



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

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

**Pre-session working group**

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**Responses to the list of issues and questions with regard  
to the consideration of the combined sixth and seventh  
periodic reports**

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

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



**The answers to questions put forward by the Committee on  
the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)  
following the consideration of the combined sixth and seventh report of the  
Lao People's Democratic Republic**

**General information**

**1. Please provide further information on the process of preparation of the combined sixth and seventh report of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The information should include which Government departments and institutions were involved in the preparation of the report and whether non-governmental organizations, particularly women's organizations, were consulted.**

The preparation of the combined sixth and seventh report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been carried out through the following process:

First, the Government of Lao PDR has set up a drafting committee for the preparation of the combined report. The said Committee involves different governmental organisations and agencies which includes among others, the Secretariat of the Lao National Committee for the Advancement of Women ( Lao NCAW ) and other line ministries and equivalent agencies. The Committee has the duty to give instructions and monitor the preparation and examination of the draft report with a view to ensuring that the content of the report is inclusive, correct and relevant while implementing CEDAW in the Lao PDR.

Second, the drafting committee for the preparation of the national report entrusted the expert team from *Gender Resource and Information Development Centre (Grid)* of the Lao Women's Union (LWU) to prepare the draft report and devise tools for data collection and analyses serving as terms of reference for the report.

Third, the drafting committee convened a series of meeting to inform its members of the objectives and drafting process of the report as well as delegated task to each one of them. The Lao NCAW at all levels has the duty to coordinate with all concerned stakeholders to facilitate data collection and provision of information to the drafting expert team.

Fourth, once the drafting expert team had finalized the preliminary draft, the drafting committee would then adopt it as a working paper for consultation with the committees for the advancement of women from different line ministries and agencies. In this connection, three rounds of consultation at the central level were held to refine the draft report. Thereafter, the revised draft report would be presented for consultation with concerned international organizations in the Lao PDR including governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. Afterward, the drafting committee had held four meetings to finalize and endorse the revised draft report based on the inputs gathered from the above-mentioned meetings. The final draft of the report was later submitted to the Government for consideration and adoption as the national report of the Lao PDR.

**2. The report contains limited statistical data disaggregated by sex on the situation of women in several areas covered by the Convention, including different groups of women. Please provide information on how the government intends to improve the collection of data disaggregated by sex and age, urban and rural women and women of ethnic groups, pertaining to the areas of the Convention.**

Firstly, the Government of the Lao PDR has a clear-cut statistic policy with the establishment of the National Statistical System in 2002 as called for by the Prime Minister's Decree No. 140/PM dated August 20, 2002. As mentioned early in the previous report to the CEDAW Committee, the Government had issued the Notification No. 0009/PMO of 5 January 2000 on the inclusion of sex disaggregated data in the national statistical system. To ensure nationwide implementation and efficiency of the said notification, the PM's Office issued a guideline paper No. 018/PMO of 10 January 2005 urging government agencies to translate the terms of the notification into reality.

Secondly, the Government's policy on data collection is being carried out by different governmental agencies. The Ministry of Education, for instance, has begun to collect sex disaggregated data since 2005 by improving the statistical data disaggregated by sex with indicators such as: total enrolment rate, net enrolment rate, repetition rate, drop-out rate, completion rate, literacy rate, numbers of schools, of classes, of both public and private school teachers and other elements pertaining to all grades, levels and fields of studies nationwide. In 2008, the collection of ethnic studies in four different languages was also conducted by linking district and provincial levels with Ministerial level, and enabling the practice of information analyses in each province, urban and rural areas.

Thirdly, although the Government's policy has been introduced for a number of years, its actual implementation has been less visible nationwide due to poor dissemination of information and lack of human and financial resources, especially in remote rural areas. In the next periodic report, the Government will pay more attention to advising all stakeholders to act in line with the terms of the above-mentioned PMO's notification and guidelines.

**3. In its previous concluding comments, the Committee requested the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic to widely disseminate the concluding comments<sup>1</sup> in respect of the combined initial, second, third, fourth and fifth report. Please provide information on the measures undertaken to make administrators, officials and politicians, as well as the general public and the women themselves, including rural women and women of different ethnic and minority groups, aware of the steps taken to guarantee de jure and de facto equality between women and men. The report states that Government officials have limited awareness and understanding of CEDAW and of gender mainstreaming. Please elaborate on measures undertaken by the State party to raise the awareness of Government officials, judges and lawyers through adequate training, about gender-based discrimination and the protection of women's human rights.**

In terms of the dissemination on CEDAW's recommendations and the Convention, the Government has taken various actions as follows:

First, the Lao NCAW had the concluding observations translated in Lao language and published those observations in both languages, Lao and English. Copies of this publication were distributed to all committees for the advancement of women at all levels for further dissemination together with the text of CEDAW which had already been translated into Lao.

Second, the Lao NCAW and Lao Women's Union organised workshops and seminars for government officials from national to local levels, using the translated texts of the Convention, the CEDAW's concluding observations, the gender approach and Lao legal instruments relating to women's rights as basic documents for discussion on the implementation of CEDAW in Laos. In addition, the Lao NCAW also organised an ASEAN regional meeting on the best practices in CEDAW reporting, monitoring and the implementation of CEDAW on 14-15 January 2008, and it had also organised a series of meetings on experience sharing and exhibition of gender mainstreaming achievements in the Lao PDR.

Third, the dissemination of information has also been made through mass media such as radio, television and newspapers. This undertaking has been carried out in different forms such as short play clips, news article, column on CEDAW and on the promotion and protection of women's rights, and fair gender roles. The content of this information dissemination is handled jointly by the Lao NCAW, the Ministry of Justice, the LWU, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Education and others.

These are some instances that the Lao NCAW has performed in raising awareness on the promotion of women's role in the Lao society.

<sup>1</sup> See CEDAW/C/LAO/1-5, para. 45.

### Constitutional, Legislation and Institutional Framework and the Status of the Convention

**4. Please describe further steps taken by the State party since the consideration of the previous report in 2005 to establish a comprehensive legislative framework in conformity with the Convention to ensure adequate protection of women from discrimination, including the availability of effective remedies and to educate women about their right to be free from discrimination.**

*The legislative Framework of the Lao PDR to ensure protection of women against discrimination since 2005 includes the following:*

First, amendments have been made to the criminal law to criminalise discriminatory acts against women as called for by criminal legal system of the Lao PDR consisting of the criminal law and criminal provisions of other relevant legal bills of the Lao PDR. Therefore, discrimination against women shall be construed as a criminal offence and violation against the criminal law or criminal provisions of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women.

Second, the Lao NCAW has formulated and adopted the National Strategy for the Promotion of the Advancement of Women for the period from 2006 to 2010, with the aim of removing obstacles that prevent women from advancing their interests, and to ensure their equal rights and development with their male counterparts in all aspects.

Third, Article 4 of the amended Law on Education (adopted by the National Assembly under the Resolution N. 43/NA of 3 July 2007), has stipulated that “the State and society are resolved to develop the national education system in quality terms, creating opportunities for all to have access to education, especially for people in rural and remote areas, women, children, the vulnerable groups, and to create enabling conditions for more people to have access to vocational education”. Article 36 has stated that, “the state has determined an allowance policy for students from poor families, vulnerable groups, especially women, children, ethnic people, talented or bright students and encourages individuals, organisations and communities to extend their assistance to these categories of people with appropriate means”.

**5. Further to the Committee’s previous concluding comments (para. 18), please explain what measures have been taken by the State party to bring the Convention into the domestic legal system and ensures that it can be invoked in the courts? The report states that a definition of the term “discrimination against women” has been included in the Prime Minister’s Decree, No. 26/PM, dated 6 February 2006, on the implementation of the law on development and protection of women. In that regard, please update the Committee on any plans to include a definition of discrimination against women in accordance with article 1 of the Convention in the Constitution or other appropriate legislation, as previously recommended by the Committee.**

Concerning the inclusion of the definition of discrimination against women in the Constitution and other Lao laws, the Government of the Lao PDR is of the view that such requirement can be done by amending the Constitution or any relevant law. In relation to this, the Lao NCAW has the following comments: (1) amending the Constitution is the duty of the National Assembly, through a relatively lengthy process of consideration. For the previous amendments, the Government had to appoint an ad hoc committee for the elaboration of the draft amendments to the 1991 Constitution. It took the Committee one year to complete the task and submit the findings to the National Assembly for consideration. In addition, amendments to the Constitution cannot be made every day. It had been 12 years from the day on which the Constitution was enacted to the day it was amended for the first time. Amending the Constitution has therefore not been an issue; (2) the Law on the Development and Protection of Women enacted in 2004 contains no definition of discrimination against women. The PM’s Decree on the implementation of the Law on Development and Protection of Women therefore provides the definition of discrimination against women. The Decree was adopted as part of that law. Courts and other authorities will read the Law on the Development and Protection of Women or other legislation related to this decree while proceeding with trials on women discriminatory act cases; (3) the definition of discrimination against women might also be included in other legislation at the next opportunity.

