



## Summary report on the International Day of the Girl Child 2017

*“In order to ultimately achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and for the country to graduate from LDC status, all girls’ potential need to be realized. A girl must have equal rights and opportunities to fully develop herself and be able to contribute to community development as well as to country as a whole.”* H.E Dr. Ms. Inlavanh Keobounphan, President of Lao Women Union.

*“Noi’s first year has been productive. More people and more agencies are aware of the importance to invest in girls. With the leadership of UNFPA, the UN Team is adopting a holistic and multi-sectoral approach, which is necessary to make girls part of the development agenda and enable Noi to realize her full potential.”* Ms. Kaarina Immonen, UN Resident Coordinator, Lao PDR

Under the leadership of the Lao Women’s Union and with support of the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and Development Partners, Lao PDR celebrated the first anniversary of Noi on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2017. Under the slogan *‘The Power of the Adolescent Girl: Vision for 2030’* the Government, United Nations agencies and development partners came together in Vientiane to bring attention to the importance of the adolescent girl within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda and to place Noi - the Lao girl representing all 700.230 adolescent girls in the country - at the centre of the Agenda 2030.

In 2016 Noi was launched as a 10 year old girl to serve as an entry point for dialogue and to create awareness on the specific needs of adolescents, especially those related to early marriage and early pregnancy in Lao PDR. By 2030 she will have passed through all stages of adolescence and will be a young woman aged 25. By then, it is essential that she has the necessary life-skills to live a healthy, responsible and fulfilling life and that she can contribute to the development of her family, her community and the country. This is what is referred to as the **Noi Vision 2030**. Each year on the International Day of the Girl Child the idea is to take stock of the progress to assess, whether we are on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, not leaving Noi behind.

### Insights to the discussions during the upcoming Round Table meeting

The discussions that took place during the Girl Child Day in Vientiane Capital raised awareness around the **cross-cutting issues related to the Girl Child** in Lao PDR as well as the importance of quality data on adolescents. The President of the Lao Women’s Union, Dr. Inlavanh Keobounphanh gave the opening remarks, highlighting the importance of investing in adolescent girls and ending child marriage in Lao PDR. Subsequently, the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Planning and Investment, H.E. Mr. Kikeo Chanthabuly spoke about girls’ roles in the SDG agenda, putting Noi at centre stage for development, and emphasizing the linkages and importance of investing in Noi to achieve LDC graduation. The UN Resident Coordinator, Ms. Kaarina Immonen, gave a speech on the importance of partnership and the necessity of a multi-sectoral, holistic approach on behalf of all development partners.

Ms. Sisavanh Didaravong, Deputy Director General of the Department of Planning of the Ministry of Planning and Investment presented on SDG Localization and LDC graduation and highlighted its relevance for adolescent girls in Lao PDR. Finally, the day was concluded in a panel discussion with Mr. Leon Paul Faber, the European Union Ambassador, Ms. Chansoda Phonethip, Director General of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women and Mother and Child Secretariat of Lao Women's Union, Mr. Prasong Vongkhamchanh, the Director General of Social Welfare Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Dr. Bouthavong Phengsisomboun, the Deputy Director General of the health care department at the Ministry of Health, Ms. Khampaseuth Kitifnavong, the Deputy Director General of Planning at the Ministry of Education and Sports and Dr. Mona Girgis, the Country Director of Plan International in Lao PDR facilitated by Ms. Frederika Meijer, UNFPA. The panel comprised of high level government officials and Development Partners and emphasized the need for increased investment and increased priority on adolescents and youth, especially adolescent girls - Noi, in future national development policies and programmes as well as illustrated the joint commitment among partners in facilitating and funding this process. Finally, discussions also echoed what was raised by the Ms. Khampaseuth Kitifnavong from MPI with regard to the importance of quality data and monitoring of the progress of girls, the possibility of having a separate chapter or annex on Noi in the first **National Voluntary Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Report** that Lao PDR will present in 2018.

### **Noi at the Centre of the Development Agenda – Outcomes of the Discussions**

The event showcased **commitment** from both government and development partners to **increase investments and join forces behind Noi**. It was agreed that ending child marriage and reducing adolescent pregnancy in Lao PDR are priority areas of focus considering their role in to achieving the targets in the 8<sup>th</sup> NSEDP, as well as for the LDC graduation. During the day, it was communicated that focusing on adolescent girls at risk not only allows governments to reach a critical mass of girls, unmarried and married, but has also shown to presents significant cost efficiencies and return of investment.

