transfer programs that provide financial incentives to families for keeping their daughters in school.

Strengthening Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration for Gender Equality in Education

- Partnerships with NGOs and International Organizations: Collaborate with non-governmental organizations, international development partners, and the private sector to leverage resources and expertise in promoting gender equality in education.

- **Government Coordination:** Enhance coordination among various government ministries and agencies to ensure a holistic and integrated approach to gender equality in education.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Improve the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data to monitor progress and identify gaps in educational access and outcomes for women and girls.
- Conduct regular assessments and evaluations of educational programs and policies to ensure they are effectively promoting gender equality and addressing the needs of women and girls.

2.5.3 Access to affordable quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

Key Focuses for Lao PDR (2025-2029) on Supporting Women and Girls' Access to Affordable Quality Health Care, Including Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights

Strengthening Legal and Policy Frameworks

- Continue the implementation and enhancement of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2021-2025) and the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) Strategy. These frameworks focus on providing free antenatal care, safe childbirth, family planning services, and preventing early-age pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Ensure the integration of gender equality and health policies into provincial and ministerial plans to translate national policies into actionable programs at the local level.

Improving Access to Health Services

- Invest in building and upgrading health facilities, particularly in rural and remote areas, to ensure that women and girls have access to quality health care services. This includes mobile clinics and telemedicine services to reach underserved populations.
- Continue efforts to achieve UHC by 2025, ensuring that all women and girls have access to essential health services without financial hardship. This includes expanding the National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme to cover more people and services.

Enhancing Sexual and Reproductive Health Services

- Increase the availability and accessibility of family planning services and contraceptives to reduce the unmet need for family planning, which is particularly high among unmarried women. This includes promoting rights-based family planning methods and ensuring they are available in all provinces.
- Integrate CSE into school curricula and community programs to empower women and girls with knowledge about their sexual and reproductive health rights and to reduce early pregnancies and marriages.

Training and Retaining Skilled Health Professionals

- Strengthen training programs for midwives, nurses, and other skilled birth attendants to improve the quality of maternal and reproductive health care. This includes adhering to international standards and increasing the number of trained health professionals in rural areas.
- Provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for health workers to ensure they are equipped with the latest knowledge and skills in sexual and reproductive health care.

Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

- Strengthen mechanisms to prevent and respond to GBV, including providing support services such as counseling, legal aid, and safe shelters for survivors. Integrate GBV prevention into health services to ensure that women and girls feel safe accessing care.
- Conduct nationwide campaigns to raise awareness about GBV and promote gender equality, aiming to change social norms and reduce violence against women and girls.

Enhancing Community Engagement and Education

- Implement community-based education programs to raise awareness about maternal, newborn, and child health, encouraging timely healthcare-seeking behaviors and promoting healthy practices within communities.
- Tailor health education and services to meet the specific needs of ethnic groups, ensuring cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in health care delivery.

2.5.4 Women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprises

Key Focuses for Strengthening and Increasing Women's Entrepreneurship and Women's Enterprises in Lao PDR (2025-2029)

Enhancing Access to Finance

- Expand access to microfinance and credit facilities specifically tailored for women entrepreneurs. This includes low-interest loans, grants, and financial literacy programs to help women manage and grow their businesses.
- Continue implementing the Financial Inclusion Roadmap (2018-2025) to ensure that women have better access to financial services, including savings accounts, insurance, and credit.

Capacity Building and Training

- Develop and expand entrepreneurship training programs that provide women with the skills needed to start and manage businesses. This includes business planning, financial management, marketing, and digital literacy.
- Offer vocational training programs that equip women with technical skills relevant to high-demand sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services.

Mentorship and Networking

- Establish mentorship programs that connect aspiring women entrepreneurs with experienced business leaders who can provide guidance, support, and networking opportunities.
- Strengthen the role of women's business associations, such as the Lao Women's Business Association, to provide a platform for networking, advocacy, and support for women entrepreneurs.

Market Access and Trade Facilitation

- Facilitate market linkages for women-owned businesses to connect them with local, regional, and international markets. This includes support for participation in trade fairs, exhibitions, and online marketplaces.
- Support women entrepreneurs in accessing export markets by providing training on export procedures, standards, and requirements, and by facilitating connections with international buyers.

Policy and Regulatory Support

- Advocate for and implement gender-sensitive policies that support women's entrepreneurship. This includes simplifying business registration processes, reducing regulatory barriers, and providing tax incentives for women-owned businesses.

- Strengthen legal frameworks to protect women's economic rights and ensure equal opportunities in business. This includes enforcing laws that prohibit discrimination and promote gender equality in the workplace.

Digital and Technological Empowerment

- Provide digital literacy programs to help women entrepreneurs leverage technology for business growth. This includes training on e-commerce, digital marketing, and the use of digital tools for business management.
- Ensure that women entrepreneurs have access to affordable and reliable technology, including internet connectivity and digital devices, to enhance their business operations.

Public-Private Partnerships

- Foster public-private partnerships to support women's entrepreneurship through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, funding, and mentorship programs.
- Encourage investments in social enterprises that focus on empowering women and creating job opportunities for women in rural and underserved communities.

Awareness and Advocacy

- Conduct public awareness campaigns to promote the importance of women's entrepreneurship and to challenge societal norms that hinder women's participation in business.
- Advocate for women's economic rights and the removal of barriers to women's entrepreneurship through policy dialogue and engagement with stakeholders at all levels.

2.5.5 Gender-responsive disaster risk prevention, reduction and resilience building

Key Focuses on Gender-Responsive Disaster Risk Prevention, Reduction, and Resilience Building in Lao PDR (2025-2029)

Integrating Gender Considerations into Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Policies and Plans

- **Policy Integration:** Ensure that all DRM policies and plans explicitly incorporate gender considerations. This includes the National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (NSDRR) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, which emphasize the importance of gender equality in disaster resilience efforts.
- **Gender-Sensitive Assessments:** Conduct gender-sensitive risk assessments to identify the specific vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls in disaster-prone areas. Use this data to inform policy-making and program design.

Enhancing Women's Participation in DRM Decision-Making Processes

- **Leadership Roles:** Promote and support the inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making roles within DRM committees and organizations at all levels. This ensures that women's perspectives and needs are adequately represented and addressed.
- **Capacity Building:** Provide training and capacity-building programs to empower women to take on leadership roles in DRM. This includes training on disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

Targeted Training and Capacity-Building Programs

- **Community Training:** Implement targeted training programs for women in disaster-prone areas to enhance their skills and knowledge in disaster preparedness and response. This includes first aid, emergency response, and resilience-building techniques.

- **Technical Skills Development:** Offer technical training in areas such as early warning systems, climate-resilient agriculture, and sustainable resource management to equip women with the skills needed to contribute to community resilience.

Improving Access to Financial Resources and Support for Women-Led Resilience Initiatives

- **Microfinance and Grants:** Expand access to microfinance and grants for women-led resilience projects. This financial support can help women implement community-based disaster risk reduction (CBDRR) initiatives and build economic resilience.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Promote economic empowerment programs that provide women with the resources and support needed to start and grow businesses that contribute to community resilience.

Developing Gender-Sensitive Early Warning Systems and Communication Strategies

- **Inclusive Early Warning Systems:** Design and implement early warning systems that are accessible and responsive to the needs of women and girls. This includes using multiple communication channels to ensure that warnings reach all community members, including those in remote areas.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage women in the development and dissemination of early warning messages to ensure that they are culturally appropriate and effective.

Strengthening Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) Programs

- **Women's Roles in CBDRR:** Recognize and strengthen the roles of women in CBDRR programs. Women often play key roles in community preparedness and response efforts, and their contributions should be supported and enhanced.
- **Community Preparedness Plans:** Develop and implement community preparedness plans that involve women at every stage, from planning to execution. This ensures that plans are comprehensive and inclusive.

Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Disaster Contexts

- **GBV Prevention and Response:** Integrate GBV prevention and response mechanisms into DRM plans. This includes providing safe spaces, counseling, and legal support for survivors of GBV during and after disasters.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct awareness campaigns to educate communities about the risks of GBV in disaster contexts and promote gender equality as a means of reducing these risks.

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

- **Partnerships:** Strengthen partnerships with international organizations, NGOs, and the private sector to leverage resources and expertise in promoting gender-responsive DRM. Collaboration can enhance the effectiveness and reach of resilience-building initiatives.
- **Community Involvement:** Foster community involvement in DRM efforts, ensuring that women and girls are active participants in planning and implementation processes.

Section 3 – Progress Across the 12 Critical Areas of Concern Clustered around Six Overarching Dimensions

3.1 Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

Over the past five years, what actions has your country taken to advance gender equality in the world of work (including informal and non-standard employment as well as entrepreneurship)?

Lao PDR has made significant strides in advancing gender equality in the world of work through various key channels. However, challenges remain, particularly in addressing persistent gender gaps and social norms that limit women's full participation and advancement in the labour market. Some of key highlights are:

Implementation of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2021-2025) by setting targets to increase women in leadership and decision-making positions in government and mass organizations to 25-30% on average. Also, an aim is to provide enhanced living conditions for women and girls through economic empowerment and increased access to education, healthcare, and social services.

Legal and policy measures: The Government adopted the Law on Gender Equality in 2019, which defines gender equality and guarantees protection of women's rights for all aspects to life. Also, efforts have been made on effective implementation of the National Social Protection Strategy from 2020, which aims to gradually achieve universal social protection.

Support for women's entrepreneurship through the Business Assistance Facility (BAF) supported by the Lao PDR Competitiveness and Trade Project, where nearly two-thirds of 459 grants disbursed as of February 2024 benefited women, including those in rural areas.

Focus on rural women's economic empowerment by accelerating efforts to bring trade infrastructure and training to rural communities to open doors to international markets for women with traditional skills.

Addressing unpaid care work by carrying out a Household Care Survey in early 2024 to gain insights into the distribution of unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities. In addition, the Government has pay great attention on improving infrastructure have aimed to improve access to vital resources like water, sanitation and preschools, which can help reduce women's unpaid care burden.

Promoting women's participation in the formal economy: Lao PDR ranked first in the world for economic participation and opportunity in the 2021 Global Gender Gap Report. However, challenges remain as women's average monthly income is still only 77% of men's, and women are overrepresented in low-skill occupations.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET): Public and private technical and vocational colleges have trained 419,642 people (184,556 women) in various sectors, including agriculture, industry, and services, to enhance women's skills and employability. Specific programs have been implemented to promote rural employment, providing vocational training to women in disadvantaged areas.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, promote work-life and family balance and strengthen the rights of paid care workers?

Lao PDR has taken a number of actions between 2020 and 2024 to address unpaid care and domestic work, promote work-life balance, and support care workers. Some of these key actions are:

National Consultation on Unpaid Care Work (2024): In June 2024, Lao PDR held a national consultation on "Valuing Unpaid Care and Domestic Work and Investing in the Care Economy." This event, organized by the Lao Women's Union, UNESCAP, and Oxfam, aimed to examine ways to accelerate progress and adopt care policies at the national level.

Household Care Survey (2024): Earlier in 2024, the Lao Women's Union, in collaboration with Oxfam and other partners, conducted a Household Care Survey. This survey provided valuable insights into the distribution of unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities and their societal impact.

Infrastructure Improvements: The Government has made efforts to improve infrastructure to enhance access to vital resources like water, sanitation, and preschools. These actions aim to reduce women's unpaid care burden by improving care-related services and infrastructure.

National Social Protection Strategy (2020): In 2020, Lao PDR implemented the National Social Protection Strategy, committing to gradually achieving universal social protection. This strategy is seen as a step towards investing in care-related social protection and contributing to the resilience and empowerment of care workers.

Implementation of Gender Equality Laws: Lao PDR has been working on operationalizing national laws on gender equality and women's empowerment. This has contributed to the country's high ranking in economic participation and opportunity for women, as noted in the Global Gender Gap report.

Targeted Social Assistance Program: In response to growing inequality and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government introduced a targeted, nutrition-sensitive social assistance program. While not specifically focused on care work, this program aims to address some of the economic challenges that disproportionately affect women.

Efforts to Address Labour Market Challenges: The government has been working to address labour market challenges, including those related to care work. This includes efforts to manage the increasing trend of workers moving abroad, which has implications for the care economy within Lao PDR.

While these actions demonstrate some progress, it's important to note that significant challenges remain:

- Women in Lao PDR still perform on average five times more unpaid care and domestic work than men.
- Nearly 30% of women cite caring responsibilities as the main barrier to their participation in the labour force.
- The implementation gap in care services and targeted investments remains significant.

These ongoing challenges will be addressed by taking some important steps and continued efforts needed to fully recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, promote work-life balance, and strengthen the rights of paid care workers.

<i>In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to reduce the gender digital divide?</i>

Lao PDR is still in the early stages of addressing the gender digital divide. For the past five years, the country has taken some key steps to reduce the gender digital divide, including launching a Digital Health Strategy, implementing cybersecurity measures, promoting digital education, and enhancing financial inclusion for women. While these initiatives have laid a foundation for greater digital inclusion, ongoing efforts are needed to address persistent gender gaps and ensure that women and girls fully benefit from digital advancements.

