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**COUNTRY PROGRESS REPORT OF LAOS**

**Drug Situation in Laos in 2012**

**Introduction**

Drug issue in Laos poses generally a major threat to the community and drug control has also long been an issue in Laos. In 1998, Laos ranked as the world's third largest illicit opium producer, especially in the Northern provinces. At the time, it also had one of the highest opium addiction rates in the world. Because Lao government pays special attention to this matter, from 1998 to 2005, opium cultivation area was reduced by 94% to 1500 ha from 27,000 ha and opium addiction by 80% from 63,000 persons to 12,000 persons. In 2006, Laos was official declared free from opium cultivation thank to the firm political will of the Lao government in cooperation with the international organizations.

However, six years after this historical declaration, opium production in Laos has been increased consecutively year after year as can be seen the opium production increased in 173% from 1,500 ha to 4,100 ha in 2011. At the same time, the trafficking of ATS, pseudoephedrine, heroin and marijuana gained new impetus. This has been demonstrated by the unprecedented seizure of 24.5 million tablets of ATS in 2010. The recent armed clashes between drug syndicates and law enforcement forces along the Mekong River where the borders of Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and China meet threaten regional security. The increasing numbers of drug abusers namely ATS abusers seeking treatment puts a big burden beyond the existing resources of treatment services in the country.

Illicit drug production, trafficking and abuse continue to pose a serious threat to Lao society and traditions. It contributes to poverty and suffering and endangers the social and economic development of the country and is a source of crime, corruption and violence that threatens security and stability.

Since the mid 1990s, there has been an increase in transnational trafficking of drugs such as Amphetamine-Type Stimulant (ATS), heroin and other illicit drugs. Transnational traffickers have made Laos a transit point for trafficking of illicit drugs from one country to a third country. ATS seizure increased to 2,335,330 tables in 2009 from 1,227,205 tables in 2008.

## **I. The current Situation.**

There are four main illicit drugs problems in Laos: opium poppy, amphetamine-type stimulant (ATS), heroin and cannabis.

### **OPIUM**

By 1990s, Laos was the third largest producer of illicit opium and had the second highest rate of addiction in the world. The opium surveys of the Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision (LCDC)-UNODC report that total villages were engaged in poppy cultivation on 26,837 hectares, this dropped to less than 1,500 hectares in 2007 or a reduction of over 94%. However, further rose to 1,600 hectares in 2008 (7% increase) and to 1,900 hectares in 2009 (15% increase). Meanwhile, the eradication has also been made each year by the local authority. In 2007, the number was 777 ha while in 2008 and 2009 it was 575 ha and 765 ha respectively.

Opium addiction has been reduced, from about 63,000 to 7,700 drug users over the same period. Since 2002, support was received from UNODC and the U.S. Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section for nationwide community-based treatment of opium users, an approach growing continually more effective. However some treated users have relapsed bringing the total number of addicts to 12,000-15,000. Opium addiction drains precious financial resources, reduces household productivity, increases domestic violence and impedes poverty reduction efforts.

### **Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS)**

Unlike poppy growing, which is rooted in poverty, the emerging drug problems in Laos arise from criminal activity. Since the late nineties there have been increases in ATS, heroin, precursors, and other illegal substances being trafficked by transnational organized crime groups through this country. Attracted by the country's economic growth and improving road network, they began to ship illicit goods through the country and also to convince Lao youth to try drugs. At present ATS abuse by mostly the youth of Laos in the main cities and some rural areas that used to grow opium poppy has increased.

### **HEROIN**

As Laos is surrounded by countries where HIV/AIDS and injecting drug use rates are high, the risk of a major HIV/AIDS epidemic is acute. Trafficking increases drug use. With heroin from elsewhere in Asia being smuggled through Laos, injecting heroin use has been observed in some border areas and cities since 2004. At present some former opium users, as well as new drug users, have begun poly drug use.

However the number of HIV victims in Laos at present is still low compared to the neighboring countries but it increases compared to the past years. More IDU and more tourists plus not inappropriate control and prevention, the number of HIV victims may increase significantly.