**Conducive environment for Noi:** It was recognized that to adequately address Noi's needs, policies must take her specific needs into account and explicitly **integrate them in existing policies and sector plans**. This work has been initiated and integrated in the drafting processes of the first National youth policy, the revision of the National Population & Development Policy (NPDP), and the Reproductive Health Policy.

**Partnerships for Noi:** In order to achieve the 2030 Development Agenda and to allow adolescent girls and Noi to reach her full potential it was recognised and agreed upon that we must work together across sectors. The multiple development needs of adolescent girls require a **multi-sectoral approach** in which health, educational, nutritional issues are address as well as labour and social protection. Addressing her different needs will ultimately influencing the outcomes of the SDG agenda that all sectors signed up to. The benefit of a **multi-stakeholder approach** consisting of Government partners, UN agencies, as well as Non-Government organisations and the private sector is that expertise can be combined to jointly plan for and address the needs of the most underserved adolescent girls, in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17.

The mass organisations such as LWU and LYU are especially important to advocate for Noi at the grass root level and to raise awareness on adolescent issues even in the most remote areas of the country.

**Data for Noi:** The limited availability of data regarding adolescents in Lao PDR was recognized by several partners and raised specifically during the Adolescent Research Day following the Girl Child Day consultation. There is a need to fill the data gap. Government and Development partners communicated the need for effective monitoring of the process of adolescents within the SDG agenda, and thus discussed the possibility of including a separate chapter or annex on adolescents in the national voluntary SDG report 2018.

In addition to this, the National Institute of Public Health (NIOPH) has worked out a comprehensive list of indicators to establish a **provincial adolescent girl situation analysis**, called the **Noi Framework**. It will include data in relation to health, education, protection, gender equality, empowerment and employment as well as data reflecting assets, obstacles, environment and behaviours directly and indirectly affecting girls. Based on this framework a large-scale data collection in Bokeo Province is currently being tested. Once finalized, the framework can be applied in other provinces and countries.

To achieve the Noi Vision 2030 and ensure that girls are not left behind, there is a need to monitor and visualize the specific progress of adolescent girls within the SDGs. In this view UNFPA along with all the development partners is developing the - **Noi 2030 Framework** which is based on the SDG Framework. A set of specific SDG targets and indicators relevant to adolescents' development will be selected to allow partners to work in a coherent manner and to visualize their contribution towards both the National and Global Development Goals.

### **Recommendations for the Round Table Meeting**

**Enhance and intensify multi-sectoral partnerships at national and provincial level** in close collaboration with the Lao Women's Union and key line Ministries such as the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Lao Youth Union and other relevant Government entities and Development Partners. This means improving mutual accountability and accelerating progress to ensure that national development plans benefit the most left behind, and the hardest to reach across all sectors.

**Establish multi-stakeholder partnerships tapping into existing mechanisms** - The idea is to plan and work together effectively to support national priorities on the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on Noi's needs in particular. Noi could be integrated in existing programmes or as standalone programmes to strengthen system-wide coherence at all levels. Partners should share a common analysis of the adolescent girls' needs that would be underpinned by the provincial situation analyses of adolescent girls; and plan, monitor and report on shared results making use of specific partners' expertise and resources for more effective and coherent programme delivery.

**Engage the private sector:** further work is needed to leverage private finances as well as to promote decent employment for older adolescent girls. Vocational training institutes could develop a specific module to prepare especially girls for the labour market and also equip them with the necessary life skills. In addition, partners need to brainstorm jointly on

financing strategies for the Sustainable Development Goals, including through innovative financing.

**Create a conducive and enabling policy environment for adolescent girls** through ensuring that national policies and laws addressing the specific needs of adolescent girls. Key tasks for the upcoming month will be the development of the first national youth policy in order to establish a conducive legal and political environment for adolescent girls such as Noi.

**Ensure targeted investment in adolescent girls** to reach thousands of girls at risk of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, through interventions (primarily community-level girl groups) that provide opportunities for social participation and leadership, gaining life skills and literacy, and accessing health services including family planning and HIV services.

**Conduct consistent and sustained quality research, data collection and monitoring** to serve as foundation for future programme design and to inform policy and sector planning.

**Increase programmatic focus on adolescent girls and ensuring girl-centred programming** to provide girls with the resources they need and to reach the girls most left behind.

**Ensure adolescent girls' participation at all stages of the programme** meaning that girls are the key stakeholders in the programmes, and that programmes reflect their inputs, and respond to their needs.

**Mobilise communities using culturally-sensitive approaches** to bring about changes in social norms to support gender equality and the abandonment of harmful practices such as early pregnancy and early child marriage.

**Include adolescent girls as key target group in nutrition interventions**, in particular social behaviour change communication (SBCC), recognizing their role in ending poor nutrition and bringing about development.