6. In its previous concluding comments, the committee recommended that the State party should strengthen its national machinery by providing adequate human and financial resources, as well as setting up mechanisms to strengthen gender mainstreaming in all Ministries and at all levels of the Government. It also recommended that governmental supervisory bodies should be created at all levels to monitor the implementation of the national strategic plan for the advancement of women for 2005-2010 (see para. 20). The report acknowledges that the mechanisms for the advancement of women, especially in respect of staff expertise and the limited budget allocations, are not sufficiently strong. Please elaborate on the steps taken to strengthen the mechanisms and institutions involved in the promotion of the advancement of women, including the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, to facilitate liaison with all sectors, including the Lao Women's Union, with regard to gender mainstreaming and the implementation of the Convention. Please provide information on the allocation of financial and human resources for the effective functioning of those national mechanisms and on the implementation of the Prime Minister's Order N.30/PM of 23 December 2004, instructing ministries, government institutions and local administrations to set up their own committees for the advancement of women.

To the recommendation that the Lao PDR strengthen its national machinery for the promotion of the advancement of women, the government may refer to some measures taken as follows.

First, the Government issued the Order No 30/PM of 21 December 2004 on the establishment and activities of the committee for the promotion of the advancement of women at all levels. So far, there has been a wide implementation of the said Order.

Second, in order to ensure a uniform execution of the PM's Order, the Chairman of the Lao NCAW had issued the Order N. 24/LaoNCAW of 24 December 2004 on the establishment and activities of the committee on the advancement of women at all levels. This has also been carried out widely.

Third, in addition to the PM's Order NO.30/PM of 21 December 2004, the Public Administration and Civil Service Authority also issued the Notification No. 32/PACSA of 20 September 2007 on the establishment of supportive machinery to the committees for the advancement of women from national to grass-root levels. The notification has been widely disseminated among and inside all governmental organisations and agencies for implementation. The terms of the notification are being carried out in the committees for the advancement of women at all levels by which the supportive machinery to the CAW nationwide would play a complimentary role in capacity building for institutions working on the promotion of the advancement of women in line with the provisions and requirements of the Convention and policy guidelines of the Party and State as well as with the reality and the needs of the Lao society.

Fourth, a number of achievements have been registered. For example, the government bodies responsible for the advancement of women have been set up at all levels: At national level is the Lao National Commission for the Advancement of Women (Lao NCAW); at the ministerial and equivalent level are the *Sub CAWs* in the line ministries and equivalent agencies; at provincial level are the provincial *Sub CAWs*.

So far, eight Ministries and six equivalent agencies have set up the divisions for the Advancement of Women to provide secretarial support to the *Sub CAWs* in their own respective organizations. In addition, sixteen provinces and Vientiane Capital have set up the office for the Advancement of Women to provide support to provincial *Sub CAWs*. These supporting bodies are part of the State machinery with the provision of staff and financial supports funded by the overall budget of each respective government agency. These are initial efforts of the Government in respect to the promotion of the advancement of women. Certainly, these bodies need to be developed further, since both staffing and financing are far from sufficient. The Lao NCAW is strongly recommended to follow up on the implementation including the setting up of training program for officials working for promoting the advancement of women, and to submit the report to the Government aimed at improving a more suitable systematic mechanism and drawing foreign assistance.

**7. Please describe the progress achieved in realizing equality for women as a result of, inter alia, the implementation of the national strategic plan for the advancement of women for the period 2005-2010, referred to in the report. This assessment should include any impediments to achieving the development strategies and target goals of gender mainstreaming and capacity building outlined in the strategic plan, remedial measures undertaken and intentions for future strategic plans.**

With regard to the implementation of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (NSAW), it can be summarised as follows:

First, the Sub CAWs attached to Ministries, Agencies and Provinces has carried out the national strategic plan for the advancement of women ( NSPAW ) within their respective institutions by incorporating it into their periodic work plans, especially by increasing the number of women in decision-making positions, formulating plans for leadership and personnel training for successions with the gender approach. Some ministries and agencies have developed their own strategies for the promotion of women in their respective organisations as part of their general work plans.

Second, some sectors have implemented the strategy with concrete results, for instance in the education and agriculture sectors. The Ministry of Education has formulated its own work plan in such a way as to promote the advancement of women by adopting 5 targets: The first target is to gradually expand girls enrolment rates at schools at all levels to be in par with boys; the second target is to eradicate illiteracy for women aged 15-40 by 82 per cent by 2010; the third target is to create favourable conditions for female workers to have access to vocational training and technical production skills, the fourth target is to provide enabling conditions for public servants to upgrade their knowledge in political science and administration, and fifth is to work out plan for upgrading women's professional skills such as: development planning, finance and accounting, banking, and others. The Ministry of Agriculture has also planned to increase the number of women for technical training in agricultural production and forestry, especially in crop cultivation and animal husbandry. These work plans have been progressively implemented.

Third, while implementing the NSPAW, the Lao PDR has encountered difficulties and challenges such as:

- The members of the committees for the advancement of women in some ministries and equivalent authorities have been changed or transferred to new positions creating difficulties for the follow up on the activities.

- Some line ministries and equivalent agencies have not yet set up a division for the advancement of women or if already established, it has not been able to act continuously in a systematic manner or has not been active at all due the lack of staff or is in the process of internal management reshuffle.

- Many institutions have not yet earmarked the budget lines for the promotion for the advancement of women activities or for the Sub CAW, even though this matter has been widely brought to the attention of all sectors of the Government.

- Some organisations have little understanding about reproductive health, women's health, gender equality and other related matters.

- Each Government agency has not had the policy and strategy on the promotion of the advancement of women disseminated widely in their agencies.

- Many Government officials consider that the work for gender equality is additional and marginal work, separate from their professional work, so it is still perceived that the gender equality work is the responsibility of the Women's Union.

In respect of these difficulties and challenges, the line ministries have already outlined some remedial plans.

**8. Further to the statement in the report regarding women having limited access to legal information, making it difficult to protect their legal rights, please inform the Committee of measures undertaken by the State party to increase legal literacy among women. Please clarify what complaint mechanism is in place for women who suffer gender-based discrimination and indicate if legal aid is provided to women in such cases? Furthermore, please indicate if the Lao People's Democratic Republic is considering establishing an independent national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles (see General Assembly resolution 48/134, annex).**

Regarding the increase of women's legal literacy, the Government of the Lao PDR would like to present further explanation as follows:

First, the Government of the Lao PDR pursues the policy on the promotion and provision of opportunities for women's self-development and empowerment. However, the Government recognizes the fact that women's legal knowledge remains limited. This problem does not only occur with women, but with men alike. Furthermore, women have limited access to legal information both physically and capability-wise. Against this backdrop, the Lao Government has adopted different measures to increase women's legal knowledge. First of all, the Government is focusing on enhancing women's education as key to gaining access to legal information database. The Ministry of Education, as the main governmental agency dealing with women's education, has determined some targets namely: (1) provide more school enrolment opportunities for girls to be gradually on par with school boys (2) eradicate illiteracy for women aged 15-40 (3) create conditions for women to have access to vocational and technical training (4) create conditions for female public servants to gain greater knowledge on policy and administration. (5) create conditions for women to have access to professional training namely in development planning, finance, banking, Law, science-technology. In addition, the Lao PDR has also introduced non-formal education programme for women who have missed their opportunity to complete their formal education so that they can pursue their general education.

Second, the Government also uses mass media to disseminate legal information including women's rights, obligations and interest so that women in both urban and rural areas have access to useful information on the protection of their rights. Besides, brochures on women's rights have also been distributed to the public, in particular to women.

Third, the existing mechanisms for addressing women's cases include among others, the counselling and protection centre for women and children, investigation and prosecution authority, the Prosecutor's Office, the People's Courts, the Lao Bar Association, and Village Mediation Units.

These are some of the measures that have been taken by the Lao PDR in respect of the promotion and protection of women, enabling them to be aware of their rights.

On the establishment of a national independent human rights institution, although the Lao PDR has not yet been able to establish such an institution in line with the Paris Principles, there are already a number of governmental bodies in place working for the promotion and protection of human rights in accordance with the reality and specificities of Laos.

#### **Stereotype and discriminatory cultural practices**

**9. According to the report, stereotypical attitudes and detrimental traditions still exist in the society. Under several articles, the report notes the pervasive impact of culturally entrenched stereotypes on women's enjoyment of their rights under the Convention, including in the areas of education and employment and in their participation in decision-making. The previous concluding comments of the Committee recommended that a concerted nationwide campaign be undertaken to eliminate the pervasive traditional gender role stereotyping and to promote public awareness on issues of gender equality in all spheres of life. Please elaborate on the measures adopted and activities undertaken to raise awareness of gender roles in society as a whole, and particularly in rural areas, aimed at bringing about changes in behaviour and the eradication of negative stereotypes and cultural practices that discriminate against women. What is the role envisaged for the media in this respect?**

**10. Please elaborate on concrete steps taken to use the educational system, including the school curriculum, to modify or eliminate gender stereotypes and negative cultural values and practices in a sustained and systematic manner.**

Further explanation on gender role in the present Lao society can be described as follows:

First, gender equality role is the key policy of the Lao PDR on women's empowerment. The Lao Government has embraced gender equality as an essential component in its policy on solidifying national solidarity in order to fulfil past national liberation cause as well as for current national defence and development.

