

COUNTRY STRATEGY

WFP's goal for Lao PDR is the eradication of malnutrition and undernourishment, improving overall health, wellbeing and development. A key area of engagement is the reduction and prevention of stunting and malnutrition related anaemia. Other areas include food waste management, resourceful handling of food and addressing the underlying causes of existing micronutrient deficiencies.

In alignment with the Government's 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and the extension of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), the WFP Country Programme (CP) has been extended until December 2016. WFP efforts are governed by four principles: 1) save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies, 2) support or restore food security and nutrition and establish or rebuild livelihoods in fragile settings and following emergencies, 3) reduce risk and enable people and communities to meet their own food and nutritional needs, and 4) reduce malnutrition and break the intergenerational cycle of hunger.

In 2015, WFP assisted 240,000 people. WFP has been present in the country since 1976.



One of the school gardens set up by WFP in support of the School Meals Programme in Oudomxay Province. Photo © WFP/Sarah Rabi

OPERATIONS

	Project Duration	Planned number of people	Total requirements (in USD)	Total received (in USD)	Total Funded (%)	6 Months Net Funding Requirements (in USD)*	Top 5 Donors
DEV 200242: Country Programme Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)	Jan 2012- Dec 2016	209,578	98,754,191	66,939,413	68%	-	USA, Australia, Japan, Luxembourg, Private Donors

* January – June 2016

Summary of WFP assistance: WFP is supporting the Government's goal of ending undernutrition and its debilitating impact on human potential and national development. WFP's long-term goal is to enhance food security and nutrition in targeted communities by implementing sustainable programmes. In addition to building national capacity, WFP supports activities which address the three elements of food security by increasing food availability, improving households' access to food and advocating for food utilisation issues. To achieve this, WFP Lao PDR uses a lifecycle approach.

The Mother and Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) effort provides pregnant women and nursing mothers with nutritional support through supplements and food rations. Once a child is born, WFP supplies micronutrient supplements to the new-born for the first two years of life. The programme ensures nutritional balance and prevents malnutrition and stunting. WFP's close consultation with local health centres provides optimal ongoing care.

For children of pre-school and school age, WFP provides a nutritious mid-morning snack or school lunch as well as education about healthy eating. The School Meals programme targets over 1,500 primary schools and includes setting up school gardens used for educational purposes and as input to the school lunches. WFP is working on formulating a hand over strategy with the Government.

In adulthood, rural development activities assist local farmers to increase their produce through Food Assistance for Assets, thus encouraging self-sufficiency and improving their long-term food security.

In all stages of life, WFP wants to address micronutrient deficiencies, advocating with the Lao Government and the private sector on fortification of locally produced foods to increase consumption of micronutrients.

Lao PDR lies in a geographical area prone to natural disasters. Recurring floods, excessive rain or persistent droughts lead to food insecurity, making planning ahead paramount. WFP's Emergency Preparedness and Response initiatives train the Government and communities to take appropriate action in a crisis. Furthermore, should disaster strike, WFP Lao PDR maintains an emergency stock of canned fish to feed 35,000 people.

OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

ACHIEVEMENTS	ISSUES/CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WFP and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry carried out a country-wide post-harvest food security assessment. The assessment, which covered 2,460 households in 13 livelihood zones, provides with an overview of the food security situation in the country, and its link to climate change and disaster risk reduction. • A Food and Nutrition Security Survey was undertaken by the Government with support from WFP, UNICEF, EU and SDC. Results indicate that: i) child stunting shows signs of improvement; ii) anemia remains high in young children and women during pregnancy and lactation; iii) poor diet in children aged 6-23 months; and iv) coverage of Vitamin A, deworming, iron/folic acid remains low. • The British Columbia University carried out an MCHN impact assessment, to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme and in which ways it contributes to reducing stunting in the three provinces where WFP operates. • In September, WFP started the transition from the mid-morning snack to school lunch in 259 schools. These schools have also set up gardens to grow vegetables for the meals. With support from the Government of Japan, WFP was able to distribute canned fish for one semester to enhance the nutritional value of the school lunches. • In December, a delegation from the Government of Nepal travelled to Laos with the aim of learning from the Lao national school meals programme. This South-South cooperation initiative was facilitated by Nepal and Laos country offices. • In December, WFP signed an MOU with Catholic Relief Services to establish a cooperation on the school meals programme at the policy level. The partnership focuses on the development of a gradual handover strategy of the programme to the Government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In November, the baseline report for the school meals programme was released. While the attention rate of the children was high, the report underlined a serious lack of understanding of good hygiene practises, and showed that less than 2 percent of children in grade 3 were able to understand 75 percent of a text (Early Grade Reading Assessment). Following one of the recommendations to address water access issues in schools and communities, WFP has started a Food Assistance for Assets project to bring water to schools. • WFP serves 40 of the 49 ethnic groups in the country. In almost all districts, many women do not speak Lao. To overcome this challenge, WFP piloted a “pictures only” poster explaining the programme, and beneficiary feedback mechanisms were set up (boxes, hotline, and youth mobilisers) in Oudomxay province. Results indicate that: i) 60 percent knew WFP’s logo and that WFP provides food assistance; ii) the large majority was aware of the school meals programme, but many did not know it was from WFP; iii) 60 percent did not know the MCHN programme; and iv) 44 percent said that if they had to complain, they did not know who to complain to. This shows the crucial role the feedback mechanism can play in terms of programme awareness and complaint mechanism. It will be gradually rolled out in all target areas to improve our accountability to affected populations.

PARTNERSHIPS

WFP is working in partnership with the Lao Government, NGOs and other United Nations agencies as part of “Delivering as One UN” to address food security and undernutrition. Government associated agencies such as Lao Women’s Union and Lao Front for National Construction are also key implementing partners. Through partnerships, WFP is developing government capacity; delivering training and awareness campaigns; implementing programmes; conducting joint monitoring; and ensuring complementarity through technical working groups.

The design of the Government/IFAD/WFP Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) has been finalised. It will be submitted to the IFAD Executive Board in April 2016 for approval.

Quarterly meetings will be organised to strengthen communication and cooperation with WFP donors present in Vientiane and in neighbouring countries covering Lao PDR. The second meeting took place in early December. It gave WFP the opportunity to present its achievements and challenges over the past quarter; explain the new M&E system; share the first market analysis report; present the project on Accountability to Affected Populations; and announce the upcoming food security assessment.

COUNTRY BACKGROUND

The Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is a least developed and low income food deficit country ranking 141 out of 188 on the 2015 UNDP Human Development Index. Lao PDR is landlocked, with a population of 6.8 million comprising 49 officially recognised ethnic groups. It has one of the lowest population densities in Asia (25 people per km²) with nearly half of all villages inaccessible and cut off from services during the rainy season. One quarter of the population lives under the national poverty line and many households just above the line are vulnerable to minor shocks such as food price changes. The World Bank lists the GDP per capita as USD 1,600, with FAO noting that 75 percent of the economically active population are in the agricultural sector.

Lao PDR is the world’s most heavily bombed country per capita. Two-thirds of the country is still contaminated with unexploded ordnance, which prevents the use of land for agriculture or animal husbandry. This, combined with long-term land lease contracts for foreign investment and export, has negatively impacted access to land and food security.

Natural disasters such as floods and droughts are common and can lead to acute undernutrition due to weak infrastructure with the World Risk Report 2015 scoring Laos’ lack of coping capabilities at 84.3 percent. The 2014 IFPRI Global Hunger Index still rates hunger levels for Laos as ‘alarming’ with Laos ranked 61 out of 76 countries. Currently, 44 percent of children in Lao are stunted. According to IFPRI reports, the prevalence of anaemia in school aged children is severe, with nearly a third of children under 5 underweight and an under 5 mortality rate of 7.2 percent.