Digital Health Strategy: In 2023, Lao PDR launched a Digital Health Strategy aimed at using technology to improve healthcare services. This initiative is expected to enhance access to health services for women and reduce maternal mortality rates by leveraging digital tools for better patient management and data collection.

Cybersecurity Measures: The Department of Cyber Security has implemented laws to protect women and girls from digital exploitation, including cyberstalking and image-based abuse. These measures are designed to provide a safer online environment for women and girls.

Education Initiatives: The national e-learning platform, Khang Panya Lao, and the introduction of tablets in schools have been significant steps towards digital education. These initiatives aim to improve digital literacy among students, including girls, and ensure they are equipped with necessary digital skills.

Awareness Campaigns: The theme for International Women's Day in 2023, "DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality," focused on promoting safe access to technology for women and girls. These campaigns aim to raise awareness about the importance of digital inclusion and the potential of technology to advance gender equality.

Financial Inclusion: This initiative provides gender-responsive financial services to women entrepreneurs, including access to digital banking. It aims to enhance women's financial inclusion and empower them economically by providing tailored financial products and services.

Support for Women in STEM: Efforts have been made to increase the participation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. This includes providing scholarships and creating awareness about the importance of STEM education for girls.

Vocational Training and Employment: The government has encouraged public and private technical and vocational colleges to train women in digital skills and other occupations. This is part of a broader strategy to enhance women's employment opportunities and economic participation.

Challenges and Ongoing Efforts: Despite these efforts, significant gender gaps remain in digital literacy and access to technology. Women are still underrepresented in digital and STEM fields, and there is a need for continued efforts to address these disparities. The digital health strategy has been in line with the 10-year Digital Economy Strategy (2021-2030) and the 5-year National Digital Economy Development Plan (2021-2025) which elaborate on the Government's ambition. However, the country still needs a clear implementation roadmap and digital public service standards, and a digitalized procurement process for the development of e-services.

In the past five years, how has the macroeconomic and fiscal policy environment affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country, and what macroeconomic policies has your country implemented in support of a more gender-equal economy?

The macroeconomic and fiscal policy environment in Lao PDR from 2020 to 2024 has posed significant challenges to the implementation of gender equality and women empowerment initiatives. Some of key issues include:

High Inflation and Currency Depreciation: Persistent depreciation of the kip and high inflation, averaging 31% in 2023, have eroded household purchasing power, disproportionately affecting women, particularly those in low-income families. In addition, high inflation has undermined food security, with many households reducing food consumption and meal frequency, impacting women's and children's nutrition and health.

Public Debt and Fiscal Constraints: Public and publicly guaranteed debt remained above 110% of GDP in 2023, leading to high interest payments that constrained public spending on social sectors such as education and health. Fiscal constraints have crowded out spending on essential services, with combined spending on education and health declining from 4.4% of GDP in 2016 to 2.6% in 2022, among the lowest globally.

Labour Market Shifts: Economic pressures have led to labour market shifts, with more workers moving abroad and others switching from service jobs to agriculture and manufacturing. Women, who are more likely to be in informal employment, have been particularly affected by these changes.

3.2 Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls?

LWU is in the administrative board of the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) at both central and local levels that has direct impact on eradication of poverty by women. PRF Programme uses a Community Driven Development (CDD) approach, whereby communities themselves decide

on how resources are allocated, manage sub-project funds, and implement sub-projects. Extensive facilitation and trainings have been provided through the Programme to ensure that all community members, including women and different ethnic groups, participate in the decision-making process and benefit from the Programme. The Programme builds local capacity by providing technical support for communities, over a number of years, to help solve problems and resolve conflicts. It also aims to create stronger links between the local authorities and communities. PRF staff at the district, provincial and national levels helps to coordinate and facilitate these linkages.

Lao Youth Union (LYU) and Lao Women Union (LWU) have been recently engaging in the vocational trainings for young people across gender groups in various parts of the country. The involvement is at the early stage but evolving over time. Some of key features of these trainings b, designed to be sustainable, with a focus on long-term impact and self-sufficiency, rather than short-term gains, include:

- Vocational training focusing on skills development and employment opportunities.
- Gender equality by providing equal opportunities for young people of all genders to develop their skills and pursue their career aspirations.
- Youth empowerment designed to empower young people with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in their chosen careers, promoting their overall development and well-being.
- Employment opportunities helping young people to become self-sufficient and contribute to the country's economic growth.
- Community engagement engaging with local communities to identify the needs and priorities of young people, ensuring that the training programs are relevant and effective.
- Partnerships collaborating with other stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector companies, and international organizations, to provide training and support to young people.
- Curriculum development designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing young people to choose from a range of courses and specializations that align with their interests and career goals.
- Inclusive approach designed to be inclusive, catering to the needs of young people with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Lao Business Women's Association (LBWA), established by the Lao Women's Union (LWU), has been actively working to support and empower female entrepreneurs and businesswomen throughout Laos. Some of their key activities include:

- **Advocacy and Representation:** LBWA represents and protects the legitimate rights and interests of Lao businesswomen by offering suggestions and recommendations to the government and relevant sectors. The association sends representatives to attend meetings and conferences related to economy and business operations at national, ASEAN, and global levels.
- **Capacity Building and Skill Development:** LBWA works to enhance the knowledge and skills of Lao businesswomen in new techniques, sciences, and technologies to help them grow continuously. The association organizes training workshops, seminars, and study tours for its members.
- **Networking and Information Sharing:** Members can obtain information about the development of women entrepreneurs and participate in various events supported by the association.
- **Women's Economic Empowerment Events:** In 2023, LBWA participated in organizing a Women's Economic Empowerment Event to celebrate Lao businesswomen and their contribution to post-COVID recovery. This event included: Panel discussions featuring

successful Lao businesswomen sharing their experiences and challenges; Inspirational talks by international guests; Networking opportunities for participants

- **Collaboration with Other Organizations:** LBWA works closely with government bodies, international organizations, and other business associations to promote women's entrepreneurship.
- **Recognition of Outstanding Members:** The association acknowledges the achievements of its members. In 2020, several LBWA leaders and members received Labor Orders and Medals from the government for their contributions.

About 60 percent of employment in Lao PDR is in the agriculture and fishery sector. Realizing the importance of this engagement of women in the sector, the Lao Government has adopted the Vision the Year 2030 and the **Implementation Project on Gender Equality Strategy of Agriculture Forestry and Rural Development Sector** from 2016 to 2025 in February 2017. By 2020, the Government met the target of training courses to 70 percent of women working in the agriculture and fishery sector and train 35 percent of women to be the technical officers and experts in this sector. Review of this strategy is current being carried out as part of the review of the current Agriculture Development Strategy (2016-2025).

The Lending and Saving Projects, Saving Groups, Village Development Funds are being carried out at central and provinces in order to be a reducing poverty mechanism, social welfare providing and make a contribution to the socio-economic at grass-root levels. Such funds have resulted in the improvement of the financial status and quality of life of women, their families and the society as a whole.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve access to social protection for women and girls?

The key actions Lao PDR has taken from 2020 to 2024 to improve access to social protection for women and girls are summarised as follow:

Adoption of the National Social Protection Strategy in 2020: aims to provide all Lao people access to basic social protection services, including health insurance, social security, and social welfare, by 2030. This strategy is guided by principles of equity, adequacy, effectiveness, universality, non-discrimination, progressivity, and sustainability.

Expansion of social health insurance coverage: effective coverage has increased from 11% in 2008 to 94.5% in 2024 by combining social contributions, tax-based financing, and direct co-payments. In addition, there have been on-going efforts to reduce out-of-pocket expenditures and enhance the management and administration of the National Health Insurance.

Gender-Responsive Social Protection: Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) - SOPs for Violence Against Women and Girls (2022): The government launched SOPs to provide critical social services to women and girls experiencing violence. These services include advice, counseling, hotlines, legal information, basic health care, safe accommodation, and vocational training. **Household Care Survey - Conducted by Lao Women's Union (2024):** In collaboration with Oxfam and other partners, the Lao Women's Union conducted a Household Care Survey to gather insights into the distribution of unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities. This survey helps inform policies aimed at valuing and investing in the care economy

Specific Programs and Initiatives

- **Mother and Early Childhood Grant (MECG)- Introduction of MECG:** This initiative aims to direct more resources to the critical period of the first 1,000 days of life, strengthening the foundation for human capital development and inclusive growth in Lao PDR.
- **Expansion of National School Meal Programme:** The government has expanded the school meal program to all state kindergarten, pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools in poor districts, promoting nutrition and educational outcomes for children, particularly girls.

- **Targeted Cash Transfers:** Various cash transfer programs have been implemented to support households in need, including those with women and girls, to improve their access to social protection and reduce poverty.

Collaboration with development partners: Working with World Bank, UN agencies, particularly, ILO UNPA, UNICEF and other partners to improve the social security system and expand coverage, particularly for informal workers. At the current stage, the Government is considering policy options to improve sustainability and healthcare services.

While these actions demonstrate progress, significant challenges remain in ensuring the financial sustainability of social protection programs, extending coverage to informal workers, and addressing persistent gender inequalities in areas like child marriage, early childbearing, and women's representation in leadership positions. Continued efforts and investments are needed to fully realize the goals of the National Social Protection Strategy and improve access to social protection for all women and girls in Lao PDR.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve health outcomes for women and girls in your country?

Lao PDR has taken significant steps to expand access to maternal and reproductive healthcare services, strengthen health systems and workforce capacity, and improve outreach to rural and youth populations in order to enhance the health and wellbeing of women and girls in the country from 2020-2024. Some of key actions as highlighted below:

- **Expanded access to healthcare services, especially for women during pregnancy,** by providing maternity benefits and free treatment for their children under 5 years of age through the National Health Insurance Fund. This contributed to reductions in infant, child and maternal mortality rates.
- **Reached 94% coverage of the population under the Universal Health Coverage scheme** by 2021, close to the 94.5% target.
- **Deployed health workers, village volunteers and facilitators to rural communities** to provide information on women's and children's health issues like hygiene, sexual health, nutrition, pregnancy care, childbirth, postpartum care, and family planning.
- **Provided free prenatal care and childbirth services for rural women** at public health facilities. Women can also use the Health Insurance Fund for hospital treatment.
- **Offered free family planning services and contraceptive choices** to women not ready to have children.
- **Increased outreach to youth, especially young women in rural areas,** to provide health knowledge through various means.
- **Implemented the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) strategy 2016-2025,** with a focus on strengthening capacity of healthcare staff in cervical cancer screening to achieve 15% screening by 2025. Conducted trainings and developed manuals on early cervical cancer detection and treatment.
- **Emphasized neonatal care, safe childbirth and postpartum care for women** under the RMNCAH strategy. Introduced manuals, conducted trainings for health workers, and carried out screening of pregnant women for risks. Efforts helped reduce maternal mortality.
- **Developed a manual on prevention and treatment of unsafe abortions** for healthcare workers at all levels. Conducted awareness raising to reduce unsafe abortions.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls, including in sectors where they are underrepresented?

Lao PDR has made significant strides in improving education outcomes and skills for women and girls through various policies, programs, and initiatives. However, continued efforts are needed to address persistent challenges and ensure equal opportunities for women and girls in all sectors.

Policy and Strategic Frameworks: National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2021-2025) set targets to increase women's participation in decision-making positions and create more opportunities for women in various sectors. National Strategy on Gender Equality (2016-2025) aiming at promoting gender equality across all sectors, including education. Education Sector Development Plan (2021-2025) focusing on improving access to quality education for all, with specific measures to support girls' education.

Specific programmes and initiatives: BEQUAL (Basic Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR) Program mainstreaming gender equality and inclusive education throughout primary curriculum materials, communications materials, and in-service training. Also, training handbooks on gender mainstreaming and preventing School Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) have been developed and distributed across the country. **Scholarships and Learning Materials** have been provided to disadvantaged girls to enable them to continue their education, particularly in rural areas. **Spoken Lao Program** has been implemented in selected schools to support oral language learning for children from non-Lao speaking backgrounds, thereby improving educational outcomes for ethnic minority girls.

Lao PDR has also taken steps forward on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) which is a critical component of education that aims to empower young people with 21st century skills and strengthen their agency, enabling them to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health and well-being. CSE is a critical component of education in Lao PDR, particularly in the context of the country's development and rollout of a standalone comprehensive CSE curriculum. The development and rollout of a standalone comprehensive CSE curriculum is essential for ensuring that young people receive accurate and comprehensive information about their sexual and reproductive health and well-being.

Noi Framework and Ecosystem: The Government has been putting greater efforts to increase investments for adolescents, especially young women, through initiatives like the "Noi framework" and "Noi ecosystem" to support their education and overall development.

Vocational Training and Skills Development encouraging public and private technical and vocational colleges to train women in various occupations and focusing on sectors where women are underrepresented, such as agriculture, industry, and services. For instance, UNFPA, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Sports, provided vocational skills training for adolescent girls. This included hospitality training, financial literacy, and basic accounting, empowering young women to start their own businesses. DVV International and the Department of Vocational and Technical Education offered mobile skills training in rural areas, including ICT skills, to enhance employability and economic opportunities for women and girls.

