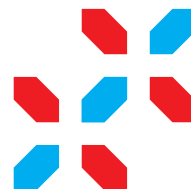


Lao People's Democratic Republic

LUXEMBOURG
AID & DEVELOPMENT



GUIDELINES FOR MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN ICP V





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Rationale

The main objective of Luxembourg Development Cooperation¹ is to contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty and the promotion of economic, social and environmental sustainability. Luxembourg aims to guarantee a minimum level of livelihoods in a rights-based environment, create equal opportunities for all, particularly for the most vulnerable and unprivileged, so everyone can actively determine the course of their own lives.

It does so by placing a strong emphasis on the principles of inclusion, empowerment, and non-discrimination², reflecting the rights-based approach³. Its interventions address the needs of all segments of the population, including those marginalised and most at risk. This is reflected in the 2021 gender strategy of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Luxembourg, as well as the 2009 Governance for development strategy.

The approach to gender adopted by Luxembourg is one that fundamentally strives to seek alignment with the priorities specified in the Constitution of Lao People's Democratic Republic (as revised in 2015). Furthermore, Luxembourg's approach seeks to reflect the 9th five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) and its comprehensive framework of indicators as described below.

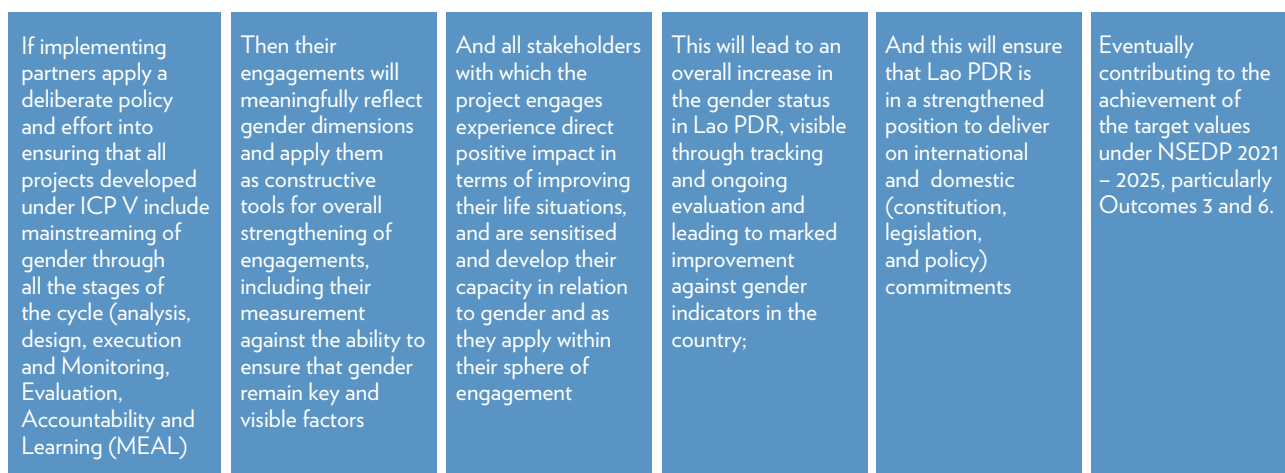
Lastly, Luxembourg Cooperation intends to support the government of Lao PDR in fulfilling its declaration of commitments in the field of gender. A key vehicle for this is the harmonisation of national legislative and policy frameworks with the (implementation of) provisions under international agreements and processes. The government of Laos officially agreed to endorse the Second National Plan of Action on Preventing and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Violence against Children (2021-2025) and the fourth National Plan of Action (NPA) on Gender Equality (2021-2025) in May 2021⁴. Lessons learned from previous NPA's implementation and the Lao government's international commitments to promote gender equality and eliminate Gender Based Violence (GBV), including obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD25), the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), were incorporated into the new NPAs. Applying the gender approaches to development practice and analysis is both a bet on equal access to resources and opportunities between people and a guarantee of effectiveness and efficiency.

One major group whose empowerment and inclusion will be central to the development of Lao PDR in the coming years is youth. The economy is projected to benefit from a demographic dividend in the medium-term, but only if young men and women are equipped with the appropriate skills and competencies and employment creation keeps pace with the growth of the working-age population.⁵ Lao youth face multiple interlinked vulnerabilities that need to be addressed through specific programs that take into account the non-homogeneous nature of youth. Education/employment is just one aspect of the multiple challenges Lao youth faces (such as access to information on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, etc). Also worth noting is that a significant number of people joining the labor market each year does not automatically imply that the demographic dividend will be realised; it is dependent on targeted and effective policies and investments, as well as their implementation.

The principle of placing gender equality at the heart of the Indicative Cooperation Programme V (ICP V) includes addressing root causes of inequalities and discrimination, strengthening capacities and opportunities for active and meaningful participation of women, men and the most marginalised in society⁶. It is based on the rationale that women's empowerment translates into stronger families and communities giving them the strength to fight poverty and drive sustainable development. The focus is on ensuring that "no one is left behind", i.e. that all people in Lao PDR benefit from these processes. The human-rights based approach to which gender dimension is interlinked is a central principle of the SDGs. It focuses on those who are most marginalised, excluded or discriminated against and requires an analysis of gender norms, different forms of discrimination and power imbalances to ensure that interventions reach the most marginalised segments of the population. Participation is a central principle, as it means ensuring that all stakeholders (including those that are most at risk) have genuine ownership and control over development processes in all phases of the programming cycle: assessment, analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In efforts to lead towards gender equality, civil society, the women's movement and civil society organisations representing groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination play a crucial role in guaranteeing that the rights/needs of all stakeholders (particularly those at risk) are at the centre of programming. The principle of participation, equality and non-discrimination on any grounds, as well as accountability, becomes central. This means integrating the principle of intersectionality, which refers to the situation of people who experience several forms of discrimination on the basis of sex, age, ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, migrant/refugee status, urban-rural and socio-economic disparities or other determining factors.

