

RTIM 2024: Sector Working Group on Governance (GSWG) Annual Report

This is a joint report of SWG Chair and Co-chairs in consultation and inputs from members of the GSWG

SWG Chairs and Co-chairs:

- Government: Minister of Home Affairs (MOHA) & Minister of Justice (MOJ)
- Development Partners: Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) Regional Director of Cooperation, on behalf of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Lao PDR from Embassy of Switzerland in Bangkok, Thailand

SWG Secretariat and Focal Points:

Representatives of the Government and State Institutions of Lao PDR

- Cabinet Office, Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA)
- DDG, Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Justice (MoJ)
- DDG, Department of International Organisations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)
- DDG, Department of Fiscal Policy, Ministry of Finance (MoF)
- DDG, Multi-lateral Inter-Parliamentary Relations Department, NA

Representatives of Development Partners

- Head of Governance, UNDP
- Head of Governance Portfolio, SDC
- Attaché, Governance, EU Delegation to Lao PDR
- Head of Sustainable Economic Development and Good Governance, GIZ

I. Update on main objectives and targets of Sector Working Group in 2024

The Sector Working Group on Governance in Lao PDR (or Laos, hereafter) is tasked with the primary objectives of advancing good governance, enhancing transparency, and fostering accountability within the nation. These objectives are in accordance with the directive issued by the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI)¹ and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)², which mandates GSWG to support the implementation of Outcome 6 of the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP 2021-2025). This involves supporting the development and implementation of policies and practices that uphold the principles of good governance, such as rule of law, effective public administration, anti-corruption measures, and the protection of all citizen by leaving no one behind.

The Technical Working Group on Governance aims to support the implementation of the 9thNSEDP, with particular emphasis on advancing three key outputs under Outcome 6. These efforts align with SDG 16, which promotes peace, justice, and strong institutions. The GSWG aims to drive progress in these areas to ensure effective governance and the achievement of national development priorities, as follows:

1. Enhanced efficiency of public governance and administration and deepened implementation of the Sam Sang Directive
2. Improved and harmonized coordination mechanisms and regulations within the public sector to increase efficiency
3. Ensure political stability, peace and order, unity, democracy, justice and civilization within the society

The SDG-based National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) Core Indicators relating to the Governance Sector Working Group (GSWG), as instructed by MPI and MOFA, provide a comprehensive framework for assessing and improving governance in Laos. These indicators focus on key areas of public administration, access to justice, decentralization, e-governance, and the effectiveness of the judicial system.

Data and figures presented in the following table and throughout this report are sourced from two primary channels. MOHA has provided a significant portion of the information, drawing from its administrative records. Additionally, Sub-Sector Working Groups (SSWGs) have contributed data and figures, which were initially presented during their respective meetings.

SDG based NSEDP Core Indicators relating to the GSWG as instructed by MPI and MOFA	Milestones 2023 and 2024	2025 Target
1. Proportion of the public administration structure that has been streamlined according to the Sam Sang Directive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Departments and divisions at ministries -other agencies - Departments and divisions at ministries- Sections, units and divisions at the local administrative level <p><i>The first indicator measures the progress in streamlining the public administration structure according to the Sam Sang Directive, examining the reorganization at both ministerial and local administrative levels. This is crucial for enhancing governmental efficiency and responsiveness.</i></p>	To be updated	20 30

¹ MPI is responsible for the National Planning (NSEDP)

² MOFA is responsible for localization of Sustainable Development Goals including monitoring and reporting on the implementation of SDGs

SDG based NSEDP Core Indicators relating to the GSWG as instructed by MPI and MOFA	Milestones 2023 and 2024	2025 Target
<p>2. Proportion of population accessing justice process (access to justice and government services)</p> <p><i>The second indicator assesses the proportion of the population accessing justice processes and government services, which is vital for ensuring equitable access to legal recourse and public services for all citizens.</i></p>	<p>2023 – 35,607 people (which 10,890 women)</p> <p>6 months in 2024: 9,870 people (which 4,301 women)</p> <p><i>(At this stage, MOJ collected the total number and will calculate the ratio at later stage)</i></p>	<p>Number on access to legal aid services in nationwide (include service by justice sector, Lao Women Union and Lao Bar Association)</p> <p>50,000 people</p>
<p>3. Sam Sang Directive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To establish the province as a strategic unit - To establish the district as a comprehensive unit - To establish the village as a development unit <p><i>The Sam Sang Directive, represented by the third indicator, outlines a decentralization strategy that aims to establish provinces as strategic units, districts as comprehensive units, and villages as development units. This approach is designed to empower local governance and promote more targeted, context-specific development initiatives.</i></p>	<p>To be updated</p>	<p>2/3 (66.6%) 1/3 (33.3%) 2/3 (66.6%)</p>
<p>4. Proportion of the essential basic services required of the governing party as online services</p> <p><i>The fourth indicator focuses on the digitalization of essential government services, measuring the proportion of basic services available online. This reflects the government's efforts to leverage technology for improved service delivery and accessibility.</i></p>	<p>To be updated</p>	<p>50</p>
<p>5. The quality of monitoring, respecting the implementation of the law and ordering the accused to be promoted to the court to be upgraded</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proportion of resolved cases - Proportion of court judgements according to the statement of the prosecutor <p><i>The fifth indicator evaluates the quality of legal implementation and judicial processes. It looks at the proportion of resolved cases and the alignment between court judgments and prosecutors' statements, providing insights into the efficiency and integrity of the judicial system.</i></p>	<p>Successful implementation of court decisions (Jan-Sep in 2024) 1,550 cases</p>	<p>95 95 (to be discussed over the target)</p>

PM's Instruction on the implementation of 2023 RTIM's policy recommendations: Instruction No. 868 dated 6 May 2024 for the implementation of the 2023 RTIM's policy recommendations related to Governance Sector are:

1. Enhanced greater partnership and engagement of CSOs and other organizations for the implementation of the 9th NSEDP.
2. Revitalisation of social structure and engagement of youth for sustainable and green growth

3. Enhanced public administration, rule of law and access to justice.

GSWG has incorporated these policy recommendations into its agenda. Notably, significant progress has been made in collaborating with CSOs, facilitating discussions, and creating platforms for all partners to address challenges and enhance the role of law and access to justice. However, the GSWG recognizes the need for increased focus on youth and social engagement. Additionally, ongoing efforts are required to further strengthen CSO partnerships and continue improving the rule of law. This approach aligns with the PM's instructions and sets a clear path for future governance initiatives in Laos.

II. Strategic progress and results in 2024 against 9th NSEDP outcomes and outputs including SDGs and 2023 RTIM policy recommendations

This report aligns GSWG's progress and activities with the outputs outlined in the NSEDP, ensuring a coherent approach to governance improvements in Lao PDR. The GSWG's efforts are concentrated within its two Sub-Sector Working Groups (SSWGs): 1) Public Service Improvement and Citizen Engagement (PSI CE) and 2) Rule of Law and Access to Justice, Rule of Law and Institutional Oversight (ROLAIO). The PSI CE sub-group focuses on enhancing public service delivery and fostering citizen participation, while the ROLAIO sub-group aims to strengthen legal frameworks and improve access to justice. By addressing these interconnected areas, this report provides a comprehensive approach to governance reform, tackling both national development goals and specific challenges in public administration and the justice system.

Thematic progress

2.1 Decentralization and Local Governance

Key Progress toward Results

- **The National Strategy on Public Services** through One Door Service Mechanism 2030 has been implemented and led to the opening of 8 additional One-Door-Service-Centers in 2024, bringing the total number of centers to 63 across the country. The National Strategy aims the streamlining administrative processes for citizens and will be completed by a Decree on Good Public Services and a Law on Public Administration, expected in 2025.
- **Village Cluster Establishment Progress:** Progress has been made in the establishment of village clusters, a key initiative to enhance local governance. The data collected in 2023 informed the drafting of a new law on local administration.
- **Three Builds Policy Implementation:** MOHA organized promotional meetings in several provinces, including Xieng Khouang, Xaysomboun, and Bolikhamxay, resulting in increased awareness and engagement in the Three Builds Policy. Furthermore, the comprehensive monitoring and compilation of reports from 11 provinces and 14 sectors have yielded valuable insights into the policy's implementation progress, enabling more targeted interventions and support³.
- **The focus on local development planning** has been reinforced, starting with the Village Development Plans under the framework of the Poverty Reduction Fund, which were then integrated into broader, higher-level development strategies, such as the law on local administration⁴.

Key challenges

- **Capacity and Human Resources constraints:** One of the most challenges is the variations in the capacity of local governments to manage their increased responsibilities. Many districts and provinces, particularly those in remote areas, struggle with financial management, project planning, and the scaling up important initiatives like the District Development Funds (DDF) and Village Development Plans.
- **Financial sustainability and infrastructure imbalances:** Despite improvements in local revenue collection, there remain substantial fiscal imbalances across different regions. Poorer or more remote areas often struggle to generate sufficient local revenue, potentially leading to uneven development in the country. This is notably demonstrated by the fragile financial

³ Data provided by MOHA (05/11/2024)

⁴ Data provided by MOHA (05/11/2024)

sustainability of the ODSC in some provinces, which represents a key challenge in the implementation of the National Strategy, or in the implementation of the DDF. In addition, these financial challenges are deepened by inadequate infrastructure and limited access to technology, particularly in remote areas, which hinders the implementation of key initiatives like the digitalization of public services, through the ODSC.

- **Coordination and oversight:** As more decision-making power is devolved to local levels, ensuring that local actions align with national policies and maintaining effective oversight from the central government is a significant challenge. The decentralization process requires robust coordination mechanisms between different levels of government (central, provincial, district, village) in planning, budgeting, and implementation of development projects.
- **Accountability and transparency:** As more funds and decision-making power are devolved to local levels, ensuring robust accountability mechanisms and transparency in local governance becomes increasingly important and challenging.
- **Equitable service delivery and public participation:** Despite progress, ensuring equitable access to services across all regions, particularly in remote or mountainous areas, remains a significant challenge. Furthermore, meaningful public participation in local decision-making processes, especially among vulnerable groups, is still a work in progress.

GSWG related activities in 2024

The GSWG's efforts in 2024 demonstrate a strong alignment with the Prime Minister's office's 2023 RTIM recommendation for the Ministry of Home Affairs to prioritize people's participation and civil society involvement for inclusive and sustainable growth. The SSWG on PSI and CE worked closely between all relevant actors to discuss the need for enhanced coordination and more efficient public services. The thematic workshop organized by the SSWG on PSI and CE focused the discussion in increasing the efficiency of the public services, especially for vulnerable groups. A list of challenges was identified with tangible actions that have been included in the LEAP project (Efficiency and Accessibility of Public Services Project in Lao PDR), which has been launched in Q4 2024 and will be implemented by MOHA and UNDP⁵.

In addition, members of GSWG have provided technical expertise to the development and implementation of key legislative reforms mentioned, including the new Law on Public Administration, the Decree on Civil Service Management, and Decree on Good Public Services, as well as the Decree on Local Administration.

2.2 Civil Service

Key progress toward Results

- **Strategic Planning and Policy Development:** MOHA has made improvements in modernizing Laos' civil service framework. The cornerstone of this effort is the drafting and implementation of the Lao PDR Civil Service Management Strategy to 2030 in 2024, which now serves as a comprehensive guide for various sectors. In 2024, Law on Civil Servants has been amended through consultations conducted at both central and local levels. MOHA completed two studies on 1) optimizing the civil service workforce and 2) establishing more effective grassroots organizational structures. Consequently, two decrees on, 1) converting technical units to self-financing models and 2) establishing public employee systems, were approved by the Prime Minister (22 May 2024).

⁵ Please refer to the SSWG PSI&CE minutes of meeting (10/09/2024) in Annex 1

- **Human Resource Management and Capacity Building:** MOHA appointed 56 deputy department heads (21% female) and approved 90 new civil servants (33% female)⁶, enhancing leadership and fresh talent in the system. Performance evaluation mechanisms have been successfully implemented across 40 sectors, covering both central and provincial levels, ensuring accountability and efficiency. The capacity building initiatives have yielded positive results, with training sessions (at least ...) conducted on various aspects of public administration. In addition, the Public Administration Training Institute of MOHA has developed a curriculum on organizational analysis, and village administration. Lastly, Lao civil servants took part in the "Young Leaders' Program," broadening their global perspective and expertise.
- **Compensation, Benefits, and Career Development:** MOHA has made progress in improving the welfare and career prospects of civil servants. A comprehensive study, led by MOHA, on salary policies and allowances has been completed, resulting in the implementation of a 150,000-kip monthly allowance per person. Salary grade-step adjustments have been approved for 2,124 civil servants, with 38.6% being female employees. Progress has been made in streamlining retirement across country with benefits approved for 753 retirees, of which nearly 50% are women. Career development pathways have been strengthened, as evidenced by the appointment of 56 individuals to deputy department head positions. These measures collectively contribute to enhanced job satisfaction, retention of talent, and a more motivated civil service workforce.
- **Ethics, Integrity, and Governance:** MOHA has taken concrete steps to strengthen the ethical framework of the civil service. A comprehensive compilation of regulations on civil servant ethics has been completed, providing clear guidelines for professional conduct. The inspection mechanisms have been reinforced, with thorough checks on the implementation of laws and regulations in the Home Affairs sector. These efforts have resulted in improved compliance and a stronger culture of integrity within the civil service. While specific metrics on corruption reduction or increased public trust are not provided, these initiatives lay a solid foundation for enhanced governance and accountability in the civil service sector.
- **International Cooperation and Modernization:** The Ministry has successfully expanded its international engagement to modernize the civil service. Productive meetings were held with counterparts in Vietnam, China, and Cambodia, resulting in concrete cooperation plans. These collaborations have facilitated knowledge exchange and the adoption of international best practices in civil service management. The reform efforts show a clear alignment with global standards while maintaining sensitivity to the local context. Gender equality initiatives have shown progress, with consistent reporting of female representation in new appointments (33%), approvals, and overall statistics (47.8% of total civil servants). These efforts collectively contribute to a more modern, efficient, and globally aligned civil service in Laos.

