On the 20th October 2010 the Government of Lao PDR, United Nations and development partners signed an MDG Compact in support of the full achievement of the MDGs in Lao PDR by 2015. The Compact also incorporated the newly designated Lao specific MDG 9 on the reduction of UXO impacts by 2020. The signing ceremony took place at the Round Table Meeting in Vientiane where national development priorities for the coming years were discussed under the theme, ‘Growth with Equity’.

With just 5 years left to achieve the MDGs the focus now is on addressing the key priority areas. In the past two decades Lao PDR has seen significant progress in the areas of poverty eradication, access to safe drinking water and infant and child mortality rates. At the same time economic growth has averaged 7.9 percent over the past 5 years. But the links between the two are not always clear. The challenge now is to ensure that the development progress reaches the unreached and that the marginalized and impoverished also benefit.

continued on page 2
**MDG Summit in New York, September 2010**

“Only five years remain for us to prove that we can live up to our joint commitment to achieve the MDGs”

- H.E. Choummaly Sayasone, President of Lao PDR

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**10th Round Table Meeting sets the way forward**

The significance of the high-level October Round Table Meeting (RTM) in Vientiane was highlighted by the presence of the UNDG Chair and UNDP Administrator, Helen Clark. The RTM is the primary platform for dialogue between the Government and its development partners on national development priorities. Over 130 countries contributed to the development dialogue, which under the leadership of the Government and with UN support reached the consensus of, ‘Growth with Equity’.  

**National Development Plans & UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) aligned to tackle key development priorities**

The Government of Lao PDR’s 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) for 2011-15 is MDG based and will provide a major opportunity to make even greater progress towards achieving the MDGs by 2015. Lao PDR is one of the first countries to fully integrate the MDGs into its NSEDP.  

To ensure the most effective and coordinated support to the 7th NSEDP, the UN and Government started the process of developing the new UNDAF in March 2010. The UNDAF will focus the UN’s key priority areas of support based on UN expertise and strengths to further the impact of development work over the coming 5-years.  

At a November 2010 meeting the Government and UN counterparts identified five key areas; inclusive and sustainable economic growth, governance, investing in human development, natural resources management and UXO.  

A UN action plan will be integrated into the early development of the UNDAF to ensure a more results based focus. This will help for clearer accountability and stronger partnerships to achieve the development targets.  

The effective implementation of the 7th NSEDP and UNDAF will not only help the country in attaining the MDGs but will also advance the nation’s other long-standing goal of graduating from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2020.  

**MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF) to help reach the unreached**

The President of Lao PDR, Choummaly Sayasone, officially launched the MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF) at the September 2010 MDG Summit in New York, which marked the 10th anniversary of the Millennium Declaration. Lao PDR was selected as a pilot country for the MAF that focuses attention on off track areas, such as food security, nutrition and gender issues.  

The Framework builds on initiatives that are already in place or planned for Lao PDR. It aims to ensure that socially and geographically disadvantaged communities are given the opportunity and capability to play their role in the development agenda.  

The MAF presents a range of targeted innovative options. By identifying obstacles, which prevent progress on achieving the MDGs, the MAF offers solutions to overcome them. The key areas covered include sectors such as, infrastructure, energy, sustainable agriculture, environmental management, education, gender, maternal and child health and water and sanitation.  

The MAF presents a basis to help deepen the underlying quality, equity and sustainability of growth and accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs by 2015.  

**MDG 9**

Lao PDR faces a unique additional challenge in its efforts to achieve the MDGs, unexploded ordnance (UXO). As the most heavily bombed country (per capita) on earth the presence of UXO continues to destroy lives and impacts on the development of the country. Around 300 people a year are killed or injured in UXO accidents and a quarter of villages are still contaminated by UXO.  

Speaking at the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, held in Vientiane November 2010, the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro said, “The people of this country know only too well the destructive impact of cluster munitions. There is a clear correlation between the widespread presence of unexploded ordnance and the prevalence of poverty here.”  

MDG 9 gives further prominence to the work of the Government and development partners in reducing the impact of UXO. It calls on all priority agricultural land to be cleared of UXO by 2020, to reduce the number of casualties to fewer than 200 a year and to ensure that the medical and rehabilitation needs of all survivors are met. Meeting these targets is vital in the attainment of all the MDGs with 41 out of the 46 poorest districts contaminated by UXO.  

Lao PDR now holds the Presidency for the inaugural year of the Convention on Cluster Munitions that entered into force in August 2010.