Applying a rights-based approach to development thus brings the dimensions of gender and ensures promotion of inclusion of all relevant stakeholders.

The rationale for mainstreaming rights and gender can be summarised as follows:



In the context of Lao PDR, these aspects are reflected in various ways throughout the domestic legal and policy frameworks as described below.

The technical focus of ICP V will continue to concentrate on health, local development, skills development and employability (Technical and vocational education and training-TVET), inclusive governance and the rule of law, while better integrating crosscutting issues, and paying a particular interest to human capital development as an overall thread. See Annex 1 for details of existing engagements and suggested sector approaches.

Indeed:

- enhance national capacities and governance structures for the provision of and access to strengthened social protection and quality public health coverage, sexual and reproductive health and nutrition information and services for all, particularly the most vulnerable populations;
- strengthened skills and employability aligned with labour market needs and development of opportunities for diversified and sustainable socio-economic and financial inclusion, particularly for women and young people, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable;
- strengthened capacities for inclusive and accountable governance, rule of law and justice systems, including improving quality and use of disaggregated data for improved policy planning, implementation and monitoring, the sustainable management of natural resources and empowerment of women and girls for improved livelihoods and fulfilment of human rights, particularly the most vulnerable populations;
- improved provision and access to community-based social services, sustainable livelihoods and socio-economic opportunities, and enhanced public administration capacities for effective decentralisation reform implementation and participatory planning at national and local levels. This stresses the need for increased participation of women from the design of a new programme.

LuxDev has already for many years contributed to strengthening these aspects in the current programming and achieved mainstreaming gender in various ways. Equal rights promotion, women's empowerment, and balanced gender engagement must be prioritised for successful programming. Gender sensitive actions are required to achieve gender equality.

Under ICP IV this includes a number of programmes, including Lao-Luxembourg Health sector support programme phase II (project LAO/027); Skills for tourism (project LAO/029); Local development (programme LAO/030); and Strengthening the Rule of Law (project LAO/031). See Annex 1 for details.

Country context

Gender

Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential ingredients in creating a more equitable Lao society and are a *sine qua non* for sustainable development in Lao PDR.

With a total population of 7,3 million⁷, of whom 3,6 million (49.87%) are women in 2021, Lao PDR has a Gender Inequality Index (GII) value⁸ of 0.459, ranking it 113 out of 162 countries⁹. 27.5%¹⁰ of parliamentary seats are held by women. Political representation of women in the National Assembly has grown by nearly 20% since 1990, which is among the highest in the region. However, women continue to struggle to participate in equal numbers and are still under-represented in senior government positions¹¹ (share of women ministers: 7.4% in 2018)¹².

Lao women play important roles in agriculture, small-scale businesses, manufacturing (especially the garment sector), and provision of basic services (especially education and health). Women in urban areas are also finding opportunities in information technology, tourism, and business services. They are also primarily responsible for maintaining their families' food security and health.

The Government has acknowledged the role of social protection in reducing poverty, inequality, and vulnerabilities and in promoting socio-economic development and social cohesion.

Gender inequities manifest across all ages in Lao PDR, with the highest gaps in adolescence and adulthood, where gender roles become more permanent. One in 5 girls drop out of school (in particular upper secondary), which is strongly related to child labour, early marriage (1 in 5 girls aged 15-19 are married) and adolescent pregnancies (83 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19).¹³ 35.1% of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education compared to 46.2% of their male counterparts.

Women's ability to take part of and contribute to the development of Laos is also characterised by barriers to achieve good health, in particular sexual and reproductive health with a high maternal mortality ratio compared to other countries in the region, lacking access to family planning, and a high prevalence of gender-based violence.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, unpaid family workers were more common among women and girls (64% of economically active women and girls vs. 27% of economically active men and boys), who perform income-generating work in family businesses without being paid.¹⁴ The National Social Protection Strategy intends to help the redistribution of economic growth to alleviate material and non-material deprivation and protect vulnerable households from falling into or back into poverty¹⁵.

In terms of all these aspects, the intersectionality aspect comes into play, in the sense that women or girls, already vulnerable because of their gender, become even more so when simultaneously affected by disability. Data from the 4th Population and Housing Census 2015 published in 2020 showed that more than 160,000 (2.77%) people live with a disability among the population aged over 5 years. Disability prevalence in Lao PDR is higher in remote geographical areas (3.33% in rural areas without roads, 2.86% in rural areas with roads, 2.48% in urban areas). Persons with disabilities aged 10 and over had significantly lower labour participation and higher unemployment compared to persons without disabilities, in both rural and urban areas. Lastly, youth and women with disability were particularly excluded from education, vocational training and the workforce¹⁶.

Furthermore, all of the aspects addressed above show variance between the 50 different ethnic groups officially recognised by the government of Lao PDR. They are divided into four ethno-linguistic families. Lao, Lue, Phoutay, and other lowland ethnicities comprise the Lao-Thai family, which accounts for 67 % of the population.¹⁷ The Mon-Khmer family is comprised of ethnic groups like the Khmu, Khuan, and Samtao, who constitute approximately 23% of the population. The Hmong, Yao, and other Hmong-Tien groups account for 7%, and the Sino-Tibetan groups account for 3% of the national population.¹⁸ As in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, the full inclusion of ethnic groups in the national economic development has proven to be challenging. One of the main reasons is that establishing infrastructure in isolated and highland places is far more expensive, leading in boom town development along valley floors contrasted to minimal change in highland locations.¹⁹ Ethnic minorities make up the poorest communities. Due to remoteness, difficulty traveling, and a lack of resources, most ethnic groups are disadvantaged in terms of access to education and healthcare. Low levels of literacy and awareness frequently stem from a lack of education paired with geographic remoteness. Women from minority groups are much more disadvantaged, as they are often constrained by tradition and societal mores and behaviors.²⁰