Key challenges

- **Structural and Organizational Efficiency:** The Lao civil service faces significant challenges in optimizing its organizational structure and improving efficiency. There are ongoing efforts to streamline roles and responsibilities across ministries and local organizations, indicating persistent issues with overlapping functions and unclear job delineations. The need for continuous job position determination and approval across numerous units suggests difficulties in establishing a clear, efficient organizational hierarchy. Furthermore, the high number of civil servants (172,341, or 2.26% of the 2023 population)⁷ points to a potentially oversized public sector, straining resources and efficiency. The government's consideration of reducing personnel numbers highlights the recognition of this issue, but implementing such reductions presents its own set of

⁶ MOHA 6-month progress report dated 12 July 2024

⁷ MOHA 6-month progress report dated 12 July 2024

challenges, including potential resistance and the need for careful planning to maintain service quality.

- **Human Resource Management and Development:** There are ongoing issues with data management and accuracy, as evidenced by the discovery of unclear or non-compliant data during personnel checks. This suggests a need for improved information systems and data management practices. Additionally, the civil service faces challenges in implementing consistent and effective performance evaluation systems across various sectors. The continuous need for curriculum development and training programs across different levels of civil service underscores the importance of capacity building and the challenges in maintaining a well-trained, capable workforce.
- **Financial Management and Compensation:** Studies on salary policies and allowances, indicate ongoing difficulties in providing adequate and competitive compensation within budget limitations. This challenge is likely exacerbated by the large size of the civil service workforce. Additionally, the efforts to convert some technical units to self-financing models and transition certain civil servants to public employees suggest a strategic move towards financial sustainability. However, this transition process itself presents challenges in terms of implementation, change management, and ensuring continued service quality while achieving financial objectives.

GSWG related activities in 2024

- The Governance Sector Working Group (GSWG) serves as a nexus for policy alignment and technical support, fostering collaborative dialogue between the Lao government and development partners by supporting the design and implementation of training programs and facilitating the exchange of best practices for enhancing human capital within the civil service. In 2024, 1,115 leaders and management staff at the central level, 2,000 district-level staff, and 18,000 village authorities took part to training programs in civil service and public administration.
- CEGGA II, among others, for example, with the National Academy on Politics and Public Administration (NAPPA), which is the combined political and public administration school through which all government staffs are being trained, developed learning module focusing on how key rule of law principles can be ensured in the public administration. The module has been delivered to more than 100 senior officials, and key parts have been integrated into the regular NAPPA curriculum and is now being taught.
- By coordinating donor support and aligning resources with government priorities, the GSWG maximizes the impact of investments in governance reform, in particular towards key civil service improvement initiatives.
- Even though efforts have been provided in this sector by the government and Development Partners, civil service improvement initiatives could represent a thematic focus area for discussion of the GSWG for 2025.

2.3 Digital Transformation and E-Governance

Key Progress toward Results

- **Electronic Civil Registration System:** A nationwide electronic civil registration system has been now operational in 148 districts and all 18 provinces. In the first half of 2024, the system facilitated the registration of 385,838 births and 10,678 deaths, demonstrating its wide-reaching impact. Additionally, it streamlined citizenship processes, handling 21 cases of citizenship changes, including 17 grants and 4 renunciations of Lao citizenship. This digital leap has not only enhanced the efficiency of civil registration services but has also improved data accuracy and accessibility for citizens across the country.

- **Digitalizing civil service management:** A comprehensive data verification process for district-level personnel-civil servants in three provinces, covering 6,949 individuals has been completed. This effort contributes to a more accurate and up-to-date digital record of the civil service workforce. Furthermore, MOHA has advanced its digital civil servant card system, successfully distributing 4,237 personnel-civil servant cards at the provincial level across three provinces. These initiatives have culminated in a robust digital database now containing records of 172,341 personnel-civil servants (47.8% female), facilitating more effective human resource management and planning in the public sector.
- **Modernizing document management** through digitalization efforts. In the reporting period, 1,050 pages of documents were successfully scanned and digitally archived, marking a significant step towards a paperless office environment. The provision of 6 document search services suggests the implementation of a digital search system, likely improving the speed and efficiency of information retrieval. Technical expertise has also been provided for the implementation of electronic management systems like PIMS (Personnel Information Management System) and Smart-Cards for civil servants, which are highlighted as important initiatives for modernizing civil service management.
- **The development of digital infrastructures:** the nationwide scale-up of the electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (e-CRVS) system has contributed to the availability of online services and processing times. Additionally, the inclusion of digital service components in some ODSCs in 2024, has contributed to better accessibility of government services. This expansion is expected to enhance user engagement, especially with the Gov-X platform. Furthermore, the continuous rollout of Smart Cards for civil servants across 103 districts in 13 provinces has led to a coverage rate of 98%⁸, contributing to the improvement of government efficiency and service delivery. To support and accelerate digital transformation initiatives, the procurement and distribution of 77 motorcycles, 7,030 USB drives, 154 speakers, 65 LCD sets, 13 WiFi routers, 305 printers, and 840 tablets to provincial and district offices represent a significant boost to local technological capabilities.

Key Challenges

- **Infrastructure and Accessibility:** Laos faces significant hurdles in establishing widespread digital infrastructure. Despite progress in the electronic Civil Registration System, challenges persist in providing reliable internet connectivity, especially in rural areas. Power supply issues further complicate this. Ensuring equitable access for all citizens, regardless of location or socioeconomic status, remains crucial. Linguistic diversity and accessibility for people with disabilities add complexity.
- **Human Capacity and Adoption:** Bridging the digital literacy gap, particularly among older citizens and rural populations, is a key challenge. This disparity can lead to uneven adoption of new systems. Training government staff to effectively use new digital systems is equally important. Change management presents another hurdle, as transitioning from traditional to digital systems often faces resistance. Successfully navigating this change requires careful planning and support to ensure widespread adoption and effective use of new digital tools.
- **Data Management and Security:** As Laos digitalizes government services, data management and security become critical. Protecting sensitive personal information from cyber threats is a significant challenge. Ensuring interoperability between various government systems is crucial to avoid data silos and inefficiencies. Implementing comprehensive backup and disaster recovery plans is essential given the scale and sensitivity of data involved.

⁸ According to the six months progress report of MOHA No. 09 dated 12 July 2024

- **Long-term Sustainability and Scalability:** Ensuring the longevity and adaptability of digital systems is a significant long-term challenge. Ongoing maintenance of hardware and software requires continuous resources, posing financial challenges. As Laos' population grows and technology advances, the government must ensure systems can scale effectively and remain relevant. This involves handling increasing data volumes and adapting to new technological standards.

GSWG Related Activities in 2024

- The GSWG has been working in supporting **the dissemination of the national strategy on public services** through ODSCs, which includes digital transformation elements. The SSWG in September 2024 included topics of discussion on the challenges and opportunities of digital public services.
- In addition, the Ministry of Technology and Communications (MTC) is working on **a Decree that will support the National Digital Master Plan** by the end of the year. Given these developments, a potential priority for the GSWG in 2025 could be to support and monitor MOHA's implementation of this digital transformation agenda. This would involve providing technical guidance, identifying capacity-building needs within ODSCs, and fostering inter-ministerial collaboration to ensure the effective rollout of digital services nationwide.

2.4 Legal Sector Reform and Rule of Law

Key Progress toward Results

- **Enhanced Legal Aid Services:** The Ministry of Justice has improved access to legal aid services, particularly for vulnerable groups, through the implementation of the 2018 Decree on Legal Aid. This decree has resulted in some benefits for local communities., as assessed by the legal aid and justice promotion division from MOJ's. Based on their 6-months report, 9,870 people in rural areas got access to the legal aid services, among which 4,301 women. This data also includes increased community access through mobile legal aid services, reaching remote areas and underserved populations
- **The Lao Bar Association (LBA)** has established a network of 22 legal aid offices across the country. This network includes one central office in Vientiane and nine district offices, significantly expanding the geographical reach of legal aid services. The increased number of offices has directly contributed to improved accessibility of legal services for citizens in various parts of the country, particularly in areas that were previously underserved. This expansion has resulted in a more equitable distribution of legal resources and has increased the number of individuals able to access legal support (From January to September 2024, 515 people (214 women)).
- **Justice System Improvements⁹:** For the 9-month statistics of 2024, the Justice sector, in relation to the implementation of court decisions, handled a total of 61,403 cases (including 7,543 new cases). Of these:
 - 1,550 cases were successfully completed
 - 56,622 cases are currently being processed
 - 3,161 cases have been suspended
- **Expansion of services has been a point of focus,** with progress made in establishing new legal aid offices, bringing the total to 159 nationwide. This expansion is complemented by training initiatives that have successfully equipped 1,278 individuals, including 462 women, with essential

⁹ MOJ report – 9 month implementation report 2024

legal aid skills. In addition, **capacity building initiatives** have played a critical role in strengthening the connection between communities and legal aid services. Training programs have been designed for village heads, mediators, and grassroots stakeholders, empowering them to serve as intermediaries in facilitating access to legal assistance. Additionally, the creation of training modules focused on family law, domestic abuse, and land conflicts has equipped local leaders with the knowledge necessary to address specific legal challenges faced by their communities.

- **Economic Dispute Resolution:** The Economic Dispute Resolution Center and its offices throughout the country received 70 economic disputes, of which 19 were successfully resolved, 18 (resent proposals) and 33 disputes in progress. The resolution of these cases demonstrates the country's improving capacity to handle complex economic disputes, potentially enhancing investor confidence.
- **Legal Awareness and Dissemination:** The completion of 6 volumes of legal publicity manuals and the dissemination of legislation related to two national agendas in 5 provinces have expanded access to legal information. The upload of 34 legislations to the Lao Official Gazette website has improved transparency and accessibility of laws. Furthermore, the production of 2,370 radio programs in Lao and 159 in Hmong languages, and 83 in Khamu languages along with the publication of 161 newspaper articles explaining laws, has significantly broadened the reach of legal education across different linguistic communities.
- **Fundamental Justice Work:** Progress in fundamental justice work is evident through the processing of citizenship applications and international adoptions. The consideration of 12 Lao citizenship applications, resulting in 6 reclamations and 1 renunciation, demonstrates management of citizenship matters. For nationality statistics work from January to October 2024: The Ministry of Justice has completed the review of citizenship applications to be submitted to the Minister of Justice for consideration and further proposal to the Prime Minister's Office, as follows: 27 cases of applications for Lao citizenship and 07 cases of applications for renunciation of Lao citizenship. The Ministry of Justice has received proposals for international child adoption totalling 06 cases. Of these, 5 cases have been completed with registration and approval for child adoption, while 1 case is still under consideration.
- **Targets for Improvement:** While setting targets is not a result in itself, the clear articulation of goals indicates a strategic approach to improving the rule of law. The aim to achieve an 80% implementation rate for court decisions, with 20% dedicated to case closure, sets a concrete benchmark for judicial efficiency. The goal of establishing a transparent litigation mechanism with an 85% success rate and an appeal rate below 15% demonstrates a commitment to enhancing the quality and credibility of court proceedings. Additionally, the plan to revise three existing laws under the Supreme People's Court's jurisdiction shows ongoing efforts to refine and update the legal framework.

Key Challenges

- **Limited access to justice for vulnerable groups as pointed out in the ROLAIO SSWG' minutes of meeting¹⁰:** Access to justice for vulnerable groups remains a significant challenge in our legal system. Language barriers pose substantial obstacles for ethnic minorities seeking legal assistance, often leaving them unable to fully comprehend or engage with legal processes. Persons with disabilities face physical accessibility issues, limiting their ability to reach legal aid offices or courtrooms. Furthermore, deeply ingrained cultural and social norms continue to hinder women's access to legal services, perpetuating gender-based disparities in the justice system.

¹⁰ Please refer to ROLAIO SSWG Minutes (04/10/2024) in annex 2 of this report.