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“**The MDG Compact for Lao is an exciting innovation. It demonstrates the commitment of development partners and provides an important assurance to the Lao people that the Government and the international community will fully support their efforts to achieve the MDGs.”**

*Helen Clark, United Nations Development Group Chair and UNDP Administrator, October 2010*
Key Events of 2010

The 55th anniversary of the Lao-UN partnership was celebrated in 2010. The close collaboration and strong trust built over the years was highlighted by the visit of the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro and the UN Development Group Chair and UNDP Administrator, Helen Clark, each attending a significant international event in Lao PDR. The UN was proud to support the Government in 2010 a successful year that will contribute significantly to development efforts in the years to come.

September 22nd: Lao commitment to MDGs showcased at MDG Summit
On the 10th anniversary of the Millennium Declaration, the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, called a special MDG Summit in New York to renew efforts and focus in achieving the MDGs by 2015. At the Summit the President of Lao PDR, Choummaly Sayasone, presented the MDG Acceleration Framework that Lao has embraced as a pilot country. He also highlighted the progress Lao has made towards the MDGs and the focus areas to be addressed in the coming 5-years.

October 19th to 21st: UNDG chair and UNDP Administrator, Helen Clark, visits Lao PDR
Helen Clark presented the keynote address at the 10th Round Table Meeting in Vientiane, highlighting the importance of ‘growth with equity’. During her 3-day visit she held talks with the nation’s leaders, addressed UN staff and spent time at the supported Vientiane Youth Centre, where she interacted with young people and spoke about their hopes, aspirations and concerns for the future. Helen Clark was also in the country for the UN Day celebrations to mark the 65th birthday of the United Nations and 55th anniversary of the Lao-UN partnership.

October 20th and 21st: MDG Compact and MDG 9 signed at 10th Round Table Meeting
At the Round Table Meeting the Government of Lao PDR, UN and development partners reaffirmed their commitment to attaining the MDGs by signing an MDG Compact. The Compact also incorporated the newly designated Lao specific MDG 9 on the reduction of UXO impacts by 2020. The document is an important statement as Lao PDR scales up its efforts to achieve the MDGs. UXO seriously hinders development in the country and MDG 9 will act as a multiplier for achieving all the MDGs.

November 9th to 12th: First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions
Delegates from 120 states and 560 civil society representatives gathered in Vientiane to discuss plans for the implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions that entered-into-force in August 2010. This was the largest international event ever to be held in Lao PDR. At the end of a productive week of negotiations the Vientiane Declaration and a 65-point Action Plan were adopted to set the path for the full implementation of the treaty. The Government of Lao PDR will hold the Presidency for the Convention’s inaugural year.

November 8th to 9th: UN Deputy Secretary-General visits Lao PDR
On her first visit to Lao PDR, Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, gave the opening remarks at the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. She highlighted the links between UXO and poverty and congratulated the Government of Lao PDR in its leadership. Dr. Migiro also met with Government leaders and stressed the continuing support of the United Nations in achieving national development priorities.

November 18th to 19th: Meeting to discuss new strategy for UN development assistance
The Government and UN Country Team came together to discuss the key priority areas for the new United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). This is the strategic planning document of the United Nations to support the Government’s 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP). The Government of Lao PDR and UN agreed on five key priority areas: Inclusive and sustainable economic growth; Governance; Investing in human development; Natural resources management and UXO.

November 25th: Regional conference on gender-based violence
On the 25th November the Lao National Assembly hosted the region’s first ever conference for lawmakers to address issues of domestic violence. Over 100 participants discussed topics such as the economic cost of violence, the situation and responses in the region and the role of parliamentarians in fighting gender-based violence. The National Assembly will now start discussions to broaden legal protection, particularly against domestic violence, which is often unreported and tolerated.
Field Diary: Mobilizing Help for Malnourished Children in Southern Laos

Two-year-old Souk has no appetite. She can't walk. Her parents say she cries constantly. “She's always sick,” says her father, Khian.

Her mother lifts Souk to her feet, showing her emaciated legs that still can't hold her weight. They say they've never considered visiting the health centre. “We don't have any money,” Khian says simply.

The family lives on the outskirts of Thalan village, an ethnic Cheng community, in Attapeu province, some 20 kilometers from the Lao-Cambodian border.

Souk was born just prior to a series of floods and storms that devastated the region's subsistence crops. An assessment by UNICEF, following these disasters, confirmed that malnutrition was plaguing the region's children. With nearly one-fifth of children under-five suffering from ‘acute malnutrition,’ the situation met the World Health Organization (WHO)'s definition of a crisis.


