A MODEL FOR SANITATION PROGRESS
The Path to an Open Defecation Free Lao PDR

IMPROVED SANITATION is a critical component of health and prosperity. Increasing access to adequate sanitation facilities is fundamental to Lao PDR’s continued socio-economic growth, especially in terms of health and child nutrition. Lao PDR has no time to lose in efforts to end open defecation.

LAO PDR: AN OVERVIEW

Improved sanitation coverage in Lao PDR is still lagging behind most other Southeast Asian countries.

IMPROVED SANITATION: 90% improved sanitation coverage in urban areas versus 50% in rural areas. Open defecation is also highest among the poorest and least educated populations.

6,000 premature deaths every year
High rates of acute and chronic malnutrition

PARTNERSHIP
This flyer was produced as part of a collaborative, sector-wide effort led by the National Centre for Environmental Health and Water Supply (Nam Saat) and the Centre for Information and Education for Health (CIEH), with co-funding from the Water and Sanitation Program of the World Bank, UNICEF, SNV and Plan.

For further information, please contact:
National Centre for Environmental Health and Water Supply. Tel: 021-413310.

IMPROVED SANITATION
Improved sanitation: Having a sanitation facility that ensures hygienic separation of human excreta from human contact.

OPEN DEFICATION (NO LATRINE)
Open Defecation: Defecating in the open, often in fields, forests, bushes, open bodies of water, or other open spaces.
**OPEN DEFECATION: THE CONSEQUENCES**

Lack of access to sanitation costs Lao PDR 5.6% of its GDP*

**OPEN DEFECATION** perpetuates the vicious cycle of disease and entrenched poverty. The practice has serious impacts on health, time use, the environment, and tourism. It fosters the spread of diseases and causes under-nutrition, stunting and death, particularly for the most vulnerable.

As a consequence, Lao PDR is falling behind on a variety of development goals, especially those related to nutrition, health, education, and child survival.

**EDUCATION**

Poor sanitation in schools influences rates of enrolment, attendance, retention and learning achievement, particularly affecting girls and those living in rural areas.

**CHILD SURVIVAL**

In Lao PDR, inadequate sanitation and hygiene causes at least 3 million disease episodes and 6,000 premature deaths annually. Young children, especially, are most vulnerable to the ill effects of poor sanitation and hygiene. Diseases, such as diarrhea, account for about 39% of deaths in children under the age of five.

**HEALTH AND NUTRITION**

Open defecation contributes heavily to health issues in Lao PDR. As much as 50% of malnutrition is associated with repeated diarrhea or intestinal worm infections as a result of unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and/or insufficient hygiene.

Open defecation is a cause of serious health issues in children, leading to irreversible impacts on their future potential.

**OPEN DEFECATION AFFECTS NUTRITION**

- Open defecation practices contaminate water supplies and food crops in fields
- Coupled with poor hygiene, open defecation causes faecal contamination at meals
- Contamination can result in gastrointestinal infections
- Infections can cause diarrhea which leads to loss of nutrients
- Over time, this leads to malnutrition

**OPEN DEFECATION AND STUNTING**

Children living in rural villages of Lao PDR where community members defecate in the open are 1.1 cm shorter than children living in rural villages where everyone uses improved sanitation. This difference is irreversible and impacts a child’s cognitive development and future productive potential.

**SOLUTIONS: THE WAY FORWARD**

Every $1 spent on sanitation brings a $5.50 return*

Sanitation means development. It means healthier and wealthier people. Adequate sanitation improves maternal and child development, which in turn improves the development of the nation.

**OVERALL ANNUAL INVESTMENT REQUIREMENTS**

In Lao PDR current levels of investment in water and sanitation initiatives must be increased.

To meet the national sanitation access target of 80% by 2020, over 200,000 people would need to gain access annually. This translates into a minimum requirement of USD 2.3 to 2.8 million annually, or USD 10.8 million over the 2017–2020 period.

**URGENT ACTIONS**

- **ENGAGE ETHNIC GROUPS**
  - Many ethnic groups in Lao PDR are marginalized from initiatives that aim to improve understandings of health issues because of language barriers and differences in traditional practices and beliefs. These groups must be engaged by district, kumban, and provincial officials.

**Sustainable Development Goal #6.2**

“By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.”

— Sustainable Development Goal 6.2