- **Resource constraints:** Resource constraints severely impede the effective delivery of legal aid services. The insufficient budget allocated for legal aid services and outreach activities hampers the expansion and improvement of these critical programs. Additionally, the lack of proper equipment and vehicles for mobile legal aid services restricts the ability to reach remote and underserved communities, leaving many without access to essential legal support.
- **Capacity gaps:** Capacity gaps within the legal aid system present another pressing concern. Legal aid officers often possess limited legal knowledge, which can compromise the quality and effectiveness of the services provided. Moreover, there is a notable lack of specialized training for handling cases involving vulnerable groups, such as victims of domestic violence, children, or individuals with mental health issues. This deficiency in expertise can lead to inadequate representation and support for those who need it most.
- **Coordination issues:** Coordination issues among various legal aid providers pose significant challenges to the seamless delivery of services. The limited effective and regular coordination between key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Justice, Lao Women's Union, and Lao Bar Association, results in duplication of efforts, inefficient resource allocation, and potential gaps in service provision. Improved collaboration and communication among these entities are essential for creating a more cohesive and effective legal aid system.
- **Public awareness:** Public awareness of legal rights and available legal aid services remains alarmingly low, particularly in rural areas. This limited knowledge often prevents individuals from seeking legal assistance when needed, perpetuating cycles of injustice and inequality. Enhancing public awareness through targeted education campaigns and community outreach initiatives is crucial for empowering citizens to access and benefit from legal aid services.
- **Data management and monitoring:** Data management and monitoring within the legal aid system face considerable challenges. The difficulties in consolidating data and sharing information between local and central levels hinder the ability to assess the effectiveness of legal aid programs accurately. This lack of comprehensive and reliable data impedes evidence-based decision-making and the development of targeted interventions to improve access to justice. Implementing robust data management systems and fostering better information exchange between different levels of administration are essential steps toward enhancing the overall efficiency and impact of legal aid services.

GSWG Related Activities in 2024

The GSWG focused its support in 2024 to targeted vulnerable groups, emphasizing the commitment to improving access to justice for all citizens. The organization of thematic workshops for the specific SSWG ROLAIO has specifically addressed the needs of women, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, ensuring that their unique challenges are considered in accessing justice.¹¹ The development of diverse communication tools, such as sign language materials and audio resources has shown a proactive approach to inclusivity and accessibility in legal aid services.

Coordination and policy support among key stakeholders has been a critical point this year. Facilitated discussions and workshops have aimed at improving coordination between the Ministry of Justice, the Lao Women's Union, and the Lao Bar Association, fostering a unified approach to legal aid. The development of referral mechanisms and common guidelines for legal aid providers further enhances service delivery. Alongside these efforts, technical assistance has been provided in drafting the Legal Aid Action Plan, pending approval, ensuring that legal aid services are integrated into broader public service initiatives.

¹¹ Please refer to ROLAIO SSWG minutes of meetings (04/10/2024) in Annex 2

2.5 Transparency and Anti-Corruption Measures

Key Progress toward Results

- **Legal framework:** Key legislation includes a revised State Budget Law enacted in 2015 and a new Public Procurement Law passed in 2017. These laws aim to improve budgetary processes and increase transparency in government spending. Furthermore, a new Public Debt Management Law was enacted in 2018, with the specific goals of better controlling public investment projects and strengthening overall debt management.
- **External scrutiny:** The State Audit Organization (SAO) has made progress in establishing its mandated role and is beginning to contribute to transparency in public financial management. However, SAO's capacity remains limited, which affects its overall effectiveness. Similarly, the National Assembly has improved its procedures for budget scrutiny, including some consultations and media access to these processes. To enhance external scrutiny of government actions, the National Assembly, with the support of the STEPS project has been working on improving its petition system. This includes the development of a digital database to track and manage citizen complaints more effectively, thereby enhancing the ability of citizens to report issues and hold the government accountable.
- **Anti-corruption efforts:** The government has initiated several measures to combat corruption in the past years. A notable step was the introduction of mandatory asset declarations for officials, which began in 2014. Officials and civil servants had complied with this requirement. Additionally, the establishment of the Government Inspection and Anti-Corruption Authority represents an institutional approach to analyzing and addressing corruption at the national level.

Key Challenges

- **Limited public awareness and engagement:** A challenge in Lao PDR's anti-corruption efforts is the limited public awareness and engagement. Citizens lack knowledge about their legal rights and the services available to them, particularly those related to reporting corruption. This information gap hinders the public's ability to actively participate in anti-corruption initiatives. Additionally, deeply ingrained cultural norms may discourage individuals from speaking out against corruption or misconduct. These social barriers create a reluctance to report wrongdoing, which in turn hampers efforts to identify and address corrupt practices effectively.
- **Institutional capacity constraints:** The effectiveness of anti-corruption measures in Lao PDR is hampered by institutional capacity constraints. Government staff tasked with implementing these measures often have limited experience and legal knowledge in this specialized field. This lack of expertise can lead to ineffective implementation of anti-corruption policies and procedures. The problem is particularly acute at local levels, where insufficient capacities in key areas such as investigation, prosecution, and enforcement of anti-corruption laws significantly impede progress. Addressing these capacity gaps is crucial for improving the overall effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts across all levels of government.
- **Coordination and data management issues:** Effective anti-corruption efforts in Lao PDR are hindered by coordination and data management challenges. There is a noticeable lack of effective coordination between different government agencies involved in anti-corruption initiatives. This disjointed approach can lead to duplication of efforts, inefficient use of resources, and potential gaps in coverage. Furthermore, there are significant difficulties in consolidating data and sharing information between local and central levels of government. This fragmentation of information makes it challenging to build a comprehensive picture of corruption issues and to develop targeted, effective strategies to combat them.

- **Resource limitations:** Resource constraints pose a significant obstacle to anti-corruption efforts in Lao PDR. There is insufficient budget allocation for anti-corruption initiatives and related public services, which limits the scope and effectiveness of these programs. This financial shortfall is compounded by a lack of proper equipment and technology necessary for effective monitoring and investigation of corruption cases. Without adequate resources, anti-corruption agencies struggle to carry out their mandates effectively, whether in terms of prevention, detection, or prosecution of corrupt practices. Addressing these resource limitations is crucial for strengthening the country's capacity to combat corruption.
- **Legal framework implementation:** While Lao PDR has made progress in establishing a legal framework to combat corruption, significant challenges remain in fully implementing and enforcing these new laws and regulations. The gap between legislation and practical implementation is a major hurdle in the country's anti-corruption efforts. This discrepancy can be attributed to various factors, including limited institutional capacity, resource constraints, and entrenched practices that resist change. Effective implementation requires not only the existence of laws but also robust enforcement mechanisms, clear guidelines for government officials, and consistent application across all levels of government.

GSWG Related Activities in 2024

- **The GSWG has not provided any specific focus on this topic in 2024. However, the PSI&CE SSWG has been working on the improvement of public services and citizen engagement through the support to the development of the LEAP initiative (Lao PDR Efficiency and Accessibility to Public Services), which aims to streamline and digitalize bureaucratic processes and increase transparency in public services. As the digital transformation is expected to reduce opportunities for corruption by minimizing direct interactions and creating traceable digital records of transactions, the GSWG could address some thematic focus in 2025.**
- The GSWG was also involved in supporting the revision of key decrees, such as Decree 238 on Non-Profit Associations (NPAs) and Decree 149 on Foundations. These revisions include public consultations, aiming to improve the operating environment for civil society organizations, which play a crucial role in promoting transparency and accountability. In support to these efforts, the **SSWG PSI&CE presented the petition system to all participants** of the GSWG, including CSOs, development partners and line ministries. The discussion allowed to emphasize the importance of SSWG to build upon good practises and capability of the Justice Committee in petition handling ¹²

2.6 Gender Equality and Inclusive Governance

Key Progress toward Results

- **Women Political Representation:** Lao PDR has made progress in increasing women's representation in political leadership, though challenges remain. As of 2023, women constitute 21.95% of the National Assembly members, representing a significant increase from previous years. At the executive level, 17.6% of Cabinet Ministers are now women, indicating improved gender balance in high-level decision-making. In local governance (At the village level), women's representation as village chiefs has increased from 2.7% in 2016 to 13.9% in 2023. The government has set ambitious targets to further increase women's representation, aiming for 20% at various levels of government. The STEPS project has strengthened the role of women in parliament through a series of workshop, which resulted in the draft of a research study on women's representation and gender equality in the National Assembly of Lao PDR and the PPAs.

¹² Please refer to Annex 3 for the SSWG PSI&CE minute dated 10/04/2024

- **Women Economic Participation:** Lao PDR has achieved remarkable success in women's economic participation, ranking 5th globally in the Global Gender Gap Index 2023¹³ for this indicator. Concrete actions, such as the disbursement of nearly two-thirds of 459 grants to women through the Business Assistance Facility, have directly supported women's entrepreneurship. The gender pay gap in the public sector has been gaining greater attention. There are 176,151 civil servants in Laos, of which 83,102 (47.1%) are women.¹⁴ This near-equal representation in public sector employment is a positive indicator, but it doesn't necessarily translate to pay equity.
- **Capacity building initiatives:** Members of the GSWG, especially development partners, such as the CEGGA Program or the Lawyer and STEPS projects, have been at the forefront of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment across partner organizations in Laos. A key focus of this initiative has been the implementation of gender-responsive practices within People's Provincial Assemblies (PPAs). Specific trainings and workshop sessions were provided to sensitize lawyers in dealing with GBV cases.
- **Legal aid services:** GSWG members, especially through the CEGGA program, have been actively working on improving the accessibility and responsiveness of public legal aid services in Laos. A significant aspect of this work involves a strong focus on gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). The program has conducted thorough legal aid needs surveys to identify gaps and challenges in the current system, particularly those faced by women and marginalized groups.
- **Gender-Based Violence¹⁵:** A progress has been made in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in Lao PDR. The establishment of a national-level GBV Steering Committee and development of Standard Operating Procedures for GBV response have improved coordination and effectiveness of interventions. The increase in protection shelters for survivors of violence from 1 to 6, with plans for 3 more by 2025, has expanded support services for GBV survivors. Perhaps most notably, there has been a substantial decrease in tolerance towards domestic violence, from 58% of women and 49.1% of men in 2012 to 12.5% of women and 10.6% of men in 2023, indicating a significant shift in societal attitudes.
- **Civil society engagement:** The participation of civil society was strengthened in governance processes, with a particular emphasis on promoting gender equality, especially thanks to development programs in place, such as CEGGA programme. The program has carefully selected 22 development projects to be implemented by 23 CSOs.
- **Gender-responsive planning:** The National Assembly's 2024 Action Plan demonstrates a commitment to gender-responsive governance by including efforts to enhance the capacity of Members of the National Assembly and Provincial People's Assembly in their parliamentary mandates. While specific details are not provided, it is likely that this capacity building includes training on gender-responsive legislation and oversight.

Key Challenges

- **Limited representation in decision-making positions:** While Laos has made significant strides in increasing women's representation in the National Assembly, a notable disparity persists in leadership positions at local levels, particularly in rural areas. This underrepresentation at the grassroots level of governance is a critical concern as it limits women's voices in local decision-

¹³ Global Gender Report 2023 - <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/in-full/benchmarking-gender-gaps-2023/>

¹⁴ MOHA 6-month progress report dated 12 July 2024

¹⁵ 2024 Lao CEDAW report - https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Submission-on-CEDAW_Lao-PDR_09092024.pdf

making processes. The gap is especially pronounced in remote and rural communities, where traditional gender roles often remain more entrenched.

- **Cultural and traditional barriers:** In Laos, deeply ingrained cultural norms and traditional practices continue to pose significant obstacles to women's full participation in governance and decision-making processes. These barriers often stem from long-standing societal expectations about women's roles, which typically prioritize domestic responsibilities over public engagement. Such cultural constraints can manifest in various ways, from discouraging women from pursuing leadership positions to limiting their involvement in community decision-making forums.
- **Intersectional disparities:** Women from ethnic minorities, rural areas, and those with disabilities in Laos face compounded challenges in accessing education, economic opportunities, and political participation. This intersectionality of disadvantage creates multiple layers of exclusion, making it particularly difficult for these groups to engage in governance processes. For instance, ethnic minority women may face language barriers in addition to gender-based discrimination, while women with disabilities might encounter physical accessibility issues on top of societal prejudices. Rural women often have limited access to information and resources that could facilitate their participation in political life.
- **Limited gender-responsive budgeting:** There is a pressing need for more systematic integration of gender considerations in public financial management and budget allocation processes in Laos. Gender-responsive budgeting is a crucial tool for ensuring that government resources are allocated in ways that address gender inequalities and promote women's empowerment. However, the current approach often lacks a comprehensive gender lens, potentially leading to the perpetuation of gender gaps in various sectors.
- **Capacity gaps:** In Laos, there is an ongoing need for continued capacity building for both men and women in gender-sensitive governance practices and leadership skills. This gap in capacity affects the ability of government officials and community leaders to effectively implement gender-inclusive policies and programs. For women, capacity building is crucial to empower them with the skills and confidence needed to take on leadership roles and actively participate in governance processes. For men, it is essential to develop a deeper understanding of gender issues and the importance of women's participation in decision-making.
- **Gender pay gap:** The significant gender pay gap in Laos, where women's average monthly income is approximately 77% of men's income¹⁶, is a stark indicator of persistent economic inequality between genders. This disparity likely extends to the public sector as well, reflecting broader societal inequalities and potentially discouraging women from pursuing careers in governance and public administration.