## **CANNABIS**

Previously cannabis cultivation and use was limited, being grown in certain regions by Laos as a herb to add flavour to food when cooking. Now cannabis production is illegal in Laos. Commercial cannabis production is grown mainly in the lowlands in remote areas of central Lao provinces and in particular in the areas near by the Mekong River for illicit export to neighboring countries. Most often entrepreneurs from across the border contract Lao farmers to cultivate cannabis. No estimates are available on the extent of illicit cannabis cultivation.

## **II. Drug Control Measures.**

### **Drug Control Programmes**

Drug situation in Laos has grown increasingly complex, therefore the Lao Government has approved its political will and commitment, which is further operationally through evolving policies, strategies and programmes to respond to challenging and changing situation. The Lao government in cooperation with international community has undergone the National Drug Control policies, strategies and programmes as follows.

The Lao Government with support from UNODC, implemented the First National Drug Control Programme (1994 – 2000), the Second national Drug Control Programme (2001-2006), the Third National Drug Control Programme (2006-2009). Those programme strategies focus on the drug supply reduction through alternative development; drug demand reduction; civic awareness; and law enforcement. The LCDC with support from UNODC has devised the country's first Comprehensive National Drug Control Master Plan, which is currently implemented.

### **Legal framework.**

Under the Fourth National Comprehensive Drug Control Master Plan, the new National Drug Law was amended in order to provide the framework for controlling drugs and related crime. The law specifies responsibilities for different sectors, including government agencies, society, the family, and the individual. Related criminal activity, such as fraud is covered while international cooperation is stressed. The law strengthens the Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision as the National Government Organization responsible for coordinating drug control.

Lao PDR is a signatory to the following international convention on drugs.

- a. 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (ratified in 1973)
- b. 1971 convention on Psychotropic substances (ratified in 1977)
- c. 1988 convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (ratified in 2004)
- d. The 1972 protocol Amending the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (ratified in 2009)

## **International Cooperation**

Lao PDR has signed bilateral agreements and MOUs. Laos has signed bilateral agreements on cooperation against illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and precursor chemical control with a number of friendly countries namely: China, Cambodia, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.

On the regional level, the Lao Government adheres to the ACCORD Plan through ASEAN structure. The ACCORD Plan of action meets the global drug control objectives as set forth by the UNGASS. Through the ASEAN, Laos is also party to a certain number of “Memorandum of Understanding” (MOU) and the ASEAN Plan of Action to combat Transnational Crime which also addresses drug trafficking.

Its cooperation with neighboring countries China, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar, is reinforced by the establishment of more Border Liaison Officers (BLO) along the border line and increased patrolling along the Mekong River. This action is proving to be more and more effective.

After Laos participated in the United Nations General Assembly’s 20<sup>th</sup> Special Session (UNGASS) on the World Drug Situation in 1998, the Government formulated its Balanced Approach to Opium Reduction the following year which led to opium being eliminated in the country.

## **III. Progress so far**

### **Contribution of the Lao National Assembly**

The Lao National Assembly amended the new National Drug Law with a proposal of formulating legal framework in controlling drugs and related crime. The law specifies responsibilities for different sectors, including government agencies, society, the family, and the individual. Related criminal activity, such as fraud is covered while international cooperation is stressed. The law strengthens the Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision as the National Government Organization responsible for coordinating drug control.

To reach the ASEAN Declaration for a Drug-Free ASEAN Community by 2015 and in conformity with the Resolutions of the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of AIPA, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the Lao National Assembly has currently encouraged to implement the resolutions on Harmonization of Illegal Drug Law on the Capture and Seizure of Assets Used in or Possessed from Drug-related Cases; and the Control of Reactant and Precursors and on Demand Reduction Interventions. It has also been an active partner to fight against drug abuse and trafficking. In this regards, the Socio-Cultural Affairs Committee of the National Assembly in cooperation with concerned government agencies and international organizations, has run the public awareness campaigns, including the drug law awareness campaign against illicit drug by organizing public activities, sportive events and drug-free village promotion.

