



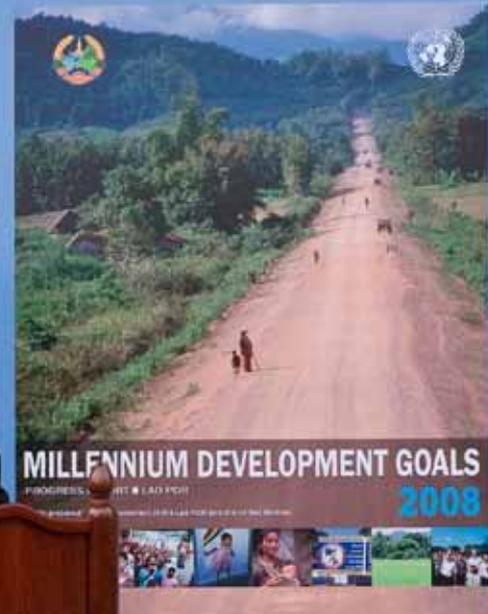
United Nations

Working for Lao PDR

Issue 2 June 2009

UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-moon visits Lao PDR

UN House
Vientiane
Lao PDR
11 April 2009
MDGs Progress Report



Features

Page 3 **Government and UN launch MDG Progress Report at UN House**



Page 7 **UN Focus on Youth**



UN Secretary-General “optimistic that Lao PDR will achieve its national development goals”

United Nations Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-moon made an official visit to the Lao PDR on 10 and 11 April, the first by any Secretary-General in nearly a quarter of a century. Speaking at an event in Vientiane to launch the mid-term Millennium Development Goals Progress Report and inaugurate the newly-completed UN House, Mr Ban Ki-moon said that he is optimistic that the Lao PDR will meet its national development goals - to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to graduate from Least Developed Country status by its target date of 2020. The Secretary-General congratulated the Government on its commitment to achieving the MDGs and the steady progress made in improving health, education and living standards. “There is a great deal to celebrate – but there is also cause for concern,” he said, as he stressed the scale of the challenges still to be addressed. Working in the country for over 50 years, the United Nations has built a longstanding relationship as a trusted and impartial partner of the Lao PDR.

Celebrating UN-Lao cooperation



The UN Secretary-General held talks with His Excellency Mr Choummaly Sayasone, President of the Lao PDR, and senior Government members

At the inauguration of the new UN House, HE Dr Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR, noted that over the course of almost six decades, Lao-UN cooperation has expanded to many areas that are priorities for the national development strategy of the Lao PDR such as education, health, agriculture, capacity building, infrastructure development and rural development as well as addressing poverty of communities, human development, and management of the environment and natural resources.

Under its current United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), the UN has committed to bringing US\$190.6 million to the country over the five years from 2007 to 2011.

Global crisis growth

During his visit to the Lao PDR, Mr Ban Ki-moon emphasised that he shares the concerns of the Government, UN agencies and development partners about the potential effects of the global financial and economic crisis on Laos and other developing countries. He announced that at the recent G-20 Summit in London, the United Nations played a central role in securing a substantial package of financial support - a total of US\$1.1 trillion – for developing countries to mitigate the impacts of the crisis.

The impact of the current economic crisis has so far been relatively limited in the Lao PDR due to its relatively low integration into the global and regional economy. However, as the global crisis deepens, the likelihood increases that the country will suffer. Evidence indicates that GDP growth has already begun to decline with more significant declines expected over the coming months. Likely declines in foreign direct investment could exacerbate this trend. Increased numbers of returning migrant workers would mean reduced remittances, as well as placing additional burden on rural families. All of this could negatively impact jobs, incomes and rural livelihoods, which in turn would further impact such critical areas as nutrition, health, and education.

In this context, continued success in poverty reduction in Laos will depend largely on how far the benefits of economic growth extend to all parts of society and to people in remote regions. One of the Lao PDR's major



UN House seen from Patouxai monument

underlines the need for with equity



"In these times of global financial turmoil, social protection is all the more important. Safety nets catch those most at risk. And that helps maintain progress."

Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, speaking at the 2008 MDG Progress Report Launch and inauguration of UN House

His Excellency Dr Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-moon launch the 2008 MDG Progress Report for Lao PDR

achievements in recent years has been in sustaining economic growth, with real GDP growth of 7 percent and above. Mr Ban Ki-moon congratulated the Government on this achievement, but stressed "Laos will have to do more than just increase growth. It will have to focus on the quality and sustainability of that growth".