GSWG Related Activities in 2024

- **Legal Framework and Implementation:** The GSWG was involved in supporting the revision of key decrees, such as Decree 238 on Non-Profit Associations (NPAs) and Decree 149 on Foundations¹⁷. These revisions include public consultations, aiming to improve the operating environment for civil society organizations, which play a crucial role in promoting transparency and accountability. In addition, the assistance from GSWG was provided in drafting secondary legislation with Provincial People's Assemblies and the support for building provinces as strategic units and districts as comprehensive strengthening units align with the goal of creating more inclusive governance structures that can better facilitate people's participation and civil society involvement.

¹⁶ <https://www.undp.org/laopdr/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>

¹⁷ Please refer to Annex 3 of this report for the Minute of Meeting of SSWG on PSI&CE dated 10/04/2024

- A key focus of the SSWG PSI&CE work is promoting citizen participation in governance processes. This involves facilitating dialogue between civil society organizations and state institutions to increase citizen engagement. The group is also supporting the National Assembly and Provincial People's Assemblies in implementing citizen-oriented processes to increase public participation and oversight. By fostering greater citizen involvement in governance, this sub-group is helping to create a more transparent and accountable government system, where citizens can play an active role in monitoring and preventing corruption.
- GSWG has been playing an essential role in facilitating policy dialogues between civil society and state institutions. A key feature of this is the creation of interactive exchange forums that provide a platform for women's organizations and other vulnerable groups to contribute directly to policy discussions. Notably, the support by the CEGGA (Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and Rule of Law) program and the development of innovative public engagement toolkits (PET) in Khammouane and Luang Prabang provinces directly address the call for increased people's participation. Lastly, the GSWG served as a platform to initiate the discussions that will eventually result in public policies.

III. Lessons learned and Key Priorities for 2025

- **Linkage between GSWG and 9th NSEDP M&E framework:** The integration of 9th NSEDP indicators into GSWG progress measurement has been a valuable lesson in simplifying and strengthening M&E work for the sector. By using existing national planning indicators instead of creating separate tracking systems, we have made it easier to measure progress while reducing duplicate work. This practical approach helps everyone involved - government offices, development partners, and stakeholders - to speak the same language when tracking governance improvements. The change has made reporting clearer, data collection more straightforward, and helped show how governance work directly contributes to national development goals and SDG targets.
- **Inclusive participation:** Experience with the Governance Sector Working Group has taught us that getting everyone involved takes more than just sending invitations. Real participation happens when we make things easier for everyone to join in – like using local languages, keeping meetings shorter, and mixing online with in-person sessions. It helped a lot when we took time to explain technical terms and provided training to help local groups and community members feel more confident in speaking up. We also found that people stay more engaged when they can see how their ideas are being used in actual decisions and plans. Most importantly, we learned that building trust and relationships with all partners, from government officials to local communities, is the foundation for successful inclusive participation.
- **A crucial lesson from governance reform efforts in Laos is that changes cannot happen in isolation.** GSWG experience has shown that successful governance improvements require working across different sectors, departments, and levels of government, rather than trying to fix issues separately. For example, efforts to enhance public services worked better when we involved multiple departments, local authorities, and communities together, rather than working with just one office.
- **Strong coordination:** We learned that governance reforms need strong coordination between central and local levels, active participation from different stakeholders (including development partners, civil society, and communities), and alignment with other ongoing reforms and national development plans. This connected approach helps avoid duplicate efforts, makes better use of resources, and creates lasting positive changes.

A notable achievement in 2024 was the completion of a comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise, as detailed in Annex 6 of this report. This mapping provides a clear overview of the various partners

involved in governance initiatives, their roles, areas of expertise, and potential synergies. This valuable resource will serve as a guide for future collaborations and help identify gaps in representation or expertise that need to be addressed. While these advancements are commendable, the GSWG recognizes that challenges remain in fully realizing the potential of multi-stakeholder engagement. Efforts are ongoing to ensure that diverse voices, particularly those of marginalized groups, are not just represented but actively influencing policy and decision-making processes. There is also a continued focus on building the capacity of all stakeholders to engage effectively in governance discussions and initiatives.

Looking ahead, the GSWG is committed to further strengthening multi-stakeholder engagement by:

- Regularly updating the stakeholder mapping to reflect the dynamic nature of the governance landscape.
- Developing targeted strategies to address identified gaps in stakeholder representation.
- Enhancing mechanisms for feedback and accountability to ensure that multi-stakeholder inputs are transparently incorporated into governance outcomes.
- Leveraging technology to create more accessible and inclusive platforms for engagement, particularly for stakeholders in remote areas.

In term of thematic focus, building on our achievements in 2024, the Governance Sector Working Group will continue its work while sharpening focus on five strategic areas for 2025.

1. In the Rule of Law sector, the GSWG will strengthen diverse representation in judicial institutions, enhance people-centered justice, and support village mediation committees to improve access to justice at all levels.
2. For government structures, our focus will be on implementing the Law for Public Administration while advancing digital transformation to modernize public services.
3. The GSWG is also committed to improving public service delivery and transparency through stronger anti-corruption measures.
4. At the local level, the GSWG will continue supporting the Three Builds (Sam Sang) directive through the local administration law and village development initiatives, including a thorough review of the Sam Sang implementation.
5. To ensure people's voices are heard, citizen engagement will be strengthened, particularly through activities with the National Assembly.

These focus areas are not separate efforts but interconnected priorities that will help create a more responsive, efficient, and inclusive governance system in Laos. By maintaining momentum on existing initiatives while adapting to new challenges, we aim to achieve meaningful progress in governance reform that benefits all people in Laos.

Annex 1

MEETING MINUTES
THEMATIC WORKSHOP ON STRENGTHENING ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES
FOR ALL, ESPECIALLY FOR WOMEN, ETHNIC GROUPS, VULNERABLE GROUPS
AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Meeting	Sub-Sector Working Group – Public Services Improvement and Citizen Engagement (PSI&CE)
Location	New Building, Ministry of Home Affairs
Date	10/09/2024
Time	13:30 – 16:30
Chairs	Mr. Vanna Boupcha, Head of Cabinet Office, Ministry of Home Affairs; Mrs. Sommany Sihathep, Programme Analyst Rule of Law and Access to Justice; Mr. Andreas Gerrits, Deputy Head of Cooperation, SDC.
Minute taker	Armita Azadeh – Governance Coordination Analyst - UNDP

Agenda

ITEM	TOPIC	PRESENTER
1.	Opening remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr Vanna Boupcha, DG of MOHA Cabinet Office - Mrs Sommany Sihathep, Team Leader Governance Unit (OIC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) - Mr. Andreas Gerrits, Deputy Director of Cooperation, Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)
2.	Presentation LEAP Project	Mme Khueavanh Chanthaphouvong, Deputy General of the Public Administration Development Department
3.	Q&A session	All participants
4.	Coffee break	All participants
5.	Group discussions on the challenges and solutions to enable access to public services for all	All participants
6.	Closing remarks	Mr Vanna Boupcha, DG of MOHA Cabinet Office Mrs Sommany Sihathep, Team Leader Governance Unit (OIC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Mr. Andreas Gerrits, Deputy Director of Cooperation, Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)

1. Opening remarks

Mr. Boupcha thanked those present for their attendance and opened the meeting with a summary of the agenda, before speaking about the work of the MOHA to date regarding the access to public

services, especially for the One-Door-Service-Centers; with the guidelines on the implementation of ODSC, awareness raising campaigns on ODSC and national strategy in 2023 on the ODSCs. Mr Boupoua reminded the need to continue strengthening efforts in enabling the access to public services for all citizens, but the funding is still lacking in these areas.

Mrs. Sihathap, representing UNDP, emphasized two key messages: First, the continued partnership between UNDP and MoHA has been crucial in driving public administration reforms, with the LEAP project playing a central role in enhancing the efficiency and inclusiveness of public services. Special thanks were given to USAID and the Irish government for their financial support. The project focuses on improving service accessibility, particularly through digital transformation and the One-Door Service Centers, ensuring that vulnerable populations are not left behind. Second, the importance of coordination and collaboration was highlighted, calling for the exchange of best practices and innovative solutions within the Governance Sector Working Group to drive meaningful reforms.

Mr Gerrits, representing SDC, expressed appreciation to MOHA for hosting the workshop. Emphasizing the link between public service delivery and citizen engagement, he highlighted the LEAP project and challenges vulnerable groups face in accessing services. The event serves as a platform for stakeholders to exchange ideas, particularly on enhancing access to services and contributing to the "Leave No One Behind" agenda. Additionally, insights from the petition system at the National Assembly and the ongoing review of decrees governing civil society organizations were mentioned as key steps toward fostering public participation and good governance in Lao PDR. Mr Gerrits finally expressed gratitude for the cooperation of MoHA, UNDP, and GIZ in advancing these efforts.

2. Presentation of the LEAP Project

Mme Kheuavanh Chanthaphouong, Deputy Director General of Department of Public Administration Development, Ministry of Home Affairs

Mme Kheuavanh presented the LEAP project to all participants.

The LEAP project (Lao PDR Efficiency and Accessibility to Public Services) aims to strengthen public service delivery across the country, ensuring efficiency and accessibility for all citizens. Implemented by MOHA/DPAD in partnership with UNDP, the project focuses on enhancing One-Door Service Centers (ODSCs) by streamlining the processes, increasing transparency and integrating digital solutions to improve service delivery, reduce bureaucracy, and make public services more accessible to all citizens and inclusive. With financial support from USAID and the Government of Ireland, the LEAP project will address challenges related to public service access, particularly for vulnerable populations, and introduce mobile ODSCs to reach remote areas. A survey conducted in 2023, which captured feedback from over 2,800 citizens across eight districts, identified key barriers to accessing public services, including insufficient information dissemination and a lack of tailored services for diverse populations.

As part of the LEAP initiative, a needs assessment will be conducted to pinpoint specific gaps in service delivery and to develop strategies for improvement. This assessment will inform the project's focus on enhancing coordination between national and central levels of government, ensuring that service delivery mechanisms are streamlined and effective. Additionally, the project will facilitate consultations aimed at drafting a robust legal framework to support public administration reform, thereby fostering an environment conducive to improved governance and service delivery across the country. Through these efforts, the LEAP project seeks to create a more inclusive and responsive public service system that leaves no one behind.

A key element of the LEAP project is its emphasis on civil society engagement and citizen participation. By promoting stronger partnerships between the government, civil society organizations, and local communities, the project aims to make public services more responsive and

tailored to the diverse needs of citizens, through strengthening their capacities in research and participation in policy dialogue. This includes efforts to ensure that ethnic groups, women, and persons with disabilities can access services without barriers.

The project aligns with the broader agenda of public administration reform, supporting better governance by increasing transparency, improving coordination between ministries, and building the capacity of public service staff. By implementing a "SMART ODSC" model, LEAP will further introduce digital tools that streamline processes, track service requests, and provide citizens with easier access to information and services. This will contribute to the ongoing digital transformation of Lao PDR's public sector, ensuring that public services become more responsive, accessible, and equitable.

4. Q&A session

During the Q&A session, SDC inquired about the number of One-Door Service Centers (ODSCs) in Laos and whether the Smart ODSC platform is available in multiple languages. Madam Kheavanh (MoHA) responded by stating that by 2030, all districts in Laos will have at least one ODSC, resulting in a total of 148 ODSCs across the country. She also noted that, at present, the Smart ODSC is only available in the Lao language, but there are plans to expand to larger locations such as Luang Prabang, Champasack, and Vientiane Capital, starting with initiatives at the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA). USAID asked about MOHA's preparations for the project launch and how the activities will include persons with disabilities. Madam Kheavanh (MoHA) confirmed that the project is planned to officially launch in December 2024 and that all the team is securing the finalizing of internal processes to prepare the project start. UNDP further elaborated that the inclusion of persons with disabilities is a priority, with the Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) ensuring their involvement in accessing public services as per the CRPD treaty. Sommany added that capacity-building efforts for the NPAs will be a key focus, enabling them to assist the government in conducting research and gathering data on public services from citizens.

5. Group discussions

The participants separated into different smaller groups to discuss, based on their experiences, the challenges of each identified population group. 3 groups, including participants from the government, the international organizations and the local CSOs, were discussing separately difficulties and potential solutions for (i) women, children and youth, (ii) ethnic groups in rural/remote areas and (iii) persons with disabilities to access public services.