Second, the purpose of pursuing a policy of gender equality is to eliminate discrimination against women nationwide. But in practice, it could be basically eliminated in legal terms and in some Government institutions only. Some inappropriate traditional practices by a number of Lao ethnic groups continue to persist due the remoteness of their habitat, limited public aid and low level of education. In light of this problem, the Government has therefore associated gender role issue and women's empowerment with national socio-economic development, especially in the implementation of the Government's National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES).

Third, the implementation of the poverty alleviation programme which includes the establishment of model villages or cluster development villages, culturally advanced villages, model health care villages, and crime-free villages are all aimed at increasing educational knowledge and awareness of the Lao multi-ethnic people so that they would be able to understand the Government's policy on the promotion of gender equality considering that the realisation of poverty eradication program comprises political, social, economic and cultural elements.

Fourth, advocacy is the main approach to this end. The objective of advocacy is to further deepen the Lao multi-ethnic people's perception about gender role in Lao society. Therefore, once prosperity has spread over to rural areas, negative stereotypical practices would gradually vanish.

Fifth, advocacy campaign has been carried out by dispatching professional personnel in different fields to the grass root areas in order to help local people improve their living conditions. At the same time, the Government uses the mass media to disseminate information about the Government's policies on gender equality, development, scientific life patterns and others.

- Sixth, the Lao NCAW and Sub CAWs have organised a series of workshops on gender mainstreaming for members of the committees for the advancement of women at all levels so that they can, in turn, disseminate, advocate and implement it in their respective organisations and areas of responsibilities.

- Seventh, the Ministry of Education is developing an educational curriculum which incorporates teaching of gender roles and gender equality. The curriculum will include the right to parental care, right to education, right to development, right to protection against discrimination, respect for women and so on. In school, female and male students will learn about gender roles, rights and obligations of both women and men in Lao society. At the secondary education level, the new edition on citizenship underlines the rights and obligations of the citizens including the rights of the child and obligations of the family members as well as economic, social and cultural rights and fundamental freedoms of the citizens, including civil and political rights.

- Eight, mass media plays an important role in advocacy campaign. The Government's policy guidelines, laws and regulations on the promotion and protection of women's rights have been disseminated through mass media in complimentary to advocacy campaign.



## Violence against women

**11. In line with the Committee's general recommendation No. 19 and further to the Committee's previous concluding comments (see para. 36), please provide information on the scope of all forms of violence against women and legislative and other measures taken to combat such violence. Please also provide information on the availability of health and social services for the victims and the introduction of capacity-building and awareness-raising programme for various groups (including the police, lawyers, health workers and the judiciary) and the public at large. Please provide, if available, statistics concerning the number of complaints, investigations, prosecutions, convictions and penalties imposed on the perpetrators and any protective and /or compensatory measures provided to the victims or their families.**

Based on the Law on the development and protection of women, there are two kinds of violence against women: physical and emotional violence or damages to asset. The scope of violence remains pervasive, from the domestic to the public domain, including work places. The Government of Lao PDR always pays attention to and takes appropriate measures to prevent acts of violence against women. The following measures have been taken by the Government:

First, in respect of domestic violence against women, Chapter 2 of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women provides means for preventive remedies for violence against women.

Second, in respect of violence against women in society, the amended criminal law provides protection for women against violence. The Government has carried out and will continue to take measures to educate and sensitize every one about the Government's policies towards women, expand women's organisations and other mass organisations to safeguard women's interests in work places and in society at large. The LWU, Trade Union and Youth Union have the duty to educate women and young people in the public sector to promote and protect women in all fields of work.

Third, the Counselling and Protection Centre for Women and Children established and run by the LWU provides services to women and children who fall victims to violence. In addition, health care services are also generally available. In urban areas, hospitals are available in each district. In rural areas, dispensaries are available in the village or cluster villages. The women's organisations at the villages will help coordinate with other services to assist women.

**12. Please provide more information on the implementation of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women, of 2004, which aims to eliminate discrimination against women and combat violence against women and trafficking in women and children. Please explain whether that law has had an impact on the reduction of such violations of women's rights. Please inform the Committee if the State party is considering criminalizing domestic violence and marital rape, as recommended by the Committee in its previous concluding comments. Please provide information on the number of shelters and services provided to the victims, disaggregated by urban and rural areas.**

Concerning the implementation of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women, and especially to combat trafficking in women and acts of violence against women, the Government has taken the following steps:

First, the Government has disseminated the provisions of the Law so as to raise people's awareness and understanding of trafficking in women and children and the risk of falling victim to trafficking in persons.

Second, it also uses mass media for dissemination of information in many different forms such as: radio talk shows, columns in newspapers, dissemination of the text of the Law through the media, calendar, brochures and other appropriate means.

Third, the Lao Women's Union is the main organisation responsible for dissemination of the Law and its subsequent implementation.

Fourth, the criminal law was amended in 2005 by criminalising discrimination against women as a means to prevent acts of violence against women.

Fifth, in terms of shelter and services to the victims of violence against women, please see the answer to the next question.

### **Trafficking in women and children and exploitation of women in prostitution**

**13. According to the report, the State party is actively implementing 20 projects, in cooperation with international organisations and national agencies that directly or indirectly aim at combating human trafficking. Please provide more information on such measures and initiatives and explain whether they have had an impact on the reduction of cases of trafficking. What practical and urgent measures are in place to prevent and combat trafficking in women and girls and to safely repatriate women and girls who have been trafficked? Are any recovery and reintegration initiatives in place for women who wish to leave prostitution, including through discouraging the demand for prostitution, as recommended by the Committee in its previous concluding comments (see para. 30).**

Human trafficking occurs by taking advantage of people's poverty. The victims of human trafficking are mostly from poor farmer families and unemployed people having low level of education but wanting to boost their income. They are trying to make ends meet for themselves and their families. Many people have gone abroad to seek job opportunities. Many cases have found success, but equal number have ended up falling victim of human trafficking or forced labour. Being aware of this problem, the Government of the Lao PDR has taken measures in combating trafficking in women and the exploitation of women's and girls' prostitution:

First, the Government has appointed a National Committee chaired by the Minister of Defence. The Committee has adopted the regional plan of action II and implement it in the Lao PDR. The Plan of Action II includes activities relating to training and capacity building for people working in the area of combating trafficking in women. Training has been organised for law enforcement officers, investigation-prosecution authorities, lawyers dealing with the prosecution on perpetrators of trafficking in and exploitation of women's prostitution cases.

Second, the Government has cooperated with neighbouring countries namely Thailand and Vietnam, and also with international organizations.

Third, the Government provides general education to illiterate victims in collaboration with international organizations, and vocational and skills training to women, enabling them to have access to the employment market at home and abroad.

Fourth, the Government has set up job creation mechanism and provided counselling for people who wants to work overseas so as to minimize the risk of labour exploitation and human trafficking.

Fifth, the Government also provides assistance to victims of human trafficking by establishing temporary shelters for women and children victims of human trafficking. Such temporary welcoming centres will be expanded across the country, especially in victims-crowded areas. Currently, there are two centres in Vientiane and two other centres in the south are being built; In addition, the Government has collaborated with international organisations to organise learning program for illiterate victims including vocational and skill training.

Sixth, training program has been offered to relevant officials at the central, provincial and district levels ( labour and social welfare, LWU, public security and health ) with regard to repatriation, rehabilitation of victims of trafficking in persons in target areas such as the Vientiane Capital, Savannakhet, Champasak and Saravan.

Seventh, awareness-raising is deemed vital. The Government has paid great attention to awareness- raising measures which can be found in the answer to question 12 above.

Eighth, concerning the statistical data on human trafficking, as of 2008, the investigation-prosecution authorities had received 35 cases involving 49 victims and 23 perpetrators; 5 out of the 35 cases had been referred to Prosecutor's Office, 20 cases are in the investigation process of Prosecutor's Office while 10 others had been referred to courts or dismissed due to unfounded evidence.

**14. Please provide more information on the bilateral agreement signed by the Governments of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand in 2005 on combating trafficking in persons and explain whether it has had an impact on the reduction of cases of trafficking. Has the State party signed other bilateral agreements on trafficking?**

Regarding the cooperation between Lao PDR and the Royal Kingdom of Thailand in the area of counter trafficking in women and children, the two governments have concluded a Memorandum of Understanding on bilateral cooperation in this issue. The MOU provides measures for the prevention and suppression of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, assistance and repatriation of victims of trafficking in persons, and tracing for those who have disappeared.

The Lao-Thai bilateral cooperation has been implemented with satisfactory results, particularly the arrangement for the repatriation of 1.315 Lao victims of trafficking in persons back to the country.

