



Socio-Economic Atlas of the Lao PDR

Patterns and Trends from
2005 to

2015





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Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB), Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), Lao PDR, and Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern, Switzerland, with Bern Open Publishing (BOP), 2018

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CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	10
LIST OF TABLES.....	10
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	11
ABOUT THE ATLAS	13
A INTRODUCTION.....	15
A1 ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION AND TOPOGRAPHY.....	16
A2 ACCESSIBILITY	18
B DEMOGRAPHY	21
B1 POPULATION DISTRIBUTION.....	22
B2 DEPENDENCY RATIO.....	24
B3 AGE STRUCTURE OF THE POPULATION.....	26
B4 EARLY MARRIAGE.....	28
B5 MARITAL STATUS.....	30
B6 HOUSEHOLD HEAD.....	32
B7 HOUSEHOLD SIZE.....	34
C MIGRATION.....	37
C1 IN- AND OUT-MIGRATION.....	38
C2 NET MIGRATION.....	40
D LITERACY AND EDUCATION	43
D1 ACCESSIBILITY OF SCHOOLS.....	44
D2 LITERACY.....	46
D3 SEX RATIO IN LITERACY.....	48
D4 NET ENROLMENT RATES.....	50
D5 SEX RATIO IN EDUCATION.....	54
D6 OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN.....	56
D7 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE.....	58
E HEALTH.....	61
E1 ACCESSIBILITY OF HEALTH FACILITIES.....	62
E2 POPULATION WITH DISABILITIES	64
E3 CAUSE OF DISABILITIES	66
E4 AGE OF FIRST CHILD DELIVERY.....	68

F ETHNICITY AND RELIGION	71
F1 DISTRIBUTION OF ETHNO-LINGUISTIC FAMILIES.....	72
F2 DISTRIBUTION OF ETHNO-LINGUISTIC CATEGORIES.....	74
F3 DISTRIBUTION OF THE MAIN RELIGIONS.....	76
G ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES	79
G1 ACCESSIBILITY OF MARKETS.....	80
G2 ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE POPULATION.....	82
G3 SEX RATIO OF ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE POPULATION.....	84
G4 UNEMPLOYMENT.....	86
G5 HOUSEHOLDS WITH AGRICULTURAL LAND.....	88
G6 SELF-EMPLOYED WORKERS.....	90
G7 POPULATION ACTIVE IN NON-FARM SECTORS.....	92
G8 EMPLOYMENT IN THE NON-FARM SECTOR.....	94
H LIVING CONDITIONS	97
H1 HOUSING.....	98
H2 SANITATION.....	100
H3 WATER SOURCE.....	102
H4 COOKING FUEL.....	104
H5 ELECTRICITY.....	108
I POVERTY AND INEQUALITY	111
I1 POVERTY DISTRIBUTION.....	112
I2 POVERTY DYNAMICS.....	114
I3 INEQUALITY.....	116
REFERENCES	119

List of figures

Figure 1: Population pyramids of 2005 and 2015	25
Figure 2: Population pyramids by ethno-linguistic categories	27
Figure 3: Share of villages by average travel time to the nearest primary school	44
Figure 4: Share of primary school students (6-11 years old) by average travel time to the nearest primary school	44
Figure 5: Share of villages by average travel time to the nearest health facility	62
Figure 6: Share of population by average travel time to the nearest health facility	62
Figure 7: Share of villages by average travel time to the nearest market	80
Figure 8: Share of population (over 10 years old) by average travel time to the nearest market	80

List of tables

Table 1: Grouping of the ethno-linguistic families and categories	72
Table 2: Distribution of the population according to main activities	83
Table 3: Distribution of the population 10 years and older according to employment category by gender	90
Table 4: Distribution of the usually employed population 10 years and older over the three main economic sectors by gender	93

List of abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CDE	Centre for Development and Environment
CLTS	Community-Led Total Sanitation
EFA	Education For All
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
GoL	Government of the Lao PDR
IMF	International Monetary Found
km	Kilometre
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LDC	Least developed countries
LECS	Lao Expenditure and Consumption Surveys
LPG	Liquid petroleum gas
LSB	Lao Statistical Bureau
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
masl	Metre above sea level
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
MW	Megawatt
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NGD	National Geographic Department of the Lao PDR
NSEDP	National Socioeconomic Development Plan
OOSC	Out of school children
PHC	Population and Housing Census
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNFPA	United Nations Population Found
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization

Foreword

The importance of reliable statistics for well-informed planning and decision-making cannot be emphasized enough, and the Government of the Lao PDR has long recognized this. The national Population and Housing Censuses are among the most important sources of information for the monitoring and analysis of socio-economic developments, and provide a solid basis for developing strategies for the sustainable development of the country.

