

FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOTS Lao People's Democratic Republic



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Produced by Mekong Institute
Supported by United States Agency for International Development

Food Security Situation in Lao PDR

In Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), economic growth has not necessarily meant food security. While it is on track towards becoming a middle income country by 2020, it continues to be among the most food insecure in Asia. For instance, it has one of the most alarming undernourishment and stunting rates for children under five years in the region.

Since 62.45% of the population live in rural areas and grow their own food, most food production concerns are in smallholder farms. Issues like irrigation hamper productivity given only 21% of arable land is equipped for irrigation. Rice production dominates the sector, with rice being grown in ¾ of all cultivated areas. Production inequality persists, for example, while Laos is already rice self-sufficient, almost half of its provinces continue to have a rice deficit.

Food availability is characterized by **low agricultural productivity in crops, livestock and fisheries**. Farmers regard lack of irrigation as the greatest single constraint on agricultural production. Land access for farmers has also been difficult due to factors like land conflicts and unexploded ordinance (UXO), rendering some parcels unavailable or unfit for agricultural use. **Access to food is unreliable and inconsistent, particularly for rural households**. Lack of permanent markets in villages and roads hamper access and transport of agricultural produce and food. In terms of **stability, Lao PDR is particularly vulnerable to environmental risks**, primarily typhoons, droughts and animal diseases.



Smallholder farmers need assistance

PILLARS OF FOOD SECURITY

Food security is "[when] people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is the application of this concept to the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern."

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization

 <p>AVAILABILITY</p> <p>sufficient quantities of food available on a consistent basis</p>	<p>UTILIZATION</p>  <p>appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as adequate water and sanitation</p>
 <p>ACCESS</p> <p>having sufficient resources to obtain appropriate food for nutritious diet</p>	<p>STABILITY</p>  <p>access to adequate food at all times with no risk losing access as a consequence of sudden or cyclical events</p>

Responses to Food Security Situation

The Agricultural Development Strategy 2011-2020 serves as food security reference for the government and development partners. The strategy outlines two main goals, which reflect government's strategy to take an area-based approach to food production.

Key policies that are important to improve availability and access were developed only as recently as 2011, including specific policies for **irrigation, biodiversity, livestock, fisheries, forestry and disaster risk reduction and management**.

Because of the country's critical food security status, direct interventions that provide immediate access to food are important. This includes food aid in times of drought and floods, seed/input relief, restocking of livestock capital, enabling of market revival and establishment of social safety nets.

STRATEGY FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, 2011–2020

Key objectives:

- modernize lowland market-oriented agriculture production adapted to climate change, with a focus on smallholder farmers
- conserve upland ecosystems, ensuring food security and improving the livelihoods of rural communities

INDICATORS

Availability

- Number of undernourished people: 1.5 M (2014)
- Prevalence of undernourishment: 22% of population (2014)

Access

- Road density (per 100 sqm of land area): 17% (2011)
- Domestic food price index: 2.21 (2012)

Utilization

- Percentage of children under 5 years of age who are stunted: 44% (2012)
- Percentage of children under 5 years of age who are underweight: 27% (2012)

Stability

- Value of food imports over total merchandise exports: 10% (2012)
- Percentage of arable land equipped for irrigation: 21.7% (2012)

Development Partners for Food Security

Major development partners work alongside government and academic institutions on policy formulation, coordination, and capacity-building. Key themes that cut across the four pillars of food security include:

- improving food and nutritional security through enhanced **policy, planning, and implementation** mechanisms
- introducing environmentally sustainable production for the market by small farmers using the **value chain approach**
- promoting **sustainable natural resource management** for crops, forests, fisheries and livestock
- **reducing risk and vulnerability** to natural and other disasters through **prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery**

USAID supported policy formulation and capacity building in Lao PDR, particularly for avian flu interventions, social services for vulnerable populations, policy support for improving transition to open markets, and promoting sustainable forest management.

Gaps in Food Security and Intervention Required

One policy area to address is the lack of a comprehensive national food security policy in Lao PDR that covers all the four pillars of food security. In terms of availability, increasing agricultural production is key, particularly for rice and other crops. This includes optimizing public resources like **irrigation and technology to support rice farmers**. Investing in **rural markets and infrastructure**, especially roads, will support access to inputs and final food products.

Resource rehabilitation, restoration and conservation, particularly of water, fisheries, and forests, are essential to ensuring food availability. For forestry in particular, main targets include improving existing forest areas up to 65% of total land area through watershed management, strict measures for avoiding deforestation, and developing monitoring mechanism to protect forests. Another measure is improving productivity in sustainable agriculture practices to avoid pressure on endangered resources.

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Land access to farmers difficult

Improving the **management of agricultural land concessions** to investors is important. In Vientiane alone, 15% of land area has been given to the private sector, primarily for mining, leaving very little land for food production. The government will need support in defining guidelines for granting land concessions or leasing contracts, since these are not developed yet.

The government foresees that one of its main roles is facilitating private investment, which would entail capacity building for local governments on **attracting and monitoring investment**. Such investments are needed for higher-value and more efficient agriculture, food production and distribution. Public-private partnerships are one desired mode of development, and the government is building linkages among farmer organizations and foreign investors. Such partnerships will ensure that Global GAP (certified good agricultural practices) is applied for sustainable management of agricultural land, improved rearing techniques for livestock and food safety.

As a **food stability** concern, Laos is highly vulnerable to climate change. It needs a proactive and integrated policy linking disaster risk management and reduction to food security. The country also needs to be better equipped to monitor and mitigate emerging zoonotic diseases.

AGRICULTURE SECTOR STATISTICS

