

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Report on the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification Implementation

April 30, 2002

Acronym

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AusAID	Australian Aid Agency
CPC	Committee for Planning and Cooperation
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
EC	European Community
FINNIDA	Finland International Development Agency
GOL	Government of the Lao PDR
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Zusammenarbeit
IUCN	World Conservation Union
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MRC	Mekong River Commission
NEC	National Environment Committee
NEAP	National Environmental Action Plan
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NORAD	Norwegian International Development Agency
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
MRC	Mekong River Commission
NSC	National Statistics Center
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
STEA	Science Technology and Environment Agency
UNDP	United Nation Development Program
UNEP	United Nation Environment Program
WB	World Bank

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National Report

1. Summary

Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) has joined the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification/Drought (UNCCD) in 1996 and then prepared its first National Report on the Implementation of the UNCCD in 1998.

The Science, Technology and Environment Agency (STEA) has been designated as coordinating agency for the Convention since 1999 and undertaking revisions of the report along with the revised NSDEP and its five year plan (2001-05) and the associated National Priority Programs and following the UNCCD implementation explanatory Note and Help Guide provided by the UNCC Secretariat in 2002.

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Situated in the center of the Southeast Asian peninsula, Lao PDR covers an area of 236,800 km² with tropical climate dominated by the Southwest monsoon that brings high rainfall, and high temperature between mid-April and mid-October and high inter-annual variability with relatively frequent occurrence of flooding and drought.

There are three main agricultural climatic zones as briefly described below:

- (1) The mountainous north experiences a cooler dry season, and high intra-annual temperature variation. Soils tend to be heavily leached and acidic with low water retention capacity and generally low fertility and not so suitable for intensive agricultural production.
- (2) The mountainous part of the center and the south is dominated by a tropical monsoon climate but similar soils in the north with exception of the Boloven Plateau which has deep, well-structured, less acidic soils with relatively good water retention and drainage capacity.

(3) The river plains along the Mekong and its tributaries which represent about 20 percent of the country area and support more than 50 percent of the population is dominated by a moist tropical climate, characterized by recent alluvial deposits which are acidic and shallow, with low organic matter and low fertility.

47% of the total area remains covered with forests, while high density forest accounts for about 4.5 million hectares or 19% of the total land areas.

The total cropland or crop harvested area in Lao PDR in 1998 was 788,162 ha (MAF 1999) of which 617,538 ha (78.4%) was rice paddy area that includes lowland rice paddy 54.6%, dry season rice paddy 6.7% and upland rice paddy 17%.

In Lao context, desertification refers to the land degradation and seasonal drought caused by the agricultural development.

The National Action Programs and projects to combat desertification/ drought in Lao PDR are related to the National Priority Programs (NPP) especially Food Production Program, Stabilization of Slash-and-Burn Cultivation Program and the sectoral Programs such as Irrigation Development Program, land and forest allocation program.

Laws and regulations were promulgated to support sustainable development and use of natural resources and environmental protection.

Setoral Development Plans and their five year plan (2001-05) have been developed along the NSEDP in view of the combating the desertification, covering issues concerning forestry, water resources, biodiversity, natural disasters, climate change, flood and drought prevention, environmental public awareness.

Progress has been made in implementation of these programs. The principal multilateral and bilateral agencies involved in the development programs of the country are Asian Development Bank, AUSAID, DANIDA, EC, ESCAP, FINNIDA, IFAD, IRRI, IUCN, JICA, MRC, NORAD, SIDA, UNCCD secretariat, UNDP, UNEP, USAID, World Bank Group.

For the enhanced coordination, National Environment Committee has been established recently with representation of key ministries. A coordination group for the UNCCD implementation is also plan to be officially established.

National Committee for Rural Development and National Committee for Land and Forest Allocation extend their programs and branches in all provinces to improve the development and use of land and forest resources in rural areas.

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) with its branches at provincial and district level have been set up. Their missions include stabilization of slash and burn, combating the forest fires, coordination and management of flood and drought control, and assessment of country natural resources with focus on forestry coverage.