ICT Skills Development: Action Education has supported primary schools in rural areas by providing **ICT equipment** such as tablets, projectors, and screens. Training sessions were conducted to help teachers and students develop basic digital literacy skills. An E-classroom App was introduced to aid in learning the alphabet, spelling, and math through interactive games and picture books in Lao language. In addition, **The Digital Literacy Initiative (DLI)**, launched by the Ministry of Education and Sports, focuses on equipping upper secondary school and TVET students with essential digital skills. This includes coding, programming, and digital entrepreneurship courses, promoting creative thinking and teamwork. This will prepare youth for the digital economy through coding clubs and digital entrepreneurship courses. It emphasizes the importance of digital literacy as a non-formal extracurricular activity in education. UNICEF has been working on **digital transformation in education**, focusing on increasing access to digital literacy classes and integrating ICT activities into the curriculum. This initiative aims to address the digital literacy gap among girls and boys. **Gender-Responsive Learning Environments:** Programs have been designed to create gender-responsive learning environments that cater to the needs of girls, particularly those from marginalized communities. This includes addressing sociocultural norms that

hinder girls' digital literacy development and ensuring safe online environments. **Support for Marginalized Women and Girls:** CARE International's projects have focused on empowering marginalized women and girls through digital literacy and ICT skills, enhancing their ability to utilize social media and other technologies for socio-economic benefits.

Health and Social Support: Family Planning Services by expanding access to family planning services and contraceptive choices, which helps keep girls in school and enables women to join the labour force. In addition, **Health and Nutrition Programs** have been implemented across the country to improve the health and nutrition of girls, which are critical for their educational performance and overall well-being.

What actions has your country taken to ensure that economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic closes gender gaps in poverty, employment, social protection, education, and/or health that the pandemic has exacerbated?

The Government has been focusing on some key actions to ensure that economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic addresses gender gaps as follow:

Socio-Economic Support and Employment Initiatives: Financial Aid to Female-Dominated Sectors: The Lao government provided financial aid and low-interest loans to businesses in sectors where women are predominantly employed, such as tourism and garment manufacturing. This helped businesses retain female employees and supported women entrepreneurs in these industries. Skills Development Programs: The Digital Literacy Initiative (DLI) have equipped young women with essential digital skills, including coding and digital entrepreneurship, enhancing their employability in the post-pandemic digital economy.

Social Protection Measures which include: expansion of Social Protection: The government expanded social protection coverage to include more women, especially those in informal employment. This included extending benefits such as medical care, maternity benefits, and unemployment support to vulnerable populations. Emergency Social Assistance: Urgent income support was provided to households most affected by the pandemic, with a focus on single-parent households and families with children, which are often headed by women. This helped mitigate the immediate economic impact on these vulnerable groups.

Health and Well-being by focusing on continuity of Health Services: Measures were taken to ensure the continuity of essential health services, including maternal and reproductive health services. This included maintaining access to contraception and other sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls, even during lockdowns and movement restrictions. In term of mental Health and GBV Support: Efforts have been on increased support for mental health services and gender-based violence (GBV) survivors was provided. This included hotlines, counseling services, and safe shelters for women and children affected by domestic violence.

Education and Training by focusing on remote learning and ICT integration: The government promoted the integration of ICT in education to ensure that girls continued their education during school closures. Digital tools and resources for remote learning were provided, and teachers were trained to deliver online education effectively. Scholarships and Financial Aid: Scholarships and financial aid programs were expanded to support girls' education, particularly in rural areas where access to education was most disrupted by the pandemic.

Policy and Legal Reforms: National Action Plans: The Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025) and the Second National Plan of Action on Preventing and Eliminating Violence Against Women and Children (2021-2025) were implemented across all provinces and sectors. These plans integrated gender equality and violence prevention into national policies. Legal Reforms: Amendments to laws, such as the Family Law, addressed issues like child marriage and protected the rights of women and girls more effectively.

Community and Grassroots Initiatives stressing the importance of Community-Based Programs: Various community programs were strengthened to support women's economic empowerment and provide social safety nets. These programs focused on income-generating activities and community-driven development projects that benefited women and girls. Public awareness campaigns were

conducted to address gender norms and promote gender equality. These campaigns aimed to reduce the stigma around women seeking support for GBV and encouraged shared domestic responsibilities.

3.3 Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

Over the past five years, which forms of gender-based violence, and in which specific contexts or settings, has your country prioritized for action?

Forms of Gender-Based Violence Prioritized

The four (4) forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) recognised under the law have been prioritised for action, including physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence and economic/property violence. Significant investments have been made in the past five (5) years, with strong partnerships with UN agencies and INGOs/CSOs ensuring acceleration towards zero violence by 2030.

Other emerging forms of violence, such as technology-facilitated GBV, have been gaining attention.

Human Trafficking continues to be a pervasive issue in Laos that requires prioritisation. The government has implemented measures to combat trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute traffickers, recognizing the severe impact of trafficking on women's and girls' lives.

Other harmful practices, such as Child Marriage and Early Pregnancy, have been prioritised. High rates of child marriage and early pregnancy have been critical concerns in Lao PDR. Approximately 32.7% of young women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18, contributing to high adolescent birth rates. Addressing these issues has been a priority, with efforts focused on legal reforms, education, and community outreach to reduce the incidence of child marriage and support young mothers.

Specific Contexts and Settings

- **Rural and Remote Areas:** Many ethnic groups in remote areas continue to practice cultural traditions that put women and children at risk. The government has targeted these areas for interventions to combat violence and change harmful cultural practices.
- **Where Laos borders neighbouring countries, especially entertainment and tourism dedicated areas.**
- **Public and Private Spheres:** Efforts have been made to address violence against women and girls in both public and private spheres, recognizing that violence can occur in various settings. This has increasingly included public discourse in online spaces.

In the past five years, what actions and strategies has your country prioritized to address gender-based violence?

Lao PDR has taken significant actions and strategies to address gender-based violence over the past five years. However, persistent challenges such as gender inequality, social norms, resource constraints, and the impact of COVID-19 continue to require ongoing attention and action.

Legal and Policy Frameworks: Lao PDR has implemented some key legal and policy reforms to address and prevent gender-based violence. The National Action Plan on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children (2021-2025) provides a comprehensive framework for tackling GBV. This plan builds on the previous action plan (2014-2020) and aims to enhance the protection of women and children through prevention, response, and multisectoral coordination. Implementation of this plan is supported by key UN agencies, with a Mid-term Review in process of being conducted. The amendment of the Family Law in 2020 specifically addressed child marriage by setting legal frameworks to prevent early marriages. Additionally, the Penal Code of 2017 defined forcible sexual intercourse with a wife or a woman as

a criminal offense (also known as “marital/spousal rape”), with specific penalties outlined to deter such acts.

Capacity Building has been a critical component of Lao PDR's strategy to prevent GBV. Under the Khan Hom Project, a comprehensive and harmonised package of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for GBV response has been developed (1. Social Sector 2. Health Sector 3. Justice Sector 4. Coordination and Referral Pathway), and capacity building on these SOPs has been rolled out to 6 provinces (of 18) to improve institutional response to GBV. Over 100 LWU counsellors have been trained on providing counselling and Psychological First Aid.

Awareness and Education Campaigns: Lao PDR has organized various awareness campaigns to raise public awareness about GBV. The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign has been a notable initiative, bringing together over 77 partners in 2022 and conducting public events and outreach activities in eight provinces, collectively reaching over 5,000,000 people in Lao PDR. These campaigns aim to sensitize communities, promote behavioral change, and prevent GBV. Additionally, a short film was launched to raise awareness about the impacts and prevention of child marriage. The Male Engagement Manual to Promote Gender Equality, Prevent GBV and Promote Sexual and Reproductive Health has been rolled out to 1621 community members, where male village chiefs and elders are engaged as change agents to conduct awareness raising sessions in their own villages. The “Women’s 3 Goods” handbook aligns with the Government’s “Three Builds” model, which involves building the capacities of provinces, districts and villages to become “developed units” under the Women Development Plan (2016-2020). In 2023, LWU sensitised 20,364 community members, returning to the communities at a later date to conduct “evaluations” of families and villages to assess compliance with the ‘Women’s 3 Goods’ model.

The integration of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) into curricula at all education levels has provided sexual health information, mental health and psychosocial support, and protection services for survivors of GBV. At the academic establishment level: development of the Manual on Prevention and Resolution of Conflicts at Secondary Schools; the Manual on Trainers for prioritization, analysis, and request for assistance; the Manual on Reproductive Health; training of trainers for gender equality for the youth in secondary schools, training for heads of faculties, heads of units and students from 5 provinces, such as Luang Prabang, Xiengkhuang, Oudomxay, Xayabury, and Houaphan. At the community level: development of a manual on community participation in the prevention and combating of violence against women and children, as well as training for women and men, who are village representatives to recognize and understand these issues to conduct campaigns on prevention and assistance of vulnerable groups and victims of violence. Lastly, strengthening of members of the press association on knowledge and news writing to advocate for and raise public awareness of violence against women, with 60 participants from national TV, national radio, and newspapers. Training on knowledge of gender equality and prevention of violence against women and children for staff of Departments of Information and Tourism, especially for those engaged in community events of 3 Southern provinces such as Sekong, Salavan and Attapeu.

Support Services: To ensure survivors of violence receive help without barriers, Lao PDR adopted the 'No Wrong Door' approach, which provides life-saving support and services. The LWU and Ministry of Health strengthened hotlines to be available 24/7 nationwide (#1362 and #1527) for citizens to seek counseling advice on violence against women and girls. The Government has opened new protection shelters for survivors of violence in Bolikhamxay, Champasak, Attapeu, Bokeo, and Savannakhet, in addition to the existing shelter Vientiane Capital, for survivors of violence to seek accommodation and shelter, counseling, psychosocial support, legal advice, and vocational training. A GBV One-Stop Service Unit was opened in Mahosot Hospital – the first hospital-based OSSC in the country. As mentioned above, the Khan Hom Project also supported the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for services to affected women and girls, ensuring a coordinated and effective response to GBV. Nevertheless, further investment and financial support are still needed to reach the ultimate goal - establishing a shelter in every province and ensuring

accessible services for all women and girls by trained health, social, police and justice personnel able to provide care and support meeting international standards.

Research and Data Collection: Lao PDR has conducted various surveys and research to gather data on the prevalence and forms of violence against women and girls. The Lao National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences 2014 provided valuable insights into the extent of GBV in the country. Research on the drivers of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy has informed policy and program interventions, ensuring that strategies are based on accurate and comprehensive data. A preliminary study was published in 2023 outlining how technology-facilitated GBV manifests in Laos.

International Collaboration: Lao PDR has actively participated in global conferences to showcase its achievements and renew commitments to gender equality. The country has organized exchange programs with experts from other countries to learn best practices. Khan Hom Project supported two South-South Triangular international exchange study visits to Mongolia and South Korea to learn best practices on operating One Stop Service Centres and strengthening GBV Administrative Data Systems, as well as one virtual site visit to Viet Nam during COVID-19. Collaboration with international organizations and development partners has been instrumental in supporting the government's efforts to prevent and respond to GBV. The Government of Laos recently showcases its best practices (SOP Package for GBV Response) along with the Government of Viet Nam as a side event to the CSW68, and will do so again in August under the 3rd ASEAN Women's Summit, along with Government of Viet Nam and Thailand.

Multi-Sectoral Coordination: The Government has established a national GBV Steering Committee overseen by NCAWMC that is replicated at sub-national (provincial and district) level, with 6 target provinces strongly operational. Similarly, established referral pathways for victims/survivors of violence and strengthened coordination between various ministries and organizations to provide comprehensive support to victims under the Coordination and Referral Pathway SOP.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence (e.g. online sexual harassment, online stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images)?

Lao PDR has been building on its existing efforts to create a safer and more equitable digital environment for women and girls. In 2023, the Prime Minister of Lao PDR issued a statement that included ten key actions to eliminate gender-based violence. From 2020 to 2024, some key actions are:

Law on Prevention and Combating Cyber Crime: Greater effort have been made toward the enforcement and implementation of the Law on Prevention and Combating Cyber Crime adopted by the National Assembly in 2015. This law establishes principles, regulations, and measures for managing, monitoring, and inspecting activities aimed at preventing and combating cybercrime. It forms a crucial part of the legal framework to protect women and girls from becoming victims in cyberspace. The law addresses various forms of cybercrime, including online harassment, cyberstalking, and the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, which disproportionately affect women and girls. It mandates the establishment of mechanisms for reporting and responding to cybercrimes, including reporting to the Ministry of Technology and Communications in addition to LWU, police etc., ensuring that victims have access to specialised justice and support services.