Khian and his wife know this is insufficient. The village health volunteer came to examine her and explained it was a problem of food.

“It’s true. Many people just don’t have much to eat, and natural disasters have made problems worse,” says Dr Bounthid Luangoudom, health director in the neighboring district. “But most parents also have very little understanding of feeding and nutrition.”

To address these issues the Government’s National Plan of Action on Nutrition, drafted with help from the UN, focuses on the most vulnerable communities and promotes sustainable food-based interventions and proper young child feeding practices.

UNICEF, WHO and development partners are mobilizing teams of volunteers to screen for and refer malnourished children for free treatment at health centres and hospitals.

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Rice rations offered by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) will help families take their children to the health facilities and remain with them while they complete their treatment. To malnourished children, pregnant and breast-feeding women, WFP will provide specialized nutrition products at the health centers and enough rice to cover the staple food needs of their families. If the first efforts prove successful, the Government plans to expand the programme to reach 200,000 children across 13 southern districts.

“In the short term, we hope this will bring in more malnourished children for treatment,” Dr Bounthid says. “In the long term, we hope the improvements in children’s health will convince people of the value of seeking healthcare.”

We ask Vai and Khian if they’ll go to a health center if the services are free and if someone gives them enough rice to last three months. “We need whatever we can get,” Vai says. Her husband nods in agreement. “Yes, we'll go.”

REACH – a coordinated multi-sectoral response

To ensure the most effective response to the high rates of malnutrition in Lao PDR, REACH (Renewing Efforts Against Child Hunger and Undernutrition) brings together the key UN agencies working in the nutrition and food security sectors (FAO, UNICEF, WFP, WHO). By providing a platform for agencies to work together REACH ensures that the UN can offer multi-sectoral support to the Government in overcoming this critical challenge.

Today malnutrition and food insecurity seriously impact the nation’s efforts to achieve MDG 1 (Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger) and MDG 4 (Reduce child mortality). The children of Lao PDR have long suffered from chronic malnutrition with 40 percent under the age of 5 malnourished or stunted. This figure strikes a stark contrast to the countries strong economic growth averaging 7.5 percent annually over the last seven years. One of the long-term keys to improving malnutrition rates is to address food insecurity, which affects two thirds of the rural population.

The Government has identified malnutrition and food insecurity as priority development issues. REACH provides an integrated response through its support to UN agencies, assistance to the Government, by developing links with INGOs working in affected provinces, and through resource mobilisation.
Nutrition Education Is Key

Access to the different foods that make up a healthy diet is only one step on the way to improving malnutrition rates in Lao PDR – people also have to know how to utilize these foods. Communication for development initiatives focused on improving maternal and child health and nutrition are an integral component in reducing the short and long-term impacts of undernutrition. For villagers, particularly those in remote areas, who are often the most affected, receiving the right information on infant and young child feeding practices, maternal nutrition and hygiene, can be a matter of life or death.

WFP’s innovative Feeding the Future project is a nutrition education initiative, which takes a community-based approach to nutrition. It is aimed at remote, rural communities who have access to natural resources in their environment.

The ‘Food Flag’ is one training material that explains the importance of eating from all six food groups. The poster shows a triangular flag divided in six sections, each filled with examples of locally available foods. Trainers use culturally specific, interactive and enjoyable training tools, such as role play, nutrition games and reinforcing messages through cooking sessions.

For health staff and community or village volunteers, capacity development on the integrated management of acute malnutrition is equally critical. Learning active screening techniques and how to effectively follow up on cases of acute malnourished children will significantly improve treatment.

The Trials of Improved Practices (TIPS), an initiative led by FAO, teaches local village health volunteers cooking skills. Community cooking sessions are held where women learn how to cook rice adding simple additional ingredients, such as egg and vegetables, to increase the nutritional value of the food.

Exclusive Breastfeeding Campaign Enters Second Phase

The Lao Government with support from UNICEF, WHO and development partners, has started a new intensive campaign to raise the country’s rates of exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) for children aged 0 to 6 months. The campaign is part of the Government’s commitment to meeting MDG 4 and 5 related to child survival and maternal health.

More than 5,000 community volunteers, known as ‘breast milk messengers’ have been trained to work with mothers and local caregivers at community levels. They will provide information and counseling on the benefits of EBF and dangers of introducing other foods or liquids prior to six months. Training has also been provided to 1,300 health staff nationwide.

The campaign is being reinforced through a series of mass media advertisements and materials distributed to mothers and posted in strategic locations, such as pharmacies, hospitals and village notice boards.

