

# **Main Message of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) of Lao PDR**

## **1. Introduction**

Strategically located in South East Asia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is a land-locked, multi-ethnic and mountainous country with a population of around 6.5 million. With a young population, Lao PDR is projected to benefit from the demographic dividend. Lao PDR is progressing towards graduation from Least-Developed Country (LDC) status.

The Lao PDR's VNR report focuses on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its own localized SDG 18 while highlighting the prominent linkages between the 2030 Agenda and the national development Vision 2030 particularly the Eighth National Social-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) of Lao PDR (2016 - 2020) and progress and challenges of each SDG.

## **2. Institutional Mechanisms**

The National Steering Committee for SDGs implementation has been set up by the Presidential Decree in 2017 chaired by the Prime Minister, with members of the Committee from all concerned ministries and agencies. The National SDGs Secretariat (the Secretariat) and SDGs focal points in line ministries have also been appointed to lead and take ownership of each SDG and to ensure coordination and collaboration within the Government while working with United Nations agencies and Development Partners to get necessary support.

## **3. Prioritization and Linkage between NSEDP and 2030 Agenda**

The Government of Lao PDR is strongly committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the implementation and achievement of the SDGs. Lao PDR was among the earliest countries to localize the SDGs and integrate them into its national planning framework. Nearly 60 percent of the Eighth NSEDP indicators are linked to SDG indicators. The remaining SDG indicators will be integrated into the Ninth and Tenth NSEDPs.

In September 2016, Lao PDR has adopted its own additional SDG 18 called "Lives Safe from Unexploded Ordnance (UXO)". Bombs dropped during the Indochina War (1964-1973) made Lao PDR the most heavily bombed country in terms of bombs dropped per capita. Given the impacts of UXOs contamination, SDG 18 is one of Lao PDR's top priority goals.

## **4. Methodology of the Review**

Based on the principle of leaving no one behind and for an inclusive, participatory and transparent VNR process, the Secretariat organized a series of consultations in 2017 and 2018 with stakeholders from government, the National Assembly, private sector, academia, non-profit associations, international non-governmental organizations, the UN agencies and Development Partners. Additionally, SDGs discussion has been infused into the agenda of the Round Table Meetings over the past two years.

## **5. Progress and Challenges**

Recent years of high economic growth have helped Lao PDR to meet two of the three inter-related criteria for LDC graduation, in the 2018 review of the Committee for Development Policy. Progress

towards the SDGs will fulfill the criteria for LDC graduation.

Lao PDR has made remarkable progress in many areas, among others, in poverty reduction with nearly 100% of citizens have gained access to electricity, 99% of net enrolment in primary schools, improved literacy rate, quality vocational training and health care, increased number of females holding important positions in public and private sectors and implementing frameworks for environmental friendly economic growth. Despite such progress, there remain challenges including insufficient financial and human resources, the widening inequality and income disparities with challenging infant mortality and school dropout rate, difficulty of accessing to finance for SMEs, unavailability of updated data, especially disaggregated data, shortage of qualified staff undertaking monitoring and evaluation of the goals and inadequate knowledge and awareness of SDGs among public officials and citizens. Economic growth still largely relies on natural resources.

## **6. Lessons Learnt and Way Forward**

- The first lesson drawn from the VNR process is that SDGs localization has to be sequenced to converge seamlessly with the development of national plans.
- Second, the Government's strong commitment to the 2030 Agenda has been a driving force for early localization, integration and reporting on the SDGs.
- Third, administrative data systems in many goal areas still need to be harmonized, streamlined and strengthened while enhancing institutional and statistical capacity building.
- Fourth, collaboration and coordination across line ministries and between central and local levels need to improve, so that interventions can converge to reach the most left behind groups.
- Fifth, the Government will continue to identify development financing needs for implementing the 2030 Agenda.