Improving the quality of growth will require much greater investments in human development, the social sectors and environmental sustainability. In this regard, the preparations of the next National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) will be crucial. A much greater focus will need to be placed on eliminating hunger and malnutrition; reducing maternal mortality; and further improving health and education indicators.

Given the potential impact of the unfolding global financial crisis, a key response will be greater investments in social protection. An urgent priority is to put in place well-designed and effective social safety nets to assist those most vulnerable and protect the valuable socio-economic gains achieved in recent years. Attracting high quality foreign direct investment will also be important in transferring valuable skills, creating sustainable jobs and safeguarding the country's valuable environmental treasure chest.

Mr Ban applauded the fact that "Laos is increasingly governed by the rule of law and its accountability systems are growing stronger". The Government's progressive alignment with international legal obligations demonstrate its commitment to the human aspects of development; to protecting vulnerable groups; and to people's participation. It will be important for these obligations to be reflected in the next NSEDP and continue to be operationalised in national and sub-national policies and programmes.

The Secretary General also urged the Lao PDR to focus greater attention on environmental sustainability, as economic activities linked to the country's natural resources impact on environmental quality and livelihoods. He reiterated the importance of addressing climate change, and the need for the G-20 stimulus package to be a "Green New Deal" to address climate change. It is hoped that a high-level meeting on climate change planned in September 2009 will increase momentum towards reaching agreement on a post-Kyoto protocol in Copenhagen at the end of this year.

In the Lao PDR, the upcoming Round Table Implementation Meeting in October provides an excellent opportunity for the Government, the UN and other development partners to coordinate with each other to build consensus on these and other development challenges and to promote harmonisation in approaches. The challenge is therefore now even greater, to ensure that there is no regression on the improvements achieved in social and economic development, and that positive momentum is not only maintained but accelerated.

The MDGs in Lao PDR: Review of Progress

The 2008 MDG Progress Report for Lao PDR shows a mixed picture: while significant progress was made on many targets since release of the first MDG report in 2004, other targets require urgent attention and increased investments in order for them to be met by 2015.

As the newly released Progress Report shows, the country's achievements to date are significant. In recent years, Lao PDR has successfully achieved real GDP growth that is close to 8 percent per annum. This is better than the economic performance of other land-locked, Least Developed Countries in the Asia-Pacific region. As a result, poverty declined steadily from 46 percent to 33 percent in 1992-2002 and the country is on course to halve poverty by 2015. This, and increases in primary net enrolment, reduction in child mortality, action against tuberculosis and malaria and increased access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation in urban areas count among the greatest achievements to date. These achievements are inspiring and must be consolidated between now and 2015.

On the other hand, there are numerous targets and indicators, which require urgent increased attention and investments in order for them to be met by the target year.

There has, for example, been little reduction in the extent of **child malnutrition** since 1990. Despite

considerable efforts, 38 percent of children under-five years of age are underweight and 41 percent of the children in the same age group suffer from chronic malnutrition. The Government is addressing this serious challenge through the preparation of a National Nutrition Policy and a National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action to promote food security and nutritional well-being.

Although access to **education** has improved, there are strong disparities between the sexes, rural and urban populations and Lao versus non-Lao native speakers as regards enrolment, retention and completion rates. The quality of education remains a major concern. To respond to these constraints and disparities, the Ministry of Education has developed an Education Sector Development Framework which represents a systemic approach to reforming the education sector.

In the 10 year period 1995-2005, the share of **women** in wage employment increased by less than 1 percentage point per year. Although there has been an increase in women's political representation at the national level, it is unclear to what extent policy priorities have shifted as a result, and this national trend has not yet been extended to the sub-national levels, where the real rigidities on gender roles may lie. Violence against women and other gender-based abuse continue to be

Ms Sonam Yangchen Rana, UN Resident Coordinator in the Lao PDR, and His Excellency Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, welcome UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-moon to UN House

"The Secretary-General's attendance at this Millennium Development Goals Progress Report launch underlines the global community's commitment to assisting the Government of the Lao PDR to achieve sustainable and quality development."

Ms Sonam Yangchen Rana,
UN Resident Coordinator in the Lao PDR, speaking at the
MDG Progress Report Launch and inauguration of UN
House, Vientiane



areas of concern. The Lao National Commission for the Advancement of Women continues to work together with the Lao Women's Union works to promote gender equality and non-discrimination, and support fulfillment of the Government's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Access to, and quality of, **health** care varies significantly by location and among income groups, with an increasing private expenditure burden for health care presenting a particular challenge. The improvement in child mortality indicators is not matched by regular progress in immunisation of 1-year old children against measles.



