



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN LAO PDR



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Foreword

COVID-19 has shown the interdependency and interconnectedness of countries and why global health issues should be taken seriously by everyone. The pandemic has resulted in millions of deaths, created economic and social hardships and adversely affected education and other sectors.

While the world is racing to find a remedy to the pandemic, most nations are grappling with its potential social and economic impacts. It is estimated that tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty globally. Job losses have pushed about 45 million people into food insecurity, with about 33 million residing in the South and South-East Asian Regions. The number of children with acute malnutrition is also expected to increase substantially.

Lao PDR has made remarkable progress in recent years in many sectors, halving monetary poverty, reducing malnutrition and improving education and health outcomes. However, the COVID-19 pandemic poses a significant threat to the gains made and may negatively affect the country's goal of LDC graduation by 2024.

In response to the potential impact of COVID-19, the Centre for Development Policy Research (CDR) and the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), with the support of UNICEF, UNFPA, the European Union and SIDA, commissioned a study to assess the social and economic impact of the pandemic on children, adolescents and women in Lao PDR. This evidence will guide the Government's possible interventions as well as feed into the current National Social Economic Development Plan (9th NSEDP), while considering the vulnerabilities of the populations in the country. As a country, we are committed to seeking appropriate interventions and initiatives to prevent our people from hardship caused by the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The evidence in these reports demonstrates our commitment.

On behalf of MPI I would like to acknowledge the technical and financial support provided by our partners – UNICEF, the European Union, UNFPA, SIDA and EPRI – in the production of these reports and briefs on the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on children, adolescents and women in Lao PDR. We will continue to strengthen our partnerships to address risks and vulnerabilities in Lao PDR, especially during emergencies. I, therefore, urge all respective ministries, departments and agencies to align their interventions with the recommendations in these reports and policy briefs to reduce the social and economic impacts of the pandemic.



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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ANC	Antenatal care
EAP	East Asia and Pacific
ECE	Early Childhood Education
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FSN	Food Security and Nutrition
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LECS	Lao PDR Expenditure and Consumption Survey
LSB	Lao Statistics Bureau
LSIS II	Lao Social Indicator Survey
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
MoH	Ministry of Health
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NAR	Net Attendance Rate
NCAW	National Commission for the Advancement of Women
NCD-RisC	Non-Communicable Disease Risk Factor Collaboration
NCMC	National Commission for Mothers and Children
NHI	National Health Insurance
NPI	Non pharmaceutical interventions
NSSF	National Social Security Fund
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PNC	Postnatal care
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

The COVID-19 pandemic first emerged as a health crisis but has rapidly evolved into a global crisis, threatening survival – economically, socially, politically and epidemiologically – with grave consequences for human development, economic stability and sustenance. In Lao PDR, soon after the first case of COVID-19 was reported in March 2020, the government swiftly implemented a nationwide lockdown which was gradually lifted from mid-May. As a result, the epidemiological impact of the pandemic on Lao PDR has not been severe. The impact of the pandemic in Lao has been predominantly socioeconomic due to the breakdown in domestic and regional supply chains, business closures, livelihood disruptions and income losses.

This report estimates the potential effect of COVID-19 on socioeconomic indicators of interest in Lao PDR along with secondary data sources, existing data and information to identify the risk drivers through a review of relevant literature from Lao PDR and globally. This document explores the cost of inaction and the benefits of action that the Government of Lao PDR can realise as part of its response towards the COVID-19 pandemic.

1 United Nations, 'General Assembly Plenary Thirty-First Special Session, 2nd meeting', 2020.
2 Further detailed in section 2.
3 Further detailed in section 3.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 1 presents a snapshot of the data and methodological framework used in determining the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 in Lao. Section 2 presents the impact in Lao PDR of COVID-19 on the dimensions of livelihoods, poverty, food insecurity, health, education, child marriage, child labour, child violence and, ultimately, how all these risks interact with climate threats in the context of the country. The results focus on both quantifiable socioeconomic indicators and issues that COVID-19 can either exacerbate directly and/or exploit as a result of implicit structural vulnerabilities. This is followed by concluding remarks.

This microsimulation analysis complements the Lao PDR risk report, both of which were commissioned in May 2020 when the COVID-19 crisis was still unfolding. Hence, the assumptions reflect the most accurate suppositions based on the intensity and duration surrounding the pandemic at that point in time. However, as the pandemic has progressed during the year, some of these assumptions have been modified. For instance, in early 2020, the impact of the crisis was expected to be far more severe for Lao PDR and the East Asia and Pacific region. However, swift and timely NPI responses in the region have mitigated the worst of the health shocks and, as a result, allowed for a gradual re-opening of the regional economy.

Consequently, Lao PDR and neighbouring countries have managed to minimise the socioeconomic impact of the crisis, particularly on education for children and on health care systems. Therefore, several of the initially modelled impacts, which reflect the initial globally accepted assumptions about the trajectory of the crisis but do not adequately reflect how the crisis has unfolded in Lao PDR, have been moved from the main report into the annex.

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