10th Periodic Report on CEDAW Implementation: In 2023, Lao PDR launched its 10th Periodic Report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This report, developed with technical support from UNFPA and financial support from KOICA, highlights the government's efforts to address discriminatory stereotypes and gender roles across various sectors, including media. The report recognizes the need for further actions, policies, and legal frameworks to comprehensively address gender-based violence, including emerging forms such as technology-facilitated GBV (TF GBV). The report tracks progress in mainstreaming CEDAW principles into national policies, such as the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and the RMNCAH Strategy. It also emphasizes the importance

of enshrining CEDAW in targeted laws and policies, such as the National Plan of Action on Gender Equality. The report underscores the government's commitment to promoting women's rights, combating gender-based violence and human trafficking, and ensuring equal access to education, healthcare, employment, social and economic benefits, and family life for women and girls.

Awareness Campaigns and Media Initiatives: Lao PDR has actively participated in the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign. This annual campaign involves a social media relay and various outreach activities to raise awareness about gender-based violence and promote positive gender norms. In 2023, the campaign included specific activities to address cyberbullying and online violence against women and girls, reaching a wide audience and fostering greater awareness of these issues. In 2022, as part of the International Women's Day and 16 Days of Activism, UNFPA launched the 'bodyright' campaign –the new “copyright” for your body online – engaging more than 120,000 people and sparking national conversation on images online, consent, online rights and protections. In 2024, an online child exploitation and abuse awareness campaign called *Beware the share* was launched in a number of Southeast Asian countries, including Laos.

Capacity Building and Training: The National Action Plan on Gender Equality includes efforts to train media professionals on gender-sensitive reporting and the portrayal of women and girls in media. This training aims to ensure that media content does not perpetuate gender stereotypes and biases. Integration of TFGBV into various trainings for LWU frontline responders has been conducted by LWU.

Support Services and Protection Shelters: LWU staff at the six shelters have been sensitised on TFGBV, and provide safe spaces and comprehensive support services for survivors of TFGBV, especially trafficking and forced sex work. The shelters are part of a broader strategy to enhance support services for GBV survivors, including those affected by TF GBV. An effort is now on ensuring SOPs rollout to operationalize the shelters using a survivor-centered approach, in which TFGBV is integrated into training and data collection forms. In 2024, a slate of high-profile TFGBV cases (or GBV cases that then “went viral” online) was the catalyst for a joint statement from LWU, MoH and UNFPA condemning the behaviour and requesting individuals and organisations immediately cease sharing highly sensitive imagery of the violence. This messaging was then taken up by government and media organisations when a subsequent case of TFGBV was shared online.

Research and Data Collection: UNFPA has supported efforts to gather data on technology-facilitated gender-based violence in Lao PDR. Preliminary findings from a study conducted in collaboration with the National University of Laos were published in December 2023, with contributions from LWU and Ministry of Technology and Communication. The study highlights the pervasive nature and impact of TF GBV and the unique manifestations of this form of violence in Lao PDR, and provides recommendations for strengthening legal, regulatory, and policy frameworks to better protect citizens from TF GBV. The research also emphasizes the need for investment in prevention, advocacy, and sensitization to TF GBV, as well as the importance of improving digital literacy and response mechanisms.

In the past five years, what measures has your country taken to resource women's organizations working to prevent and respond to GBV?

Lao PDR has taken significant measures to support women's organizations working to prevent and respond to GBV. Some of key measures include:

Financial Support and Funding Initiatives: The Government, in collaboration with international partners such as UNFPA and UNDP, has provided direct funding to women's organizations. This funding supports various initiatives aimed at preventing and responding to GBV, including community outreach programs, shelter services, and legal assistance. Khan Hom Project Funding: The Khan Hom Project, funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), has allocated significant resources to support the Lao Women's Union (LWU) and other women's organizations. This funding has been used to enhance the capacity of these organizations to deliver essential services to GBV survivors.

Capacity Building and Training Programs: Extensive training programs have been conducted for staff and volunteers of women's organizations. These programs cover areas such as trauma-informed care, legal advocacy, and case management. The goal is to enhance the ability of these organizations to provide effective support to GBV survivors. Justice and Policing Sector Training: Capacity needs assessments and training programs have been provided specifically for the justice and policing sectors. This ensures that law enforcement officers and judicial personnel are equipped to handle GBV cases sensitively and effectively, thereby supporting the work of women's organizations.

Enhanced Support Services: Five (5) new protection shelters for survivors of violence have been established. These shelters provide safe space and comprehensive support services, including counseling, legal aid, and medical care. For many of the shelters, Provincial Governors have contributed to the UNFPA-supported shelters, such as contributing plots of land, fencing, air-conditions, stationing police etc. The Lao Women's Union (LWU) has established hotlines to offer immediate counseling and support to GBV survivors. These hotlines are staffed by trained professionals who can provide guidance and connect survivors with necessary services.

Policy Advocacy and Legal Reforms: Women's organizations have been actively involved in advocating for legal reforms to better protect women and girls from GBV. This includes the amendment of the Family Law in 2020, which addresses child marriage and other forms of violence against women and children. Women's organizations have been included in the development of national policies and action plans, such as the National Action Plan on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children (2021-2025). Their input ensures that policies are comprehensive and address the real needs of GBV survivors.

Awareness and Education Campaigns: Women's organizations have led community outreach programs to raise awareness about GBV and promote gender equality. These programs include workshops, seminars, and public events aimed at educating communities about the importance of preventing GBV and supporting survivors. Women's organizations have played a key role in participating in the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign, especially in more rural and remote areas working with district government. This annual campaign involves a wide range of activities, including panel discussions, educational sessions, and media campaigns to raise awareness about GBV.

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

Legislative and Policy Frameworks: The Law on the Media of Lao PDR amended in 2016 states the role of the press in promoting the gender equality and protection of young girls and children. The Law prohibits the media to report on biased and raw information including sexual and unethical contents that negatively affect women and children. Since the amendment of this Law, the Government carried some key activities, for instance, information exchange between the Government and partners on the international obligations and national laws related to the media. As a result, guidelines for Media Reporting on Children have been prepared. In collaboration with UNICEF, the Lao PDR Journalists Association published revised guidelines for media reporting on children in 2021. These guidelines aim to ensure responsible reporting in line with child rights and promote the protection and participation of children in media. This initiative has been a significant step towards improving the quality of media content and aligning it with international standards on child rights.

In addition, Lao PDR has integrated the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) into national laws and policies. The 10th Periodic Report on CEDAW, launched in 2023, highlights efforts to address discriminatory stereotypes and gender roles in various sectors, including media. Additionally, the Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025) includes specific measures to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women at all levels, including media. This plan aims to create an enabling environment and promote access to information on gender equality.

Awareness Campaigns and Media Initiatives: Lao PDR has actively participated in the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign. This campaign involves a social media relay and various outreach activities to raise awareness about gender-based violence and promote positive gender norms. In 2019, the campaign reached over 500,000 people in Laos through social media. Initiatives like the "Brave to Change" soap opera, promoted by Care International in collaboration with the Lao Women's Union, focus on healthy relationships and gender equality. This series aims to change traditional social norms by portraying positive examples of gender equality in daily life.

Capacity Building and Training: The National Action Plan includes efforts to train media professionals on gender-sensitive reporting and the portrayal of women and girls in media. This is part of a broader strategy to ensure that media content does not perpetuate gender stereotypes and biases. By equipping media professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge, Lao PDR aims to foster a media landscape that supports gender equality.

International Support and Collaboration: UNFPA and UNDP have supported Lao PDR in its efforts to promote gender equality in media. These organizations provide technical and financial assistance for various initiatives aimed at improving the portrayal of women and girls in media and combating gender bias. This collaboration has been instrumental in advancing gender equality in the media sector.

Monitoring and Reporting: The National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers, and Children (NCAWMC), in cooperation with the Lao Women's Union, monitors the implementation of laws and policies related to gender equality, including those affecting media portrayal. It ensures that media practices align with national and international commitments to gender equality. This body plays a crucial role in overseeing and ensuring compliance with gender equality standards in media content.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken specifically tailored to address violence against marginalized groups of women and girls?

Lao PDR has taken significant steps to address violence against marginalized groups of women and girls through targeted initiatives and collaborations with international organizations. These actions include workshops to support ethnic minority women, inclusive campaigns for women and girls with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ individuals, social protection projects for informal workers, the establishment of protection shelters for human trafficking survivors, and outreach activities in rural and remote communities.

Ethnic Minority Women and Girls: Workshops on Ethnic Affairs: In 2021, the Department of Ethnic and Religious Affairs conducted workshops in eight provinces to disseminate the Decree on Ethnic Affairs. These workshops aimed to support ethnic people, especially women and children in remote areas, by protecting their rights and ensuring they benefit from development schemes. Notably, 13% of the participants were indigenous women. This initiative helped raise awareness among civil servants working in ethnic areas about the unique challenges faced by these communities and promoted the integration of ethnic minority women into development processes.

Women and Girls with Disabilities: Inclusion in 16 Days of Activism Campaign: During the 16 Days of Activism campaign in 2023, women and girls with disabilities were actively involved in outreach activities and community mobilization events. This inclusion aimed to raise awareness about the specific forms of violence and discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities and to promote their rights and protection. The campaign's success is reflected in the increased visibility and participation of women and girls with disabilities in public advocacy efforts, helping to break down barriers and promote inclusivity. All of the GBV SOPs (health, social, justice, coordination) all include specific integration of people with disabilities, including in the data collection forms. For the TFGBV study, focus group discussions were held with women with disabilities to account for their unique experiences.

LGBTQIA+ Individuals: Inclusion in 16 Days of Activism Campaign: The 16 Days of Activism campaign in 2023 also included LGBTQIA+ individuals in its activities. By involving LGBTQIA+

communities, the campaign sought to highlight the violence and discrimination faced by these individuals and to promote inclusivity and equality. This initiative has helped to foster a more supportive environment for LGBTQIA+ individuals, encouraging broader societal acceptance and understanding. All of the GBV SOPs (health, social, justice, coordination) all include specific integration of LGBTQIA+. For the TFGBV study, focus group discussions were held with LGBTQIA+ people to account for their unique experiences.

Informal Workers: Inclusive Social Protection Project: Oxfam in Laos implemented a project focused on more inclusive and equitable social protection for informal workers. This project likely benefited marginalized women in the informal sector by providing them with better access to social protection measures and resources to improve their economic security and resilience. Through this initiative, informal workers, particularly women, have gained greater access to essential services and support, enhancing their ability to cope with economic challenges. Under ASEAN, a declaration and guidelines is in the process of endorsement for Asean Declaration on the Care Economy, which includes the increased risk of GBV for informal and domestic workers.

Human Trafficking Survivors: The Government opened new protection shelters for survivors of violence in Bolikhamxay and Champasak provinces. These shelters provide safe spaces and comprehensive support services for survivors of human trafficking and other forms of violence, ensuring they receive the necessary care and assistance to rebuild their lives. The establishment of these shelters has been a significant step forward in providing targeted support to survivors, helping them to recover and reintegrate into society.

Rural and Remote Communities: The Government has expanded efforts to reach women in rural and remote areas through various outreach activities and community mobilization events during the 16 Days of Activism campaigns. These efforts aim to raise awareness about GBV and provide support to women who may otherwise have limited access to resources and services. The success of these initiatives is evident in the increased engagement and participation of women from rural and remote communities in advocacy and support programs.

3.4 Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

In the past five years, what actions and measures has your country to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making?

Lao PDR has made progress in promoting women's participation in public life and decision-making, significant room for improvement remains. Therefore, the Government will be continuing to build on existing initiatives and addressing the remaining challenges in order to further advance its commitment to gender equality and ensure that women have equal opportunities to participate in all aspects of public life.

Legislative and Policy Frameworks: Lao PDR has implemented several key legislative and policy frameworks to promote gender equality and enhance women's participation in public life and decision-making. The Law on Gender Equality (2019) was enacted to mainstream gender equality principles across all sectors. Additionally, the Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025) includes specific measures to promote women's participation in political and public life. This plan aims to create an enabling environment and promote access to information on gender equality. Furthermore, Lao PDR has integrated the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) into national laws and policies, as highlighted in the 10th Periodic CEDAW Report launched in 2023.

Political Representation: Lao PDR has made strides in increasing women's representation in political and public life. As of recent data, women constitute 27.6% of the National Assembly, although this represents a slight decline from previous years. The government has set ambitious targets to increase women's representation in leadership positions, including aiming for 20%, in 2023 Women Cabinet Ministers is 17.6% of 17 ministers. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to

ensure that women have a more significant role in decision-making processes at all levels of government.

Capacity Building: To enhance women's leadership skills and understanding of diplomatic protocols, Lao PDR has conducted various workshops and training programs. For instance, in March 2022, the Faculty of Law and Political Science organized a workshop to strengthen the knowledge and skills of female lecturers and teachers. This workshop, supported by LuxDev's Project LAO/031, aimed to empower women in academic research and leadership roles. Additionally, capacity development programs for women in government institutions have been supported through projects like the Khan Hom Project, which focuses on building institutional capacities and promoting women's participation in decision-making.