**15. The report states that more than ever, women are participating in decision-making at all levels of society, that the electorate has elected more women than ever before to the National Assembly and that the Government has appointed an increasing number of women to high-ranking positions. However, the report also acknowledges that the number of women in leadership at all levels is limited and that there remain a number of factors that prevent women from political participation. Given the underrepresentation of women in the judiciary, at the international and local levels, and further to the Committee's previous concluding comments (see para. 32), please elaborate on concrete measures carried out or measures envisaged to achieve women's full and equal participation and representation in these areas, taking into account the Committee's general recommendation No. 25, on article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, and general recommendation No. 23 on women in political and public life.**

To increase more women's participation in leadership, the Government has outlined a National Strategy for the Advancement of Women consisting of 5 work programs. Here, work plan No. 4 has determined the following goals:

First, to strive to increase the number of women in the Party Committee from district level and upward by 10 per cent;

Second, to endeavour to increase the number of female deputies in the National Assembly by 25 per cent in the Eight Legislature;

Third, to strive to increase female leadership in the governmental and mass organisation agencies, ranging from the national to local levels by 20 per cent;

Fourth, in sectors such as education, health, socio-cultural and business sectors in which women cover 40 per cent of the total workforce, they must be included in the leadership of those respective sectors and enterprises;

Fifth, create conditions for more female public servants to be trained to upgrade their level of ideological theory: political science and administration.

The cause for limited number of women in leadership can be characterized as follows: it is partly due to women's level of education and abilities not being as high as they should be. Some of them have to shoulder and take care of their families hand in hand with their professional work. This is one of the causes that restrains their time for knowledge and educational upgrading. There are a number of women still undermining their own capabilities thus leading to low self-confidence.

**16. The Committee, in its previous concluding comments, recommended that the State party should introduce measures, including legislative and administrative measures, as necessary, to create space for autonomous women's and human rights organizations (see para. 40). Please provide more detailed information on women's groups and national and international non-governmental organizations in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and any obstacles that may prevent their formation and participation in public life.**

So far, the country does not have any autonomous women's and human rights organizations yet as there is no law or decree governing the activities of such organizations over the past years. Nevertheless, the Government had issued a new PM's decree on the establishment of association signed by the Prime Minister on 29 April 2009. The said Decree will form a basic legal framework serving as a reference for future establishment of civil society organizations.

### **Education**

**17. The report states that, in general, although the education of women has improved, the literacy rate of women is still lower than that of men. Only 63 per cent of women are literate while the literacy rate of men is 83 per cent. The report further indicates that the school enrolment rate of girls is also lower than that of boys due to various causes such as family poverty, too many children in a family and lack of income. In its previous concluding comments, the Committee urged the State party to immediately take all appropriate measures, including temporary special measures, to reduce the illiteracy rate of women and to provide education to women, both formal and informal, especially in rural areas and including ethnic minority women. Please provide more detailed information on the steps taken by the State party to reduce the illiteracy rate of women, including rural women and ethnic minority women, and to improve the school enrolment rates of girls and reduce their drop out rates. Such steps may include specific programmes, initiatives, including scholarships for girls, and other temporary special measures. Please explain whether the State party has sought or is considering seeking international assistance in this respect.**

The Government has taken the following measures to reduce the rate of women's illiteracy:

First, the Government has implemented its Second Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women contained in the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women by focusing on attaining 2 out of 4 targets. They include: (1) increase school enrolment opportunities for girls to be on par with boys; (2) eradicate illiteracy for women aged from 15 to 40 with a set target of 82 per cent by 2010. The implementation of target No. 1 has gained some key results as follows:

#### **Pre-school education**

- In 2007 – 2008 academic year, the total number of children enrolled in both public and private childcare centre and kindergarten was 69.717 out of which 35.156 were girls, if compared to 2006–2007, the total number of pre-school children increased 14.377 or equivalent to 26 per cent, girls increased 7.481, covering 27 per cent while boys increased 6.896, covering 25 per cent of the total number.

- Net enrolment of kindergarten students aged 3-5 reached 15.4 per cent of the plan which is 1.9 per cent higher than the estimated target.

#### **Primary education**

- In academic year 2007–2008, there were 900.817 students in both public and private schools, the number of schoolgirls was 419.996 and boys was 480.821, if compared to 2006–2007, the total number increased by 9.010 equal to 1 per cent. Girls increased by 6.544 equal to 1.58 per cent and boys increased by 2.466 equal to 0.52 per cent.

- Net enrolment rate reached 89.2 per cent including 87 per cent of girls and 91.4 per cent of boys. If compared to 2006-2007, there was an increase of 2.8 per cent greater than targeted 1,8 per cent, compared to that of 2006-2007, increased 2,8 per cent and 1.8 per cent higher than the target plan.

## Secondary education

- In academic year 2007 – 2008, there were 255.083 students in lower secondary schools across the country, girls were 112.911, boys 142.172, if compared to 2006 – 2007, the number of students increased 6.516 equal to 2,62 per cent, girls increased 3.767 equal to 3,45 per cent, boys increased 2.749 equal to 1,97 per cent.

- Total enrolment in lower secondary schools reached 59,2 per cent, out of which girls 53,8 per cent, boys 64,3 per cent, which is 1,2 per cent higher than the annual implementation plan. In the academic year of 2007-2008, girl enrolment increased. However, the State should strive to ensure greater school enrolment rate of girls to be on par with boys.

- There were 154.785 students of upper secondary schools in 2007-2008, girls 66.975 and boys 87.810, a total increase of 3.272 students equal to 2,16 per cent, girls increased 2.364 (3.66 per cent ) and boys increased 912 (1,05 per cent ). If compared to school years 2006-2007, it increased 3.276 equal to 2.16 per cent out of which girls increased 2.364 equal to 3.66 per cent and boys increased 912 equal to 1.05 per cent.

- Total enrolment rate of upper secondary students in 2007-2008 was 37,2 per cent out of which girls 32,6 per cent and boys 41,6 per cent. If compared to 2006-2007, it increased 2,6 per cent compared to the annual plan, it attained 36,5 per cent which is 0,7 per cent higher than the target. The number of girl students has increased but remained less than that of boys. Therefore, greater efforts must be exerted to ensure greater school enrolment of both girls and boys.

## Higher education

- In academic year 2007 – 2008, there were 78.109 students nationwide in higher education out of which there were 32.563 female students and 45.546 male students. If compared to 2006 – 2007, there was an increase of 14.302 students equal to 22,41 per cent, female students increased 7.195 equal to 28,36 per cent and male students increased 7.107 equal to 18,49 per cent. The number of female students increased faster than male students in 2007–2008, but we will strive to ensure a greater balance of school enrolment of female and male students.

For the plan target No. 2, the Government has adopted additional measures for non-formal education as follows:

### 1) The Government has established an informal learning system.

The Government has placed emphasis on the development of informal education outside the school specially designed for over-school-aged women to have the opportunity to study. The Government has carried out some works as follows:

- Set up the Literacy Resource Centre for girls and women whose mandate is to develop human resource curriculum, teaching materials, printing and electronic documents to provide information for target groups of women nationwide.

- The Ministry of Education has appointed a panel for the amendment of the curriculum for non-formal education (Decision No 607/MEIED of 23/3/2007). The panel is entrusted to improve the curriculum for informal education level I including the teaching of gender equality as part of the curriculum, especially the substantive provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women. The curriculum of basic informal education level I aims at teaching adult to read, write and perform basic calculations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division). The amendment of the curriculum is supported financially by UNIFEM.

- Since 2005, the Government has allocated an annual budget for non-formal education as shown in the table below: (in kip)

2005	2006	2007	2008
1,600,00,000	2,00,00,000	2,080,080,000	2,600,000,000

▪ In 2007–2008, 39.804 people aged 15 to 40 (22.511 women and 17.239 men) were freed from illiteracy. If compared to 2006–2007, there was an increase of 56.034 literate people.

**2) Basic education.** The Government has established a basic education project with a budget of USD \$34.02 million, which includes USD 20 million loan from the ADB, a grant of USD 5,02 million from the Australian Government, the Lao Government's contribution of USD 8 million and the Lao people's contribution of USD 1 million.

The project seeks to:

- Enable women and people of all ethnic groups at all ages to contribute to national socio-economic development;
- Improve better education in both quality and quantity;
- Create opportunities for girls and ethnic children and young adults to have access to primary education so as to complete the compulsory education required by Government policy since 1996 and to enable them to continue to secondary studies and beyond.

The project life span was 2000–2007 divided into two phases. The first phase ran from 2000–2003 in 6 provinces covering 12 districts. The second phase ran from 2004–2007 extended to 5 more provinces, covering 40 districts. The project was not only designed for providing opportunities for girls to educational learning but also trained 486 ethnic teachers in which 326 were women and 160 men.

In the attempt to promote women's education, the Government has collaborated with the international community in formulating and implementing various projects on the promotion of women's education such as:

(1) Project for the promotion of girls' and communities' quality education. The project aims at supporting girls and communities in education, healthy lifestyle, income generation, improved living conditions and people's participation in decision-making ( in collaboration with ICS-Asia ). The project runs since 2001 till now in 6 provinces: Champasak, Saravan, Sekong, Vientiane, Xieng Khouang and Houaphan. The project provides: (1) buildings for primary schools and kindergarten funded with people's contribution; (2) class-room equipment; (3) clean water and latrine facilities at school and home; (4) Learning equipment, text books, sport equipment and school uniforms; (5) house repairs; (6) mosquito impregnated nets and blankets; (7) the set up of rice banks; cattle banks; family gardens, and fish ponds to provide assistance to people to support their children to attend school.