STEA and its Provincial offices for Science, Technology and Environment have mission in environmental awareness and enforcement of the Environmental Protection Law and other relevant regulations as well as coordination and supervision regarding Multilateral Environmental Agreement.

Decentralization of decision making procedures is in process. Socio-economic Development Plan designates provinces as strategic units, districts as planning-financial units and villages as administrators/executors.

Actions developed through these programs and institutions are supporting National Drought Management Actions Plan which was established since 1999 thus the combatting to desertification/drought in Lao PDR.

2. National Plans and Strategies

2.1. National Socio-economic Development Plan

The National Socio-economic Development Plan has been formulated based on the result of the previous national plan. The new plan is a vision for year 2020 and includes national strategy for the next 10 years and plan for the next five years (2001-2005). Its goal is to free the country from the status of underdevelopment by the year 2020 through sustained and equitable economic growth. The general objectives is to ensure the social calmness, political stability and continuous economic growth. By the year 2005, half of the present poor people must be relieved; rice and food supplies throughout the country must be sufficiently secured; the shifting cultivation must be basically solved, the opium and marijuana growing must be completely eradicated by making the population engage in other jobs and practice fixed cultivation; and human resources must be developed in various fields and at different levels in order to promote the development along the industrialization and modernization of the country.

As Regards combating the desertification/drought in Lao PDR, the five year plans details actions as follows.

- **Eradication of Shifting Cultivation**
 - i. The primary goal is to eradicate the shifting cultivation, especially in northern provinces that have more than 10,000ha of slash-and-burn area by implementing the projects on slash-and-burn eradication and fixed employment allocation. This should be undertaken associated with opium/marijuana cultivation eradication projects and poverty alleviation projects in selected sites.

- ii. Completely eradicate opium/marijuana cultivation by the year 2005.
- iii. Implement the policy of forest and land allocation in accordance with the laws on urban planning, land and forests.

- **Irrigation**

- i. Complete the ongoing large and medium-scale irrigation schemes.
- ii. Study new projects where deemed necessary and proved to be efficient.
- iii. Encourage small-scale projects built and managed by the farmers.
- iv. Increase irrigated area to 400,000ha for rainy season and 300,000 ha for dry season.

- **Agriculture and Forestry**

- i. Promote the modification and use of techniques or technologies in agriculture and forestry.
- ii. Promote people's cooperation in setting up irrigation service groups; agricultural machinery service groups and rural credit groups for instance.

- **Rural Development and Poverty Eradication**

Decentralize the decision-making system by transforming provinces as strategic units, districts as planning-financial units and villages as administrators/executors.

Promote Rural development targeting remote areas where major part of population are living below poverty line and also belong to ethnic groups in many cases.

Promote Regional Development in Northern provinces focusing on cattle raising, industrial tree planting introducing rubber tree, fast growing trees and other plants, in Central provinces focusing on food stuff production, and in Southern provinces focusing on agro-forestry and food stuff production.

The Committee for Planning and Cooperation, as coordinating body, has announced the targets and requested sectoral ministries and local authorities to prepare their plans according to their mandates and responsibilities.

2.2. National Environmental Action Plan

The first National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) was developed in 1993 and implemented. Since then until now, several factors have changed environmental conditions and priorities of the country. Those factors include new legislation and directives for increased emphasis on environmental conservation. Also, a number of the still important actions prescribed in the original NEAP have been implemented slowly. NEAP has been drafted with the support of prepared ADB TA and is being revised at present in view of adjustments of actions or new actions to achieve the major national goals for environmental conservation and sustainable use of natural resources along with the five year SEDP.

In connection to combating the desertification/drought in Lao PDR, the draft NEAP prescribes actions below:

- **Water Resource Management Actions**

The Lao PDR has the highest per capita availability of renewable freshwater resources in Asia. However, only 50 percent of the urban and 20 percent of the rural population have access to piped water supply. Although demand for water is expected to increase, serious competition for water resources is not expected to be a problem during the period of year 2001-2005. The development of the country's hydropower potential is to be undertaken with a full analysis of the potential environmental impacts.