The impact of COVID-19

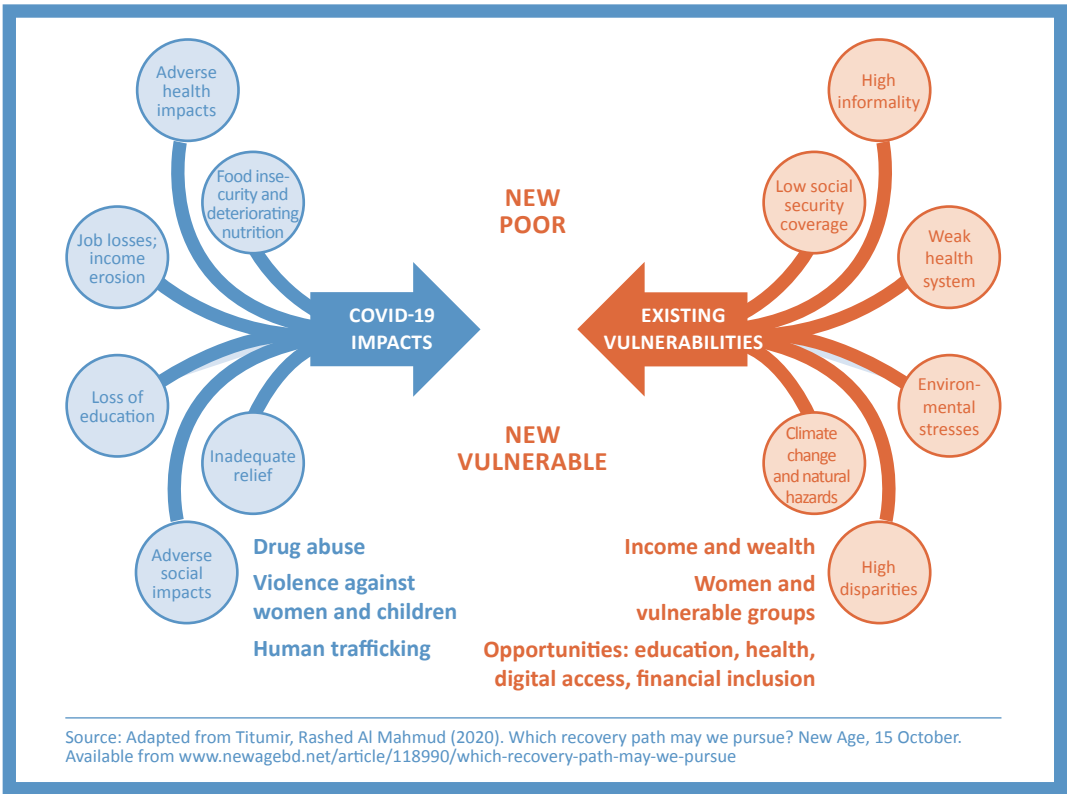
Mainstreaming the gender dimensions throughout ICP V has become particularly important since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Impacts of crises are never gender neutral, nor without detrimental impact on governance and institutions, and COVID-19 is no exception. Until April 2021, COVID-19 had mainly had a socioeconomic effect in Lao PDR, as domestic and regional supply chains crashed, along with markets and, with them, household incomes and market demand. The pandemic has had a particularly negative impact on sectors with a significant female workforce (e.g., agriculture, tourism, services, healthcare, and garment factories), increasing women's economic insecurity. With a significant rise in COVID-19 positive cases across all of Lao PDR from end of April 2021, leading to a comprehensive lockdown of most functions in society, the impact of the pandemic is at this stage unforeseeable but may turn out to have significant ramifications.

Because of already precarious financial conditions, disadvantaged groups (marginalised urban women, remote ethnic minority women, returning migrant workers, etc.) are most affected by the economic downturn. Almost half a million people are predicted to lose their employment, and 383,000 people are projected to return to poverty, exacerbating pre-existing disparities²¹. COVID-19 jeopardises Lao PDR's hard-won growth gains over the last decade, obstructing progress toward the SDGs and its goal of becoming a middle-income nation. It will be important to ensure that no one is left behind in overcoming these hurdles. There will be no effective response to COVID-19 if gender, age, disability and other diversity specific impacts are not analysed and addressed with affected people acting as agents of their own fate.

While the health impacts of COVID-19 are yet to be determined, the economic and social impacts, as shown in the increase of GBV and other harmful practices, disruption of education and public service delivery (with differentiated impacts based on sex and people's vulnerabilities), have proven to be significant and will continue to unfold throughout the life of ICP V.²² Addressing GBV is a priority for the government of Lao PDR as indicated in the NPAVAWAC in Lao PDR 2021-2025.

Therefore, mainstreaming gender is crucial under ICP V to help challenge/reverse the current situation. As a result, a comprehensive programme response to reduce economic and social impacts, as well as other potential health-related impacts, would be required to help support national efforts in that sense.



Policy or strategic frameworks on gender and rights²³

Lao PDR

Constitution

The Constitution (2015) is the supreme foundation of Lao society and expresses the framework of values and principles that all other law and policy must adhere to, including gender and rights. See Annex 2 for details of relevant sections.

Legislation and policies

The equal participation of men and women in economic, social, and political life is supported by the 1991 Constitution, various national laws and policies, and international treaties such as the CEDAW, to which Lao PDR is a signatory. Women of all ethnic groups should receive equal treatment in terms of legal rights, economic and social opportunities. The principle of equality is reflected in several national laws, such as the Labour Law (1994), which requires non-discrimination in employment (Article 2) and equal pay for work of equal quantity, quality, and value (Article 39). The Family Law (1990) provides generally that “the husband and wife have equal rights in all aspects within the family (Article 13). The Lao PDR is a signatory to a number of international Conventions, which the country is committed to implementing. It acceded to the convention on the political rights of women in 1969 and ratified the CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1981 and 1990, respectively. CEDAW prohibits women’s discrimination and protects their rights and CRC obligates governments to protect the rights of children - girls and boys - and to ensure that their basic needs are met. Safe motherhood is also part of the 9 CRC (Articles 22 and 24).