On general education: The project provides information on healthcare, HIV/AIDS, the rights of the child, gender roles and treatment for students with disabilities, library books, training in farming and livestock breeding, training and creating activities for "friend helping friend "among teenagers and girls at school. The project organises training in gender roles and equality, and children's rights for project targets, village education committees, students' parents and students themselves. So far, 235 people have been trained out of which 103 women and 132 men.

(2) Project for the promotion of basic education for improved quality of life in collaboration with World Concern, running from 2006 to 2011. The project is based in Sekong Province, covering Kaleum and Dak-cheung districts. The project aims at providing informal education for target groups by including vocational training in the project activities.

(3) Project for Development of Community Education Centre. (Japan National Federation of UNESCO Association). The project began its activities in Luang Prabang province with activities such as: building a centre for community education, training administrators of the centre for community education and organising learning and teaching for women. The project also established a revolving fund for adults to have access to capital for their supplementary work to earn extra income for their families. The project has received assistance of USD 24,725. So far, the project has been able to set up 340 community education centres involving 76.600 volunteer teachers.

(4) Pilot project to teach Kammu language to eradicate illiteracy. The project is based in Hinheup District, Vientiane province, with the support from UNESCO in Bangkok of USD 9,000. The project has developed a handbook to improve teaching methods of Lao language for Kammu people so that they can learn the language more rapidly. The outcome of the project shows that it is possible to apply the lessons learned of the pilot project in other Centres for Community Education where there are Kammu communities.

(5) Vocational training for women and the disadvantaged Project in collaboration with the international volunteers of Japan. The project is based in Xieng Khouang, Luang Prabang, Vientiane Province and Vientiane Capital. The training deals with garment work, carpentry, food cooking, beauty salon, flowers making and others with a total budget of USD 218,550.

**18. Please provide updated information on budgetary allocations for the education of women and girls, including the annual percentages of the total national budget allocated, since the consideration of the combined initial through fifth periodic report in 2005.**

During the period 2005-2007, the Government allocated each year a budget for education as follows:

First, the total budget allocated for education in 2004-2005 was 701,650.19 million kip, for women's education 315,461.92 million kip, about 44,96 per cent of the total budget of education sector and about 1,12 per cent of GDP.

Second, the total budget of 2005-2006 allocated for education was 1,008,053.83 million kip, for women's education 454,329.84 million kip, about 45,7 per cent of the total budget allocation for education sector, and about 1,36 per cent of GDP.

Third, in 2006-2007 academic year, the total budget allocated for education was 1,248,417,62 million kip out of which for women's education 5,650,338 million kip equal to 45,26 per cent of the total budget for education and equal to 1,43 per cent of GDP.

The table below shows the details of budget allocated for education in 2001-2007.

Description		00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07
	T	1,173,776	1,248,695	1,307,353	1,358,102	1,397,377	1,424,823	1,449,590
Total	F	524,274	554,130	584,257	609,298	628,281	642,222	656,114
	M	649,502	694,565	723,096	748,804	769,096	782,601	793,476
GDP (millions)		15,885,000.00	17,719,000.00	21,499,000.00	24,621,000.00	28,076,000.00	33,300,000.00	39,492,000.00
Government budget (millions)		3,547,750.00	4,035,000.00	3,821,582.19	5,862,577.39	5,218,925.28	7,006,132.60	5,986,969.50
Education budget total (millions)		312,510.00	422,331.24	464,185.82	597,696.32	701,650.19	1,008,053.83	1,248,417.62
Current education budget (millions)		164,840.00	191,445.51	175,073.30	206,832.02	308,271.72	358,062.94	467,305.51
Investment education (millions)		147,670.00	230,885.73	289,112.52	390,864.30	393,378.47	649,990.89	781,112.11
Unit cost per student		266,243	338,218	355,058	440,097	502,119	707,494	862,221
Total cost for female student as GDP		139,584	187,417	207,445	268,150	315,472	454,368	565,059
% of total cost for female student as GDP		0.88%	1.06%	0.96%	1.09%	1.12%	1.36%	1.43%
% of total cost for female student as Gov. Budget		3.93%	4.64%	5.43%	4.57%	6.04%	6.49%	9.44%
% of total cost for female student as edu. Budget		44.67%	44.38%	44.69%	44.86%	44.96%	45.07%	45.26%

Source: Ministry of Education.



## Health

**19. According to the report, access to health-care services remains a challenge, particularly in the rural areas; health indicators in the Lao People's Democratic Republic mark the lowest standard in the region; maternal and infant mortality rates are high and there are huge gaps between rural and urban areas in respect of access to health care. Since the consideration of the report in 2005, what specific measures have been undertaken by the State party to ensure access to health-care services for women throughout the country, including in rural and remote areas?**

In order to improve the life and health of women, the Government of the Lao PDR has adopted and implemented the following priority work plans with a view to enhancing women's access to health-care services such as:

- a. Campaign on model healthy village establishment as part of the villages or cluster development villages. Campaign on maternal mortality reduction.
- b. Campaign on maternal mortality reduction.
- c. Campaign on increased child survival, especially newborn babies, through intensive care, breastfeeding, comprehensive and safe immunisation, anti-contagious disease treatment.
- d. Campaign on surveillance, prevention and combating pandemic diseases in association with addressing hunger, dehydration and malnutrition.
- e. Campaign on human resource development and competent personnel training as planned.
- f. Campaign on improved institution, mechanism, legislation and planning restructuring.
- g. Campaign on the establishment of sustainable healthcare financial system.
- h. Campaign on the efficient mobilisation of external cooperation, assistance and investment.

**20. Please provide updated information on budgetary allocations for the health of women and girls, including the annual percentages of the total national budget allocated, since the consideration of the combined initial through fifth periodic report in 2005.**

The budget allocated for health care in respect of women and children for the period from 2005 to 2008 is shown on the table below:

Description	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Budget allocated for Mothers' and Children's health care (in million kip)	18,384	21,067	30,530	40,082
Ratio between budget for Mothers' and Children's health care and the total budget of health sector (without ODA)	17.0%	17.5%	17.8%	18.6%
Ratio between budget for Mothers' and Children's health care and total State budget (without ODA)	0.43%	0.40%	0.50%	0.51%
Ratio between budget for Mothers' and Children's health care and GDP(without ODA)	0.054%	0.055%	0.071%	0.079%

It is to be noted that the total budget allocated for mothers' and children's healthcare for 2006-07 was 14% higher than 2005-2006, and for 2007-2008, there was an increase of 44% if compared to 2006-2007, and for 2008-2009, another increase of 31% if compared to previous fiscal year.

Source: Ministry of Public Health

**21. The report indicates (see table 16) that a very high number of women (36,066 out of 114,165 women) gave birth to children at home in 2004 and 2005, without the assistance of a midwife. Further to the Committee's previous concluding comments (see para. 26), please elaborate on concrete steps undertaken to reduce the high maternal and infant mortality rates. In this respect, please provide additional data on the maternal mortality rate, disaggregated by the age of the women, and urban or rural sectors, since the consideration of the combined initial through fifth periodic report in 2005. Please also provide additional data on the infant mortality rate, disaggregated by sex, age and cause of death of the infant.**

The Government has taken the following practical measures to reduce maternal and child mortality rates:

- First, the Government has increased the number of medical kits distributed to villages. In 2006, the number of village medical kits was 5.561, and up to October 2008, the number increased to 5.668, covering 98 per cent of target villages (villages that could not have access to health care services) aimed at addressing health care services for rural and remote people.

- Second, the Government has dispatched trained midwives and child delivery assistant personnel to assist people in giving birth safely at home, at pre-natal and child delivery facilities, and dispensaries (as an alternative to giving birth in the forest practised by ethnic people), at district, provincial and central hospitals.

- Third, the Government has set up mobile medical units to offer free medical check-up and treatment to local people including women namely for cleft palate and cataracts removal operations.

- Fourth, the Government has expanded family planning services to reach out rural and remote ethnic women through training of local personnel for contraceptive distribution. The various forms of contraceptive on offer include condoms, pills and drug injection. One contraceptive distributor is looking after 410 villages. This undertaking has helped rural and remote ethnic women have access to family planning services thus reducing the risk of unwanted pregnancy and child birth. Since 2006 and up to now, there are currently 68 local contraceptive distributors in 8 provinces covering 14 districts thus increasing the family planning ration in rural and remote villages from 0 per cent to at least 28 per cent to 87 per cent.

- Fifth, the Government also mobilizes people to embrace healthy lifestyle; encouraging people and communities to have clean drinking water (boiled water), clean food (well cooked) and sanitation (installation and usage of latrine facilities).

- Sixth, the Government has assisted the people to protect themselves from malaria by distributing 1,19 million impregnated bednets to 3.3 million people in malaria-prone areas.