Economic Empowerment: Lao PDR has also focused on promoting women's economic participation. According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2023, Laos ranks 5th globally in women's economic participation. Initiatives such as the "Banking On Women" program by the Banque Franco-Lao have supported women-led businesses and entrepreneurship, providing financial resources and training to help women succeed in the business sector. Furthermore, the Lao PDR Competitiveness and Trade (LCT) project has disbursed grants to support women, particularly in rural areas, enhancing their economic opportunities and resilience.

International Cooperation: Lao PDR has collaborated with international organizations like UNDP, UNFPA, and UN Women to implement various programs supporting women's empowerment and leadership. These collaborations have provided technical and financial assistance, helping to strengthen the capacity of local institutions and promote gender equality across different sectors.

Sector-Specific Initiatives: Efforts have been made to promote women's participation in traditionally male-dominated fields. For example, the Lao Rugby Federation has worked to increase women's involvement in sports leadership, providing training and opportunities for women to take on leadership roles within the organization. These sector-specific initiatives are part of a broader strategy to break down gender barriers and promote inclusivity in all areas of public life.

Challenges and Ongoing Efforts: Despite these efforts, challenges remain in achieving gender parity in leadership positions. Women's representation in leadership roles is still low, with only 17% of director generals in line ministries and 2% of village chiefs being women. There is a need for more targeted efforts to address barriers to women's participation, especially in rural areas and among ethnic minority groups. Additionally, deeply ingrained social norms and cultural practices continue to pose significant challenges to gender equality.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technologies (ICT)?

While Lao PDR has taken significant steps to increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in media and ICT, there is still significant room for improvement. The government's focus on digital inclusion and protection from online violence is promising, but more targeted efforts are needed to address the specific challenges women face in the media and technology sectors. For the past few years, the Government carried some key actions as follow:

Digital Inclusion Initiatives: In 2023, Lao PDR celebrated International Women's Day with the theme "DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality," highlighting the country's focus on ensuring women's safe access to technology. This initiative underscores Lao PDR's recognition of the importance of digital inclusion for women. By promoting digital literacy and access to technology, the government aims to bridge the digital gender gap and empower women to participate more fully in the digital economy.

Cybersecurity Measures: The Department of Cyber Security has implemented laws on cybercrimes and other relevant legislation to protect women and girls from online exploitation and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF GBV). These measures aim to create a safer online environment for women's participation by addressing issues such as cyberbullying, online

harassment, and the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. The establishment of reporting mechanisms and collaboration with law enforcement agencies ensures that victims of cybercrimes receive the necessary support and justice.

Digital Health Strategy: The government launched a Digital Health Strategy focusing on using technology and innovation to improve healthcare, particularly for women. This initiative aims to reduce maternal mortality and achieve health-related goals by leveraging technology to enhance patient management, data collection, and service delivery. By integrating digital tools into the healthcare system, the strategy seeks to improve access to quality healthcare for women, especially in remote and underserved areas.

Awareness Campaigns: Lao PDR has organized various events and campaigns to raise awareness about women's rights and participation in public life, including in media and technology sectors. For example, the International Women's Day celebrations in 2023 included activities to promote women's representation in all areas of public life. These campaigns aim to challenge traditional gender norms and encourage greater participation of women in decision-making roles.

Capacity Building: The Government, in collaboration with international partners, has conducted workshops and training programs to enhance women's skills and knowledge in various sectors, including technology and media. In March 2022, the Faculty of Law and Political Science organized a workshop to strengthen the knowledge and skills of female lecturers and teachers. This workshop aimed to empower women in academic research and leadership roles. Additionally, capacity development programs for women in government institutions have been supported through projects like the Khan Hom Project, which focuses on building institutional capacities and promoting women's participation in decision-making.

Please describe your country's current national women's machinery (government entity exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women) and describe the measures that your country taken over the past five years to establish and/or strengthen it.

Lao PDR's National Women's Machinery comprises two primary entities: the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers, and Children (NCAWMC) and the Lao Women's Union (LWU). The NCAWMC serves as the main body responsible for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment at the national level, while the LWU, a mass organization, plays a crucial role in advancing women's rights and interests across the country.

From 2020 to 2024, Lao PDR has implemented **some key measures to strengthen its national women's machinery.** In terms of **policy and legislative framework**, the country has enacted the Law on Gender Equality (2019) to mainstream gender equality principles across sectors. Additionally, the Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025) has been developed and implemented, incorporating specific measures to bolster state organizations and personnel in areas of gender equality.

Capacity building efforts have been a key focus, with workshops and training programs conducted to enhance the knowledge and skills of women in government institutions, particularly those working on gender equality issues. Projects such as the Khan Hom Project have supported capacity development programs, aiming to build institutional capacities for implementing the National Action Plan on Preventing and Eliminating Violence Against Women.

To **expand reach and representation**, targets have been set to increase LWU membership to 70% of women aged 15 and older. The LWU committee network is also aimed to cover 20% of all business units in the private sector. In promoting leadership, the LWU has been encouraged to conduct campaigns linked with national directives, promoting women to take up 20% of leading management-level positions at various levels of government. Goals have been set to increase the proportion of women in leadership positions in government and mass organizations to 25-30% on average.

Efforts to strengthen coordination have focused on **promoting the use of Information Technology (IT)** to enhance management, coordination, and monitoring of gender equality efforts

across all central and local sectors. International cooperation has been fostered through collaboration with organizations such as UNDP, UNFPA, and UN Women to implement various programs supporting the national women's machinery.

In terms of **monitoring and reporting**, Lao PDR has committed to implementing at least 50% of the concluding observations from the combined 8th and 9th National Reports under CEDAW. Additionally, there is an aim for at least 80% of Commissions for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (CAWMC) to integrate and implement the Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025).

While these measures demonstrate Lao PDR's commitment to strengthening its national women's machinery, challenges persist in fully achieving gender equality goals. Particularly, increasing women's representation in leadership positions and addressing persistent gender gaps across various sectors remain areas requiring continued focus and effort.

In the past five years, what other mechanisms and tools has your country used to mainstream gender equality across sectors? (e.g. gender focal points in the Executive, Legislature or Judiciary; inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms; gender audits, consultations with women's organizations)

Lao PDR has employed different mechanisms and tools to mainstream gender equality across sectors from 2020 to 2024.

Gender Focal Points: The National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers, and Children (NCAWMC) serves as the main coordinating body for gender equality efforts across various sectors. Gender focal points have been established in numerous ministries and government agencies. For instance, the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO) has two to three gender focal points, including both men and women. In the UXO sector, gender focal points have been trained to promote gender-sensitive practices.

Inter-ministerial Coordination: The NCAWMC coordinates with UN agencies, civil society organizations, NGOs, financial institutions, and embassies to promote gender equality. There is also coordination between the Lao Women's Union, the National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action, and other stakeholders to implement gender mainstreaming initiatives.

Gender Audits and Assessments: The government has conducted capacity assessments on CEDAW implementation, revealing gaps due to a lack of capacities, knowledge, and budget. Gender-responsive data collection and analysis are emphasized in policy reviews and implementation.

Consultations with Women's Organizations: The Lao Women's Union plays a crucial role in advising the government on issues related to women's and children's rights. There is collaboration with women's groups and organizations to improve gender-responsive implementation of policies.

Policy Frameworks and Action Plans: The Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025) includes specific measures to strengthen state organizations and personnel in areas of gender equality. The government has also developed the Second National Strategy for the Advancement of Women and the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2016-2025).

Sectoral Initiatives: In the UXO sector, gender mainstreaming training has been conducted to integrate gender considerations into all aspects of UXO/Mine Action work. Efforts have been made to promote women's economic integration and opportunities across various sectors. For instance, the Lao PDR Competitiveness and Trade (LCT) project, under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC), has focused on women's economic empowerment. An event held in March 2024 highlighted the importance of sustained investment in the economic and social inclusion of marginalized groups, particularly women, youth, and rural communities. The Forest Strategy to 2020 was the first to embed provisions on gender inclusion, and efforts have continued with the Forest Strategy to 2035. The Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality initiative (WAVES) has been instrumental in this sector, organizing training sessions to support decision-makers in the Department of Forestry (DOF) and Department of Forest Inspection (DOFI).

Monitoring and Reporting: The government has committed to implementing at least 50% of the concluding observations from the combined 8th and 9th National Reports of Lao PDR under CEDAW. Efforts are also underway to disseminate progress reports on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

If there is a national human rights institution in your country, what measures has it taken to address violations of women's rights and promote gender equality?

Lao PDR does not have a dedicated national human rights institution (NHRI) that fully complies with the Paris Principles. However, the country has established several government bodies and mechanisms to address women's rights and promote gender equality:

The National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers, and Children (NCAWMC) serves as the main coordinating body for gender equality efforts across sectors. It works with various ministries, UN agencies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to promote gender equality and women's rights. The NCAWMC plays a crucial role in developing and implementing national action plans and strategies related to gender equality.

The Lao Women's Union (LWU) is a mass organization that plays a vital role in advancing women's rights and interests across the country. It advises the government on issues related to women's and children's rights and is involved in implementing various programs and initiatives to empower women and promote gender equality.

The Ministry of Justice and other justice sector agencies have been working to improve the legal framework and response to gender-based violence. For example, they have developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the justice sector response to violence against women and children.

Key measures taken to address violations of women's rights and promote gender equality in Lao PDR include:

- Implementation of the Law on Gender Equality (2019) to mainstream gender equality principles across sectors.
- Development and implementation of the Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025), which includes specific measures to strengthen state organizations and personnel in areas of gender equality.
- Establishment of gender focal points in various ministries and government agencies to promote gender-sensitive practices and policies.
- Conducting capacity assessments on CEDAW implementation and addressing implementation gaps through targeted interventions.
- Collaboration with international organizations like UN agencies and other development partners to implement various programs supporting women's empowerment and gender equality.
- Development of policies and initiatives to address issues such as violence against women, women's economic empowerment, and women's participation in decision-making.
- Efforts to improve data collection and analysis on gender-related issues, including gender-responsive budgeting and gender-disaggregated data collection.

3.5 Peaceful and inclusive societies

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the women, peace and security agenda?

Lao PDR has taken significant steps from 2020 to 2024 to build and sustain peace, promote inclusive societies, and implement the women, peace and security agenda. **The country has demonstrated its commitment to regional cooperation by signing several ASEAN declarations**, including

the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, the Vientiane Declaration on Enhancing Gender Perspective and ASEAN Women's Partnership for Environmental Sustainability, and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children. These agreements provide a conducive environment for implementing action plans related to the advancement of women's rights. **At the same time, the Government has launched several national action plans to address gender equality and violence against women and children.** These include the Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025), the Second National Plan of Action on Violence against Women and Violence against Children (2021-2025), and the National Women Development Plan (2021-2025). These plans integrate the government's commitments to promote gender equality, eliminate gender-based violence, and fulfill obligations under CEDAW and other international agreements.

In addition, **the Government of Lao PDR has recognized the importance of involving international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and local civil society organizations (CSOs) in supporting gender equality.** To facilitate their activities, the government has issued regulations such as Decree 115/PMO and Decree 238/Gov on Non-Profit Associations, which prescribe principles for the establishment, activities, and management of associations in Lao PDR. Collaboration with CSOs has been instrumental in increasing access to justice. For instance, the Government has worked with the Association for Development of Women and Legal Education (ADWLE) and the Law and Development Partnership (LDP) to produce a manual on gender-based violence and train paralegals and law enforcement officers.

In the area of gender-responsive small arms control, Lao PDR conducted a national consultation workshop in March 2022 to review relevant policies and laws. The workshop aimed to improve sex and age-disaggregated data collection on armed gender-based violence, harmonize legislation on gender-related issues with those related to small arms, and enhance gender equality in the security and defense sector.

Efforts to clear unexploded ordnance (UXO) and assist victims have continued, recognizing the disproportionate impact on women and children. Over 86,860 hectares of land have been cleared, and more than 1.9 million UXO have been destroyed. Risk education and victim assistance programs have also been implemented.

The Government has conducted various capacity building and awareness initiatives, including training programs on gender mainstreaming and women's leadership, annual 16 Days of Activism campaigns, and awareness campaigns on cyberbullying and online violence against women and girls. To increase CSO participation in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, the Government has been accommodative of organizations that can positively impact the country's development, such as Proud to Be Us, which advocates for LGBTI rights.

International cooperation has been a key component of Lao PDR's efforts, with collaborations involving UN agencies and international partners to implement programs supporting women's empowerment and gender equality. The country has also engaged in south-south cooperation initiatives, such as collaboration with Thailand, China and Vietnam on women's economic empowerment.

While Lao PDR has made significant progress in developing policies and plans, there are areas for improvement. These include increasing women's representation in leadership and decision-making positions, especially in peace and security sectors; enhancing data collection and analysis on gender-related issues in conflict prevention and peacebuilding; strengthening implementation and enforcement of existing laws and policies; increasing funding for women's organizations working on peace and security issues; and expanding programs addressing the specific needs of ethnic minority women and girls in peacebuilding efforts.

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

From 2020 to 2024, even though Lao PDR did not engage in any domestic or external conflicts, the Government has always placed emphasis on the importance of peace-building and has undertaken actions to enhance women's leadership, representation, and participation in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian action, and crisis response. These efforts are reflected in policy frameworks, representation targets, capacity-building initiatives, and international commitments.

