Concept Note

1. Introduction

The Lao PDR National Consultation on Valuing Unpaid Care and Domestic Work and Investing in the Care Economy will be jointly convened by the Lao Women’s Union (LWU), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), and Oxfam in Laos.

The national consultation will be held on 4 and 5 June 2024 and will bring together representatives of line ministries, UN entities, Embassies, INGOs, civil society organizations (Women-led; gender; feminist organisations) members of academia and/or think tanks, and the private sector.

The consultation will serve as a critical platform to deliberate on the pressing issues surrounding the responsibilities of care work for women in Lao PDR. Throughout the sessions, participants will primarily focus on discussing the key elements of a comprehensive care policy ecosystem by recognizing the value and importance of investing in the care economy through legislation, policy initiatives and partnerships at the national level.
The consultation will consist of a series of presentations, on the care economy at regional- and ASEAN level followed by findings of care surveys at national and local level. An expert panel will then discuss care-sensitive and gender-differentiated policies in the context of Lao PDR.

The group work will be structured around the following four care policy categories: (a) Care infrastructure; (b) Care related social protection; (c) Care services; and (d) Employment-related care. The first group work session will identify 2-3 entry points for national coordinated action on addressing the care economy in Lao PDR per policy category, and the second group work session will discuss and analyse a total of four interventions at the policy level, either as part of upcoming or ongoing initiatives.

2. Contextualizing the Care Economy in Lao PDR

In Lao PDR, women and girls bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work (UCDW), devoting on average five times more time to unpaid care work than men.¹ The 2015 population and housing census revealed that 61 per cent of women in the labour force served as unpaid family workers, in stark contrast to only 26 per cent of men. ² This imbalance was exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic, with women primarily engaged in domestic care activities such as cooking and cleaning, while men were more likely to participate in external community meetings.³

This gendered and unequal distribution of care responsibilities, deeply rooted in social norms, limits the opportunities available to women and girls, impeding their access to, inter alia, quality education and decent work. Despite having the smallest gender gap in labour force participation among ASEAN countries, caring responsibilities still constitute a significant barrier for women's access to decent work in Lao PDR. 28.8 percent of women cite unpaid care and domestic work as the primary reason for their non-participation in the labour force, contrasting with men, who are primarily deterred by educational pursuits⁴. Moreover, women who do work are often pushed into the informal sector, with 79.6% of women employed in this capacity, leaving them without crucial employment benefits and social protections⁵. The absence of affordable and accessible childcare services exacerbates this issue, compelling many women to opt out of the labour market to fulfil domestic responsibilities.

To address these challenges, the government of Lao PDR has prioritized women's labour force participation within several national policies, including the National Strategy Plan for Gender Equality (2016–2025).⁶ Efforts to improve infrastructure have also improved access to vital resources like water and preschools, reducing women's unpaid care duties.⁷ At the regional level, Lao PDR has spearheaded efforts to address the care economy, hosting the Regional Forum on Care Work in ASEAN countries in July 2023 and championing the upcoming ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening the Care Economy and

¹ Asian Development Bank, Exploring the Gender Dimensions of Unpaid Care Work in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.
² Lao Statistics Bureau (2015) Results of Population and Housing Census 2015
³ UNICEF, UN Women, and Care, “Gender Analysis to Inform COVID-19 Response | UNICEF East Asia and Pacific.”
⁶ Asian Development Bank, Exploring the Gender Dimensions of Unpaid Care Work in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.
⁷ Asian Development Bank.
Resilience Towards the ASEAN Community Post-2025 as Chair of ASEAN in 2024. These efforts demonstrate Lao PDR’s strong leadership and dedication to addressing the care economy.

In light of these national and regional efforts, it is crucial that all key stakeholders in Lao PDR come together and engage in collaborative efforts and inter-ministerial deliberations, to foster a comprehensive understanding of the challenges at hand and opportunities ahead. By sharing expertise and insights, diverse actors can effectively address these issues and build on the growing momentum to address the care economy, thereby cultivating a more equitable and supportive environment for women and girls.