- Seventh, the Government has organized regular immunization and National Immunization Day for women and children against tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, tuberculosis, measles, hepatitis B and polio; If calculated in percentage, in 2007 and 2008, the number of children having vaccination against tuberculosis was 56 per cent and 68 per cent respectively, against diphtheria and Hepatitis B was 51 per cent and 61 per cent, against measles was 40 per cent and 52 per cent, anti-polio doses 46 per cent and 60 per cent. Nevertheless, in 2007, there was only 27 per cent of children under 1 year old had received a complete set of 8 different vaccinations and only 55.5 per cent of women had received anti-pertussis vaccination, and on the national measles immunization day, 96 per cent of children under one year old had been vaccinated.

- Eighth, the Government has also organized various national immunization day resulting in the reduction of whooping cough, diphtheria, tuberculosis, measles, hepatitis and the total eradication of polio. In percentage, in 2006, BCG covered 100,2 per cent, DTC and hepatitis B 82,2 per cent, polio 81,7 per cent, measles 71,8 per cent. In 2007, the record of vaccination is as follows: DPT3 covered 50 per cent, polio 46 per cent children under 1 year old, 27 per cent had full immunisation, 55,5 per cent of women were vaccinated against tetanus. On the National Vaccination Day, 96 per cent of targeted people were vaccinated against measles in 2007 and 2008.
- Ninth, attention was also paid to solving malnutrition by providing, for example, iodised salt (covered 85 per cent) distributed vitamin A tablets, iron supplement, and worm killer tablets.
- Tenth, 74 per cent of the population has been provided with clean water, 49 per cent of the people have access to latrine facilities, and 19 per cent of schools have latrine facilities.
- Eleventh, the Government has taken measures to combat the outbreak of epidemics, such as avian flu and SARS.
- Twelfth, build and renovate 789 dispensaries nationwide, the majority of which are located in rural areas (approximately 90 per cent).
- Thirteenth, build and renovate hospitals at all levels: It involves 127 district hospitals, 16 provincial and 4 national ones, including 19 renovated and 16 newly built district hospitals, most of them in rural areas. Three newly built provincial hospitals are in Luangnamtha and Vientiane provinces. Further, there have been four regional hospitals which have been renovated and newly built for the Northern part, one in Luang Prabang and the other in Oudomxay (newly built); for the middle part is in Savannaket and for the Southern part is in Champasak (upgraded). The Government has also modernised national hospitals: A new cardiology section has been built and equipped with modern facilities at Mahosot Hospital. In Mittaphab (Friendship) Hospital, one separate building has been renovated and used for avian flu and SARS treatment only. In the mother and child hospital, patient-rooms, operation and post-operation rooms, and rooms for newborn babies have been improved. In the eye hospital, a new additional treatment building has been built and the infrastructure and service techniques of the rehabilitation centre have been modernised. In the dermatology treatment centre, patient rooms have also been renovated.

According to the 2005 census, the children under 1 year mortality rate was 70 per 1,000 newborn, children under five mortality rate was 98 per 1,000. The causes include: non-transmittable diseases, 4 per cent, neonatal 37 per cent, injury 4 per cent acute respiratory infection 17 per cent, diarrhoea 16 per cent, malaria 7 per cent, measles 4 per cent, HIV/AIDS 2 per cent, other infections 9 per cent. Women mortality rates are illustrated in the table below:

Age range	Mortality rates per 1,000
15-19	404.8
20-24	405.2
25-29	405.5
30-34	406.2
35-39	406.8
40-44	400.0
45-49	306.7
15-49	405

**22. In its previous concluding comments, the Committee recommended that the State party should take all measures necessary to raise awareness among men and women especially in rural areas, around construction sites and existing and emerging trade routes, to the risk of HIV/AIDS (see para. 28). According to the report, the number of women infected with HIV/AIDS increases at an average rate of 8 per cent per year. Please provide more information on the implementation of the plans and programmes to combat HIV/AIDS referred to in the report. This should include details on progress, challenges and gaps in implementation, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms established and results achieved. Please indicate whether there are any special measures for prevention in places that target women and what other concrete measures are undertaken by the State party to address the feminization of HIV/AIDS.**

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Lao PDR is still relatively low if compared with neighbouring countries. The Government does, however, consider the prevalence of HIV/AIDS a serious issue affecting the socio-economic development of the country and health of the people. The Government's objective is to keep the level of HIV/AIDS infection to the minimum. Measures taken by the Government include:

First, the Government has appointed the National Committee Against AIDS, chaired by the Minister of Public Health with 13 members from 13 different agencies such as Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Public Work and Transportation, the Central Women's Union, the Trade Union, the Youth Union, the Lao Front for National Construction and the Lao Red Cross. The provincial and district Committees against AIDS are chaired by the deputy governors and deputy district Chief respectively.

Second, the Government has established Anti-AIDS Centre which is under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Health.

Third, the Government has, to this end, taken preventive and curative measures which include the following:

- Check and provide treatment of sexually transmitted diseases for service girls across the country at an interval of 3-6 months.
- Implement a 100 per cent condom project for service girls at entertainment places in 15 provinces.
- Distribute condoms all over the country.
- Set up medical check-up centres for service girls in 4 provinces (Luang Prabang, Vientiane Capital, Savannaket, Champasak).
- Set up health centres for men in 2 provinces (Vientiane Capital and Savannaket).
- Create project volunteer teaching friends for service girls.
- Set up project volunteer teaching friends for homosexuals.
- Organize mobile advocacy campaign on changing behaviour for service girls.
- Expand blood test sites to 91 sites and advisory sites to 16 sites.
- Improve the services related to sexually transmitted diseases in 164 provincial and district hospitals.
- Include anti AIDS program in infrastructure construction projects.

- Raise anti-AIDS awareness for members of National Assembly, officials, academic institutions and private sectors.
- Expand HIV/AIDS carriers networking from 7 provinces to 10 provinces.
- Mobilize the participation of infected persons in awareness-raising.
- Encourage the infected people to participate in the campaign against HIV/AIDS.
- Make use of the belief in Buddhism and Buddha teaching to comfort the moral of infected persons.
- Develop handbook for good behaviour in collaboration with FHI, PSI and LYAP organizations.
- Develop handbook for 100 per cent safe sex by using condoms in accordance with the WHO's guidelines.
- Develop handbook for consultancy services and voluntary blood tests in collaboration with national experts in different agencies hospitals and some provinces.
- Develop handbook for quick blood tests in collaboration with epidemiological centres, the committee's secretariat at provincial level, national hospitals and a number of provincial hospitals.
- Print brochures, caps, T-shirts and posters for dissemination of information against HIV/AIDS.

-Treatment of AIDS with ARV:

- +Expansion of treatment networks with ARV (SVK, VTC, LPB, CPS)
- + Treatment covered more than 60 per cent
- + Develop handbook on ART/OI
- + Organize medical procurement and delivery
- + Collaborate with WHO, MSF and PR for ARV drug procurement centre twice a year.
- + Collaborate with Drug and Medical Equipment Centre for the distribution of ART/OI to various HIV/AIDS treatment Centres.

Fourth, the Government has taken measures on survey and monitoring as follows:

- The third round survey of AIDS infection rates found that the infection rates had reduced from 2,0 per cent in 2004 to 0,4 per cent in 2008
- The survey for infection among homosexuals in 2007 found that the infection rate was 5,6 per cent
- Conducted survey at three national hospitals for the infection rate among pregnant women in 2008 was 0.3 per cent.
- Conducted survey in 2008 for infection rate of STD among drug addicts with chlamydia 13,6 per cent and gonorrhoea 1.1 per cent.

Fifth, the Government's measures on capacity-building for officials include the following:

- Training in estimation of target groups.
- Training in surveillance and monitoring surveys.
- Training in ART/OI for doctors and nurses.
- Training in medicine prescription for the AIDS-infected people.
- Training for the Anti-AIDS committee's secretariat at provincial level and friend — teaching — friend, volunteering in communication to change behaviour.

Sixth, in the field of the International Collaboration

- The Government has received assistance from Anti-HIV/AIDS International Fund for the first, fourth and sixth rounds of Anti-HIV/AIDS campaign.
- The Government also received assistance from the following organizations:
  - ADB – CDC
  - USAID (CDC, FHI, MSH, Clinton Foundation)
  - AUSAID (BI, Albion Street centre)
  - United Nations agencies
  - MSF Suisse and MSF Belgium
  - AFD and others
  - 2006-2008 budget: USD 16,616,835

### **Challenges**

The Government will need effective measures to cope with the following challenges:

- The number of entertainment places such as night clubs have increased.
- Number of drug addicts has increased.
- Increased People's movement heightening the risk of HIV/AIDS infection.
- Data and information about people at high risk is limited.
- Lack of facilities for dissemination of information.
- Misperception among many institutions that combating AIDS is the sole duty of the public health sector.

- Lack of competent personnel.
- Lack of financial resources.
- The treatment by using ARV is relatively new for the anti AIDS Centre.
- Estimation of AIDS infected persons which need ARV still remains an issue.
- The treatment by using ARV needs the cooperation from patients so as to avoid drug resistance.
- Lack of money for transport and diagnosis fees of infected persons.
- The Government's operation against HIV/AIDS in recent years is bearing fruit. Infection has decreased. If the Government has sufficient budget, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS could be contained.