The Lao National Assembly together with its Government is preparing to host the 7<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting and the 9<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe Meeting in October and November 2012 respectively. Laos has taken this occasion to establish a movement composed of many concerned sub-committees in Vientiane and in other provinces to address social evils such as drug trafficking and abuse and guarantee the security of ASEP and ASEM leaders, who attend these important gatherings. Successful implementation of necessary measure will be needed to addressing the drug problem.

## **Overall Progress in Laos**

### **1. The Burning Ceremony of the Seized Drug**

On the occasion of the International Day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking, the Lao government has recently organized the burning ceremony of the sized drugs on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2012 in Vientiane Capital, Laos, presented by the Prime Minister of Laos, concerned ministers, diplomatic corps, and mass media. At the important event different kinds of narcotic drugs have been burned as follows:

- Heroin 33 blocs = 12,525 kilograms
- ATS (Yabaa): 470,170,700 tablets
- Cannabis: 1,535 kilograms
- White power containing chemical precosure: 226.5 kilograms

Drugs displayed for the burning at this ceremony were from 20 cases involving 53 offenders (13 women) including 03 foreign nationals. At that time, drug seized in other provinces of the country, after provincial courts sentenced and order them to be destroyed, and then the provincial authorities burned and destroyed them in place.

### **2. Reduction of Opium Cultivation and Opium Drug Addicts**

By 2006, from being the third largest producer of illicit opium and having the highest opiate abuse rates in the world, Laos has practically entered a post-opium setting, having significantly eliminated opium poppy and treated the majority of its opium addicts. On 14 February 2006, the Government of Laos officially declared its success in being able to eliminate opium poppy cultivation to insignificant levels. This is seen as a praise worthy and historical achievement, but much more needs to be done. Six years after the declaration, opium poppy production has been increased consecutively in 173% from 1,500 ha in 2006 to 4,100 ha in 2011

### **3. International and Bilateral Agreements on Drugs**

Laos is one of the Members of the United Nations and is a signatory to the international conventions on drugs and has signed bilateral agreements and MOUs and has signed bilateral agreements on cooperation against illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and precursor chemical control with a number of friendly countries namely: China, Cambodia, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.

On the regional level, the Government of Laos adheres to the ACCORD Plan through ASEAN structure. The ACCORD Plan of action meets the global drug control objectives as set forth by the UNGASS. Through ASEAN, the Lao PDR is also party to a certain number of “Memorandum of Understanding” (MOU) and the ASEAN Plan of Action to combat Transnational Crime which also addresses drug trafficking.

In cooperation with neighboring countries, Laos has drug agreements with China, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar is reinforced by the establishment of more BLO along the border line and increased patrolling along the Mekong River. This action is proving to be more and more effective.

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#### **4. International Cooperation**

Laos has cooperated with international organizations and agencies such as UNODC, UNIDO, WFP, UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO, UNDP, FAO, as well as no-governmental organizations (NGOs). It has also cooperated with international financial institutions such as ADB, WB and IFAD in the course of implementing various programmes and projects on Alternative Development and Drug Demand Reduction.

#### **5. Implementation of Community Projects on Drug Demand Reduction**

Implementation of projects requires the active participation of all stakeholders. Beneficiaries actively participate in the identification of needs and solutions including the planning, implementation of various project interventions. This approach ensures pride and ownership of projects by beneficiaries. Likewise, support service organizations at the district and provincial levels are strengthened to enhance support service delivery. Alternative development activities includes water supply and latrine, access tracks, schools, irrigation schemes and income generating and marketing activities which includes micro credit, post harvest and processing and marketing. In all these activities community actively participate through paid and unpaid labor and local materials counterpart.