According to national estimates, the **maternal mortality** ratio declined from 650 to 405 deaths per 100,000 live births in the period 1995 to 2005, but remains at an unacceptably high level. The current low levels of investment in the health sector, coupled with the fact that the proportion of births attended by skilled birth attendants increased by less than 5 percentage points between 1994 and 2005, make further reduction of maternal mortality a challenge. In response to this situation, the Ministry of Health has launched a multipronged National Strategy and Strategic Plan for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) Integrated Service Delivery Package; an ambitious initiative to increase both the provision of, and demand for quality maternal, newborn and child health care.

The Report also found that Lao PDR's forest resources that once covered about 70 percent of the total land area had declined to 42 percent by 2002. Hunting, illegal trade and gathering in addition to the loss of habitat is having a detrimental effect on the Lao PDR's

wildlife. The Government has enacted a wide array of legislation, regulations and action plans for **environmental conservation and protection**. However the capacity of various institutions to implement and enforce environmental regulations, as well as environmental action plans, needs strengthening.

In addition to advancing the MDGs, improvements in these areas are essential to achieving the country's goal of graduating from LDC status by 2020, as many of the MDG targets are directly relevant to criteria for exiting LDC status. In order to achieve these overarching objectives, far greater investments are required to implement policy commitments in human development, the social sector and environmental sustainability.

MDG Strategy

The Government of Lao PDR with support from the UN Country Team is developing a **MDG Strategy** to identify how to accelerate progress towards achievement of the MDGs by 2015. This MDG Strategy will be a key tool for the Government to address the recommendations of the MDG Progress Report and to implement the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) 2011-2015.

The Strategy recommends building on existing work in key areas:

- Continued support to the Sector Working Groups;
- Localising human development efforts using proven integrated services models;
- Large scale 'green jobs' which address poverty, and promote adaptation to climate change;
- Effective social safety net programmes targeting the most vulnerable groups;
- Strengthened governance, fiscal space, and partnership arrangements.

The MDG Strategy complements the Government's **7th Plan costing** initiative currently underway. Led by the Ministry of Planning and Investment, this initiative will determine the total public expenditure required for supporting social development and achieving the MDGs by 2015. While the MDG Strategy will look at *how* to achieve the MDGs, identifying policy constraints and opportunities; the 7th Plan costing will determine *what and how much* is required to implement the NSED 2011-2015 including achieving the MDGs.

Delivering as One



After the official inauguration of UN House on 11 April, more than 200 UN staff members from all agencies working in the Lao PDR participated in a Staff Forum held in the open-air courtyard of the newly-completed building in Vientiane, which provides working space for nine UN agencies.

Mr Ban Ki-moon championed UN Reform, and shared his hopes that, while the Lao PDR is not a pilot One UN country, the new shared premises would further encourage staff to work together across agency boundaries in order to deliver as one. Globally, regionally and locally, the UN is making more effort to work as one towards its primary goal to make people's lives better. He also emphasized the need for the UN to work effectively on issues including the impacts of the global financial crisis and climate change.

Mr Ban urged the UN Country Team under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator to continue working together with a strong collaborative spirit according to the Vientiane Declaration, to support the Government to achieve the national goals to meet the MDGs and exit Least Developed Country status.

Questions and answers: staff discussions with Mr Ban Ki-moon at the Staff Forum

Staff member: "What do you see as the main challenge in further implementing the One UN concept?"

Mr Ban Ki-moon: "How to use always limited resources in the most effective and most productive way – that is our challenge. But with your commitment we can do this. With the combined resources and your effort jointly consolidated, we can deliver as one, and the delivery can be different. These combined premises will provide a good synergy so that you can work as one team. This is the theme of this era."

Staff member: "What would be your vision as to how the UN can help cope with the global economic crisis?"

Mr Ban Ki-moon: "For you to work as one team and One UN, that's the best way to overcome this financial crisis. That is the best way for your work to make a difference."

Staff member: "Your work ethics and motivation are admired. What is your advice to us on the ground so that we can be better motivated?"

Mr Ban Ki-moon: "Even though you have been working in the area for many years, try to be motivated and try to be creative, and try to be different every day. Just think every morning whether there is any room for improvement, and you will try harder."