In 2004, the law on the protection of women and children was passed. The government developed and approved a National Plan of Action for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children in 2004 (NPAVAW). The NPAVAW outlines specific initiatives and activities aimed at preventing and protecting women and girls from violence by improving the quality and quantity of social and health services. Subsequently, the Law on Resistance and Prevention of Violence against Women and Children (law on VAWC) was also developed and passed in the National Assembly in December 2014. The law on VAWC aims to respond to violence against women and children as well as provide assistance to survivors to protect their rights and promote gender equality. A National Study on Women’s Health and Life Experiences in Lao PDR has shown that violence against women is widespread, socially embedded and has a significant impact on the health and well-being of women, children and families²⁴. Although the legal framework provides equal rights to men and women, the application of these rights is still hindered by customs, traditions and the socio-economic characteristics of different groups. Significant gaps between men and women still persist among different groups. Progress has been made in the organisation of the state administration and in the legal sector with formulation of new laws, but progress is constrained by limited legal awareness in the administration and among law practitioners, and by limited access to justice.²⁵

To promote gender equality, the Government has established a National Commission for the Advancement of Women programmes aimed at

- the development of an information system, sex segregated statistics, advocacy and dissemination, awareness raising, movements to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment to participate in all fields;
- the institutional and personnel strengthening to promote women’s advancement;
- ensuring gender equality and women’s empowerment to participate in all fields;
- the fulfilment of Lao PDR’s obligations under CEDAW Conventions and other international conventions pertaining to women.

These directions are reflected in the five-year plan (2016-2020) and long-term vision 2030 on promoting gender equality that aligns with the NSED²⁶.

For the period 2021 – 2025, the tentative plan for the 9th Legislature of the National Assembly is to achieve the drafting of 38 laws and the amendment of 58 laws. These will include for instance amendments to the drafting of a new Law on Youth, as well as amendments to the Law on the Development and Protection of Women and on Lao Women's Union (LWU).²⁷ The government of Lao PDR and its partners will continue to implement the CEDAW, the CRC and the Lao PDR's commitment to the promotion of children's rights under the motto "Unlimited potential of the Lao people by 2030" and the Beijing Declaration and Action Plan.

A number of laws have been specifically adopted to address gender aspects (see Annex 2 for details).

Lastly, at the level of policy, a number of instruments are particularly relevant.

The 9th NSEDP adopted by the National Assembly in March 2021²⁸ will guide policymaking to advance sustainable and inclusive growth, human capital investment, infrastructure development and progress towards the smooth transition from Least Developed Country status. It contains three outcomes of particular relevance to ICP V:

Outcome 2

"Improved qualities of human resources with enhanced research capacities and abilities to meet development needs, use science and technology to improve efficiencies and add value to production and services", in particular Output 2.1 "More inclusive and better-quality healthcare services and nutrition", most notably measured by maternal and child mortality rates, proportion of children above 15 years of age within minimum reading and writing proficiency and proportion of total government expenditure on social sectors.

Outcome 3

"People's material and mental well-being, income and food security enhanced", in particular Output 3.3 "The rights of women, children and people with disability are promoted to achieve gender equality and enhance their contribution to socio-economic development", most notably measured by the proportion of women in leadership positions and the proportion of girls 15-19 years old who are married.

Outcome 6

"Efficient public administration, and equal, just and protected society following the direction of effective and strict rule of law", most notably measured by the proportion of the population who have access to the justice system and public services.

In the area of gender, key policy references include:

- the Vision for Development of Lao Women 2030;
- the Strategic Development Plan for Lao Women 2025;
- the Five-Year Lao Women Development Plan 2020-2025, which aims to protect the rights and create opportunities for women in the process of the national socio-economic development are being implemented by the National Commission for the Advancement of Women and Mothers and Children and the LWU;
- The Lao PDR Gender Profile developed by the LWU and published in 2018;
- NPAVAWAC (2021-2025);²⁹
- NPA on Gender Equality (2021-2025);
- the Noi 2030 Framework and Ecosystem: achieving gender equality and empowerment of adolescent girls, representing all adolescent girls in Lao, the framework is based on engaging activities gender-sensitive to help protect girls' rights: reduce out schooling, reduce early marriages and early pregnancies, fight gender-based violence, engage positively men and boys to participate into the promotion of women and girls' rights.³⁰
- the Lao PDR Gender Analysis developed by the EU Delegation, published in 2020.
- EU Gender Action Plan III 2021- 2025 – Country Level Implementation Plan
- the draft European Joint Programming Strategy 2021-2025 for Lao PDR
- the 2021-2025 Roadmap for European Engagement with Civil Society in Lao PDR
- the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2025 for Lao PDR.

With respect to gender, implementation at the national level is carried out by the LWU, the NCAW and the Women Parliamentary Caucus who are all responsible for the promotion and protection of the rights of women and children in the country.

The LWU is a mass social organisation representing women and children of all social strata across Lao PDR. The LWU pays special attention to its mandate to promote women's involvement in national development and protect the rights and interests of women and children of different ethnic groups. Creating space within the women's movement for youth participation and young women's engagement may be relevant, since often LWU is promoting a very "traditional" view of women's interests and needs. This may help fostering intergenerational dialogues among LWU on gender equality.

With respect to disability inclusion, the Government of Lao PDR ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD)³¹, which outlines the human rights of persons with disabilities in all sectors. Several initiatives, programs, and action plans aimed at people with disabilities - one of the most disadvantaged groups - have been implemented in Lao PDR in recent years. Inclusion efforts will continue through ICP V which will suggest targeted recommendations in the field of disability-inclusive services, TVET, health, local governance and the rule of law to ensure persons with disabilities benefit from social, economic and environmental development on an equal basis, in Lao PDR.

Luxembourg

3rd National Plan for Sustainable Development (December 2019)

The 3rd National Plan for Sustainable Development is Luxembourg's main instrument for implementing the seventeen SDGs of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.³² The ten priorities of the national plan for sustainable development will serve as the government's roadmap to act and contribute concretely to the achievement of the objectives of Agenda 2030 and ensure sustainable development in Luxembourg. Again, see Annex 2 for details.