3. Objectives

The objective of the national consultation is to serve as an interactive forum for key stakeholders to examine ways to accelerate progress and adopt national care policies. This includes accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 5 (“achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”) and target 5.4 (“recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate”).

The consultation will offer all stakeholders an opportunity to consider possible areas for joint interventions (policy, programmatic, or otherwise) for the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of paid and unpaid care work in Lao PDR; for the promotion of women’s economic empowerment and participation in the labour force; as well as for further advancing the availability of timely, relevant and comprehensive sex-disaggregated data and gender-related information.

Through interactive discussions, participants will contextualize the political economy of care in the context of Lao PDR through debate and analysis of (i) Relevant actors and interests; (ii) Formal laws, policies, and institutional mechanisms on gender and care; (iii) Informal norms, rules, practices and discourses on gender and care/informal Institutions on gender and care.

Within the context of identifying entry points for action on the care economy, the following levers of change will be analysed in detail: (i) Legislative and regulatory frameworks; (ii) Whole-of-government approach, and partnerships; (iii) Gender responsive budgeting and investing in the care economy; (iv) Care disaggregated data and Gender disaggregated data for intersecting identity markers; (v) Represent intersectional gendered perspectives in decision making, and (vi) Advocate social change in gender norms to bolster policy efforts.

Specifically, this consultation will facilitate the exchange of knowledge and ideas in order to:

- Increase awareness and understanding of the importance of the care economy in Lao PDR.
- Explore innovative approaches, best practices and successful models from national and international contexts of care policy ecosystems that address gendered inequalities in the care economy.
• Foster partnerships across government ministries and departments to collaborate towards a comprehensive and holistic ‘whole of government’ approach to recognize, reduce, and redistribute paid and unpaid care domestic work.
• Identify entry points for policy change (social, economic and legislative aspects) to utilise for a concerted and coordinated implementation of care-focused policy measures, integrating both short and long-term considerations.

The outcome of the national consultation will be the identification of at least four entry points for policy action on the care economy in Lao PDR.