Policy Frameworks: Lao PDR implemented the Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025), which includes measures to promote women's participation in political and public life, including in crisis response and decision-making roles. This plan aims to integrate gender equality principles across all sectors and ensure that women are actively involved in shaping policies and strategies related to peace and security.

Representation Targets: The government set ambitious goals to increase the proportion of women in leadership positions in government and mass organizations to 25-30% on average. Additionally, each sector is encouraged to have women in leadership and decision-making positions at least 15-20%. These targets are designed to ensure that women have a significant presence in decision-making processes, particularly in areas related to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Humanitarian Action and Crisis Response: During recent crises, such as flooding and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lao Women's Union (LWU) played a key role in supporting affected populations, particularly women and children. The LWU set up women-friendly spaces to provide counseling on health, psychological, and legal issues, with trained staff from the LWU and the health sector. They also collaborated with local health departments to conduct awareness sessions on mother and child health, family planning, and gender-based violence in crisis settings.

UXO (Unexploded Ordnance) Response: Lao PDR has implemented the UXO Victim Assistance Strategy, which includes support for women affected by UXO, either as survivors or as family members of survivors. Skill training courses have been provided for women UXO survivors or wives of UXO-affected individuals, in partnership with UN Women and the Embassy of Canada. These initiatives aim to empower women economically and socially, helping them rebuild their lives after UXO-related incidents.

Capacity Building: The Government has conducted numerous workshops and training programs to enhance women's understanding of diplomatic protocols and leadership skills, which can be applied in conflict prevention and peacebuilding contexts. The Ministry of Justice, in partnership with UN Women, has included a gender perspective in its Mediators' Manual and Training of Trainers Manual on Village Mediation Skills. This training covers content on applying a survivor-centered approach when village mediators are approached by women who have experienced violence. The Association for Women's Development and Legal Education is a civil-society organisation that supports the training of 53 Village Mediation Units, which are the project's target group in Xaythani and Xaysettha Districts of Vientiane Capital, Peak District in Xiengkuang Province, Phongsaly District of Phongsaly Province and Bolikhan of Bolikhamxay Province, with 265 participants (53 women). In addition, there was also training for 60 law enforcement officers (45 women) such as People's Court, Prosecutors, Public Security, Justice, Health and the LWU of Xaythani and Xaysettha Districts of Vientiane Capital and Sanxay District of Attapue Province with the aim to have a unified understanding of gender equality, gender-based violence, and common practice.

International Commitments: Lao PDR has reaffirmed its commitments to international agreements that promote women's participation in decision-making and peacebuilding, such as CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These commitments underscore the country's dedication to upholding women's rights and ensuring their active involvement in peace and security efforts.

Institutional Strengthening: Efforts have been made to strengthen the capacity of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers, and Children (NCAWMC) and the Lao Women's Union. The government has also worked on establishing a national coordination

mechanism for small arms control, aiming to enhance gender equality in the security and defense sector. The NCAWMC makes efforts to oversee the enforcement of laws, the implementation of plans, programs as well as the issuing of regulations and rules to ensure the suppression of violence especially the National Action Plan on Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children in each period. There are also measures to assist female victims of violence and those injured by the use of violence to access justice and get support and assistance in various aspects. The government issued the Decree on Village Mediation, No. 626/GOL/2021, defined the position, role, rights, and duties of Village Mediation Units to conflicts resolution at the village level under the supervision, oversight and technical advice of the District Justice Office, in order to ensure that victims, particularly women and children, can access this mediation process, this Decree, No. 626/GOL/2021 also defines principles for mediation based on equality and voluntariness of conflict parties.

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

Constitutional and Legal Framework: The Constitution of Lao PDR incorporates key provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which the country ratified in 2009. Articles 35 and 37 of the Constitution ensure that all Lao citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of gender. The Constitution has been amended multiple times to align with socio-economic development needs and international obligations. Over 100 laws have been adopted to implement the Constitution, including the Penal Law, Law on Media, Law on the Election of the National Assembly, Law on Civil Servants, and Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children. These laws reflect the provisions of the ICCPR and other international treaties to which Lao PDR is a party.

International Treaties and Obligations: Lao PDR follows a dualistic legal model, where treaty obligations prevail over national laws in case of conflict. The Presidential Ordinance on the Conclusion, Accession, and Implementation of Treaties (2009) and the Law on Legislation Making stipulate that the provisions of international treaties shall prevail over inconsistent domestic laws. This ensures that international humanitarian law and human rights obligations are effectively integrated into the national legal framework.

Judicial Accountability: The People's Supreme Court has taken steps to improve access to justice, particularly for women and girls in rural and remote areas. The court published a book entitled "How to Access to Justice," distributing more thousand copies to enhance the understanding of legal rights and obligations among the Lao multi-ethnic population. This initiative aims to ensure that women and girls can seek redress for violations of their rights and access judicial remedies.

Capacity Building: The government has conducted numerous workshops and training programs to enhance the capacity of judicial and law enforcement personnel. For example, the Ministry of Justice, in partnership with UN Women, included a gender perspective in its Mediators' Manual and Training of Trainers Manual on Village Mediation Skills. This training covers content on applying a survivor-centered approach when village mediators are approached by women who have experienced violence. Additionally, the LWU has been involved in developing manuals on gender-based violence and training paralegals and law enforcement officers.

Gender-Responsive Small Arms Control: In March 2022, Lao PDR conducted a national consultation workshop to review policies and laws related to gender-responsive small arms control. The workshop aimed to improve sex and age-disaggregated data collection on armed gender-based violence and harmonize legislation on gender-related issues with those related to small arms.

In addition, the Government issued Instruction No. 943/MoJ/2022 on Mediation at the District/Municipality/City Justice Office by defining the types of conflicts to mediation at the district level. For minor conflicts with low value and not sophisticated, the District Mediation Unit shall advise the parties to submit the case to Village Mediation Units first. In addition, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) also provides legal assistance and legal references, especially the Law on Violence

Against Women and Children; the establishment of Legal Clinics for Victims Office, and on 2019-2022, there were 1.658 petitions, and 1.351 conflicts were solved with 177 pending cases and 130 cases were referred to other authorities as well as coordinated with police, prosecutors and courts to consider legal proceedings in accordance with laws and regulations.

The MOJ also makes efforts to improve legislation and train on the mediation of conflicts at the village level for the justice sector at the provincial and district level to deepen the understanding of work, especially Provincial Justice Departments and District Justice Offices across the country to improve and strengthen role, rights and duties of the Village Mediation Units for them to have a better understanding and see the adverse impacts of violence in the society; at the same time, to provide access for women to health care support when violence occurs. The Ministry of Health (MOH) established victim support units at 7 central hospitals, namely, Mahosot hospital, Mitthaphab hospital, Setthathirath hospital, Mother and Child hospital, 103 hospital and Hamesa hospital; in each hospital, from the central to the local level, there is a team to assist victims of violence, including psychological and mental healing; victims of trafficking in persons, if they are poor, hospitals can refer them to the Law and regulations on medical treatment, the Health Insurance Fund and the Health Equity Fund in the discharge of their duty and mandate.

In the collection of data about cases on the use of violence, the MOJ has created a program for collection on the court's verdicts by separating the type of cases, such as cases with female offenders and female victims, for example, in 2019-2020, there were 759 cases, where victims were women, of which, 41 cases are violence related (6 trafficking in persons cases, 35 adultery cases). In addition, 17 cases of violence involved child victims, and there were 1.008 cases, where women were offenders. Out of 1.008 cases, 74 cases are violence related (11 trafficking in persons cases, 58 adultery cases, and 5 prostitution cases). The relationship between offenders and victims is mostly close friends, people from the same village or family and relatives.

In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child, including adolescent girls?

From 2020 to 2024, Lao PDR has taken a number of actions to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child, including adolescent girls. These actions span legislative reforms, policy implementation, capacity building, and international cooperation.

Legislative and Policy Reforms: In 2023, Lao PDR amended the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children to enhance the protection of children's rights. This amendment included a historic ban on corporal punishment, making Lao PDR the first ASEAN country to fully prohibit corporal punishment in all settings. The Government also implemented several national plans of action, including the Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025), which promotes gender equality and protects the rights of girls and women. Additionally, the Second National Plan of Action on Violence against Women and Violence against Children (2021-2025) focuses on preventing and eliminating violence against women and children, with specific provisions for girls. The National Plan of Action for Lao Youth and Adolescent Development (2021-2030) addresses issues such as child marriage and adolescent pregnancy.

Capacity Building and Awareness: To ensure robust mechanisms for protecting vulnerable children, including girls, Lao PDR developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for child protection case management. These SOPs are designed to function in both development and emergency settings. The government conducted training programs for government officials, judiciary members, and social workers on child protection and gender equality. Capacity-building initiatives were also implemented to enhance the skills of those working in child protection and gender equality sectors.

Health and Education Initiatives: Lao PDR launched the Family Planning (FP) 2030 commitment to support adolescent girls and boys in delaying pregnancy and marriage until adulthood, providing them with family planning services and education. Awareness campaigns on reproductive health and rights were conducted to reduce adolescent pregnancies and promote gender equality. The Basic Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR (BEQUAL) program was

implemented to integrate gender equality and inclusive education principles into the curriculum and teacher training materials.

International Cooperation and Support: Lao PDR collaborated with UN agencies such as UNICEF, UNFPA, and other international organizations to develop and implement strategic frameworks for ending violence against women and girls by 2030. The country received technical and financial assistance from international partners to develop child protection systems and enhance gender equality initiatives. Lao PDR has committed to international agreements such as CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which obligate the country to protect the rights of girls and eliminate discrimination⁴.

Community and Social Initiatives: The Government organized campaigns to raise awareness about child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and gender-based violence. For example, the "Noi Framework" campaign focuses on adolescent issues, including early marriage and pregnancy. Lao PDR also participated in the annual 16 Days of Activism campaign to raise awareness about gender-based violence and promote positive gender norms. Women-friendly spaces and support services for girls affected by violence, including counseling and legal assistance, were established to provide necessary support.

3.6 Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation and land degradation?

From 2020 to 2024, Lao PDR has taken key actions to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and land degradation. These efforts encompass legislative reforms, policy implementation, capacity building, and international cooperation.

Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation: Lao PDR has integrated gender actions into its revised Nationally Determined Contributions (revised NDCs submitted in 2021 and the next revised one expected to be submitted in 2025) under the Paris Agreement. This includes identifying gender-specific barriers and opportunities for climate action and developing gender-responsive strategies and toolkits. The Climate Promise II project, supported by UNDP and Germany's Federal Ministry for the Environment, has facilitated this integration. Between June and August 2023, a gender consultant conducted stakeholder consultations and developed a gender analysis to support the creation of gender action plans and strategies for climate change. The Lao Women's Union (LWU) is included in the Technical Working Group on Climate Change, promoting women's participation in environmental policymaking.

Biodiversity Conservation: The 2nd National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) for 2016-2025 includes gender-sensitive approaches, acknowledging the different roles of men and women in managing and using agro-biodiversity resources. This plan calls for the incorporation of women's knowledge into biodiversity management plans. Extensive stakeholder participation was involved in the development of the Sixth National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), including training workshops and consultations to ensure gender perspectives are considered in biodiversity conservation efforts.

Land Degradation: Lao PDR has set national Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets to be achieved by 2030, which include gender-sensitive approaches to land management and soil rehabilitation. These targets aim to ensure sustainable agricultural practices that consider the roles and needs of women in agriculture. The National Report on Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting highlights the importance of gender-sensitive land management practices to achieve these targets.

Forestry and Resource Management: The Forest Strategy to the year 2035 includes provisions for gender inclusion. Training programs, such as those organized by The Regional Community Forestry Training Centre for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC) through the Weaving Leadership for

Gender Equality initiative (WAVES), have supported decision-makers in the Department of Forestry to enhance gender equality provisions within forestry policies and actions. WAVES leaders from various departments are advocating for and implementing gender mainstreaming in their work. Institutional mechanisms have been established to work on and report on gender-disaggregated data.

Disaster Risk Management: The LWU is included in Village Disaster Management Committees under the Law on Disaster Management, promoting women's involvement in disaster risk management at the local level. This inclusion ensures that women's perspectives are considered in disaster preparedness and response efforts. The National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (NSDRR) 2021-2030 sets seven strategic priorities to strengthen disaster resilience, emphasizing the importance of early warning systems and enhanced disaster management structures. The Government has also participated in the UN Secretary General's Early Warnings for All (EW4ALL) global initiative, aiming to ensure that everyone, including marginalized and vulnerable populations, is protected by early warnings by 2027.

Mid-Term Review of the Sendai Framework: In 2023, Lao PDR conducted a mid-term review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. This review assessed progress, challenges, and achievements under the framework's four main pillars: understanding disaster risk, strengthening disaster risk governance, investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience, and enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and recovery. The review highlighted the integration of gender perspectives in disaster risk governance and the development of sub-national disaster risk reduction strategies

Challenges and Areas for Improvement: Despite having strong legal frameworks, there are gaps in the implementation of gender equality provisions due to constraints in knowledge, capacities, and coordination. There is a need for improved mechanisms for the collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis to better inform policymaking and implementation. High rates of violence against women and children, poor employment opportunities, and limited access to land and financial capital for women remain significant challenges that need to be addressed to enhance women's resilience to climate and disaster risks

<i>In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction and building environmental and climate resilience?</i>

Same as above.