Luxembourg Cooperation Strategy (Road to 2030), Vision 2030 and Gender Strategy

The general strategy of Luxembourg Cooperation is shifting from a sectoral prioritisation to a more inclusive approach, now focused on priority themes, in order to facilitate coordinated approaches between sectors, partners, and instruments, in accordance with the 2030 Agenda. Luxembourg aims to provide a minimum level of subsistence for all, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, in a rights-based, equal-opportunity and "leaving no-one behind" environment. Of its four interconnected target themes,

- "Improved access to quality basic social services - Wellbeing for all";
- "Strengthening the socio-economic integration of women and youth";
- "Promoting inclusive governance".

are particularly relevant. They reflect our strong focus on education, health, water and sanitation as well as food security and nutrition sectors to continue expanding access to basic social services in partner countries programmes in Laos.

Furthermore, in line with the CEDAW, ICPD, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the EU Gender Action Plan III, the 2021 gender strategy aims to, by 2030, mainstream the promotion of gender equality and its implementation, monitoring and evaluation in all policies and programmes of Luxembourg Cooperation. This is done through the implementation of the four key principles on inclusion, empowerment, non-discrimination and intersectionality.³³ Its other guiding principles are to develop indicators close to the EU Gender Action Plan and at field level: alignment with national poverty reduction policy priorities and gender strategies where they exist. Luxembourg's 2021 gender cooperation strategy takes the multiplicity of existing gender identities and gender expressions into account, while also aiming to promote this diversity throughout all of Luxembourg Development Cooperation interventions.

At an overall level, Luxembourg aims to assist the government of Lao PDR in fulfilling its international commitments relevant to the priority areas of the ICP V in close collaboration with domestic stakeholders and through close collaboration with other development partners.

Specifically in terms of the Universal Periodic Review recommendations, this will be particularly important in the follow-up mid-term reporting scheduled for November 2022, as well as the 4th cycle commencement with a national consultation scheduled for November 2023, a drafting period until July 2024 followed by civil society submissions by October 2024, and finally the Review in January 2025.³⁴ See Annex 2 for details.

European Union (EU)

The European Joint Programming Strategy serves as a common reference framework for European Partners' bilateral and/or regional strategies benefitting the Lao PDR.

The new European Joint Programming Strategy for 2021-2025 is aligned with the 9th NSEDP (2021-2025) of the government of the Lao PDR. It fully takes into account the SDGs and the main strategic priorities of EU's external action, focuses on three broad priority areas, of which the third, good governance (local governance; public finance management; citizens' engagement; justice, rule of law and human rights) is of particular relevance to these guidelines as it is intended to support the gender sectors with reference to 9th NSEDP Outcome 6 (improved governance) and the SDGs on gender equality (SDG 5); reduced inequalities (SDG 10); and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). In doing so, the European Joint Programming Strategy explicitly addresses, as cross-cutting aspects, gender equality and women empowerment, as well as the implementation of a rights-based approach.³⁵



It is supplemented by two dedicated action plans which provide further guidance in relation to gender and rights: the EU's new action plan on gender equality and women's empowerment in external action 2021-2025.

With the first-ever Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Questioning (LGBTIQ) equality strategy (2020-2025), the Commission addresses the inequalities and challenges affecting LGBTIQ people, in order to move towards a union of equality. It pays particular attention to the diversity of LGBTIQ people's needs and to the most vulnerable, including those experiencing intersectional discrimination and trans, non-binary and intersex people, who are among the least accepted groups in society and generally experience more discrimination and violence than others in the LGBTIQ communities. Discrimination is often multidimensional and only an intersectional approach can pave the way to sustainable and respectful changes in society.³⁶

This strategy follows calls for action by Member States, the European Parliament, with the strong support from the Intergroup for LGBTI Rights, and civil society. It sets out a series of targeted actions across four pillars³⁷:

- tackling discrimination against LGBTIQ people;
- ensuring LGBTIQ people's safety;
- building LGBTIQ inclusive societies;
- leading the call for LGBTIQ equality around the world.

Regional and international

At the ASEAN level, a number of initiatives at the Ministerial and Committee/Commission level are relevant, especially in the area of gender. They include the Ministerial Meeting on Women (AMMW) and its subsidiary body, the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW); the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), and the ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

AMMW and its subsidiary bodies: the AMMW carries out the coordination and monitoring of the implementation of ASEAN's key regional priorities and cooperation in women's issues and concerns. Composed of ministers in charge of women and girls in all ASEAN Member States, the AMMW sets the strategic policy direction on ASEAN's regional cooperation on women.

ACW: ACW is a subsidiary body of the AMMW composed of senior officials in the respective ministries in charge of women and girls. The ACW supports AMMW by recommending regional policies, developing and implementing the five-year regional work plan, and managing partnerships. See Annex 2 for details.

The United Nations

At the United Nations level, Lao PDR is a party to a number of human rights treaties, which in several aspects address gender areas, including participation, empowerment and inclusion/non-discrimination, the latter also with respect to e.g., disability. See Annex 2 for details.

ICP V strategies and guidelines for mainstreaming gender

Approach

Gender equality is a prerequisite for improved access to quality basic social services/ well-being and thus for socio-economic growth in three main ways³⁸. Firstly, there are empowering measures: girls' and women's access to post-primary education, technical skills, and formal sector labor participation through gender mainstreaming in educational systems, economic productive sectors, and macroeconomic policies will increase national competitiveness, reduced inequalities and promote sustainable economic growth.

Second, by overcoming discriminatory obstacles, the following elements act as enablers: women's access to education, good health, in particular sexual and reproductive health, bodily autonomy³⁹, jobs, decent housing, freedom from violence and harmful practices, autonomy over household capital, and access to reproductive choices have been related to improved growth outcomes, such as better family health, educational levels, nutritional status and food security, and overall welfare, especially for children.

