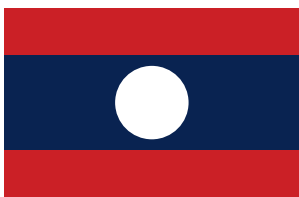




Asia-Pacific Regional Youth Call to Action 2024



Lao PDR

Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Eradicating Poverty in Times of Multiple Crises: The Effective Delivery of Sustainable, Resilient and Innovative Solutions in Asia and the Pacific with Young People at the Forefront

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Implementation and Overall Progress

According to the 2023 SDG Status Analysis by the UN ESCAP, Lao PDR is making significant progress on half or more of the indicators on SDG6, SDG7, and SDG15. Based on currently available evidence, progress is predominantly seen in eradicating poverty SDG1, and achieving zero hunger SDG2. The availability of evidence and data is limited across the goals, especially for the number of indicators for the SDG 5, 11, 13 and 16, hence it is challenging to accurately measure progress of these goals until more data becomes available.

Economic

The Lao economy is gradually recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic mainly by the service and tourism sector. However macroeconomic instability remains, especially in terms of high inflation - surging prices of

basic commodities, food, and fuel while minimum wages remain low. The economic instability and inflation has influenced more workers to migrate to neighbouring countries, resulting in shortage of workers within the country - which then could pose challenges in economic growth long term.

Environment and Climate Change

Lao PDR is particularly vulnerable to the climate crisis due to the potential rise in temperatures, increase in rainfall, and more severe and frequent flooding. Deforestation remains a major environmental issue in the country. Agriculture and food security is under threat, especially for lower income families and marginalised communities. Rising temperatures also pose public health risks of medical conditions caused by heat, as well as anticipating increase in diseases such as dengue and malaria.



Air pollution is a major contributor to the high rate of respiratory diseases in Lao PDR. Household air pollution is mainly caused by solid fuel for cooking, with women being at higher risk due to traditional roles in household chores. The agricultural burning season, coal-fired power stations, and reliance on fossil fuels vehicles contribute to rising outdoor air pollution. While vehicles that rely on fossil fuel are still common, many are starting to shift their preferences to electric cars as fuel prices increase.

Health

Almost 1 in 3 young people in Lao PDR have reported personally experiencing mental health challenges - and youth from the LGBTQIAN+ community are at higher risk of experiencing mental health challenges due to social stigma, discrimination and bullying, as well as those living in remote and rural communities, ethnic groups, migrant populations, persons with disabilities and persons living with HIV, among other marginalised communities.

Many youth experience barriers and challenges in accessing sexual reproductive health services, from the lack of information available in Lao languages, social stigma, to finding actual places to receive treatments. The country has the highest rate of adolescent pregnancy in South-East Asia, and the birth rate is particularly high among those with lower income families and ethnic groups in remote areas.

Gender Equality

Gender inequality is still prevalent in the Lao community, leading to early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, less employment opportunities, and lack of access to education. Furthermore, gender equality work is usually viewed in a traditional binary gender perspective - excluding the existence and the experiences of gender-diverse people. While visibility and understanding towards the LGBTQIAN+ community has improved in the urban areas and among younger generations, it is less prevalent in rural areas and among the older generations.

Youth Participation and Civic Engagement

Lao youth are eager to participate in the development of the country. Many youth are actively involved in volunteerism, digital advocacy, and engaging in online discussions on social issues. However, youth are much less represented in formal decision-making mechanisms, and civil society spaces, with those from marginalised communities especially facing the most barriers.

OUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

General Recommendation:

In order to accomplish all the SDG goals, it is crucial to reaffirm the fundamental principles of Leave No One Behind, Non-discrimination, Inclusion and Diversity through intersectional lenses, and Affirmative Actions for the most marginalised in the implementation of 2030 Agenda.

SDG 1: No Poverty

- To break the cycle of poverty - investment should be made into human development. This means providing accessible, quality education, and a safe and inclusive environment for all children and youth that ensures inclusion of all marginalised communities - such as youth with disabilities, youth from the LGBTQIAN+ community, indigenous youth, and other relevant aspects.
- Prevent people falling into poverty by implementing nationally appropriate universal and sustainable social protection systems and basic health care for all.
- Invest in youth entrepreneurship and startups to set up small and medium enterprises, facilitating capacity building training, access to finance, marketing and management skills.

SDG 2: Zero Hunger

- Ensure sustainable food production by facilitating local farmers and small scale agribusiness in strengthening their capacity for adaptation to climate change and disasters via providing technical skills training, access to finance and marketplace.
- Foster innovative solutions for food security by facilitating youth in agribusiness entrepreneurship, startups in innovative technology food systems, and through advocacy.
- Implement food bank models to reallocate resources to support public school meal programmes, breastfeeding nursing parents, and vulnerable communities.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services by integrating comprehensive sexuality education into formal education systems and community outreaches; and provide accessible, stigma-free, disability-inclusive, LGBTQIAN+ inclusive sexual and reproductive health care.
- Foster a safe and inclusive learning environment for all children and youth, schools and education institutions by having gender-inclusive infrastructures (such as gender neutral bathrooms), integrating intersectional gender responsive safeguarding policies, and revise on any school policies that does not reflect on the interest of children and youth with diverse gender identities.
- Promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender norms in schools, workplaces, community-level, to end gender-based violence against children, women, and people with diverse SOGIESC. Additionally, providing community-based training on gender equality, and how to respond to gender-based violence - particularly for local leaders, men of all ages, including gatekeepers.

SDG 13: Climate Action

- Integrate gender-sensitive and responsive disaster mitigation and preparedness plans and policies at all levels, including but not limited to creating awareness, expertise and anticipatory preparedness capacity within all government sectors, all stakeholders such as intergovernmental organisations, civil society organisations and volunteer organisations.
- Incorporate climate education into schools from primary to tertiary education, and engage youth in data-collection, research, and youth consultation in climate policy design and implementation.
- Facilitate youth-led climate solutions by creating safe and inclusive spaces for youth participation and decision-making, providing capacity building training, and reallocating resources and finances for youth volunteers organisations, advocates, entrepreneurs in climate innovation and technology.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

- Ensure youth to have better accessibility of public data by converting analog data such as research reports, policy papers, laws, into digital format that are categorised and easily navigated online.
- Ensure disaggregated data by sex, gender, age, disability and other relevant aspects, in order to develop a more effective and affirming plan of actions to achieve the SDG goals.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

- Ensure meaningful and substantive participation of the marginalised communities, such as LGBTQIAN+ community, people with disabilities, rural women and girls, migrants and Indigenous communities in the national implementation of the SDGs goals, by ensuring safe spaces for participation.
- Create formal mechanisms, including virtual platforms where children and youth of all diverse identities can actively participate in sharing their views and suggestions; and decision-makers and relevant stakeholders can directly communicate with the youth, and implement on such
- Acknowledge and provide spaces for informal youth-led groups and networks to participate in decision-making processes at all levels - especially youth-led groups within underrepresented or marginalised communities, such as youth with disabilities, LGBTQIAN+ community and ethnic groups. Additionally, supporting youth-led groups to establish as registered organisations will encourage youth to further contribute to the development of the country.

The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum in Bangkok on February 15-17, 2024. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.