5.1 Women, Children, and Youth

Challenges:

- Access to information about public services is limited for women, who have less access compared to men.
- There is a lack of awareness-raising activities, and families traditionally do not prioritize women's participation in public service events.
- Younger women are more likely to engage with public services, especially with access to the internet, but older generations face more barriers.
- Rural areas lack internet access, making it even harder for women to obtain information.
- Cultural beliefs lead women to defer to men as the heads of the household for accessing services, often resulting in low confidence and reluctance to engage.
- Travel to service centers is difficult for women due to economic constraints, limited access to transportation, and societal expectations that they do not travel unaccompanied.
- For youth, service access is mediated by their parents, limiting direct engagement.
- Mobile service centers could help, but logistical and coordination challenges, as well as the remoteness of many villages, may still impede access.

Recommendations:

1. Disseminate information through a diversity of channels.
2. Provide gender awareness sessions for ethnic groups.
3. Deploy mobile service units to increase access for women.
4. Integrate public service information into educational curricula to empower youth and promote inclusion.

5.2 Ethnic Groups in Rural/Remote Areas

Challenges:

- Remote locations are a major barrier to accessing services.
- Traditional gender roles in ethnic communities often restrict women's access to services, as men typically do not approve of women attending on their own.
- Men are generally the community volunteers, leaving women less involved.
- Ethnic communities lack awareness about women's rights to access services and the importance of having personal identification documents.
- Language barriers prevent effective communication between service providers and ethnic group members.
- Service centers in remote areas are often under-resourced, and travel becomes more challenging during the monsoon season.
- Service quality is poor, and the need for IDs is only recognized when people need a marriage certificate.

Recommendations:

1. Disseminate clear and accurate information about public services, rights, and benefits through culturally appropriate means, such as animations or through village elders.
2. Improve the quality of services and simplify access by consolidating services at ODSCs and hiring local staff from ethnic groups.
3. Expand services to reach remote areas.
4. Engage communities by collecting concerns, claims, and feedback.
5. Strengthen local capacity to ensure communities have access to basic services, such as healthcare and education.
6. Highlight success stories and promote champions within service provider staff to build trust and engagement.

5.3 Persons with Disabilities

Challenges:

- Persons with disabilities lack information and guidelines on how to access public services.
- Village authorities do not adequately disseminate available service information.
- The dispersed locations of service centers create access difficulties.
- There is inadequate infrastructure, such as ramps and facilities for wheelchair users, and a lack of accommodations for persons who are deaf or blind.
- Service fees pose a financial barrier for persons with disabilities.
- There is limited access to legal information and legislation relevant to persons with disabilities.

Recommendations:

1. Deploy mobile service units to improve outreach.
2. Disseminate service access information via TV, radio, and applications.

3. Improve service center accessibility by enhancing infrastructure such as ramps, toilets, and rails.
4. Introduce policies to subsidize service fees for poor and vulnerable individuals with disabilities.
5. Modernize public services to be more inclusive.
6. Provide disability inclusion training for service staff.

6. Closing

Thanked MOJ for presentations on the situation on access to justice for vulnerable groups. Acknowledged the efforts made in this sector, especially through the legal aid offices. Acknowledged the dynamic participation of the participants from all sectors to have shared their ideas and discussions during the workshop, for which there was an overall agreement. Thanked the DPs and UNDP's long support to MOJ through different actions and projects.

Outlined the next steps following this working group on how access to justice can be ensured for all and about the proper approach to put into action the mentioned solutions. Next meeting of the ROLAIO sub-sector WG will be organized in September. The next Governance sub-sector WG meeting will be focused on CSI & CE, specifically looking at the One Door Service Centers and MOHA's plans to implement the ODSC strategy and upcoming projects. This will be organized in August. QR code will be distributed in the next SSWG to collect participant feedback (UNDP).

Action points:

- **UNDP:** to disseminate minutes to SSWG Secretariat.

Annex 2

MEETING MINUTES
THEMATIC WORKSHOP ON STRENGTHENING ACCESS TO JUSTICE,
ESPECIALLY LEGAL AID SERVICES FOR WOMEN, ETHNIC GROUPS,
VULNERABLE GROUPS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Meeting	Sub-Sector Working Group – Access to Justice, Rule of Law, and Institutional Oversight (ROLAIO)
Location	New Building, Ministry of Home Justice
Date	04/10/2024
Time	09:00 – 12:00
Chairs	Ms. Saykith Visisombath, Deputy Director General of International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Justice; Ms. Laura Fragiaco, Head of Governance, UNDP; Mrs. Karla da Silva Leitzke, Attaché (Governance), EU.
Minute taker	Armita Azadeh – Governance Coordination Analyst - UNDP Armaan Khan – RoL and Inclusion Analyst – Governance Unit - UNDP

AGENDA

ITEM	TOPIC	PRESENTER
7.	<i>Opening remarks and meeting objectives</i>	Ms. Saykhit Visisombath, Deputy DG International Cooperation Department, MoJ; Laura Fragiaco, Head of Governance, UNDP; Karla da Silva Leitzke, Attaché Governance, EU
8.	<i>Presentation of the results from the previous Thematic Workshop on Strengthening Access to Justice, for Women, Ethnic group, Vulnerable Groups and Persons with Disabilities</i>	Ms. Vipaphet S.Phabmixay, Director of International Cooperation Division, MOJ
9.	<i>Presentation of the Justice Sector Workplan for strengthening the access to justice and legal aid services for all vulnerable groups</i>	Ms. Lotchana Khemthong, Director Division of Legal Advice and Legal Aid, Department of Judicial Promotion and Management, MoJ
10.	<i>Exchange & Discussion</i>	All participants
11.	<i>Group Discussions in developing concrete actions to support the Justice Sector Workplan (women, ethnic groups, vulnerable groups, persons with disabilities)</i>	All participants
	<i>Summary of Specific Actions proposed by groups and comments</i>	Group discussion representatives
12.	<i>Action plan and closing remarks</i>	Ms. Saykhit Visisombath, Deputy DG International Cooperation Department, MoJ; Laura Fragiaco, Head of Governance, UNDP; Karla da Silva Leitzke, Attaché Governance, EU

1. Opening remarks

Ms. Visisombath thanked the attendees and opened the meeting by outlining the agenda. She provided an update on the Ministry of Justice's work to improve access to justice for vulnerable groups, emphasizing the need to strengthen these efforts. She highlighted the 2018 Decree on Legal Aid, which ensures legal services for local communities, and the ministry's work on protecting the poor, disadvantaged individuals, people with special needs, and women who are victims of trafficking. Ms. Visisombath stressed the importance of including vulnerable group representatives in discussions and hoped for a participatory approach to share lessons from civil society, international organizations, and the government. She concluded by urging development partners to continue their support.

Karla, representing the EU, welcomed the presence of participants from various sectors, including government, development partners, and civil society. She stressed the importance of taking concrete actions aligned with the Justice Sector Workplan, not only to drive progress but also to contribute valuable input to the annual report for the Governance Sector Working Group (GSWG). Karla highlighted the success of both the previous and today's meetings, attributing it to the active engagement of civil society. She emphasized that civil society plays a critical role in addressing the unique challenges faced by vulnerable groups and is instrumental in developing innovative solutions to these issues. This collaboration is especially important in light of the upcoming Round Table Meeting, where these efforts will be showcased and further discussed.

Laura, representing UNDP, outlined the work to date and expressed gratitude for collaboration from all members. The objective of the meeting was to move from discussions on equitable access to justice, especially for women, ethnic groups, and persons with disabilities, towards concrete actions. UNDP highlighted priorities such as improving legal aid services, strengthening coordination among justice stakeholders, and supporting village mediation committees in addressing gender-based violence. The draft Legal Aid Action Plan was mentioned as a critical step, with hopes for its approval by the Ministry of Justice soon. Development partners were thanked for their ongoing dedication to these efforts.

2. Presentation of the results from the previous Thematic Workshop on Strengthening Access to Justice, for Women, Ethnic group, Vulnerable Groups and Persons with Disabilities

Ms. Vipaphet S. Phabmixay, Director of International Cooperation Division, MOJ

Ms. Vipaphet presented the key findings from the previous SSWG workshop, focusing on the main obstacles to accessing justice. A consensus was reached on several challenges and potential solutions. These obstacles include cultural barriers, which limit women's access to justice, and difficulties faced by ethnic groups, particularly those with limited education or language skills, in understanding legal information. In rural areas, inadequate infrastructure further restricts access to legal aid services. The shortage of service staff also hampers support for vulnerable populations. Persons with disabilities face additional barriers, such as the physical inaccessibility of justice services. The discussion emphasized the importance of using technology to improve access to justice for people with disabilities and addressing these challenges through targeted solutions.

3. Presentation of the Justice Sector Workplan for strengthening the access to justice and legal aid services for all vulnerable groups

Ms. Lotchana Khemthong, Director Division of Legal Advice and Legal Aid, Department of Judicial Promotion and Management, MoJ

The presentation on the Legal Aid and Justice Promotion Division outlined the government's plans and vision for improving access to legal aid under the Legal Aid Decree, particularly Article 4, which identifies target groups for legal services. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has been actively advocating and promoting legal aid, with a focus on increasing community access through mobile legal aid services, which have proven effective and accessible. Digital platforms, such as the MoJ's legislation website, are also being used to disseminate information on legal aid. However, challenges remain, particularly with language barriers for ethnic groups, which the MoJ aims to address by providing information in more diverse languages in the future.

Key stakeholders in legal aid, including the Justice Department, the Lao Women's Union (LWU), and the Lao Bar Association (LBA), are working to strengthen coordination mechanisms, with designated focal points in both the Lao Bar Office and LWU. However, challenges persist, particularly related to the frequent turnover of staff in legal aid offices and the lack of legal expertise among newly appointed personnel, especially at the Lao Women's Union. Regular training is essential to address these gaps and build staff confidence in providing legal aid services.

One of the main obstacles highlighted was the difficulty for people in remote areas to be aware of available legal aid services. The government is working to enhance the implementation of the legal aid framework under the decrees. Alongside the Legal Aid Decree, a suggestion notification (No. 1077, 3 September 2018) is being implemented in parallel, and a legal aid services manual is being used for training and implementation at the community level. Feedback from the community has been collected to measure satisfaction with the services provided. The data collected needs to be disaggregated by specific groups to ensure the identification of targeted solutions.

The presentation also emphasized the need for stronger referral pathways, better coordination with courts, prosecutors, and the police, and the integration of legal aid services into criminal procedures. A clear referral pathway is needed to ensure that people accessing legal aid services are properly connected to relevant actors, such as lawyers or police. The need for stronger coordination, particularly at the district level, was emphasized, along with the importance of improving the dissemination of legal information to vulnerable groups, including women, persons with disabilities, and ethnic groups.

The presentation also included ways to exempt court fees for vulnerable groups, address delays in funding for legal aid, and improve data collection, particularly disaggregated by vulnerable groups. Enhancing human resource capacity, building legal knowledge, and promoting justice access were identified as key areas for future progress.

The need for continued collaboration among stakeholders, including the Ministry of Finance, LWU, LBA, and justice sector actors, was stressed to ensure that legal aid services effectively reach vulnerable populations and that financial support is consistently available for legal aid initiatives.

The session concluded with a call for continued collaboration among key actors to strengthen the legal aid framework and ensure that vulnerable groups have better access to justice.

5. Exchange & Discussion

Experience sharing from Lao Women's Union (LWU), Deputy Director of Center of Protection to Women:

The Lao Women's Union (LWU) plays a crucial role in the country based on an established legal framework, including the Law on Development, the Law on the Lao Women's Union, the Law on Human Trafficking, and the Law on Violence Against Women (VAW). These legal frameworks serve as the foundation for delivering essential services and creating an enabling environment for individuals with disabilities to access necessary support.

To enhance accessibility, the LWU is committed to providing facilities that cater to the needs of individuals, including the provision of sign language interpreters for those who are deaf or mute.

The LWU welcomes close collaboration with the MoJ, the Department of Justice (DOJ), and relevant agencies to specifically support women with disabilities. Efforts will focus on strengthening coordination through comprehensive referral pathways for victims and survivors, ensuring they receive appropriate assistance. The LWU aims to work together with the LBA and MoJ to develop effective referral mechanisms and common guidelines for future initiatives. This collaboration is vital in facilitating joint legislation that addresses the needs of these vulnerable populations and promotes their rights and access to justice.

Experience sharing from Lao Bar Association (LBA), Deputy Chair of the Lao Bar Association:

The Lao Bar Association (LBA) shares a commitment to providing legal aid services alongside other organizations. With support from The Asia Foundation (TAF), the LBA has established 22 offices across the country, including 1 central office in Vientiane and 9 district offices. Their efforts focus on enhancing legal literacy and providing legal representation, as requested by the Department of Justice (DOJ).

Currently, the LBA operates with limited core funding and has not formalized agreements regarding the number of cases it can support. At present, only four cases have received approval for funding. The LBA hopes that, in the future, relevant sectors will streamline processes to facilitate better support for these cases, ultimately strengthening the effectiveness of their services.

The LBA's legal aid offices, established with TAF's support since 2020, have been instrumental in providing services to vulnerable groups as defined by Decree 77. Referrals are primarily received from the justice offices, but the LBA's operations are still heavily reliant on TAF funding, as it does not possess sufficient funds of its own for legal aid. Currently, they are supporting four cases, but additional requests are pending due to inadequate funding. The LBA emphasizes the need to strengthen cooperation with the MOJ to enhance access to funding and support their ongoing legal aid initiatives.