Finally, encouraging women to engage fairly and meaningfully in decision-making processes including municipal and urban politics, local and national political life, humanitarian aid, and peacebuilding will result in better policy decisions, more representative governmental structures, more stable and egalitarian communities, and vibrant community growth.

Similarly, by strengthening the capacity of citizens and community members (as rights-holders) to engage with the government (as duty-bearers), they will increasingly be able to contribute towards policy planning, implementation and evaluation of efforts (national as well as supported by development partners). This contributes towards increased local ownership and, ultimately, increase the likely sustainability and impact.

To successfully achieve any form of mainstreaming during programming, a systematic approach is essential, which means ensuring multi-stakeholder inclusion at every step of the process – i.e., in the formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation stages. Gender mainstreaming should be also pursued with the potential integration of gender-specific programmes (Gender marker 2), particularly in fields where gender equality appears to be limited.

One avenue to ensure the mainstreaming within the rights and justice areas is through multi-stakeholder participation across sectors. See Annex 1 for details.

Locally adapted implementation guidelines and tools

The expected impact is greater equality and a tangible effort to empower women and girls and elimination of all forms of violence in Lao PDR. The practical needs and strategic interests of Lao men and women are different and require different approaches and solutions in which the target audience need to be actively involved. Also, as outlined above, Lao PDR has committed to advancing a defined scope of human and social rights areas. A "One size fits all" approach therefore cannot be applied. However, at the same time there are generic aspects to mainstreaming through the various stages of the programming cycle, which can serve to ensure that the effort pays off.

A fundamental challenge throughout the stages of the cycle as described below will be to access and systematically harvest and utilise the relevant data essential for instance, context analysis and monitoring. This will require the collection and/or analysis and use of quality comparable of gender and age disaggregated data to inform evidence-based decision making.

Furthermore, lack of technical capacity among core stakeholders both on the rights-holder and duty-bearer side, including familiarity with the project cycle approach, as well as linguistic challenges, may require focused efforts aimed at strengthening the capacity of the key implementing partners to engage in this.

Project management cycle

These guidelines aim to improve the quality of interventions within ICP V through a rights-based approach, which can be summarised as follows:

STAGE 1: FORMULATION

All new interventions are based on a targeted gender analysis (2020 EU's gender analysis for Laos to be consulted) addressing the specific area/sector in question. This will include collecting evidence through gender analysis of context and results from summative assessments and formative programme research. At the formulation stage, this will be reflected through the formulation of the sectoral/outcome area Theory of Change, and highlighting areas of the overall strategic engagements where the gender dimensions must be kept in focus.

Further elements include:

- mainstream gender across problem and stakeholder analysis – including preliminary assessments to determine gender sensitivity within target sectors (diagnostics, screening or analysis before the design of interventions). Tools must be adapted according to local context and capacity;
- include gender equality as part of the overall terms of reference for formulation, including definition of gender Terms of Reference (ToR)/guiding questions for the formulation mission, which would include the consultation of other donors known to promote gender equality in Laos, to explore possibilities of developing joint initiatives;
- integrate specific questions on gender equality into existing tools that the cross-disciplinary team will address; and have the team review the questions and discuss how they relate to the specific country context and adapt as needed;
- ensure integration of gender targets in the overall ICP V monitoring dashboard and identification of OVIs, at a principal level with details to be defined during the inception phase.
- mainstreaming gender performance targets or indicators in ToR/job descriptions of international and national technical assistants;
- ensure that each team member identifies, understands and is accountable for gender equality questions related to the particular level or analysis table that the team member handles;
- discuss gender equality in the appropriate context between implementing partner institutions' professionals and team member experts and ensure that this is done in an integrated manner other than seen or handled as an "add on" or parallel exercise.

Nb: The formulation team will be supported during this phase by a dedicated gender and rights working group piloted by LuxDev's gender expert. The working group will provide technical guidance to the formulation team on gender mainstreaming, particularly in terms of:

- increasing the sensitivity of sectoral assessment tools;
- providing quality assurance on the deliverables produced by the formulation team (*aide-mémoire*, technical annexes, preliminary technical and financial document, final technical and financial document) to ensure that gender issues have been adequately addressed and resources clearly defined for continued mainstreaming during the ICP V implementation phase (i.e., inception and execution), in line with the key indicators defined in the Gender Action Plan III.

STAGE 2: INCEPTION AND EXECUTION

In compliance with the European Union's Gender Action Plan, which notes that "all new external acts (bilateral, international, or thematic) must be subjected to a systematic gender equality review," LuxDev will ensure that the gender dimension is included through the consultation of existing gender analysis instead of the development of a gender analysis both at an overall level and reflected within the relevant areas of engagement. As discussed below in relation to financial resources, this will have to be taken into account during the programme budget design process.

The findings and recommendations of these analyses inform the project/programme design, including outcome/output and activity tailoring. This includes the selection of priority issues, target groups and coverage, and their integration in terms of programme results, indicators and intervention modalities.

- mapping of existing gender initiatives within target sectors and geographic areas by domestic as well as external stakeholders.
- determine the relevant type of assessment that needs to be carried out prior to project execution and, if applicable, include a summary of the assessment in the inception report or technical and financial document;

- gender capacity development approaches, materials and tools are developed to support project staff and implementing partners.

To ensure that the implementation reflects the principles to be mainstreamed, implementation modalities including budgeting (especially gender responsive) and partner engagement as well as capacity development of these must be ensured.

- systematic integration of gender and rights actions within the Annual Operational Plan (AOP), both as single-standing dedicated activities and mainstreamed throughout programmatic activity;
- capacity development of project staff and implementing partners on gender and human rights in the form of dedicated activities (e.g., modules in trainings dedicated to gender and rights aspects);
- design and/or adaptation of tools and methodologies for practical implementation of gender tasks and activities, e.g., including gender-reflective budgeting as well as increased transparency in use of financial resources allocated for these dimensions;
- when setting up implementation modalities including hiring of staff (local as well as international), insert standard clauses as regards gender and HR in selection processes, at least as an additional optional qualification, and include recruitment of relevant gender and rights expertise, national and international.