Section 4 – National Institutions and Mechanism

4.1 National Action Plan for Gender Equality

The policy of promoting gender equality and combating discrimination against women is considered one of the government's priorities in the development and empowerment of women in all fields. The government has continued to implement the National Plan of Action on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children (2014-2020) and the Lao Women's Development Plan (2016-2020), continue to implement the MDGs in the field of women that have not yet been implemented and the 2030 Agenda for SDGs. Especially since the completion of the combination the 8th and the 9th Periodic Report in the implementation of CEDAW, the government has also continuously adopted a number of additional legislations and strategies as measures and references for the promotion of women's and children's rights, such as: adopting the 3rd National Plan of Action for Mothers and Children (2021-2025), the 2nd National Plan of Action on Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children (2021-2025) and the 8th Women's Development Plan (2021-2025); integrate women's and children's rights into the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2025) which has clearly defined indicators and outputs; adopt the 4th National Plan of Action for Gender Equality (2021-2025) with the target of more than 30% of women's participation in politics; encouraging, promoting and facilitating in various aspects for the women can access to the education, healthcare services, technical trainings and employment as well as economic empowerment, especially for poor and disadvantaged women to develop and generate income for themselves and their families to overcome poverty; adopting the National Plan of Action for Mothers and Children (2021-2025) that has set targets to reduce the shortage of children especially in nutrition and healthcare services, child protection, clean water, safe hygiene, adequate shelter, development of preschool children, in access to education and information to 30% in each province; determined mechanisms to help women and children who are victims of violence to have access free health services, justice process and social assistance to increase to 20%; at the same time, Vision for the Development of the Lao Generation towards 2030 has been completed; Adopted the National Plan of Action for Strengthening of Child Protection System (2021-2025) and the National Plan of Action for Eradicating Child Labor and Promote Decent Work for the Youth of the Lao PDR. Mainstreaming women's rights and children's rights into the National Strategy for Social Protection and the National Strategy for Employment in rural areas; the Law on Gender Equality has been promulgated, this law stipulates the promotion of gender equality in politics-governance, economic, social and cultural equality and it has been disseminated to the central and local leaders, civil servants including community leaders, village chiefs, the media, employers and the general public that everyone is generally aware of and understands these rights. In addition, the Decision of the Minister of Health on the management of surrogacy and abortion has been adopted for the amendment of some related articles of the Penal Code and endorsement of the commitment of the government together with local government agencies, development partners and private business sector to advance children's rights under the slogan "Unleash the unlimited potential of Lao people in 2030".

The Lao PDR has made progress on promotion of gender equality by 3 pillars of women's empowerment namely the NCAWMC, LWU and the Women's Caucus expressed as the index of gender equality from 0.713 in 2015 to 0.731 in 2020 from 52nd to 43rd in the world and is still the 2nd in ASEAN which shows that the development of gender equality in the Lao PDR is gradually progressing.

The government has improved the organisation of NCAWMC by combining the National Commission for the Advancement of Women and National Commission for Mothers and Children together as National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children and this commission play an important government mechanism to promote the advancement of women, gender equality and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and children, Protect the rights and interests of mothers and children and also considered as responsibility of implementation of CEDAW, BPFA and CRC and its optional protocol. Currently, the network of NCAWMC, there are from central to grassroot level; 3,460 personnel working for the advancement of women and

mothers and children in the whole country, 1.133 of whom are women. The Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children at all levels has coordinated with the government, business, development partners, international organizations, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations both domestically and abroad, including international friendly countries in the region and in the world in the performance of their duties, especially in the implementation of various programs.

The National Assembly has issued the resolution, No 264/NA/ 2022 on the assign the National Assembly Women's Caucus, in the NA's IX Legislature (2021-2025), to continue on mainstreaming gender equality into Law making process, the exercising oversight over the implementation of the Constitution, laws and policies in order to achieve SDGs, treaties and other obligations that relevant to gender equality, advancement of women and protection the rights of women and children.

During this same time they also make gender equality work widely implemented. The Lao Women's Union and the Women's Union Committee at each level have given importance to the task of educating the members of the Women's Union, Lao women of all ethnic groups in many ways in accordance with the target groups held by the party committee, governing bodies and organizing research, integration and development of laws and legislations related to the protection of the legitimate rights and interests of women and children, which have achieved many successes, such as: completion of the Lao Women's Development Plan (2020-2025) and the Vision for the Development of Lao Women 2030; to mobilize and encourage women to access information through the media of the Lao Women's Union and other media, with 12.807.897 visitors and improve the news network covering the country; Organized vocational training for poor and disadvantaged women 525 times, with 5.071 participants, 460 men, 4.661 women; 05 professional training centers have been expanded, namely in: Provinces of Sekong, Champasak, Khammouan, Savannakhet and Saravan; Create 06 vocational training centers and training rooms at the district level: 03 in the districts (Ta-oi, Toumlan and Sa-muoy) of Saravan province; 02 Districts (Hua District and Son District) of Houaphanh Province and Hom District of Xaysomboun Province; Microfinance institutions that receive deposits for the development of women and families have 15 service units; they have 15.984 members, has given credit to 3.772 members and won the ASEAN award for rural development and poverty eradication.

The Government has paid attention to the work of promoting the advancement of women, gender equality and elimination of all forms of discrimination against women by allocating personnel and budget for support the activities of promoting women advancement and rights and interests of women and children. In addition, the government has also issued the Law on state budget by assign all ministries, agencies and localities a budget allocation that takes into account the role of gender in all state investment projects. However, the personnel and those budgets have not been able to meet the requirements of the actual tasks and there is also the use of budgets from international organizations to combine with the government's budget to implement the said work.

4.2 National system for tracking the proportion of the national budget

National system for tracking the proportion of the national budget invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women has not been established yet. However, the Government of Lao PDR has expressed a commitment to allocating resources for gender equality and women's empowerment, as evidenced by the inclusion of gender-responsive budgeting in the State Budget Law and various national plans and strategies. The establishment of a legislative framework, capacity-building initiatives, and collaborative efforts with various ministries highlight the country's commitment to promoting gender equality. Nonetheless, challenges such as limited funding, a lack of trained human resources, and the need for robust planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation systems need to be addressed to ensure the effective implementation of gender-responsive budgeting, particularly tool and checklist for finance sector and national assembly.

Legislative Framework: The revised State Budget Law, approved by the National Assembly in December 2015, includes provisions for gender-responsive budgeting. This law mandates the inclusion of gender considerations in budget planning and allocation processes. By embedding

gender-responsive budgeting within the legislative framework, Lao PDR aims to ensure that gender perspectives are systematically integrated into financial decision-making.

Institutional Mechanisms: The National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers, and Children (NCAWMC) plays a coordination role in promoting gender equality and monitoring the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting across various sectors. NCAWMC collaborates with the Ministry of Finance and other line ministries to ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into budget planning and allocation. This collaboration is crucial for the effective mainstreaming of gender considerations in national financial policies.

Capacity Building and Training: A national workshop on gender-responsive budgeting was organized by ESCAP in partnership with NCAWMC and UN Women. This workshop aimed to enhance the capacity of government officials to implement gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), including participants from the Ministries of Finance, Planning and Investment, and other key sectors. Additionally, training programs have been conducted to improve the understanding and practical skills of government officials in undertaking gender analysis of budgets and implementing GRB. These capacity-building initiatives are essential for equipping officials with the knowledge and skills needed to integrate gender perspectives into financial planning.

Policy and Planning: The Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025) includes measures to integrate gender perspectives into national planning and budgeting processes. Similarly, the National Financial Protection Strategy against Disaster Risks (2023) emphasizes gender inclusion in financial planning for disaster risk management. These national plans underscore the government's commitment to ensuring that gender considerations are embedded in policy and planning frameworks.

Monitoring and Evaluation: NCAWMC has been working on developing a monitoring and evaluation framework to track the implementation of gender equality action plans and the effectiveness of GRB initiatives. The development of such a framework is critical for assessing progress, identifying gaps, and ensuring accountability in the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting.

Despite the progress made, there are several challenges related to the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting. Limited funding for advocating and mainstreaming gender perspectives into various sectors remains a significant hurdle. Additionally, there is a lack of human resources specifically trained in gender advocacy and GRB implementation. The need for more tools and guidance to effectively mainstream gender, collect gender statistics, and conduct gender analysis is also evident. Furthermore, the absence of a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track progress and identify gaps in the implementation of gender equality initiatives remains a significant challenge.

4.3 Multi-stakeholder engagement and participation – implementing and monitoring the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Over the past five years, from 2020 to 2024, Lao PDR has implemented formal mechanisms to facilitate the participation of different stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These mechanisms underscore the country's commitment to gender equality and sustainable development.

National Steering Committee for SDG Implementation: Chaired by the Prime Minister, this committee includes members from all concerned ministries, ministry-equivalent agencies, and mass organizations. It oversees the overall implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring that efforts are coordinated and aligned with national priorities.

National SDG Secretariat: Led jointly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the National SDG Secretariat coordinates SDG efforts across government

agencies. This secretariat plays a crucial role in aligning national policies with the SDGs and ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into sustainable development initiatives.

SDG Focal Points: Appointed within each relevant line ministry, SDG focal points serve as custodians to lead and take ownership of specific SDGs. They ensure smooth coordination and collaboration within the government, facilitating the integration of gender perspectives into sectoral policies and programs.

Lao Women's Union (LWU): The LWU's role is pivotal in ensuring that gender equality initiatives are effectively implemented and monitored.

National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers, and Children (NCAWMC): Acting as the secretariat for the Beijing Platform for Action coordinates with both government and non-government stakeholders to gather input on BPfA progress, plays a crucial role in promoting gender equality and monitoring the implementation of gender-related initiatives. It collaborates with various ministries and stakeholders to ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into national policies and programs.

Stakeholder Engagement Seminars: Organized by the National SDG Secretariat in partnership with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, these seminars promote SDG implementation, localization, and integration into national and local development planning. They provide a platform for stakeholders to discuss progress, challenges, and opportunities in achieving the SDGs.

Consultations and Outreach: Prior to submitting the BPfA review, consultations were organized with different sectors, including governmental bodies, development partners, and civil society organizations. Additional efforts were made to reach out to sectors not present during official consultations via offline and online communications. This inclusive approach ensures that diverse perspectives are considered in the implementation and monitoring of the BPfA.

Integration into National Planning: The 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plans (NSED) integrate SDGs into their frameworks. The current 9thNSED has embedded SDGs into its three outcomes, aligning with the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. This integration ensures that gender equality and sustainable development are central to national planning processes.

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs): Lao PDR has conducted Voluntary National Reviews (VNR 2018, 2021, and 2024) on SDG implementation, involving various stakeholders in the process. The VNRs are developed based on the principles of inclusiveness, participation, and transparency, reflecting the country's commitment to accountable and participatory governance.

4.4 Stakeholder participation for the BPfA+30 of Lao PDR

Consultation process: The Lao Government organized consultations with different sectors, including governmental bodies, development partners, and civil society organizations (CSOs) to gather comments on the BPfA+30 review.

Coordination role of NCAWMC: NCAWMC acted as the secretariat for the Beijing Platform for Action, coordinating with both government and non-government stakeholders to gather input on the progress of BPfA implementation.

Additional outreach efforts: NCAWMC made extra efforts to reach out to sectors that were not present during the official consultations. This was done through both offline and online communications to gather their comments and ensure the review was as inclusive and objective as possible.

Inclusive approach: The government aimed to make the review process inclusive, inviting input from various stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive perspective on the progress made.

Alignment with SDG reporting: While not specific to BPfA+30, the report mentions that the government has adopted an inclusive approach for SDG reporting, which likely informed the

BPfA+30 process as well. This includes inviting stakeholders from the government sector, private sector, UN agencies, INGOs, CSOs, academia, and development partners to contribute their ideas.

Ongoing engagement: The report suggests that while there was not a specific stakeholder engagement process solely for BPfA, various ministries have been carrying out different forms of stakeholder engagement on agendas related to the 12 critical areas of concern in BPfA.

The government's approach demonstrates an effort to make the BPfA+30 review process participatory and inclusive, gathering diverse perspectives from various sectors of society.

4.5 Action plan and timeline for implementation of recommendations of CEDAW or the UPR or other UN human right mechanisms

Action Plan and Timeline for CEDAW Recommendations

10th Periodic CEDAW Report:

- The 10th Periodic Report on CEDAW was submitted to CEDAW's Committee in March 2023 and officially launched in November 2023, recognizing the progress made in advancing women's rights through law reforms and policies.
- The report was developed through extensive consultations with government departments, civil society organizations, and development partners, led by technical committee members from various line ministries and agencies.