The LBA highlighted main ongoing collaborations, including TAF's support through the Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Platform (MSCP) and UNDP's contributions via the Rule of Law program, which includes digital legal aid initiatives. LuxDev is also active, providing support in 5 provinces, while TAF covers 10 provinces. The EU and GiZ are also involved through the CEGGA initiative, which trains legal professionals and educators at various levels. Despite these advancements, the LBA faces challenges, particularly high staff turnover. Therefore, ongoing support from development partners remains essential.

The LBA is actively implementing an action plan to deliver legal services, with significant contributions from TAF covering 10 provinces, as well as additional support from donors like the EU and JICA, which focus on education and training within legal aid frameworks, including training at the village mediation unit level.

7. Group discussions

The participants separated into different smaller groups to discuss, based on their experiences, concrete solutions of each identified population group. 4 groups, including participants from the government, the international organizations and the local CSOs, were discussing separately difficulties and potential solutions for (i) vulnerable groups, (ii) women, (iii) ethnic groups and (iv) persons with disabilities to access justice.

5.1 Women Groups

To address the challenges women face in accessing legal aid, it is essential to employ trained and sensitized female staff in legal aid offices and tailor outreach efforts to suit women's comfort levels. This could include engaging intermediaries, particularly for vulnerable cases such as domestic violence. Women in rural areas face significant barriers to accessing legal aid. These include trust issues, discomfort in formal settings, cultural norms that prioritize family reputation over personal rights, insufficient enforcement of laws that protect women, and a general lack of awareness about available

legal aid services. These factors underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to overcome these challenges.

- ⇒ The three key bodies involved in providing legal aid—the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the Lao Women’s Union (LWU), and the Lao Bar Association (LBA)— require improved coordination to enhance service delivery.
- ⇒ Female lawyers should be actively involved in assisting women in legal aid offices, as women are likely to feel more secure and confident in working with female professionals, which would help them feel more empowered to seek justice.
- ⇒ Utilizing informal communication channels can help establish connections with women and spread essential information. Addressing cultural contexts and prioritizing the protection of women's rights in these efforts is crucial.
- ⇒ Awareness campaigns should be launched to inform women about legal aid services, as awareness of the existing laws and services remains very low.
- ⇒ Sensitizing intermediaries to enforcement mechanisms and directly targeting women through information dissemination at community events—providing them with contact details for local intermediaries—can further facilitate access to legal aid and support services.

7.2 Vulnerable Groups

In remote areas, all key stakeholders, especially CSOs, must be involved to ensure vulnerable groups know where to access legal aid services. Existing networks should be used for outreach, with service providers trained to meet the specific needs of each group, particularly women and persons with disabilities.

Infrastructure must be adapted to include transport facilitation and accessibility features like ramps and elevators for people with disabilities. Additionally, a training module for law students should be integrated into curricula to ensure that future legal professionals can address the needs of special groups.

Key challenges identified include illiteracy, limited resources in rural areas, staffing shortages in legal aid offices for women, and geographical barriers. To address these, the following actions are proposed:

- ⇒ Establish a hotline for immediate legal aid access.
- ⇒ Use diverse communication channels, including radio and TV, for raising awareness.
- ⇒ Create translation teams to overcome language barriers.
- ⇒ Develop a targeted fundraising strategy involving CSOs and the private sector to ensure sustainable support.

7.3 Ethnic Groups

- ⇒ Provide comprehensive information and training to officers and authorities to ensure they are well-informed about legal aid services and processes.
- ⇒ Use diverse communication tools, including social media, radio, and local platforms, to effectively engage with ethnic groups
- ⇒ Collaborate closely with village and community leaders to strengthen trust and facilitate communication with local populations.
- ⇒ Enhance coordination between government bodies, courts, police, and justice actors to ensure streamlined service delivery, with a focus on pilot projects such as prosecutors providing legal services to the elderly and vulnerable groups.

7.4 Persons with Disabilities

To improve access to information and legal aid for persons with disabilities (PWD), we propose the following six main programs:

- ⇒ **Strengthen the capacity of human resources** by providing ongoing training focused on specific issues related to PWD, such as sign language and effective communication techniques. Collaborate with CSOs and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to raise awareness about available legal aid services.
- ⇒ **Enhance physical accessibility for PWD** by installing lifts, ramps, and other necessary infrastructure. Ensure that information platforms are user-friendly and tailored to the specific needs of different types of PWD, facilitating their access to legal resources.
- ⇒ **Improve the collection and disaggregation of data on PWD clients**, including the number and types of individuals served. Foster dialogue at the policy level by engaging the private sector and government agencies to improve overall accessibility for PWD.
- ⇒ **Enhance M&E systems to track progress and impact**, ensuring that best practices and knowledge are effectively transferred among stakeholders. Maintain continuity in training and support for staff to address the evolving needs of PWD.
- ⇒ **Increase opportunities for PWD to access legal education** and training facilities that cater to various needs, ensuring that learning environments are inclusive and supportive. Incorporate PWD perspectives into legal and judicial training programs, including the National and Key Course (N&K) and the Foundations of Legal Practice (FLP).
- ⇒ **Leverage technology to enhance digital literacy among staff** and support the creation of informative video programs aimed at educating PWD about their legal rights and available services. Encourage all stakeholders, including other ministries and government agencies, to take responsibility for supporting these initiatives. For example, the Ministry of Technology and Communications (MTC) could play a vital role in assisting women victims of cybercrime.

7.5 Group of International NGOs and Development Partners

The INGO group representative clarified first that this group covered legal aid generally, rather than taking a focus on one vulnerable group. It was first highlighted that two major challenges were commonly faced by INGOs focusing on providing legal aid to vulnerable populations. One was the remoteness of villages that vulnerable groups may inhabit. This is compounded by the second challenge – the lack of financial and infrastructural resources in place to provide assistance to those living in these areas. The representative posed three solutions:

1. Combining written and digital formats to disseminate legal information to vulnerable groups. Since different age groups use different mediums of communication, for example the use of WhatsApp and Facebook by younger people, and radio and print media by older people, varying dissemination methods is important.
2. Implementing targeted training based on the needs of specific areas. Certain types of legal information may be more in demand in a given village or district, for example, family law, GBV, land disputes etc.
3. Training intermediaries to provide legal information to populations. Most people in Lao PDR still prefer to use informal justice mechanisms at the village level. Because of this, village chiefs should have the necessary information to guide citizens on formal legal resources to bridge the information gap.

8. Closing

Thanked MOJ for presentations on the situation on access to justice for vulnerable groups. Acknowledged the efforts made in this sector, especially through the legal aid offices. Acknowledged the dynamic participation of the participants from all sectors to have shared their ideas and discussions during the workshop, for which there was an overall agreement. Thanked the DPs long support to MOJ through different actions and projects.

Outlined the next steps following this working group on how access to justice can be ensured for all and about the proper approach to put into action the mentioned solutions. The next Governance Sector Working Group (GSWG). Fed the discussion for the Round Table Meeting.

Annex 3

Meeting Minutes
Sub-Sector Working Group on Public Services Improvement & Citizen Engagement (PSI & CE)

Meeting: Sub-Sector Working Group Secretariat	Date: 10/04/2024
Location: New Building, Ministry of Home Affairs	Time: 09:00 – 12:00
Chairs: Mr. Vanna Boupha, Chief of MOHA Cabinet; Caitlin Porter, Head of Governance Unit, UNDP, Aurélie Righetti, Deputy Director of Cooperation, SDC.	
Minute taker: Jenny Douglas – Governance & Participation Analyst - UNDP	

Agenda

Item	Topic	Presenter
1.	Opening remarks and meeting objectives	Mr. Vanna Boupha, Head of Cabinet, MoHA; Caitlin Porter, Head of Governance, UNDP; Aurélie Righetti, Deputy Director of Cooperation, SDC.
2.	Presentation on the Petition System	National Assembly
3.	Exchange & Discussion	All participants
4.	Presentation on the implementation lessons and the review of Decree on 238 Non-Profit Associations (NPA) and 149 on Foundations	Department of Public Administration Development, Ministry of Home Affairs
5.	Exchange & Discussion	All participants
6.	Closing remarks	Mr. Vanna Boupha, Head of Cabinet, MoHA; Caitlin Porter, Head of Governance, UNDP; Aurélie Righetti, Deputy Director of Cooperation, SDC

1. Introductory remarks:

Mr. Vanna Boupha thanked those present for their attendance and opened the meeting with a summary of the agenda, before speaking about the work of the Secretariat to date. This includes the GSWG Workplan, summary of the roundtable table process and revision of Decree on Petition scheduled this year.

Caitlin outlined work to date and expressed gratitude for collaboration from all members. The SSWG is positioned at a technical level to capture lessons and discussions, and convey to different levels, including national discussions, i.e, to Round Table Meeting processes. This sub-sector working group will have a final meeting later this year. The purpose of these meetings is to create space to bring issues and improve coordination across ministries and the government. Requested to reflect on potential collaboration and feedback on the issues raised.

Aurélie outlined the good progress made on implementing activities in the GSWG Workplan, which will contribute to the implementation of Outcome 6 of the 9th NSEDIP where improved public governance, administration and the rule of law, including through the promotion of civil society

participation, are defined as key priorities. The presentations today will explain new processes and instruments, specifically on the revision of decrees and the National Assembly on their digitalization efforts.

2. Presentation on the Petition System

Mr. Selysanb Vongsenechanh, Deputy Head of the Justice Affairs Legislation Division, The Justice Affairs Inspection Department, Justice Committee, National Assembly

Presented on the petitions system under NA (inquiries) where citizens lodge petitions to the Justice Committee and discussed the timeline to process (90 days). The new revised law in 2017 sets the Justice Committee as the focal point for petitions (e-certification of petition – entry number of petitions, issues certificate of petition to monitor progress). The Justice Committee (JC) meets at 3pm daily to examine petitions, categorize and will be sent to specific committees. Committees will attempt to resolve issue, if the petition is complex this will be submitted to the standing committees/line ministries.

Progress on Database & Management: In the current database, this is manually recorded (excel) and dispatched to departments, therefore filing is inconsistent, time-consuming, non-centralized and takes a long time to circulate. 1000+ petitions per year. A new digital database was required to monitor the progress easily, quickly and to reduce human resource requirements. In 2021, the database was developed by CEGGA & WFD to improve flow of documents and transition from a paper-based system. There is 1 admin user per committee, the relevant department/committee sends a petition to technical divisions. The dashboard shows petitions being processed and pending, the designated case officer and recipient of petition. Parliamentarians and citizens can access the database to review progress.

Outlined difficulty in developing staff capacities and using the common server of the NA, the Justice Committee is planning to develop and use an independent server. Planning to expand petitions database to PPAs to ensure citizens can monitor and follow up at a local level.

3. Exchange & Discussion

Questions on how the petitions are received in a paper or digital format how petitions are separated into topics and sent to committees and prioritization of ‘hot’ topics (GIZ), which other mechanisms are used by the NA to collect inputs from citizen (e.g. the Hotline) (SDC). Further inquiries on accommodations in place for persons with disabilities and the role of the ministries if this coordination process between Ministries and Committee can be strengthened (EU & UNDP).

Response by NA explained that petition forms are paper based. A poster on how to lodge petition is available, also guidance is given on filling in the form and timeframe of petitions. Hotline mechanism is used during the Ordinary Session to lodge petitions (contact numbers and information not provided by citizens is an issue). Few petitions are lodged via email. JC are learning from Indonesia how lodging petitions electronically. Database enables citizen information to be displayed and citizens can be contacted regarding their petition process.

The roles of each department are being re-evaluated, currently 70-80% of petitions are justice related and referred to the Justice Committee. This is challenging due to the limited number of staff. For Persons with Disabilities, family support in bringing them to the office to lodge petitions. The Justice Committee wants line ministries to be better connected to the NA, for example the Prime Minister’s Office. Current coordination is via phone.

Questions on how citizens can be encouraged to raise petitions on other issues throughout the year, outside of Ordinary Session periods (UNDP). Emphasized importance of SSWG to build upon good practises and capability of the Justice Committee in petition handling. USAID expanded on collecting data on petitions, if during public consultations when citizen feedback is received, if these considered as petitions.

Response by NA outlined that the petition process is an administrative burden on the NA, especially if citizens do not provide contact information. Citizens can lodge a petition during a public consultation, this process of petition lodging needs to be adequately explained during consultations (JC).

Further digitalization of the petition system is highly welcomed (ICPMS/NA), petition handling is part of Parliamentary training. Hotline is only during the Ordinary Session, but Parliamentarians require training to disseminate petition tool to constituents. Noted significant progress in the last six years in managing petition handling. Further feedback on strengthening mechanisms welcomed.