During the inception phase, these aspects are given further definition in the development of implementation plans at the output and activity levels, allowing for a first level of adjustment e.g., through initial lessons learned and a consolidated MEAL framework (see below). On this basis, the full roll-out in the implementation phases is enabled.

Resources

Mainstreaming has often been more successful in producing effective policy outcomes than in translating them into concrete initiatives on the ground. This implementation gap is primarily due to a lack of effective human, technical and financial resources. Under ICP V, the following resource allocation should be considered:

Human resources

Two parallel efforts will be required to facilitate full implementation of the mainstreaming of gender approaches:

- internally for LuxDev, recruitment of dedicated gender and rights/inclusive governance/justice senior expertise at country/regional office level.

The mandate of this senior expertise would include:

- facilitating policy dialogue with key stakeholders;
- supporting the Embassy in defining gender and rights policy, the latter with a view to ensuring alignment with Lao interpretation and positions on human and fundamental rights;
- spearheading technical support and capacity development of project staff and implementing partners;
- liaising with other DP gender and human rights experts;
- participating in relevant working groups;
- participating in project design, etc.

The expert(s) will work in close collaboration with HQ's gender and human rights expert and will also make use of nationally recruited specialists for improved contextual relevance and facilitating engagement with local networks and communities of practice. Furthermore, he/she/they would be able to assess and ensure a relevant organisational response to staff and external experts' needs for capacity development in the relevant areas.

- for implementing project partners, a strategically designed and implemented capacity development effort.

Civil society, and women's organisations in particular, are also instrumental to driving legislative and policy change, challenging social norms and delivering services to girls, boys, women and men. Women's rights groups, organised and autonomous social justice movements and civil society organisations have the knowledge to articulate the lived social realities of all groups of women, including youth, marginalised groups and/or groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination/marginalisation. Their engagement and contribution in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies and programme can contribute to guarantee that such interventions respond to the needs of such groups and they play a critical role in holding duty bearers accountable to their obligations.

The lack of sufficient capacity among implementing partners may pose obstacles to LuxDev's effort to ensure a full and equally inclusive and participatory partnership. A capacity development programme for dedicated focal points across the programmes and stakeholder groupings within these can help to ensure this, as well as pave the way for a more sustainable impact of LuxDev's gender and rights efforts. This should be based on assessment of specific individual and institutional needs for capacity development of implementing partners both in the substantial areas of rights and gender, and in terms of programming and, in particular, MEAL. This is necessary to ensure that these aspects become "a way of life" within the partner institutions rather than a "box ticking" exercise.

Technical resources

Technical resources implemented primarily at the inception stage should include, but not be limited to:

- implementation of a robust monitoring and evaluation database to improve data collection and dissemination and build the evidence base for mainstreaming of gender and targeted gender actions;
- explicit integration of gender issues in programme documentation, AOP, annual reports, mid and final term evaluations, etc. – separate chapter elaborating on how the gender component was addressed and what has changed through the intervention also on a qualitative level;
- a toolbox designed and contextually tailored to coach and facilitate processes of exploration and learning in gender areas with local partners at all levels to ensure participation and strengthen local ownership;
- thematic papers linking gender to the different thematic areas that are relevant for the policy dialogue and awareness raising efforts of the particular Lao context, in line with the key thematic areas defined in the new ICP V Laos (gender and D4D/ gender and health/ gender and local development/ gender and governance/ rule of law, gender and education/ skills development).

Financial resources

Financial resources' allocation for mainstreaming gender will be determined based on identified needs during the inception and execution phases by the regional office in consultation with the project implementation team.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning

For each programmes' relevant framework for MEAL⁴⁰, the successful realisation of the gender dimension means that all of these will be screened against the criteria of the rights-based approach as outlined above. This includes:

- a sound methodology and performance measurement framework (included in inception report/revised technical and financial document) for measuring the selected gender indicators/sub-indicators at output and outcome levels;
- defining baseline and target values and sources which are coherent in relation to project design, and realistically applicable;
- ongoing tracking and adjustment e.g., relative to data access and outcomes harvested, and scheduled assessments of "lessons learned" with implementing partners;
- regular reporting, e.g., annually to the Project Steering Committee, with focus on results achieved, added value and outcomes on such gender indicators.

Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning are important dimensions of programming, because they enable assessment on progress against mainstreaming targets and objectives.

LuxDev aims to foster accountable communities by improving evaluation and reporting on outcomes, encouraging citizen participation in decision-making, and supporting the production and use of transparent and comprehensive data and information for programme design, and implementation. This involves interventions such as using metrics that are disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, age, disability, and other diversities, as well as gender-specific indicators, engaging women's rights organisations in reporting and decision-making.

Specifically in relation to gender, key approaches should develop and apply gender-sensitive criteria and indicators; include statistics on women as well as on men when collecting and presenting data; capitalise on the talents and contributions of both women and men; and set targets for female participation and consultation in activities and encourage equality.

Throughout the project cycle gender mainstreaming should be included in the ToR of programme staff, as well as throughout the preparation of contractual documents; and be explicitly taken into account in mid-term and final evaluations. All annual project/programme reports must report progress against gender indicators.

Monitoring of gender as well as mainstreaming within projects and programmes is the responsibility of the technical advisers and chief technical advisers. It is a responsibility specific to projects and programmes and preferably managed by a gender and rights expert who is part of the ICP V technical assistance team⁴¹.

A gender evaluation assesses the extent to which a project or programme has contributed to the reduction of gender inequalities in the sector concerned. It also provides recommendations on the issue for future projects and programmes. It will assess gender mainstreaming at the level of programme design, actual implementation and propose elements for further action. Mid-term evaluations will present lessons learned, and final evaluations will make general recommendations. The terms of reference of the evaluations on the one hand, and the draft reports on the other, are systematically shared with the gender expert for critical reading. As discussed above in relation to the inception phase, such expertise will need to be sourced and financed.