Since 2003, LCDC/PFU has been implementing a community-based drug treatment programme. Previously, health practitioners in Laos used liquid tincture of opium to detoxify opium addicts. In early 2005, LCDC, UNODC/PFU, the Ministry of Health (MOH) and Pharmaceutical Factory Number 3 developed tincture of opium in capsule form. Treatment using tincture of opium capsules has proven very effective in providing smooth detoxification. The treatment guidelines for tincture of opium capsules were developed and treatment is being expanded on a nationwide basis.

## **6. Drug Prevention**

The policy of Laos is to place first priority on drug prevention. Thus drug awareness campaign to mobilize all sectors of society is given focus to establish an anti-drug culture based on a better understanding of drug related harms.

### **Experiences learned in fighting illicit drug**

#### **1. Implementing Structures**

Establishing implementing structures at all levels from the central to the provincial, districts and villages to ensure that policies, strategies and programmes are brought down to the grassroots through projects and activities.

#### **2. Participation of All Stakeholders**

Full participation of all stakeholders in the implementation of project and activities including the involvement of civil society to develop a counter culture against drugs.

#### **3. Partnership and Collaboration**

Partnership and joint efforts and collaboration with immediate country neighbors assisted by bi-lateral agreements and resources including support from international organizations.

#### **4. Capacity Building**

Strengthening community level organizations at the village level and enhancing support services delivery of district and provincial offices coupled with strengthening capability of law enforcement agencies.

## **IV. Next steps in Combating drug Manace.**

The Lao government faces the challenges of sustaining the elimination of illicit opium poppy, treat and rehabilitate remaining opium addicts as well as ATS and other drug users, prevent new drug use, address transnational drug trafficking, related drug abuse, crime, violence, corruption and money laundering, in order to develop a healthy, happy and prosperous drug free society for all its people.

### **Sustainability of Alternative Development and Drug Demand Reduction**

Political will and commitment to pursue policies, strategies and programmes for AD and DDR. These policies and programmes must be the basis for formulating community based participatory projects that ensure the participation of all stakeholders. The implementation of these projects, while being coordinated at the central level by LCDC, by PCDC at the

provincial level, by DCDC at the District level, are being implemented through the existing offices of the district, provincial, and central ministries. The capacity building efforts on these organizations ensures sustainability and support services delivery. While the strengthening of the VDC including its sub-working committees will ensure efficient and effective project implementation at the village level.

The success of AD is closely linked to drug demand reduction. There is a need to develop strategies for marketing AD products within the country and with the neighboring countries. Thus, there is a need to develop cross border cooperation and trade for AD products.

### **Food Security and Environmental Sustainability**

In the course of implementing projects food security and environmental sustainability must be given a priority attention since most of these communities are in subsistence economy. Appropriate technologies must also be used to ensure environmental sustainability. Communities must have access to micro credit to support basic production activities, livelihood activities, post harvest and processing facilities and marketing. The establishment of group funds and village funds are necessary to ensure sustainability.

### **Partnerships and Cooperation**

Synergy in programme and project implementation is enhanced through partnership and cooperation with United Nations Organizations, international development organizations, international NGOs, and financial institutions. Aside from the financial resources from these various agencies, they also bring along with them specific knowledge and expertise which could complement the local knowledge.

### **Strengthen Border Relations, Bilateral Agreements and International Conventions**

Enforcing the rule of Law is more effective and efficient through close border relations in cooperation with our immediate neighbors. The transnational nature of drug trafficking requires the sharing of information and resources to combat drug trafficking.

### **Future measures to be taken by the government**

The National Drug Control Master Plan 2009-2013 addressing the recent rise and proliferation of illicit drug production, trafficking, abuse as well as related criminal activity that threatens the Lao PDR. The Drug Control Master Plan is a Five Year Strategy to address the drug problems that threaten the Lao PDR and has nine main pillars as follows:

1. trend Analysis and Risk Assessment
2. Alternative Development and Poverty Reduction
3. Drug Demand Reduction especially ATS as well as HIV and AIDS prevention
4. Civic Awareness and Community Mobilization
5. Law Enforcement
6. Criminal Justice and the Rule of Law



7. Chemical Precursor Control and Forensics Capacity
8. International Cooperation
9. Institution Capacity Building