4. Review on Implementation of Decree 238 on Association and Decree 149 on Foundation – Ministry of Home Affairs

Mr. Souliya, Deputy Head of CSO Division, Department of Public Administration Development, Ministry of Home Affairs

Outlined consultation process on Decrees 238 and 149, 3 Provincial consultations with 456 people (168 women). Participants agreed to revise both decrees and expressed difficulties with MOU process, CSO registration, funding threshold and reporting to the Government. Agreement to merge the two decrees due to similar activities. This feedback is being incorporated into the revised decree. Some decree content remains unclear. Dissemination of the decree is not being conducted across the country (provincial and district levels) and there lacks training on understanding decree.

Future plans: MOHA will revise Decree 238 on Association, Prime Minister issued instruction to complete by October 2024. The drafting committee in MoHA is preparing this. Challenge of limited time (the Justice Committee required to convene meeting) and lack of learning from other countries. A request for budget to support exchanges. 7 meetings are planned between now and October, including 2 public consultations.

5. Exchange & Discussion

Questions/comments: Decree review process, timeline and improvements are required, this is clear from the presentation. Questions on expected date of new decree and consultation process and target countries for study tour (SDC). Reflected on CSO registration and reporting process and high administrative fees (compounded by inflation of LAK). Recommended to shorten and decentralize MOU process, if approval should be MoHA or MoFA (National Committee of CSOs). In agreement on disseminating decree to local levels and questioned when this will take place (ARMI, LCCC).

The Government agrees with database use and recommended MoHA to manage this. Outlined high staff turn-over and need for policy to promote ICT staff (OSPP), current economic difficulties limit decree implementation and focus must be on reducing approval process length and decentralizing authority from provincial to district levels (MoHA).

Response: MoHA outlined the importance of understanding decree but currently has limited time to acquire inputs from all stakeholders and consult with other countries. The funding threshold is a key issue, and regulations require revision. MOHA will consult with line ministries and MOFA. CSO activities at District and Village levels require coordination with the local authorities, coordination largely occurs at provincial level due to lack of district capacities. Commented on CEGGA Program enabling dissemination of decree at district level, this has improved CSO management. MOHA will submit a draft decree in 2024, for implementation in 2025. Target countries are Switzerland, Australia, Vietnam, China, or Thailand.

MoFA acknowledged evaluation of MOU is required and outlined that foreign funding requires approval and asset management at the macro level from MOFA.

6. Closing

Thanked NA and MOHA for presentations on improving petition handling processes through digitalization and further improving the CSO environment. Acknowledged the efforts made in these fields and, referring to the timeline of the 9th NSEDP, anticipate acceleration of progress under

Outcome 6. Acknowledged the key steps of the Decree revision process, especially the consultation of NPAs on the draft Decree that shall contribute to improve the operating environment for local civil society (SDC).

Outlined next SSWG meetings: CSI & CE will be in August, specifically looking at One Door Service Centers and MOHA's plans to implement the ODSC strategy and upcoming projects. Rule of Law and Access to Justice SSWG thematic workshop will be held on 23 May. This will cover strengthening access to justice especially legal aid service for women and vulnerable groups. QR code will be distributed in the next SSWG to collect participant feedback (UNDP).

Thanked stakeholders for participation and outlined need to assess database sustainability post project funding, specifically staffing and addressing the high staff-turnover. On the Decrees, clearer coordination between MOFA and MOHA is required to organize public consultations and comply with respective regulations. MoFA and MOHA need to develop a workplan and collect data on model countries on CSO management.

Action points:

- **UNDP:** to disseminate minutes to SSWG secretariat.
- **MOJ** to send out invitations to the next SSWG on access to justice, rule of law and institutional oversight (ROLAJIO) on May 23.
- **MOHA:** The next SSWG meeting on public services and citizen engagement (PSI & CE) will be hosted by MOHA in August. It will focus on One-Door Service Centres, with a broader discussion on how to improve public services and strengthen the engagement of citizens.

Annex 4

MEETING MINUTES
THEMATIC WORKSHOP ON STRENGTHENING ACCESS TO JUSTICE,
ESPECIALLY LEGAL AID SERVICES FOR WOMEN, ETHNIC GROUPS,
VULNERABLE GROUPS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Meeting	Sub-Sector Working Group – Access to Justice, Rule of Law, and Institutional Oversight (ROLAIO)
Location	New Building, Ministry of Home Justice
Date	23/05/2024
Time	09:00 – 12:00
Chairs	Mr. Khamphone Sipaseuth, Director General of International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Justice; Mrs. Sommany Sihathep, Programme Analyst Rule of Law and Access to Justice, UNDP; Mrs. Karla da Silva Leitzke, Attaché (Governance), EU.
Minute taker	Armita Azadeh – Governance Coordination Analyst - UNDP Thippavanh Virakhom – Project Consultant – Governance Unit - UNDP

Agenda

ITEM	TOPIC	PRESENTER
13.	<i>Opening remarks and meeting objectives</i>	Mr. Khamphone Sipaseuth, DG International Cooperation Department, MoJ; Sommany Sihathep, Rule of Law and Access to Justice, UNDP; Karla da Silva Leitzke, Attaché Governance, EU
14.	<i>Presentation on the implementation of legal aid for the justice sector and the status of legal aid for women, ethnic groups, vulnerable groups, and persons with disabilities</i>	Dr. Chomkham Bouphanivanh, Director General of Judicial Promotion and Management Department, MoJ
15.	<i>Presentation of the difficulties and challenges to implement the legal aid and access to the justice for women, ethnic groups, vulnerable groups, and persons with disabilities</i>	Ms. Lotchana Khemthong, Director Division of Legal Advice and Legal Aid, Department of Judicial Promotion and Management, MoJ
16.	<i>Exchange & Discussion</i>	All participants
17.	<i>Thematic Discussions in small groups: (i) women from vulnerable groups, (ii) ethnic groups, (iii) persons with disabilities, (iv) vulnerable groups</i>	All participants
18.	<i>Closing remarks</i>	Mr. Khamphone Sipaseuth, DG International Cooperation Department, MoJ; Sommany Sihathep, Rule of Law and Access to Justice, UNDP; Karla da Silva Leitzke, Attaché Governance, EU

4. Opening remarks

Mr. Sipaseuth thanked those present for their attendance and opened the meeting with a summary of the agenda, before speaking about the work of the MoJ to date regarding the access to justice for vulnerable groups and the need to continue strengthening efforts in this sense. Mr. Sipaseuth stressed the importance of tailoring the approach and methodology for providing support to vulnerable groups in accessing justice, emphasizing the necessity to consider their specific needs.

Sommany, representing UNDP, outlined the work to date and expressed gratitude for collaboration from all members. The Sub Sector Working Group, which convened in December 2021, highlights the importance of advancing the Rule of Law and Access to Justice in Lao PDR, particularly focusing on legal aid services. There is an urging need to assess the effectiveness of these services, especially in benefiting vulnerable groups. Participants were urged to view the workshop as an opportunity to identify solutions and improvements, as addressing the challenges in legal aid quality and coordination is of significance for advancing access to justice. Sommany concluded by expressing hope for the approval of the Legal Aid Action Plan by the Ministry of Justice to enhance accessibility and coordination in legal aid services.

Karla, representing the EU, welcomed the presence of participants from various sectors, including government, development partners, and civil society. Regular meetings to discuss concrete actions in the legal sector, policy dialogue, and reforms, is of the utmost importance, as demonstrated by the profound impact of collective efforts on the Laotian society. There is a need for dialogue with key stakeholders, including civil society, to ensure inclusive development and meaningful decision-making, particularly in the context of the upcoming Round Table Meeting. Karla concluded by emphasizing the importance of the ongoing Legal Aid Action Plan in providing clear guidelines for legal assistance in Lao PDR.

5. Presentation on the implementation of legal aid for the justice sector and the status of legal aid for women, ethnic groups, vulnerable groups, and persons with disabilities

Dr. Chomkham Bouphanivanh, Director General of Judicial Promotion and Management Department, MoJ

Dr. Bouphanivanh presented the results achieved over the past 5 years. Overall, results are encouraging, even though there is still a significant margin of improvement. Access to justice for vulnerable groups is a new sector for the Lao justice system. The decree being endorsed in 2018, the MoJ is conscient about the needed efforts to achieve sustainable results.

- 159 legal aid offices were established throughout the country with 13 legal aid offices at the provincial level, 129 at the district level, and 17 legal aid offices under the Lao Bar Association (LBA).
- 1278 persons trained, among which 462 women through legal aid capacity building sessions.
- 120,501 legal assistance services were provided, including: 47,653 provisions of legal counsel, 60,256 provisions of legal information and 12,592 legal documents drafted.

6. Presentation of the difficulties and challenges to implement the legal aid and access to the justice for women, ethnic groups, vulnerable groups, and persons with disabilities

Ms. Lotchana Khembhong, Director Division of Legal Advice and Legal Aid, Department of Judicial Promotion and Management, MoJ

Ms. Lotchana presented the key numbers regarding legal aid offices in the provinces and districts, depending on the supporting organization:

Ministry of Justice	171 legal aid offices	514 staff members at the legal aid offices
Lao Women's Union	166 legal aid offices	494 staff members at the legal aid offices
Lao Bar Association	22 legal aid offices, including 13 at provincial level and 0 at district level	64 staff members at the legal aid offices at the provincial level and 18 staff members at the district level

Since 2018, a total of 120 512 legal aid service users of the justice centers was recorded. These statistics show the number of times that the center was visited and not the number of persons who reached out for the services.

Since 2018, a total of 20 cases were dealt in the justice centers with legal representatives supported by the Ministry of Justice (11 cases) and the Lao Bar Association (9 cases), regarding mostly domestic violence, family disputes, assaults, land management.

4 main categories of challenges were identified and presented, around budget and human capacities (HR, experience and qualification):

- (i) **Limited experience and legal knowledge** of government staff and lawyers who are in charge of providing legal aid services: Training needs for local staff in providing legal aid services (training can be done by the staff at central level); difficulties for the staff to search for information in legal counseling, in legal aid dissemination, and in legal issues, using modern working methodologies (internet search...);
- (ii) **Lack of coordination between the legal aid organizations:** No effective coordination system between the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Lao Women's Union and the Lao Bar Association (LBA), especially between the MoJ and the LBA, even though LBA organized some inter-agency consultations on cases. Need to work more with the organizations such LBA and LWI but limited capacities to do so.
- (iii) **Lack of budget** funding from the government, or other sources of income: Need for the government to raise more funding to increase the support of legal aid programs.
- (iv) **Lack of regular monitoring and evaluation** on legal aid work: lack or absence of regular reporting in the existing channels, mostly linked to the lack of human resources or the knowledge of the existing staff to use the proper channels and tools to elaborate and share reports. Difficulty to consolidate data and share the data from the legal aid offices to the central level.

6. Exchange & Discussion

Experience sharing from LuxDev:

Positive results regarding the number of visitors. Training and inspections conducted by LuxDev in provincial offices have seen an **increase in visitor numbers**. The primary demand lies in legal consultation and the drafting of legal documents. There is an important **need for disseminating information** to the public. Staff members exhibit high levels of motivation and determination, **actively engaged** in assisting and supporting communities.

Main challenges regarding logistics and capacities: 1/ *Logistical challenges.* To effectively reach the most remote villages and provide support, there is a pressing need for funding to acquire suitable vehicles for outreach activities, including motorbikes and proper cars. **2/ *Insufficient capacities in key areas.*** While the capacities of the local staff are not lacking, they are deemed insufficient in critical areas highlighted by the communities. These areas encompass family law matters such as inheritance, divorce, dissolution of marriage, and custody, as well as issues related to domestic abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, violence against children, and land conflicts. **LuxDev is collaborating closely with the Asia Foundation and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ)** to develop solutions and tools aimed at enhancing the capacities of staff members in legal aid offices.

Experience sharing from CEGGA (GiZ):

Success in elaborating new channels to allow access to justice, such as Work with Clinical Legal Aid and Digital Legal Aid platform in Khammouane and Luang Prabang, with ongoing projects yielding promising results. Findings derived from a survey conducted jointly by Babseacle, the National Institute of Justice, and CEGGA underscore a notable **lack of public awareness regarding the existence of legal aid offices**.

In response, a strategic intervention has been developed: the implementation of **training sessions targeting village heads, mediators, and other pertinent stakeholders at the grassroots level**. These sessions are geared towards equipping these individuals with the requisite knowledge and skills to effectively direct individuals to legal aid offices and clarify the available assistance. Thus, they assume an essential role as **intermediaries** in connecting communities with the legal aid services.

Experience sharing from Asia Foundation:

Over the past five years, there has been an **increased number of services at the legal aid offices**, which is mostly linked to the noticeable dedication of the staff efforts. However, in terms of resources required, there is a pressing **need for additional ICT materials and supplies** to strengthen capacity-building activities. To achieve sustainable results, a participatory approach will be integral to the next phase of the program. This entails an **expansion of services within the Ministry's scope to regions where legal aid offices are not yet established**, ensuring broader access to legal assistance and support.

Experience sharing from Babseacle:

Based on their on-site experience, recommended to foster connections with lawyers beyond their representation role, but also for capacity development. Lawyers should be perceived as a valuable source for capacity strengthening, such as co-trainings of paralegals.