List of Issues and Response:

- The CEDAW Committee published a list of issues and questions in relation to the tenth periodic report of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and was submitted reply list of issued to CEDAW's Committee in April 2024. These issues include measures taken to strengthen justice and combat gender-based violence (GBV), access to sexual and reproductive health, combating early marriage, GBV, and trafficking, and ensuring gender parity in employment, education, and decision-making positions.

National Action Plans:

- The Fourth National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021-2025) integrates CEDAW recommendations and aims to implement at least 50% of the concluding observations from the combined 8th and 9th National Reports.
- The Second National Plan of Action on Violence against Women and Violence against Children (2021-2025) focuses on prevention, response, and multisectoral coordination to address violence against women and children.

Training and Dissemination:

- Training programs and workshops have been conducted to disseminate CEDAW principles and enhance the capacity of stakeholders, including civil servants, law enforcement officers, and members of the National Assembly, to implement and monitor CEDAW recommendations.

Public Awareness Campaigns:

- Activities have been organized to raise awareness and understanding of CEDAW and gender equality among the general public and specific target groups.

Action Plan and Timeline for UPR Recommendations

UPR Process and Follow-Up

Third UPR Cycle:

- Lao PDR's third UPR review took place in January 2020, resulting in 226 recommendations from Member States. The government fully supported 160 recommendations and noted 66,

following consultations led by the Lao National Steering Committee on Human Rights with relevant authorities and stakeholders, including civil society organizations.

Implementation and Monitoring:

- The National Steering Committee on Human Rights oversees the implementation of UPR recommendations, coordinating with various administrative, legislative, and judicial authorities to ensure compliance and progress.

Integration into National Plans:

- UPR recommendations have been integrated into national development plans, including the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDPP), to ensure alignment with human rights obligations and sustainable development goals.
- Other UN Human Rights Mechanisms

Data Collection and Reporting Systems:

- Systems have been established to collect data and report on the implementation of CEDAW and other human rights recommendations periodically. This includes training and guiding stakeholders in the formulation of reports at sector and local levels.

Key Milestones and Timeline

2024:

- Attend Constructive Dialogue on CEDAW report between Lao delegates and CEDAW Committee during 89th session in October 2024.
- Submit the stakeholders' report for the UPR by October 2024.

2025:

- Submit the national report for the UPR by February 2025.
- Participate in the UPR Working Group session in May 2025.

2026-2030:

- Conduct annual progress reviews on the implementation of CEDAW and UPR recommendations.
- Continue capacity-building initiatives and stakeholder engagement activities.
- Ensure continuous alignment of national policies with international human rights obligations and the SDGs.

Section 5 – Data and Statistics

5.1 The most important areas of progress for gender statistics

What are the most important areas in which your country has made most progress over the past five years when it comes to gender statistics at the national level?

Over the past few years, Lao PDR has made significant strides in developing its national statistics system and database infrastructure, focusing on improving the quality, timeliness, and relevance of statistical data to support national socio-economic development and sustainable development targets. These efforts are underpinned by legislative and strategic frameworks, organizational improvements, enhanced data accessibility, and international cooperation.

Legislative and Strategic Frameworks: The National Statistic System Development Strategy 2016-2025 and Vision to 2030 outlines the development of the national statistical system, aiming to improve the quality, timeliness, and relevance of statistical data. This strategy supports national socio-economic development and sustainable development targets. The Revised Law on Statistics No. 24/NA/2017 defines principles, regulations, and measures for the implementation, monitoring, and inspection of statistical work to ensure comprehensiveness, accuracy, timeliness, and relevance. Additionally, Prime Minister's Instruction No. 19/PM/2018 was issued to interpret and implement the revised Law on Statistics, emphasizing the importance of improving the organization of statistical work both vertically and horizontally to ensure smooth and simplified processes.

Organizational Improvements: To enhance data collection and management, line ministries and ministry-equivalent organizations have appointed statistic focal points and established statistic collection and information management units. The Lao National Statistical Bureau (LSB), under the Ministry of Planning and Investment, plays a central role in coordinating statistical activities and ensuring the quality and accessibility of statistical data.

Data Accessibility and Dissemination: The Lao Statistical Information Service (LAOSIS), launched in 2019, serves as the national database created by the LSB for the official dissemination of statistics. LAOSIS provides a single window for accessing statistical information across various sectors, making data more accessible to people of all ethnic groups. The Lao Social Indicator Survey III (LSIS III) conducted in 2022-2023 aims to create data for monitoring the progress of the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED), sustainable development indicators, and the welfare of children, mothers, and youth in Lao PDR.

Gender and Disaggregated Data: The National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers, and Children (NCAWMC) in cooperation with LWU is developing a data collection system and website to collect disaggregated data by gender, ethnicity, age, and other basic backgrounds. This data is essential for progress reports such as CEDAW and CRC and for other treaty obligations ratified by Lao PDR. The National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2021-2025) includes measures for gender-disaggregated statistics, reinforcing the importance of gender-specific data in policy-making and implementation.

International Cooperation and Support: Lao PDR has collaborated with organizations like UNFPA, UNICEF, and the World Bank to strengthen the production, dissemination, and use of vital statistics and other gender-specific data. Training programs, supported by USAID and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), have improved skills in gender and social inclusion data collection and analysis, equipping government officials and representatives from organizations for persons with disabilities with the knowledge to design surveys that capture disaggregated data and analyze multidimensional data using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Key Achievements: The establishment of LAOSIS and the implementation of the LSIS III survey have significantly improved the accessibility and quality of statistical data in Lao PDR. The development of a comprehensive data collection system by NCAWMC and the integration of gender-specific indicators into national surveys have strengthened the capacity to monitor and report on gender equality and other development goals. The alignment of national statistical efforts with

the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the integration of these goals into national planning frameworks demonstrate Lao PDR's commitment to sustainable development.

Despite these advancements, challenges such as limited funding, a lack of trained human resources, and the need for robust monitoring and evaluation systems remain. Continued efforts are needed to address these challenges and ensure the effective implementation of gender-responsive budgeting and comprehensive data collection systems.

5.2 Priorities for strengthening national gender statistics

Over the next five years, from 2025 to 2029, Lao PDR has identified several priorities for strengthening national gender statistics. These priorities aim to improve the quality, accessibility, and comprehensiveness of gender-disaggregated data to support effective policy-making and monitoring of gender equality initiatives. The key priorities are outlined as follows:

Enhancing Data Collection and Quality: Lao PDR plans to continue conducting the Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) to gather comprehensive gender-disaggregated data on health, education, and economic participation. Additionally, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) will be regularly updated to include gender-specific indicators, ensuring accurate representation of women's economic activities and employment status. Efforts will be made to strengthen the integration of gender-disaggregated data into administrative records across various sectors, including health, education, and social protection. Measures will also be implemented to enhance the accuracy, timeliness, and reliability of gender statistics collected through administrative systems.

Capacity Building and Training: Intensive training programs will be conducted for government officials and representatives from civil society organizations on gender equality, social inclusion, and data analysis. For example, a recent training organized by USAID Okard, ADB, and the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) focused on strengthening skills in designing surveys, analyzing multidimensional data, and communicating data-driven insights. The capacity of the Lao Statistics Bureau will be enhanced to lead and coordinate gender statistics initiatives, including providing technical support and resources to improve data collection and analysis capabilities.

Data Accessibility and Dissemination: The Lao Statistical Information Service (LAOSIS) will continue to be developed and enhanced as the national database for official statistics. Efforts will be made to ensure that gender-disaggregated data is easily accessible to policymakers, researchers, and the public. The single window system for accessing statistical information across various sectors will be maintained and expanded, making data more user-friendly and widely available.

Policy and Strategic Frameworks: Lao PDR will continue implementing the Strategy for the Sustainable Development of the National Statistical System (SSDNSS) 2016-2025 and Vision 2030 to support the monitoring and evaluation of localized SDG indicators, with a focus on gender equality. National action plans will be developed and implemented to incorporate gender perspectives into national development strategies, such as the National Plan of Action for Gender Equality and the National Financial Protection Strategy against Disaster Risks.

International Cooperation and Support: Lao PDR will strengthen partnerships with UN agencies and international organizations to receive technical and financial support for gender statistics initiatives. The country will participate in joint programs and projects aimed at improving gender data collection and analysis.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Regular progress reports on the implementation of gender equality initiatives, including CEDAW and SDG monitoring reports, will be produced and disseminated. Robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks will be developed to assess the effectiveness of gender equality policies and programs, ensuring continuous improvement.

Addressing Data Gaps: Efforts will be made to ensure that data is disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity, and other relevant factors to capture the diverse experiences of women and girls in Lao PDR. Data collection efforts will prioritize vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women in rural areas, ethnic groups, and persons with disabilities.

5.3 Gender-specific indicators for monitoring progress on the SDGs

Since the formal agreement with all SDG focal points in 2021, Lao PDR has been actively monitoring 257 national SDG indicators. The current SDG VNR 3 (2024) provides a snapshot of progress made for all 257 indicators. The ongoing work involves identifying which of these indicators are gender-specific and determining the necessary data collection and compilation efforts required for these gender-specific indicators in the coming years. This initiative aims to ensure that gender perspectives are effectively integrated into the monitoring and evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), thereby supporting the country's commitment to promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls.

5.4 Data disaggregation – routinely provided by major surveys

The recent national survey in LSIS (2023) and LFS (2022) have already included some indicators on SDG 5 with disaggregated data on gender. At the same time, the administrative data collected by LWU, NCAWMC, line ministries and development partners have also begun, with data on many newly adopted indicators forming baseline values for further monitoring and reporting of BPfA of Lao PDR.

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

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

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

Section 6 – Ways Forward

Lao PDR has made significant strides in promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls through the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). However, to sustain and enhance these efforts from 2025 to 2029, key strategic pathways to address existing gaps and challenges for the implementation of BPfA in Lao PDR are:

- 1. Enhancing Gender Data Collection and Monitoring:** To effectively monitor progress and inform policy-making, it is crucial to continue conducting key national surveys such as the Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) and Labour Force Survey (LFS) with a focus on gender-specific indicators. Strengthening the integration of gender-disaggregated data into administrative records across sectors like health, education, and social protection will ensure comprehensive and accurate data collection. Additionally, enhancing data management systems to ensure the quality, timeliness, and reliability of gender statistics is essential.
- 2. Capacity Building and Training:** Building the capacity of government officials and civil society representatives on gender equality, social inclusion, and data analysis is vital. Conducting intensive training programs can strengthen skills in designing surveys, analyzing multidimensional data, and communicating data-driven insights. Enhancing the technical support and resources provided to institutions like the LSB will enable them to lead and coordinate gender statistics initiatives effectively.
- 3. Data Accessibility and Dissemination:** Improving access to gender-disaggregated data via national databases like the Lao Statistical Information Service (LAOSIS) is crucial. Maintaining and expanding the single window system for accessing cross-sectoral statistical information will make data more user-friendly and widely available to policymakers, researchers, and the public. This will facilitate informed decision-making and promote transparency.
- 4. Policy and Strategic Frameworks:** Implementing strategies such as the Sustainable Development of the National Statistical System (SSDNSS) 2016-2025 and Vision 2030, with a focus on monitoring localized SDG indicators, will support the integration of gender perspectives into national development strategies. Developing and executing action plans that incorporate gender perspectives, such as the National Plan of Action for Gender Equality and the National Financial Protection Strategy against Disaster Risks, will further strengthen these efforts.
- 5. International Cooperation and Support:** Strengthening partnerships with UN agencies and other international organizations will provide technical and financial support for gender statistics initiatives. Engaging in joint programs and projects aimed at improving gender data collection and analysis will enhance the country's capacity to address gender inequality.
- 6. Addressing Data Gaps:** Ensuring that data is disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity, and other relevant factors is essential to capture the diverse experiences of women and girls in Lao PDR. Prioritizing data collection efforts that focus on marginalized groups, including women in rural areas, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities, will provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender disparities and inform targeted interventions.
- 7. Economic Empowerment Initiatives:** Investing in infrastructure that supports women's participation in economic activities, especially in rural communities, is crucial. Promoting social enterprises and foreign direct investment (FDI) to create job opportunities for women and youth will enhance their economic empowerment. Additionally, implementing programs that address the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women will enable them to participate more fully in the labour market.
- 8. Strengthening Legal and Institutional Frameworks:** Continuing to implement and enforce laws and policies that promote gender equality, such as the Law on Gender Equality (2019), is essential. Strengthening the capacity of institutions like the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers, and Children (NCAWMC) to monitor and evaluate gender-related initiatives will ensure accountability and continuous improvement.

9. Promoting Gender-Responsive Budgeting: Ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into budget planning and allocation processes through gender-responsive budgeting will support the effective implementation of gender equality initiatives. Providing training and resources to government officials on gender-responsive budgeting will enhance their ability to allocate resources in a way that promotes gender equality.

10. Raising Awareness and Changing Social Norms: Implementing awareness campaigns and educational programs to challenge and change harmful social norms and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality is crucial. Engaging men and boys in these efforts will promote a more inclusive approach to gender equality and help address issues such as gender-based violence and discrimination.