4. Programme

Day 1 – Tuesday 4 June 2024

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09:10 – 09:30</td>
<td>Opening remarks</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H.E Thamma Phetvisay, Vice president, Lao Women’s Union</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mr. Bakhodir Burkhanov, UN Resident Coordinator in Lao PDR</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ms. Cai Cai, Chief of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section,</td>
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<td>Social Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)</td>
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<td>Mr. Thasphorn Butsaling, Country Director, Oxfam in Lao PDR</td>
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<tr>
<td>09:30 – 10:00</td>
<td>Overview presentations on the care economy at regional- and ASEAN level</td>
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<td>Valuing unpaid care and domestic work and investing in the care economy in Asia and the Pacific</td>
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<td>Ms. Channe Lindstrøm Oguzhan, Social Affairs Officer, UNESCAP</td>
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<td>ASEAN Declaration on the Care Economy</td>
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<td>Ms Soukphaphone Phanit, Permanent Secretary, Lao Women’s Union</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Questions and answers</td>
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<td>10:00 – 10:30</td>
<td>Group Photo and tea break</td>
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| 10:30– 11:15 | **Data and evidence-building on care for informed policy making**  
**Moderator:** Ms. Phetvilay Phomnexay, Gender and Inclusion Program Coordinator, Oxfam in Laos.  
- Findings from care survey by Oxfam/LFTU/LWU  
  *Mr. Khamphy Khammavong, Civil Space Program Manager, Oxfam in Laos*  
- Women contributed to unpaid care and domestic work in Lao Labor force survey, National Statistics Bureau  
  *Ms. Kaisone Phokhay, Lao Statistics Bureau*  
- **Institute of Development Studies’ Contribution in generating research and evidence on care**  
  *Dr. Deepta Chopra, Professorial Research fellow, Institute of Development Studies*  
Questions and answers |
| 11:15- 12:00 | **Panel discussions on care-sensitive and gender-differentiated policies**  
**Moderator:** Dr. Ninpasueth Xayyaphonsy, General Director of Women Development Department, LWU.  
- Policies, promising practices and lessons learnt from the Philippines  
  *Ms. Caryl Gatapia, GAD Specialist II, Office of the Executive Director for Operations of the Philippines Commission on Women*  
- Unpaid care work and policy for informal workers  
  *Ms. Lamphan Nanthapanya, President of IWAA Association, HomeNet Laos*  
- Child care initiative in Houyxay Noy, CAMKID  
  *Ms. Phonxay Manivongsay, President of CAMKID Association.*  
- Care practices in private sector  
  *Ms. Fatema tuz Johoora, Oxfam GB’s private sector programme advisor*  
Questions and answers |
<p>| 12:00 - 13:00 | <strong>Lunch break</strong> |
|             | <strong>Plenary reflection on upcoming and ongoing care-sensitive policies</strong> |</p>
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<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>13:00: 13:45</td>
<td><strong>Moderator: Ms. Phetvilay Phommexay</strong>, Gender and Inclusion Program Coordinator, Oxfam in Laos. Opportunity for ministries to share policy initiatives</td>
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<td>Ms. Somchai Pharlivan, Technical staff Department of Women’s Advancement, Ministry of Health</td>
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<td>Ms. Bounhieng Sivongsa, Deputy Kindergarten Division, Early Childhood Education Dept, Ministry of Education and Sports</td>
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<td>Ms. Monethong Inthavong, Deputy of the Cabinet, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare</td>
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<td>Ms. Chanhphen Sibounheuang, Deputy of Labour Skills Development Division, Career Development Department, Lao Youth Union</td>
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<td>Mr. Soubin Thenbouapha, Head Department of Occupational Safety, Lao Federation of Trade Unions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dr. Ninpasueth Xayyaphonsy, Director of Women Development, Lao Women’s Union</td>
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<td>13:45 - 15:00</td>
<td><strong>Group work (led by ESCAP), within the context of the overall political economy of care and according to the four care policy categories as follows:</strong></td>
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**The political economy of care:**

- Relevant actors and interests
- Formal laws, policies, and institutional mechanisms on gender and care
- Informal norms, rules, practices and discourses on gender and care/informal Institutions on gender and care

**Care policy categories:**

- Care infrastructure
- Care related social protection
- Care services
- Employment-related care

*The group work is intended to identify 2-3 entry points for national coordinated action on addressing the care economy in Lao PDR*

**Facilitators:**

Chaipasird, Khamphy, Phetvilay and Soudany

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<tr>
<td>15:00 – 15:30</td>
<td><strong>Tea break</strong></td>
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<td>15:30 – 16:30</td>
<td><strong>Group work presentations on identified entry points</strong></td>
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<td>Groups deliver presentations on identified entry points (45 minutes)</td>
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Day 2 - Wednesday 5 June 2024

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<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>09:00 – 09:10</td>
<td>Recap from the first day by LWU</td>
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| 09:10 – 10:10 | **Group work (led by UNESCAP), on one key entry point for national coordinated action on addressing the care economy in Lao PDR per policy category, according to the levers of change as follows:**  

**Levers of Change**  
- Legislative and regulatory frameworks  
- Whole-of-government approach, and partnerships  
- Gender responsive budgeting and investing in the care economy  
- Care disaggregated data and Gender disaggregated data for intersecting identity markers  
- Represent intersectional gendered perspectives in decision making  
- Advocate social change in gender norms to bolster policy efforts  

*The group work is intended to analyze a total of four interventions at the policy level, either as part of upcoming or ongoing initiatives.*  

**Facilitators:** Chaipasird, Khamphy, Phetvilay and Soudany |
| 10:10 – 10:40 | **Tea break**                                                                                   |
| 10:40 – 11:40 | **Group work presentations on levers of change for care economy action**  

- Groups deliver presentations (45 minutes)  
- Group Reflection (15 minutes)  

