



CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT IN LAO PDR



(Photo Credit: The Laotian Times)

Background of Climate Change and Environment in Lao PDR:

Lao PDR is a landlocked country in Southeast Asia with a population of 7.42 million with more than 80% of the country classified as mountainous and sparsely inhabited, with little arable land. The remaining 20% is lowland plains and floodplains situated along the Mekong River and its main tributaries. More than 65% of the country's population of 7.2 million lives in rural areas, though the proportion of the population living in cities is increasing. Lao PDR is endowed with abundant natural resources, such as water, forests (with one of the highest forest cover rates in all SE Asia), minerals and biodiversity. Relative to other Asian nations, many of these assets remain in a comparatively healthy state. However, since the turn of the 21st century, exploitation of natural resources has accelerated. In 2016, Lao PDR ratified its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Paris Climate Agreement and launched its climate change action plan.

An updated NDC, finalized in March 2021, further identified key climate change adaptation gaps, barriers and needs across sectors. The Government of Lao PDR (GOL) has prioritised pro-poor economic growth as a strategy to build climate resilience and has articulated specific priorities for adaptation in highly vulnerable sectors and locations. Climate resilience is included as a national priority in the country's 8th five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016-2020). The 2009 NAPA identified the public health, water, agriculture, and forestry sectors as those with the greatest immediate adaptation needs. The country's National Strategy on Climate Change (2010), National Green Growth Strategy of the Lao PDR till 2030, National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2016 - 2025 reconfirm the GOL commitment to ensuring environmental sustainability and confirm the ongoing and anticipated impacts of climate change on already endangered environmental landscapes.

Children, Climate Crisis, and Environment:

The climate crisis is fundamentally and irreparably reshaping our world, with grave implications for the rights of current and future generations of children. Children's physical development, health, safety and protection are also under threat due to pollution, injury from extreme weather events, poor access to food and water, and vector-borne diseases exacerbated through climate change. Children need to have safe, protective, healthy and sustainable environments in which to thrive and climate change is threatening this.

The environmental sector is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and much of the socio-economic development and poverty reduction achieved by the country has come as the result of significant, inefficient, and unsustainable use of natural resources, such as: forests, cultivation land, mines, water resources, biodiversity, etc. This has resulted in the rapid degradation and depletion of these natural resources. This has also impacted urban environments with increases of air, odour and noise pollution, solid waste, sewages, traffic jam, road accidents, etc. caused by the rapid expansions of urban populations, increases in the number of vehicles, industrial factories and so on as well as by inefficient urban administration. These impacts combined with the exacerbation of existing inequalities due to the climate crisis is likely to affect vulnerable children and adolescents the most, particularly the most vulnerable.

Actions to adapt to climate change impacts appear necessary in order to protect ecosystem integrity and the productivity of Lao PDR's environmental resources, especially given the decline in forest area over past years from 70% in 1940's to 40% in 2023. Some examples of the policies and practices include: i) incorporating concerns of climate change trends in long-term land and water management and planning practices; ii) expanding protected areas; iii) promoting mixed land use to reduce vulnerability; iv) undertaking anticipatory ecosystems based adaptation initiatives; and vi) strengthening forest fire prevention and management.

Our past and ongoing work in the region:

Save the Children implements child focused environmental programs across Asia and the Pacific. Examples of this work include:

Red Alert Campaign is a multi-country initiative that enables children and youth to design and lead their own campaigns for greater climate and environmental action across Asia Pacific and globally. The Red Alert strategy (2021-2024), agreed by children and youth, targets the following broad objectives: increasing public support for efforts to limit global heating, increase adaptation and protect the environment, increasing government action to speed up decarbonization, increase climate financing, uphold children's rights and roles and address threats such as pollution and deforestation, and encouraging more private sector action to reduce CO2 emissions, pollution and other threats to nature.

My Forest Child (MFC) is a unique project seed funded by Save the Children's 'Centre of Excellence' and piloted in Nepal and Pakistan. MFC employs a multi-dimensional approach by linking environment and biodiversity restoration (primarily through reforestation), support for diversified livelihoods and advocacy and campaigns led by children. In Nepal, it continues to focus on forestry ecosystems while in Vietnam it will prevent coastal erosion and promote adaptive livelihoods through mangrove plantations.



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(Photo Credit: The Guardian)

Climate-Resilient Communities Accelerator (CRCA) model which borrows from best practices in nature-based solutions (NbS) and lessons learned through MFC. CRCA received seed funding of US\$100,000 from Save the Children's LIFT Lab. This project is currently piloted in 4 countries in Asia Pacific region: Nepal, Vietnam, Philippines, and Indonesia.

SHIFT a youth-led accelerator model that supports activists (aged 14 - 25) to design and launch public campaigns on issues of their concern, including environmental sustainability and climate action. The model supports participants across four distinct phases. The SHIFT model has supported over eight child and youth-led climate related campaigns across Myanmar, Vietnam and Nepal. This includes '**Shift For Our Planet**' in partnership with World Wildlife Fund (WWF) that supported groups across Nepal, including LGBTQI+ groups and others campaigning on behalf of Nepal's most marginalised groups

As the only International Non-Governmental Organisation Accredited to the Green Climate Fund Save the Children has secured funding and begun implementation on three project within the Asia-Pacific that will work to reduce the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on children:

Strengthening the Resilience of the Lao PDR Health System Project: It is funded by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and is the first health-focused project funded by the GCF. Save the Children will work to comprehensively strengthen the resilience of the health system of Lao PDR, and it will enable 250 communities to better respond to climate-induced disasters through early warnings, manage and mitigate climate-related risks to health, and seek care appropriately.

The Vanuatu Community-based Climate Resilience Project was funded in 2022. This is the largest yet community-based adaptation and resilience project in the world.

Solomon Islands Knowledge-Action-Sustainability for Resilient Villages (SOLKAS)' project takes a locally-led approach, reaching over 185,000 people across 170 communities and 100 schools.

Our path forward in Lao PDR

There is a vital need to take to scale proven child centred climate change and environmental programming in Lao PDR. We have seen that taking a piecemeal approach has resulted into slow progress toward national and regional goals for land use, forest cover, water conservation and protection, biodiversity protection. With our significant geographical presence across Lao PDR and our trusted relationships with both the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Save the Children in Laos is primed to take on this work.