The GOL's Water Resources Coordination Committee has developed 'Water Sector Strategy and Action Plan' for the period of from 2000 to 2005. It will:

- (a) prepare water resources management plans for priority rivers,
- (b) prepare water distribution plan for each river body that have high levels of water use and that are suitable for multipurpose water resources development projects,
- (c) create a setting in which different sectors can make full use of existing information by aiming at complete and effective data management,
- (d) establish a centralized data compilation center,
- (e) improve and expand the meteorology network,
- (f) concentrate on capability building, human resources development, and integrated river basin development planning.

- **Actions for Land Resource Management**

Lao PDR is predominantly rural in character and has a potentially cultivable land area of 5.9 million ha (FAO 2000), or 25% of the total country area of which 800,000 ha is cultivated for rice or secondary crops under both lowland terrace and upland shifting cultivation systems. Pasture land makes up another 15% of the cultivable land.

A recent report shows that about 37,000 km² or 16% of land is subjected to light severity of human-induced degradation. About 197,000 km² or 83% is subjected to moderate severity and 3,000 km² or 1% is subjected to very severe land degradation. The study also states that the major cause of land degradation is deforestation of the water erosion type.

For the period 2000-2005, the GOL policies, strategies, programs, and priorities for upland and lowland resources management are developed for different aspects of land use including Sustainable Upland Development and Environmental Management, Shifting Cultivation and Lowland Transformation through land-use planning and allocation program based on the participatory process and the village/community level.

2.3. National Drought Management Action Plan

There is no specific strategies and action plans to combat desertification/drought before 1999. However, the main problem that affected directly the populations which depend to the nature resources base are droughts. Land degradation by erosion is also another critical factor that affects them.

The National Drought Management Actions Plan has been developed in September 1999 through a National Awareness Workshop on Combating Desertification/Drought with representation of concerned, ministries, 10 provinces and NGOs and International organizations, coordinated by the National Focal Point of the Convention.

The Plan comprises of 4 components: Training and public awareness, Prevention and mitigation, Preparedness and Relief. A number of activities has been implemented and annual report is done. The coordinating agency of this plan is the National Committee for Combat Natural Disaster (Drought and Flood).

The Plan is summarized in the following table.

Training and public awareness	Prevention and mitigation	Preparedness	Relief
Strengthening capacity of the national institutes and capability of the support staff for forecasting;	Feasibility studies to assess the potential and feasibility of water harvesting and conservation work	Improvement of drought forecasting and early warning system	Post-disaster assistance strategies, including institutional mechanisms for administering relief programmes, effective food delivery system
Strengthening local capacities in the planing and implementation of water conservation works. Including training of provincial and district staff in providing technical support to local communities	Area specific studies: master plans for water management (irrigation and soil/water conservation, water budgets to optimize use of reservoirs and ground water sources	Contingency plans for droughts(line Ministries and Agencies) including: drinking water, food delivery, public health and nutrients for children, fodder and nutrients for livestock, adequate resources at the operational level	Data collection and reporting on damage and needs assessment
Public awareness campaigns aimed at enhanced community mobilization	Drought insurance and self-financing	Calamity relief fund	
Sensitization programs to advocate drought mitigation and preparedness to senior officials and decision makers	Study on Local vulnerability Reduction Measures, building on the considerable local knowledge and coping mechanisms		Employment Generation (including drought mitigation works)
	Introduction of simple low-cost irrigation technologies, Generation of power for uninterrupted power supply to the		

	agricultural sector (and other fuels), Employment generation		
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3. Institutional Measures involved in the UNCCD Implementation

3.1. Establishment of the National Committee for Natural Disaster Management

- **Legal Status**

Based on the Environmental Protection Law, the National Committee for Natural Disaster Management has been established in 23/8/99. It has to develop plans, identify measures for prevention, combating and restore the areas suffering from disasters in cooperation with all concerned agencies and local administrations. At the same time they shall regularly monitor the threatened areas and anticipate future disasters.