9. Group discussions

The participants separated into different smaller groups to discuss, based on their experiences, the challenges of each identified population group. 4 groups, including participants from the government, the international organizations and the local CSOs, were discussing separately difficulties and potential solutions for (i) vulnerable groups, (ii) women, (iii) ethnic groups and (iv) persons with disabilities to access justice.

5.1 Women Groups

Discussion initiated with the need to better define the target group. Intersectionality needs to be taken into consideration when dealing with women's challenges (women with disabilities, from rural area, from ethnic groups...). To effectively address the related issues, it is essential to define and sub-categorize women into various groups based on their specific circumstances and needs and

subsequently, identifying and categorizing the specific related legal aid issues. This approach enables **targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by different groups of women.** Women in rural areas encounter significant barriers accessing legal aid, including trust issues and discomfort in formal settings, cultural norms prioritizing family reputation over personal rights, insufficient enforcement of laws protecting women, and a lack of awareness about available legal aid services, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address these challenges.

To overcome these challenges, it is essential to employ trained and sensitized female staff in legal aid offices and tailor outreach efforts to women's comfort levels, potentially engaging intermediaries for vulnerable cases like domestic violence. Leveraging unofficial communication channels can help establish connections and disseminate crucial information, while addressing cultural contexts and prioritizing women's rights protection is crucial. Additionally, sensitizing intermediaries to enforcement mechanisms and directly targeting women's awareness through information dissemination at community events with contact details for local intermediaries can facilitate access to legal aid and support resources.

9.2 Vulnerable Groups

The group noted challenges with illiteracy, limited resource distribution in rural areas, staffing shortages in legal aid offices for women, and geographical barriers. To tackle these, they suggested a multifaceted approach: establishing a hotline, using diverse communication channels like radio and TV, building translation teams, and implementing a targeted fundraising strategy involving CSOs and the private sector.

9.3 Ethnic Groups

The group identified key challenges hindering the ethnic group's access to legal aid services, including language barriers, limited information access, and entrenched social norms. To overcome these obstacles, they proposed working closely with village leaders, integrating legal knowledge into school curricula, utilizing diverse communication tools, implementing information accuracy checks, conducting regular dissemination activities, and establishing youth and women representatives in village offices to foster trust and facilitate access to aid services.

9.4 Persons with Disabilities

The group identified challenges including communication barriers and physical limitations hindering access to legal aid services, compounded by a lack of awareness about legal rights. Proposed solutions include integrating legal aid education into the school system, training programs for stakeholders like associations of people with disabilities, establishing village call centers, assigning legal experts for disability cases, developing communication tools such as sign language materials, and training legal service providers to better serve people with disabilities, aiming for a more inclusive legal aid system.

10. Closing

Thanked MOJ for presentations on the situation on access to justice for vulnerable groups. Acknowledged the efforts made in this sector, especially through the legal aid offices. Acknowledged the dynamic participation of the participants from all sectors to have shared their ideas and discussions during the workshop, for which there was an overall agreement. Thanked the DPs and UNDP's long support to MOJ through different actions and projects.

Outlined the next steps following this working group on how access to justice can be ensured for all and about the proper approach to put into action the mentioned solutions. Next meeting of the ROLAIO sub-sector WG will be organized in September. The next Governance sub-sector WG meeting will be focused on CSI & CE, specifically looking at the One Door Service Centers and MOHA's plans to implement the ODSC strategy and upcoming projects. This will be organized in August. QR code will be distributed in the next SSWG to collect participant feedback (UNDP).

Action points:

- **UNDP:** to disseminate minutes to SSWG Secretariat.
- **UNDP:** to organize a follow-up meeting with DPs and MoJ on discussing concrete actions following the discussions from the working groups regarding access to justice
- **MOJ:** The next SSWG meeting on access to justice, rule of law and institutional oversight (ROLAIO) will be hosted by MOJ in September. It will focus on the follow-up of this working, with a broader discussion on how to concretely improve access to justice in the existing projects.
- **MOHA** to send out invitations to the next SSWG on public services and citizen engagement (PSI & CE) in August.

Annex 5 – 2024 Stakeholder Mapping for GSWG

In October 2024, a stakeholder mapping survey was conducted during the Gender Sector Working Group (GSWG) meeting. The survey garnered responses from 23 partners, providing valuable insights into their involvement in the Governance sector:

1. Active Participation: 15 partners reported currently implementing projects or programmes related to the Governance sector.
2. Potential Engagement: The remaining 8 partners, while not currently involved in specific projects or programmes, expressed keen interest in participating in sector discussions.

Summary of these partners is as follow:

Currently implementing a project / programme / policy related to the governance sector

Organization's Name	Topics and names of projects/ programmes	Intention on working in the governance sector in 2025	Contact details	Additional comments or feedback	Proposals for strategic priorities for 2025	Other specific thematic focus to discuss for 2025
1) Gender Development Association	Strengthening CSO Participation in the ICESCR Reporting Process in Lao PDR, Low Value Grant, UNDP	Yes	Gender Development Association, E: manivanh.suyavong@gmail.com, Tel: +8562055049494, Office: +85621417758, 703/39 Phonphanao, Vientiane, P.O.Box 10820			
2) MoHA	Lao PRD Effective and Accountability Public Services	Yes	Kheuavanh@yahoo.com	None	1. Government structures and administrative frameworks	None
3) National Assembly	CEGGA	Yes	khampanya01@hotmail.com	None	2. Public Personnel/human resources	None
4) Ministry of Home Affairs	n/a	Yes	thounvilai.oudomsine@gmail.com	n/a	3. Delegation of Responsivity (Decentralization) and local service delivery	Governance Ethics
5) USAID	Legal aid Support Activity	Yes	Pphanayanggoor@usaid.gov	More open discussion on various roles that GOL, Development	4. Legal sector, rule of law, institutional oversight	People center justice for all justice sectors

Organization's Name	Topics and names of projects/ programmes	Intention on working in the governance sector in 2025	Contact details	Additional comments or feedback	Proposals for strategic priorities for 2025	Other specific thematic focus to discuss for 2025
				partners, CSOs, marginalized groups to be part of this drafting plan on the governance sector		
6) USAID	Access to Justice, Legislative Strengthening, Audit and Transparency, Counter Trafficking in Persons, Public Financial Management	Yes	svongphosy@usaid.gov	None	4. Legal sector, rule of law, institutional oversight	Anti Corruption, LDC graduation
7) ADWLE	Promotion Access to justice for citizen in Lao PDR	Yes	Yes I am very pleased	Please disseminate the roles of CSOs to public esp. all government sectors	1. Government structures and administrative frameworks	Lao CSOs engagement
8) BABSEACLE	Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and Rule of Law (CEGGA)	Yes	pavina@babseacle.org	IEC materials available should display as show case during the meeting area	4. Legal sector, rule of law, institutional oversight	Access to legal services
9) Douangchanh from Oxfam	Civil space	Yes	Douangchanh.lopaying@oxfam.org	Propose to review the leaders' statement that 'The Party leads, the State manages, and the people are the masters.' Is this within the framework of Governance? If so, how can we develop this into a 5-year plan?	4. Legal sector, rule of law, institutional oversight	Distance working to reduce transportation cost
10) CEGGA	Gener equality, rule of law in principles, human rights	Yes	I am part of mailing list	N/A	5. People's participation and representation	N/A

Organization's Name	Topics and names of projects/ programmes	Intention on working in the governance sector in 2025	Contact details	Additional comments or feedback	Proposals for strategic priorities for 2025	Other specific thematic focus to discuss for 2025
11) Moj, dic	No	Yes	ຂໍໃຫ້ມີການແຕ່ງຕັ້ງຄະນະ ຢ່າງ ບັນທາງການ ໃນໜ່ວຍງານນີ້	No	4. Legal sector, rule of law, institutional oversight	No
12) Ministry of Justice	I serve as the Project Coordinator (Support Unit) for the Ministry of Justice's collaboration with The Asia Foundation on the "Cooperation Project on Access to Justice and Legal Aid Support in Lao PDR." I also work with other partners, including the Governance Sector Working Group (GSWG), the Rule of Law Access to Justice and Good Governance Project (Lao/037), the Citizen Engagement for Good Governance Accountability and Rule of Law (CEGGA) Programme, and initiatives related to Sustainable Development Goal 16.	Yes	viphaphetsp@gmail.com	the Governance Sector Working Group (GSWG) was implement efficient and effective	4. Legal sector, rule of law, institutional oversight	For Justice sector I would like to add thematic related with village mediation committee
13) HELVETAS Laos	(i) CEGGA, Civic Engagement and support to PPAs; (ii) PIASVC, Land information & Legal aid (iii) GiWEAC, Youth Engagement & Climate Justice (MoU under preparation)	Yes	jesper.lauridsen@helvetas.org	The SSWG and SWG are important platforms for knowledge sharing and networking. it would be nice to more often give space to showcase good practices and approaches from implementing partners that can potentially be replicated, scaled up and/or feed into	5. People's participation and representation	Fiscal decentralization , tax & revenue mobilization

Organization's Name	Topics and names of projects/ programmes	Intention on working in the governance sector in 2025	Contact details	Additional comments or feedback	Proposals for strategic priorities for 2025	Other specific thematic focus to discuss for 2025
				policy making processes		
14) JICA	The project for promoting Development and Strengthen of the Rule of Law in Legal Sector	Yes	MANIVANH-Santhana@jica.go.jp	N/A	4. Legal sector, rule of law, institutional oversight	N/A
15) GIZ	Citizen Engagement, Good governance, Accountability and the Rule of Law	Yes	anna.kleinschroth@giz.de	none	5. People's participation and representation	no

Not implementing a project / programme / policy related to the governance sector

Organization's Name	Topics and names of projects/ programmes	Intention on working in the governance sector in 2025	Contact details	Additional comments or feedback	Proposals for strategic priorities for 2025	Other specific thematic focus to discuss for 2025
1) ChildFund	N/A	No	vilasai@childfund.org.la	Appreciated for inclusion		
2) Lao Child and Youth Development Association (LaoCYDA)	Not yet, but LaoCYDA planned to start the implementation of relevant programmes in 2025. We look forward to collaborating more with all development partners.	Yes	vilasai.laocyda@gmail.com	Appreciated for inclusion. GSWG meeting - informative and helpful. LaoCYDA) as the new locally-led Lao-led and Youth-led CSO – willing to participate and contribute more in GSWG in 2025.		
3) INGO Network	NA. We are an umbrella organisation.	Yes	Ingonetwork@directoryofngos.org	Appreciated for inclusion	1. Government structures and administrative frameworks	Localisation
4) Lao Women's Union	No	Yes	vylaichith@gmail.com	Appreciated for inclusion	2. Public Personnel/human resources	Next time. Thank you

Organization's Name	Topics and names of projects/ programmes	Intention on working in the governance sector in 2025	Contact details	Additional comments or feedback	Proposals for strategic priorities for 2025	Other specific thematic focus to discuss for 2025
5) Ministry of Foreign Affairs	No	Maybe	58099977	No	1. Government structures and administrative frameworks	Economic development
6) Oxfam in Lao	MRLG	Yes	tonecheuy.saechao@oxfam.org	GSWG meeting has been useful. It will be good if more time allocated for discussion and exchange	4. Legal sector, rule of law, institutional oversight	Role of law and responsible agriculture
7) Ministry of public security	No	Maybe	-	-	5. People's participation and representation	-
8) PFHA	No	Yes	southisouk.laopfha@gmail.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time allocation for discussion during sector meeting is too short - To enhance justice in local areas, we should focus on the following: - Capacity building for local networks, including: - Healthcare providers at district hospitals - Women's Union representatives at district and village levels - Improving access to justice by: - Increasing the number of channels through which people can seek legal assistance 	1. Government structures and administrative frameworks	Set up team, Announcement justice work in crease channel and M&E

Organization's Name	Topics and names of projects/ programmes	Intention on working in the governance sector in 2025	Contact details	Additional comments or feedback	Proposals for strategic priorities for 2025	Other specific thematic focus to discuss for 2025
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishing safe spaces for women, particularly in rural areas - Emphasizing the importance of justice and safety for women, especially those in remote or underserved communities - These measures will help strengthen the local justice system and ensure better protection and support for vulnerable populations, particularly women in rural areas - 		

Annex 6 – List of Interviews conducted as part of the GSWG drafting

Name	Agencies/organizations
1) Mr. Vanna Boupha, Head of Cabinet Office	MOHA
2) Mr. Daovy Vongxay, Director General, DIO/MOFA	MOFA
3) Mr. Santi Songnavong, Director – UN Division, DIC/MPI	MPI
4) Ms. Nithsa Vongphanakhone, Senior Advisor	SDC
5) Mr. Kevin Smith, Program Office Director	USAID
6) Ms. Silavanh Vongphosy	
7) Mr. Koga Toshimich, First Secretary	Japan
8) Ms. Khempheth, Assistant	
9) Ms. Viemgsamay Sithirath	WB
10) Mr. Soulinthone Leuangkhamsing – Senior Country Economist	ADB
11) Mr. Thomas Lammar	Embassy of Luxembourg
12) Mr. Frank Peiffer	