### **Employment, rural women's access to property and poverty**

**23. In its previous concluding comments, the Committee recommended that the State party should study the impact of its economic reforms on women, with a view to improving equality between women and men in the labour market, including strengthening formal and informal mechanisms for the resolution of labour disputes through appropriate representation of women (see para. 34). Please elaborate on the steps undertaken by the State party to implement those recommendations. Please provide details of the sectors where women predominately work and also indicate how occupational segregation, pay inequalities, sexual harassment in the workplace and issues of occupational health and safety of women in both the public and private sectors are being addressed.**

The impact of economic reform on women may be both positive and negative. In general, the implementation of the economic reform policy, switching from centralised planning economic management to market-oriented economic mechanism, and the expansion of the country's global cooperation and integration from 1986 onward have brought about considerable benefits to the entire population, including women. Many of them have become successful businesswomen. In addition, the foreign investment flow into Lao PDR has constantly increased with greater job occupation for Lao labour force. So far, there are 151,906 workplaces, which provided jobs for men and women alike, and some sectors have even employed a large number of female workers; the garment sector, for example, has employed more women than anywhere else. There are currently 27,525 persons working in the garment sector including 22,202 female workers equal to 80 per cent and 5,505 male workers equal to 20 per cent. Nevertheless, the economic reform policy also has negative impacts on society, including on women. The expansion of international economic cooperation has created favourable conditions for national socio-economic development, (90 per cent of government development projects are funded by international assistance) whereas the economic development has created more freedom for women to choose their life pattern, jobs, business opportunities and others. While all these activities have brought about great benefits to the Lao nation and women, there are also a considerable number of people, especially women and children being exposed to the risk of human trafficking, prostitution and other criminal acts: Many of them have fallen victims of human trafficking, forced labour and trade in prostitution. They are at risk of falling victims to human trafficking, forced labour and prostitution.

The Government's policy is focused on promotion of gender equality in all sectors. All sectors are open for men and women to apply without discrimination. According to laws and practices, both men and women receive the same salaries and wages for work of the same value. For example, director-generals of departments in a government agency receive the same salaries regardless of their sex. In addition, the labour law has defined provisions for the protection of women, such as Article 38 which prohibits employing pregnant women to work in certain areas; Article 39 allows a woman to take leave before or after giving birth to a child and Article 41 provides conditions for employing children with a certain limit of ages and working hours. On occupational health and safety, the Lao PDR has put in place a social insurance system for public servants and enterprise employees. Any company that has employees from ten persons upward has to join the social

insurance system to insure the health care of its employees. Any violation of the rules may be filed with the authority concerned. For instance, in 2008, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare received a complaint from a woman stating that she was laid off from work while being pregnant for 7 months. According to Lao Labour law, in such a case, the employer must pay compensation to the plaintiff. For Labour dispute, the Labour Law serves as an important instrument for dispute settlement. The Criminal Law and the Law on the Development and Protection of Women will come into play for addressing cases of violence against women, including sexual abuses and harassment at work places.

**24. According to the report, villagers, especially the poor, do not have opportunities for self-development and do not have access to social-economic services, such as self-help funding, education and health care. In this regard, please provide data and trends showing the rates of rural women's educational levels, health-related issues and access to health services, the nature of their participation in the formal and informal labour sectors and access to loans and financial credit. What steps has the State party undertaken to improve women's access to economic opportunities such as production capital, market information and production technologies?**

Government's measures taken for facilitating women's access to education and health care, and the trend of women's education have been already elaborated in the answers to question numbers 17 and 21 above. Nevertheless, additional explanation is given hereunder:

First, over the past recent years, the Government has concentrated a large amount of resources on the development of education focusing on development of curriculum and necessary infrastructure so that the educational sector is improved in both quantity and quality. This goes hand in hand with the promotion of gender equality in getting access to socio-economic services, including educational services. The rate of women's literacy had progressively increased from 47,9 per cent in 1995 to 63,2 per cent in 2005. However, the results of the 2005 census conducted by the Statistics Department, Ministry of Planning and Investment indicated that there remains a big gap between the women's and men's literacy rate. The number of both male and female enrolment has a direct influence on their literacy ability. For example, the literacy rate of men from the age of 15 and above in urban areas (92,4 per cent) is higher than that of women in the same areas (84,5 per cent). Similarly the literacy rate of rural men from the age of 15 and above (77,1 per cent) is also higher than that of rural women of the same age (54,0 per cent). These figures also indicate that the literacy rate of urban men and women is higher than those in rural areas.

Second, access to health services has already been elaborated above. In its overall policy, the Government has outlined a strategy for health care development with a strong emphasis on protecting people's health while taking account prevention as main task and treatment as vital. This will go hand in hand with the expansion of the health service network across the country so that everybody can have access to health services and be in good health for active participation in the socio-economic development of the country.

Third, measures taken for access to credit. The Government has made great efforts to create opportunities and conditions for people of all ethnic groups particularly the poor and women, to have access to financial and banking services, by providing small loans or credits. Beginning in 2003/04 the National Assembly has approved a fund with an amount of 25 billion kip for the establishment of village development funds in 47 priority poorest districts. In 2004-05, 2005-06 fiscal years, the NA also adopted an additional fund of 10 billion kip, and in 2006-07, 9,5 billion kip for those village development funds. The objective of establishing such a fund is to create favourable conditions for poor people, especially women, to have access to credits and resources for production. In addition, the Agricultural Development Bank provides opportunities for farmers to have access to capital for production. In 2007, the Government established Nayobay Bank in order to provide loans to poor people, including women, focusing on 47 targeted poor districts. In addition, the mass organisations, particularly, the Lao Women's Union, has mobilised and encouraged the establishment of saving funds so as to provide opportunities for business people to have access to capital for production in different sectors, such as handicraft, livestock breeding, crop cultivation and other kinds of services.



Fourth, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare has cooperated with the International Labour Organisation to implement a project for the prevention of trafficking in women and children in five provinces in the Middle and Southern parts of the country covering 23 districts and 95 targeted villages and 40 non-target villages. To this end, village development funds have been established to prevent labour outflow to Thailand as well as to combat human trafficking and to alleviate poverty in the targeted areas. The establishment of village development funds, which have saved up to 10,500,000,000 kip equivalent to USD 125,000. It has 15,681 members, of which 7,467 members are women. The fund pursues a policy of providing zero interest on loans to the poorest families, who borrowed money for medical treatment of their family members. This has resulted in a 40 per cent reduction of labour outflow in target provinces to foreign countries. In short, the Government has devoted its limited resources coupled with the mobilisation of domestic resources as well as donated resources from foreign countries or development partners to improve and construct necessary infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, dispensaries/medical kits, bridges, roads, irrigation systems and other basic facilities to create favourable conditions for the people to have wide access to economic and social services thus improving people's to people's contact, trade exchange and living conditions of the people.

Fifth, the Government has also taken measures in the field of agriculture and forestry. The agriculture and forestry sector has been pro-active in the attempt to eradicate poverty, participating actively in the implementation of the strategy for comprehensive development in rural areas where there are focal development projects for women.

- The agriculture and forestry sector is resolved to turning subsistence crop cultivation and livestock farming and forestry along with producers' organization to boost production.
- The sector also collaborates with the industrial manufacturing sector to promote the processing of agricultural products to add value to agricultural and forestry products. This will help create more jobs, reduce unemployment of urban women and effectively increase working time of rural women.
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Central Bank of Lao PDR, the Ministry of Telecommunication, Transportation, Post and Construction, the Lao Women's Union, and local administrations, supports the production in the fields of cultivation farming, livestock breeding and forestry as well as marketing by providing information on marketing. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has also improved transportation, storage, processing techniques, skills in production and packaging and loan provision.
- It has also promoted income generation by increasing production of crop cultivation and livestock and through the organisation of integrated producers groups. To set up technical promotion system, transfer of technology as well as import services for production (breeds, fertiliser, pesticide, machinery) while paying attention to developing training curricula suitable to each target with special attention to women and ethnic groups.

**25. According to the report, poverty is mostly found in rural and remote areas, especially among women. In its previous concluding comments, the Committee urged the State party to accelerate its plan to eradicate poverty among women, especially rural and ethnic minority women, by seeking international assistance more actively and, at the same time, by applying gender perspectives in all development programmes and fully integrating women into decision-making on those programmes and in their implementation processes (see para. 22). Please elaborate on measures undertaken by the State party to implement those recommendations. What has the state party done to ensure that ethnic minority women who depend on opium poppy production are provided with alternative and sustainable means of livelihood?**

Most elements of this question have largely been explained in the answer to question No. 24 above. Additional information may include the following points: (1) Some measures taken to reduce poverty; (2) the participation of women in decision-making and implementation in respect to development planning; (3) solutions to the opium cultivation issue.

First, over the past years, besides the building of infrastructure and other facilities for the development and enhancement of living conditions of the people, the Government has created conditions for and allowed women to participate in the economic and social development on equal terms with men. In addition, women are allowed to have equal access to training to upgrade their knowledge and skills so as to effectively develop themselves, their families, the organization and communities.