Capitalisation

A capitalisation strategy on mainstreaming cross-cutting issues will be developed to create a learning culture based on documented practice. Consistent (quality) monitoring and the implementation of feedback loops cutting across different levels (e.g., from Lao and Luxembourg strategic/policy priorities, through ICP V mainstreaming guidelines, through programme operations, implementing partners and beneficiaries) will enable the capturing of good practices and generate valuable lessons as well as provide innovative examples that are potentially relevant for future forms of dissemination and transferability within other country offices.

LIST OF ANNEXES (available upon request)

- Annex 1 – Mainstreaming gender and rights in ICP IV and V target sectors
- Annex 2 – Legal and policy framework
- Annex 3 – Gender and vocational skills development
- Annex 4 – Gender tools for the formulation phase

Endnotes

- 1 Luxembourg's general development cooperation strategy entitled "The Road to 2030".
- 2 According to Luxembourg's general development cooperation strategy "The Road to 2030".
- 3 The core elements of a rights-based approach are participation, non-discrimination and equality. Participation of all segments of the population in the design, implementation and monitoring, regardless of ethnicity, gender identity and expression, age, disability, sexual orientation, etc.
- 4 <https://lao.unfpa.org/en/news/lao-pdr-agrees-endorse-five-year-plans-advance-womens-right-and-gender-equality>
- 5 <https://lao.unfpa.org/en/news/demographic-dividend-lao-pdr#:~:text=Sustainable%20development%20cannot%20be%20achieved,and%20contribute%20to%20economic%20growth.>
- 6 To be transformative, the commitment to gender equality should be universal; address the structural foundations of gender-based inequality, including in the three dimensions of sustainable development— social, economic and environmental; and ensure accountability.
- 7 Worldometers info
- 8 The Gender Inequality Index (GII) reflects gender-based inequalities in three dimensions – reproductive health (RH), empowerment, and the labor market, as data of reasonable quality allow. RH is measured by maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates; empowerment is measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by women and attainment in secondary and higher education by each gender; and economic activity is measured by the labor market participation rate for women and men. It shows the loss in potential human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in these dimensions. It ranges from 0, where women and men fare equally, to 1, where one gender fares as poorly as possible in all measured dimensions.
- 9 In the 2019 index - human development report 2020 for Lao PDR. Cf. Annex-3 on the 2019 list of the Gender Inequality Index for ASEAN countries
- 10 <https://data.unwomen.org/country/lao-peoples-democratic-republic>
- 11 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/03/01/key-findings-country-gender-assessment-for-lao-pdr>
- 12 <https://www.oecd.org/gov/gov-at-a-glance-sea-country-factsheet-laos.pdf>
- 13 Lao Social Indicator Survey II, 2017
- 14 ADB Gender assessment, p 39
- 15 National statement advancement of women , permanent mission of Lao PDR to the UN at the 73rd session of the GA (5 October 20) https://www.un.int/lao/sites/www.un.int/files/Lao/national_statement_advancement_of_women_com3.pdf
- 16 <https://lao.unfpa.org/en/news/towards-better-inclusion-people-disability-rights-lao-pdr>
- 17 <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/47137-003-ippfab.pdf>
- 18 <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/47137-003-ippfab.pdf>
- 19 <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/47137-003-ippfab.pdf>
- 20 Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) 2012
- 21 UN Lao PDR Socio-Economic Response Framework to COVID-19 Proposed offers prepared by the UN Country Team in Lao PDR, 2020
- 22 COVID-19 to Impact Lao PDR Growth, Debt in 2020: New World Bank Report
- 23 In the following, see Annex 2 for details.
- 24 <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/824181495177203647/pdf/115142-WP-LaoPDRGAPFINAL-PUBLIC.pdf>
- 25 https://cooperation.gouvernement.lu/content/dam/gouv_cooperation/politique-cooperation-action-humanitaire/politique-evaluation/evaluation-pic/laos/Mid-term-Review-of-the-Indicative-Cooperation-Programme-ICP-IV-2016-2020-between-the-Grand-Duchy-of-Luxembourg-and-Lao-People%E2%80%99s-Democratic-Republic.pdf
- 26 <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/824181495177203647/pdf/115142-WP-LaoPDRGAPFINAL-PUBLIC.pdf>
- 27 Internal note from International Cooperation and Project Management Secretariat (ICPMS), National Assembly, Lao PDR
- 28 Prime Minister's Order on to formulated the 9th NSDEP 2021-2025, numbered 05/PM, dated 21st Mar 2019. • Minister of Planning and Investment's Guideline to Prepare 9th NSEDP 2021-2025, numbered 1610/MPI, dated 26 July 2019. 9th NSEDP was adopted by the National Assembly in March 2021 (opening session 22nd to 26th March)
- 29 <https://lao.unfpa.org/en/news/new-national-plan-action-prioritizing-multi-partner-coordination-combating-violence-against>
- 30 https://lao.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/loi_2030_framework_eng.pdf
- 31 On September 25, 2009
- 32 <https://chronicle.lu/category/environment/35387-luxembourg-unveils-3rd-national-plan-for-sustainable-development>
- 33 The Draft 2021 gender strategy of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Luxembourg
- 34 <https://www.upr-info.org/en/review/Lao-People%27s-Democratic-Republic>
- 35 Internal draft for consultation.
- 36 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/lgbtiq_strategy_2020-2025_en.pdf
- 37 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/lgbtiq_strategy_2020-2025_en.pdf
- 38 World Bank 2012, pp. 3-6
- 39 Bodily autonomy is the right to governance over our own bodies
- 40 Including relevant indicators underpinned by relevant baselines, and including risks and assumptions, must be designed and actively implemented through the entire cycle, including regular feedback and reflection scheduled into project planning and, when necessary, including capacity strengthening of key involved stakeholders.
- 41 If there is no gender expert, the person in charge of monitoring the project/programme should be trained in gender issues.





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