A national nutrition survey conducted in 2006 showed that only 26 percent of infants aged 0-5 months were exclusively breastfed. But there is hope that EBF campaign messages are being heard. A 2010 small scale assessment suggested that EBF rates had more than doubled in some areas. The Ministry of Health aims to raise the EBF figure to 60 percent by 2012.
Khoun Community Radio broadcasts the people’s voices

At sunset in Houay Jaek village, Xieng Khouang Province, a group of villagers are performing a role play about the importance of good hygiene. The story is being recorded by village volunteers for the local Khoun Community Radio for Development station, the first community-run radio broadcaster in Lao PDR.

Khoun Radio was founded in 2007 with support from UNDP. Village volunteers are involved in every aspect of production, from programme concept to scripts and editing. Another unique feature of the radio station is that it broadcasts in 3 ethnic languages, Lao, Khmu and Hmong. In its three year existence the community volunteers have broadcast over 9,000 hours of programming, covering topics from vital sanitation and health information to farming techniques and tips on how to cook the famous Xieng Khouang noodles.

“The radio comes from the community by the community and for the community. The idea of bringing volunteers to work in community radio is very important because all the information will come to the radio automatically,” said Vongsone Oudomsouk, the Khoun Radio Project Manager.

In a 2009 report the Khoun district health services said there had been a decrease in the numbers of diarrhea-related illnesses, 60-70 percent more ethnic women were using health facilities when pregnant and 50 percent more women were bringing their children for vaccinations. This increase was particularly high amongst the Hmong community who used to refuse vaccinations.

On the back of the success of Khoun Radio the Ministry of Information and Culture has asked the UN for assistance in setting up further projects in Sekong, Xieng Khouang and Oudomxay Provinces. Volunteers from Khoun are playing a leading role in the development of the new radio stations.

Lao teenagers learn video making skills

Fifteen short films – each exactly one minute long – were the outcome of a workshop in the northern Lao town of Luang Prabang that gave a group of Lao teenagers a unique opportunity to try their hand at digital video production. The workshop was a collaboration between the Netherlands-based One MinutesJr Foundation and UNICEF.

Stories about a stranded tuk tuk driver, a gilded puppet, and a young boy dreaming of running his own computer shop were among the finished films. Buddhist monks, a maker of traditional instruments and an animated family portrait also featured in the video productions which drew high praise for their creativity and technique.

“This was a great opportunity to strengthen young people’s participation in media production,” said Mr Boun Leuane Boupha, Deputy Director General of Cabinet, Ministry of Information and Culture.

The 15 participants – drawn from groups at the Luang Prabang Children’s Cultural Centre and the self-study centre @my library -- spoke warmly of their experience. 15 year-old schoolgirl Linda Phomavong said, “I really enjoyed the chance to be creative and to learn about video production -- developing the idea using a story board, learning different shooting techniques as well as acting in my own film.”

“I’m very proud of all of the workshop participants, and hope that knowledge and skills they gained here will spur on further creative use of media among youth in Luang Prabang and throughout the country,” said Oneminutejr trainer Emile Zile. The films produced at the workshop were screened at the first Luang Prabang film festival.

UN supported Vientiane Youth Centre broadcasts “edutainment”

For 1-hour every Sunday youth across Vientiane tune in to a 1-hour radio program that broadcasts Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health (ASRH) information and provides a platform for youth to discuss their issues and concerns. The program also promotes the ASRH hotline number and the counseling and clinic services available at the Vientiane Youth Centre for Health and Development (VYCHD).

Hosted by a youth worker, the program uses an “edutainment” approach, a mixed format of education with entertainment to appeal to young listeners and generate interest. The development, production and airing of the radio program involve all youth staff and also build the capacity of youth workers for radio programming.

The program covers news about events and activities related to youth, interviews and discussions with resource speakers and experts and a callers segment where listeners are given the chance to ask questions to invited speakers or experts.

UN Deputy Secretary-General visits Lao PDR, November 2010

“The United Nations is indeed grateful for the trust, cooperation and partnership extended by Government in the shared struggle to eradicate poverty, promote economic growth and achieve the MDGs in this beautiful country.”

- Sonam Yangchen Rana, UN Resident Coordinator
New strategic direction discussed on UN development assistance framework (UNDAF), November 2010
“The Lao Government supports delivering as one in the context of the Vientiane Declaration and would like to see more UN coordination efforts strongly reflected in the UNDAF” - H.E. Mr Alounkeo Kittikhoun, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lao PDR

UN Lao PDR in Brief

Violinist and UN Messenger of Peace, Midori, visits Lao PDR

From 20th to 29th December Midori and a team of 3 musicians gave concerts and lectures to children and youth in schools, orphanages and hospitals in Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Bolikhamxay.