Lao youth: coming to terms with new opportunities

With 60 percent of the Lao population aged 24 or under, young people constitute a large yet vulnerable group. In pace with the nation's rapid development, and changes in traditional social and family structures, many young people are now facing both new opportunities, and risks for which they are often ill-prepared.

In the area of youth issues, as well as of UXO, human trafficking, gender and rural development, the UN in the Lao PDR works in partnership with the mass organisations, which currently undertake much of the work otherwise done by civil society organisations, in order to ensure that the fruits of development reach the people in most need.

During his time in the Lao PDR, the UN Secretary-General had the opportunity to visit the Vientiane Youth Centre. Mr Ban learned about the work of UN-supported youth services throughout the country, and met some of the young people involved at the Centre as peer educators and phone counsellors. Established in 2001, the Vientiane Youth Centre is a ground-breaking initiative of the Lao Women's Union, supported by the UN and other agencies. It aims to support young people to develop the life skills they need to protect themselves from social and health related risks, act as an information hub, and advocate the issues impacting on young people to policy makers. With assistance from the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UNICEF, and support from Oxfam Novib (Netherlands) and the Japanese Embassy, the Centre pioneers innovative, youth-friendly services using creative media such as a gender specific telephone hotline, a clinic providing reproductive health services, and peer-to-peer education on reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and other issues.

Through discussions with young users of the Centre and other youth-related initiatives such as the vocational training activities of the UNODC-supported Somsanga drug treatment centre, the Secretary-General got a first-hand impression how the UN is reaching out to young people in Lao PDR. He welcomed the commitment and enthusiasm of the people who greeted him and the positive effects of collaborative work of UN Agencies and development partners in support of youth capacity development and empowerment.



Mr Ban Ki-moon applauds AIDS awareness efforts and support for young people in Laos



"I am very much impressed by all that you are doing to help young people of Laos, to teach them awareness and the importance of prevention of HIV/AIDS," the Secretary General told two young reporters from a UNICEF-supported youth radio programme who interviewed him during his visit to the Vientiane Youth Centre.

Pointing out that the global campaign against HIV/AIDS was a UN priority, Mr Ban applauded the young counsellors and volunteers whom he met for their active engagement in addressing stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS.

Lao PDR's large young population is reaching an age where they are looking for jobs and starting their reproductive lives. Making serious investments now in education, social support and employment growth in the country will be essential to open opportunities for the new generation to become the engine of Lao PDR's social and economic growth into the future.



United Nations

Working for Lao PDR

The United Nations in the Lao PDR

Laos joined the United Nations in 1955, with the first UN agency office established in Vientiane in 1957.

The United Nations Country Team Commitment to the Lao PDR

The United Nations Country Team in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is committed to supporting the efforts of the Government to improve the life of all citizens, especially those most vulnerable. We shall continue to work closely with the Government and all development partners for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Our collective endeavour is to assist the people of Lao PDR to achieve progress and better standards of living for all.

UN agencies collaborate in Sector Working Groups in order to deliver the most effective support to the Government in the areas of Health, Education, Poverty Reduction, Governance and HIV and AIDS, along with the cross-cutting issues of Human Trafficking, Gender and Statistical Indicators.

United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the Lao PDR (2007-2011)

UN Country Team in the Lao PDR

ORC Office of the UN Resident Coordinator

Resident UN Agencies

ADB Asian Development Bank
FAO Food and Agriculture Organization
IMF International Monetary Fund
IOM International Organization for Migration
UNAIDS Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCDF United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA United Nations Population Fund
UN-HABITAT United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNIFEM United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNODC United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNV United Nations Volunteers
WB World Bank
WFP World Food Programme
WHO World Health Organization

Non-Resident UN Agencies

ESCAP United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
IFAD International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO International Labour Organization
ITC International Trade Centre
ITU International Telecommunications Union
OCHA Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNCRD United Nations Centre for Regional Development
UNCTAD United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR United Nations High Commission for Refugees



The UN Secretary-General with His Excellency Mr Somsavat Lengsavad, Standing Deputy Prime Minister of the Lao PDR

"I know that you are concerned about the global financial crisis, and how it could affect life here in Laos. I share your concern.

That is why I used my recent visit to the G-20 Summit to sound the alarm about the world's most vulnerable people. I wanted to make sure that leaders in London did not forget subsistence farmers in Laos. I called for a truly global stimulus that advanced the interests of all nations."

UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-Moon,
Speaking at UN House, Vientiane, April 2009

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