**Moderator: Channe Lindstrom Oguzhan, UNESCAP** |
| 11:40 – 12:00 | **Closing remarks**  

- H.E Thamma Phetvisay, Vice president, Lao Women’s Union  
- Ms. Cai Cai, Chief of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, Social Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)  
- Mr. Thasphorn Butsaling, Country Director, Oxfam in Lao PDR |
5. Background

Enabling equal access for women and girls to opportunities and resources, particularly for rural and marginalized women, has been part of the main goals to enhance gender equality in Lao PDR. More specifically, illiteracy, poor reproductive and basic health, food insecurity, and economic disenfranchisement are high priorities in the country's development agenda for women. Despite notable progress, sharp regional, gender, urban-rural and ethnic disparities persist. Limited access to quality and coordinated health services as well as the availability of reproductive health services remains a challenge in the country. Moreover, 32.7 per cent of women aged 20–24 years old were married or in a union before age 18. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, Lao PDR ranked 54 out of 146 countries, indicating a decline in its standing compared to previous years.

In response to these challenges, Lao PDR has enacted several laws and policies aimed at promoting the status and participation of Lao women in the country's socio-economic development. Notable among these are the Law on the Development and Protection of Women (2004), the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (2006), and the Law of the Lao Women’s Union (2013). Other important legal frameworks include the Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Children (2014) and the amendments to the constitution of Article 35 and Article 37, which assert that all Lao citizens are equal before the law irrespective of their gender, social status, education, beliefs and ethnicity and should enjoy equal rights in the political, economic, cultural and social fields and in family affairs. The amendment to the Law on State Budget in 2015 further enforces the principle of gender equality in state budget expenditures.

On the institutional front, the government established the National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW) in 2003 as the national focal agency for gender mainstreaming in development programmes and policies. Under the commission's oversight, there has been significant improvements in sex-disaggregated data collection and developing a comprehensive national gender strategy. Additionally, the Lao Women’s Union (LWU), established officially in 1955, plays a crucial role as the focal point for SDG 5. It is an official mass-based organization that operates throughout the country and is represented across all ministries and at the central provincial/ministerial, district/municipal and village levels. LWU has been taking the lead in advocating, disseminating and advising on the implementation of the Constitution, laws and regulations of the government, and the international instruments concerning women’s rights.

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9 UN Women, “Country Fact Sheet | UN Women Data Hub.”
11 Lao Women’s Union, “National Review of Lao People’s Democratic Republic Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform.”
12 Lao Women’s Union, “Promotion and Protection of Lao Women’s Rights.”
6. Contact

Lao Women's Union

Lao Women's Union (LWU) was established in 1955 as part of the Lao People's Democratic Republic system. Its mission is to mobilize and unite Lao women for active participation in national protection and development effort. LWU works to safeguard the rights and interests of women and children, promote gender equality policies, and support women's advancement in socio-economic development.

Ms. Soukphaphone Phanit, Permanent Secretary, Lao Women's Union, ACWC Representative for Women's Rights, ACW Focal Point soukphaphone@yahoo.com

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) provides an inclusive intergovernmental platform for governments and other stakeholders in the region to accelerate the implementation of global gender equality commitments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the outcomes of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Ms. Channe Lindstrøm Oguzhan, Social Affairs Officer, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, Social Development Division, ESCAP lindstromoguzhan@un.org

Oxfam in Laos works with partners to transform the unequal power relations, structures, norms and values that cause poverty and inequality, including gender-based violence and injustice. Oxfam offers its continued support in promoting a care economy and strengthened social protection in Asia and the Pacific.

Ms. Phetvilay Phommesay, Program Coordinator, Gender and Inclusion program, Oxfam in Laos phetvilay.phommesay@oxfam.org

Ms. Chaipasird Phunphouvanna, Program Manager-Gender and Inclusion, Oxfam in Laos chaipasird.phunphouvanna@oxfam.org

7. Additional documents

COVID-19 and the Unpaid Care Economy in Asia and the Pacific

How to Invest in the Care Economy: a Primer

Addressing Unpaid Care Work in ASEAN