In order to implement this mandate, Provincial Committee for Disaster Management has been established in all provinces since November 1999. The Committee has representation of all provincial departments, being coordinated by Labor and Social Welfare Department.

MAF, with its branches at province and district level, plays important role in the fields of:

- stabilization of slash and burn,
- combating the forest fires,
- coordination and management of flood and drought during the wet seasons as well as the development of irrigation schemes to support the production of rice and other crops;
- assessment of natural resources with focus on the forestry coverage.

National Committee for Rural Development, National Committee for Land and Forest Allocation extend their programs and branches in all provinces to improve the development and land and forest resources use in the rural areas.

As STEA is designated to coordinate Multilateral Environmental Agreement, the focal point for the UNCCD has been moved from Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare to STEA in 1999. The focal point has a core role in coordinating with the National Committee for Natural Disaster Management to implement the UNCCD. Coordination will be enhanced through the recently established National Environment Committee, represented by key ministries, and a coordinating group for the UNCCD implementation to be established.

STEa and its Provincial Offices for Science, Technology and Environment are also working on the environmental awareness program in which many components are linked with combating desertification/drought caused by slash and burn, forest fires, climate change, biodiversity loss and other natural resources degradation.

- **Resources**

STEa as National coordinating body for UNCCD has limited qualified staff and financial sources. The national coordinating body for the Drought Management Actions Plan, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, has been partially supported by international donors and has to provide assistance to Provincial Committee for Disaster Management which are lacking qualified staff and financial sources.

MAF is the main implementing agency of activities related to the combating to desertification/drought. It is appropriately staffed but lacks financial sources. Other concerned ministries are in the similar conditions of MAF.

4. Co-operation with international organisation in the implementation of national Action Program

The international projects related to the Combating Desertification/Drought implementation in Lao PDR are as follows:

No	Project name	Status	Donor
1.	Poverty Eradication Program	complete	ADB
2.	Preparedness and relief for natural disaster in rural and remote areas	ongoing	CARE
3.	Strengthening the environment management	ongoing	SIDA
4.	Biodiversity Action Plan and Strategy	ongoing	UNDP/Danida
5.	Environment and Social Program	ongoing	ADB(loan)
6.	Shifting Cultivation stabilization	ongoing	ADB(loan)
7.	Community managed irrigation	ongoing	ADB(loan)
8.	Industrial tree plantation	ongoing	ADB(loan)
9.	Forest Development	ongoing	ADB(loan)
10.	Tree Plantation	pipeline	ADB(loan)
11.	Northern upland Forestry management	pipeline	ADB(loan)

National Committee for Natural Disaster Management

(by Prime Minister Decree No 158/PM of March 23, 1999)

1. Minister for Labor and Social Welfare, Chairman
2. Vice-Minister for Agriculture and Forestry, Vice-chair
3. Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vice-chair
4. Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Defense, member
5. Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Interior, member
6. Director General of Department of Budget, Ministry of Finance, member
7. Director General of Department of transport, Ministry of Communication
Transport Post and Construction, member
8. Director General of Department of Industry, Ministry of Industry and Handicraft,
member
9. Director General of Department of Health, Ministry of Health, member
10. Director General of Department of Press, Ministry of Culture and Information,
member
11. Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Education, member
12. President of the Lao Red-Cross, member
13. Director General of Department of social welfare, Ministry of labor and Social
Welfare, member

Co-ordinating Group for UNCCD Implementation

No	Institution / Agencies	
1.	Vice President, STEA	Chairman
2.	Permanent Secretary, STEA	Member
3.	Director General of Department of Environment, STEA	Member
4.	Director General of National Disaster Management Office, Ministry of Labour Social and Welfare	Member
5.	Department of Irrigation, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	Member
6.	Department of Meteorology, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	Member
7.	Centre Soil Research Institute, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	Member
8.	Forest plantation Research Centre	Member
9.	State Planning Committee	Member
10.	Environmental Research Institute	Member
11.	Environmental Research Centre	Member
12.	Environmental Policy and Legislation Division, DOE National Focal Point	Member/ Secretary