In addition to being one of the world’s most revered violinists, Midori is also the President and Founder of Music Sharing, an NGO that presents free educational music programs to children and young people. Music Sharing believes that the firsthand experience of music of the highest caliber gives children an enhanced sense of aesthetics and culture, awareness of their own creative powers and of their environment.

Midori was designated a United Nations Messenger of Peace by UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, in September 2007.

WFP and UNFPA Regional Directors in Lao PDR

In late 2010, WFP Regional Director for Asia, Mr Kenro Oshidari and Asia and the Pacific Regional Director of UNFPA, Ms. Nobuko Horibe, visited Lao PDR to review strategic documents prepared by their agencies. In November Mr Oshidari visited WFP projects in Luangnamtha and Oudomxay to get first hand experience of malnutrition problems in Laos and the solutions proposed in the WFP Country Strategy 2011-15. In December Ms. Horibe participated in a joint field trip to Saravan Province and reviewed UNFPA’s 5th Country Programme draft prior to its submission to the Executive Board.

Revolving Fund Makes Taps and Toilets Accessible for All

Lao PDR is now well underway to achieve its Millennium Development Goal 7 indicator for halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. The Government of Lao PDR has set its targets of 69 percent of the population with access to improved water and 54 percent for sanitation by 2015.

Despite the progress too many people are still deprived of these basic services, particularly in rural areas and small towns. UN-HABITAT has focused their efforts in delivering water and sanitation services to these areas since 2006 through its Mekong Region Water and Sanitation (MEK-WATSAN) programme.

The programme is carried out in close collaboration with the local water utilities, with the aim of creating a permanent, sustainable water and sanitation infrastructure that will benefit the communities and the surrounding areas for decades to come. This includes building water treatment plants and extending the pipe networks to new areas. This helps to open doors to wider regional development, as areas with better infrastructure can attract more businesses and services.

To make the water and sanitation programmes accessible to everyone, particularly to poor households, UN-HABITAT uses an innovative scheme known as the “revolving fund”. All households are eligible to apply for an interest-free loan for a water connection or a latrine, with the poorest households given priority.

“Everyone wants to have their own water tap, so the fund for water connection has been very popular and successful. The challenge is to convince the poor households to take out a loan for latrine construction or keep up with their payments. They don’t always see the immediate benefits of hygienic sanitation, which is where we have to work hard on our awareness raising activities”, said Buahom Sengkhamyong, the Chief Technical Advisor of UN-HABITAT in Lao PDR. There are community-based projects in 13 provinces across the country.
Economic Costs of Gender-Based Violence

While the personal impact of violence against women is hard to measure, the social, health and psychological consequences are extremely costly. The economic costs of violence can include the cost of intervention services – health, police, courts, social welfare – as well as loss of income, time off work, reduced productivity, failure to complete education, and resorting to unsafe migration to seek jobs.

In Australia, one of the first countries to attempt to calculate the economic costs of domestic violence, the government estimated that the total annual cost of domestic violence to the national economy in 2002–03 was AUSD$8.1 billion. Different studies in Lao PDR have reported a prevalence rate of at least 20% in violence against women, including domestic violence, rape or violence against girls. According to the Gender and Development Group Domestic Violence Survey (2004) 45% of women have experienced violence from their spouse in some form.

Lao PDR addresses the issue of violence in the Penal Law and the Law on Development and Protection of Women. These define violence and provide for penalties. Limited support facilities for survivors of domestic violence have been established in Vientiane and some other provinces. Current legislation only covers violence in matrimonial relationships and does not criminalize marital rape. Its measures for penalizing offenders are focused on mediation rather than prosecution. Mediation is not always appropriate and in any event, mediation units are not staffed by neutral personnel trained in gender, which is critical to an effective system.

In November 2010, the National Assembly with the support of the United Nations Country Team in Lao PDR held the first National Parliamentarians Conference on Gender Based Violence. It now intends to develop laws on gender based violence, to prevent it taking place, and develop services for those affected.

“The beatings during my third pregnancy made me fear for my life. The first time my husband hit me I was 3 months pregnant, the second time I was 5 months pregnant (...) He grabbed me, tied my hands behind my back and tried to strangle me. I was crying and screaming for help”, said Viengthong *a young woman from the countryside before breaking into tears. Like her, there are hundreds of women with untold stories of gender based violence in the Lao PDR.

*Changed name to protect the identity of the victim/survivor.