Second, in 2002, the Government set up a fund for poverty alleviation worth USD 20,67 million, the operation of which has begun in 3 provinces. They include Houaphanh, Savannakhet and Champasak, covering 14 districts by providing funds for 409 projects. So far, the operation of the fund has expanded to Xiengkhouang and Xekong Provinces now totalling 5 provinces covering 20 districts in which there are 1,913 villages, 781 out of which are poor villages. The objectives of the project activities aim at building infrastructure in rural areas which include schools, health care centres and medical kits, small scale irrigations, rural roads and bridges. In addition, there are other activities designed for earning additional incomes such as weaving works and so on. The project phase II of the fund will run from 2009 to 2011 and has been supported by the World Bank and the Swedish International Development Assistance, worth USD19,8 million, USD15 million of which is the World Bank's grant. In this phase, the operation of the fund extends to one more province-Luang Namtha Province. This amount of fund was provided for the continuation of the activities that have been implemented from phase I of the project. So far 19 out of the 47 poorest districts of the Government's development priority have been covered by the operation of the fund for poverty alleviation.

Third, following the adoption by the NA of the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) in 2003, the Government has adopted four sectors: Agriculture, Education, Public health and Infrastructure (Transportation) as main sectors to boost economic growth and help eradicate poverty and promote investment. The Ministry of Planning and Investment collaborates with those four sectors and the Steering Committee for Rural Development as well as with relevant sectors at provincial level, organised training in the formulation of plans of action for participatory development of cluster villages for government officials concerned at district level, which include planning, agriculture, education, health, industrial, handicrafts and commerce, energy and mining, tourism, labour and social welfare. The training emphasises the importance of gender roles by encouraging the promotion of women's participation in the processing of data and information collection and analyses, as well as in the process of priority or activities formulation for the development of a village group and alleviation of poverty. Knowledge and skills learned from the training have since been put into practice in targeted village groups in those targeted provinces and districts. So far, 68 village groups in 57 poor districts of the 72 completed the formulation of such plans of action. The formulation of a participatory plan of action has given women opportunities to participate equally with men in the elaboration and decision making in respect of such plans of action. In doing so, women have become more apt to understand their roles, more confident and more pro-active to participate in the process of formulating plans for socio-economic development. In addition, the Ministry of Planning and Investment has worked closely with the Lao Women's Union and other relevant agencies and local administration to integrate gender roles into the National Strategy for Socio-Economic Development and their own development plans, at the same time gradually building capacity for women.

Fourth, the National Commission for Drugs Control has adopted the National Strategy for Drugs Control in the Lao PDR with the introduction of ways and means to stop opium growing by implementing the NGPES and poverty eradication programmes for opium growing substitution. The activities to be done include: (1) formulation of a general national development strategy which will do away with opium growing and which will be carried out by a strong implementing centre at district level; (2) Establishing a development fund for the purpose of developing opium growing alternatives; (3) providing various technical personnel for such centres, for example, personnel dealing with financial and income generation matters. Rural areas such as Yort-ou and Samphanh districts of Phongsaly province, Xaysomboun, Vientiane province, Vieng Phoukha, Luang Numtha, Mueng District in Bokeo, Khamkeut, Vieng Xay, Viengthong and Samtay districts in Huaphanh and other poor districts in other provinces are the targets of these activities.

## Vulnerable groups of women

**26. Given that, according to the report, the Lao People's Democratic Republic is one of the most multi-ethnic nations in the world, with 49 official ethnic groups, please provide more information on the human rights situation of women belonging to ethnic and minority groups, in respect of education, employment, health-related issues and access to health services, access to land rights and protection from violence. Similar information should be provided in respect of women belonging to other vulnerable groups, including elderly women and disabled women.**

Regarding the education, employment and access to health care of the people of all ethnic groups, especially vulnerable groups of women, the Government of the Lao PDR has the following comments and explanations:

First, the Lao PDR does not consider any Lao ethnic groups as ethnic minorities. The Government policy on socio-economic development has been designed to create benefits equally enjoyed by all ethnic groups of Laos. All ethnic groups have the same civil and political and economic, social and cultural rights. The implementation of the programme for poverty alleviation is a good example. The programme has been designed with a view to bringing development to all villages and village groups which have been identified as programme targets: the poorest villages and village groups. The qualification for the priority of development is the degree of poverty, not the ethnicity of the people. All members of a targeted village, for instance, will equitably and equally enjoy the benefits from development projects, education, health care, development funds, loans and others, without discrimination as to their ethnic origins.

Second, all 49 ethnic groups have equally benefited from the various development projects, programmes and measures specified above in accordance with their priorities. In education, a centre for the promotion of education for women, ethnic people and persons with disabilities has been established. In implementing educational policy towards women and ethnic people, the Ministry of Education has set up a number of education projects such as vocational and upgrading training for ethnic people, a project for the promotion of basic education on quality of life. The Ministry has also organised training on quality of life. The Ministry has also trained teachers who are of ethnic origins to meet the needs for teachers in rural areas where a mixture of people of many ethnic groups exist.

Third, since 1995 the National Land Title Authority has carried out the programme of Land titling (phase I (1995-2003) and phase II (2003-2008)). As of 2006, the project had issued 393200 land title certificates for the people, in which 142276 certificates belonged to women, equivalent to 36,18 per cent. The programme of land titling is being carried out from urban to rural and from lowland to highland areas. In rural areas which the programme operation has not covered, the Government pursued a policy of entrusting local administrations to authorise the use of land to people so that they can work on the land for their living and look after the forest in accordance with the Government's policy.

Fourth, in respect of women with disabilities, the Government has also pursued a policy of promotion of their rights. The Government has established the National Commission for persons with disabilities, approved the establishment of the Association of Disabled Persons, established Vocational Training Centres for people with disabilities in the country (one in Luang Prabang, one in Savannaket, one in Champasak and two in the Capital), one among which is for women with disabilities. The Government has also managed to have a rehabilitation centre for the disabled. The Government takes the responsibility for the basic living needs of women who have been disabled by their involvement in battle fields or serving in the national struggle. Their families will be responsible for their additional needs. In respect of children with disabilities, the Ministry of Education has created learning and teaching programme for mixed students between normal children and children with disabilities. There is also a project at a Rehabilitation Centre which deals with the care for and providing education for people with disabilities.

Despite these efforts, the Government is encountering difficulties in respect of taking care of people with disabilities who live in remote rural areas. Elderly women and women in remote rural areas without road access are facing difficult problems: they cannot help themselves when they get sick and lack resources for making their living. Women with disabilities have difficulties to move around because of lack of facilities to assist namely sticks, wheel chairs and so on.

**27. Taking into account Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), please indicate whether both women and men war veterans have benefited from equal recognition and rehabilitation, including medical care.**

To this question the Government has the following explanation:

Women who had joined the national revolution from 1954 to 1975 enjoy the benefits provided by the decree No. 343/PM of 25 September 2007, under which the State shall provide land, houses, or fund a part of building or fixing houses and vehicles for people falling in the category mentioned above. Besides this, the Government has also collaborated with the Veteran Association to implement a project dealing with the care of and assistance to elderly women. The Decree mentioned above applies equally to all persons in these categories without any discrimination as to ethnic origins or other prohibited discrimination; but according to their works and services in the course of revolutionary struggle.

The Government has also issued another Decree No 70/PM on the state social insurance Regime. According to Decree, the members of the State social insurance regime shall benefit from it. For example, they may receive treatment, health rehabilitation, artificial organs such as sticks, wheel chairs, transportation fees, and other things. These are provided for free to them by the Government. Besides, they shall be treated equally like other government officials.

Regarding the special disabled persons, the government has special treatment such as providing new houses one story villa with two bedrooms equipped with sitting room, kitchen and bathroom, one house for each person, and one caretaker paid by the State.

### **Marriage and family relations**

**28. According to the report, article 17 of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women provides that men and women have the right to marry at 18 years of age, and that, in special and necessary cases, the limit may be lowered to less than 18 years of age, but not less than 15 years of age. In its previous concluding comments, the Committee recommended that the State party should prohibit under-age marriage in all circumstances (see para. 38). Please indicate any steps taken to raise the minimum age of marriage for both boys and girls to 18 years in order to bring it in line with article 16 of the Convention, and the Committee's general recommendation No. 21, and whether a timetable has been established for enacting such an amendment. Furthermore, please inform the Committee of the extent of the practice *mia noi* (minor wife) in the State party, despite polygamy being formally prohibited.**

On marriage and family relations, the Government agency concerned has the following explanation that Article 17 of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women does not have provision dealing with such special circumstances whereas the Family Law No. 07/90 ISPA of 29 November 1990 does have provisions dealing with such special situation. The 2008 amended family Law, No. 05/NA of 26 July 2008 repeals the provisions regarding this special situation so as to be in line with Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Focus of Discrimination Against Women. Regarding the question of mistress or so-called minor wife, it is illegal under Lao PDR's Law.

### **Optional Protocol and the amendment of article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention**

**29. Please indicate any progress made towards ratification of or accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention and acceptance of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, as recommended by the Committee in its previous concluding observations (see para. 41).**

In respect of the Optional Protocol, the Lao NCAW is considering the possibility of its participation in it; As to the amendment of Article 20, it is under the consideration of technical experts whose findings would be submitted later.