

Appeal 2004



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Southeast Asia Country Summary:

Lao PDR

National Context

The present state of Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), founded in 1975, is governed by the Lao People's Revolutionary party. This landlocked country, where more than 60 per cent of the population of five million live in relative poverty, has a lower disaster profile in comparison with its neighbours. However, it is affected by seasonal flooding from the Mekong River as well as fires, droughts and health epidemics.

The economy is mainly agricultural, with 85 per cent of its population working in farming, although forestry, hydropower and tourism are also significant industries. Lao PDR is highly vulnerable from the health perspective and health education poses a challenge because of the remoteness of many villages and the diversity of languages, many of which are not written.

One of the major challenges facing the country is how to provide employment and education for more than half a million Lao adolescents now aged 15-19 years, and in the longer term to ensure quality education, health and social services to equip the nation's children. Currently the population is growing at the fastest ever rate, at nearly three per cent. According to the latest health ministry statistics, barely half the population has access to clean water with only 39 per cent benefitting from family latrines and eight per cent of children with access to school latrines.

National Society Priorities

The Lao Red Cross (LRC) was recognised by the Movement in 1957. In the 1980s, it became a department of the health ministry, and in the 1990s was transferred to the Ministry of Social Welfare as a department. The Politburo Decree of December 1992 and Prime Ministerial Decree one year later officially recognised LRC as an independent national Red Cross society. A new decree (Prime Minister 36/PM) in May 1999 approved the role and status of the society and defined a clear organisational structure at headquarters and branches.

As a social organisation, the LRC has a role as an auxiliary to the government to alleviate poverty, help victims of disaster, promote public health, and participate in humanitarian activities. A strategic five-year development plan (2001-2005) is in place, outlining areas within which the society will focus while a well-established participatory annual planning process exists. In September 2002, LRC and its key partners signed the region's first cooperation agreement strategy (CAS). In collaboration with a number of ministries, the society has also drawn up various memoranda of understanding (MoUs) or development contracts with a number of participating national societies in support of its core programmes.

Disaster preparedness and response: The LRC is a member of the national disaster management office and works towards ensuring timely relief to disaster victims, focusing on community-based disaster preparedness. Typical activities include providing relief to victims of drought, fire and floods.

Health: Most branches of the LRC run community-based first aid training programmes; those in the north also focus on primary health care activities, building latrines and improving water supply.

HIV/AIDS: Peer-education projects on HIV/AIDS are conducted by the society in seven provinces throughout the country.

Organisational development: Organisational development and capacity building remain the focus of the Federation's work in Lao PDR, particularly at the society's headquarters.

Blood services: Established in eight provinces throughout the country, the goal of the LRC blood service is to provide adequate and safe supply of blood to the sick and those in need.

Youth: The programme has provided community-based first aid training for volunteer teachers and first aid coverage at sporting events. It is also engaged in road safety peer group education activities for youth in the Vientiane municipality.

Dissemination: Dissemination of the humanitarian values of the Red Cross Red Crescent will be reinforced using teaching kits, prepared for each branch by the ICRC and LRC information department.

Communications: The LRC communications strategy has been prepared following a communications workshop in August 2002 and is now being implemented.

Red Cross Red Crescent Priorities

The society's main partners - the Federation, ICRC, and the Red Cross societies of Australia, Austria, Denmark, France, Japan, Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland - are committed to supporting the LRC core programmes through the CAS. The plan has been developed in accordance with the strategic directions in the Federation document *Strategy 2010*, targeted at meeting the needs of the country's most vulnerable groups. It provides the foundation for developing capacity and capabilities within LRC as it moves towards the goal of becoming a well functioning national society by 2010.

Partnerships

The LRC maintains active partnerships with the United Nations system and some non-governmental organisations, specifically in the fields of community health, HIV/AIDS and disaster preparedness. As part of the human resources development programme, stronger links with other members of the international donor community as well as the private sector are being forged. It is hoped such ties will lead to future support or sponsorship for activities such as blood donor recruitment, youth and road safety.

Federation Secretariat Support

The LRC participates and contributes to the Federation-supported regional networks including the Southeast Asia secretaries general forum, regional OD forum, regional disaster management committee, as well as the Asian regional taskforce for AIDS (ART) and regional blood donor recruitment, health and communications networks. With the closure of the Federation secretariat office at the end of 2003, the Southeast Asia regional delegation will manage multilateral support to Lao Red Cross through the CAS office, as detailed in the planned programmes for 2004 described elsewhere in this appeal.