The 4th Population and Housing Census was conducted in March 2015 by the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) according to the Prime Ministerial Decree No. 89/PM, dated September 11, 2013. The results of the census provide key insights into the demographic, social, and economic conditions of all households in the Lao PDR, and are therefore a key foundation for supporting the smooth graduation from the list of Least Developed Countries (LDC), and for monitoring of progress towards the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDPP) and towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

This new Socio-Economic Atlas of the Lao PDR takes the statistics of the census one level further by adding a layer of geographic information that lets us visualize important trends and indicators through a large set of highly informative maps. Not only does the Atlas present the socio-economic characteristics of the Lao population as of 2015, but it also reveals the many changes society experienced in the past decade. It reveals where progress was strongest in specific areas of development, as well as locations where progress has been less pronounced.

It is my hope that this new source of insights will be used widely to inform decisions for the continued strong development of our country.



Dr. Samaychanh Boupha
Head of Lao Statistics Bureau, Vice Minister

Preface

The world has successfully fought against human ordeal such as poverty, hunger, diseases and illiteracy. Cutting world poverty to half and reducing hunger significantly between the years 2000 and 2015 are substantial achievements by the Millennium Campaign. Never before in history did the aggregate numbers that indicate development trends hit comparable marks.

The Lao PDR has been particularly effective in designing pathways out of poverty. With the majority of the economic indicators pointing steadily upwards, its goal to graduate from the LDC countries in the early 2020s comes into reach. At this moment, the Socio-Economic Atlas of the Lao PDR is a particularly timely publication, as it allows tracing different variations of possible development trajectories. The detailed analysis of a rich variety of socio-economic indicators puts the success narrative on the aggregate accomplishments into perspective.

The 131 maps highlight the dimensions that characterize the socio-economic development pathways in the Lao PDR and thus stimulate the debate about what measures will be effective in addressing persistent poverty. The Atlas illustrates, impressively, that while the development gap between the Lao PDR and other countries was reduced, the concern about within-country inequality must continue to drive political agendas. The trajectory of a country like the Lao PDR, notable as it is, needs to be reflected against the more complicated, the high-resolution and often inconvenient truth of inverse relations. The maps identify where and for whom deprivation is most entrenched, where progress was made and in what areas the obstacles appear to be insuperable and thus inviting interpretations about interlinkages between poverty dimensions. In light of Agenda 2030, these are the challenges we are facing. This is reinforced by the fact that nowadays over 70% of the world's poor live in middle-income countries. Against the background of the rapid change in socio-economic conditions, political priorities in the Lao PDR will have to draw upon a thorough analysis of these patterns. The plea to leave no one behind resonates with the commitment to dig deeper and shape policies towards actual transformation.

The present edition of the Socio-Economic Atlas of the Lao PDR offers a fascinating story of development. It is an alternative to the mainstream narrative that indeed must be told now.



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About the Atlas

Since 1985, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, through the Lao Statistical Bureau (LSB) and under the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), has conducted four national Population and Housing Censuses (PHC) at ten year intervals. The 3rd and 4th PHC were conducted in March 2005 and 2015 respectively. These censuses collect basic demographics and housing data for the entire population of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). Such information is essential for carrying out well-informed socio-economic analysis, monitoring, and planning at central as well as at sub-national levels. The design, implementation, and monitoring of – for instance – the National Socio-Economic Development Plans (NSEDPs), as well as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030) set by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 with its corresponding set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), relies heavily on detailed national statistics such as those resulting from the national censuses. The census results have proven invaluable for planning, targeting, implementing, and monitoring of a wide range of development programs promoting poverty alleviation in general, gender equality and inclusion of disadvantaged segments of the population, as well as improving infrastructure and services in the health, education, water, sanitation, and transport sectors.

Unlike national sample surveys, the PHCs are distinctive in being a complete enumeration of the entire population. The range of information collected on every individual in the country includes demographic as well as socio-economic characteristics.

This complete coverage of the entire population results in a rich statistical database. During the census implementation, each individual was counted at his or her usual place of residence, which in most cases is the village where each person was registered. By combining the statistical census database with detailed geographic information, a whole new dimension is added to the collected information, opening the doors for detailed analysis of patterns across the different areas of the country. To achieve this, the individual and household statistics were aggregated and calculated as specific indicators at village-level, then plotted on national maps, and disaggregated to the lowest administrative level possible (the village-level). This process of combination and analysis using data from the PHC 2005 resulted in the Socio-Economic Atlas of 2005 – the first of its kind in the Lao PDR, published in 2008, revealing for the first time the rich diversity in socio-economic characteristics of the population of the Lao PDR on detailed national maps (Messerli *et al.*, 2008).

This new atlas goes one important step further: using geographic information on the place of residence of each individual in each census, the data of the two latest PHCs (2005 and 2015), were linked geographically, which allowed for calculations, analysis and the mapping of changes in Lao society and its population over space and time. The resulting maps – showing both the Lao PDR in 2015, and the changes between 2005 and 2015 – reveal patterns and trends not obvious when looking at the statistics alone, and provide invaluable insights for current and future development planning.

With the exception of the maps on the topography, the accessibility times to different locations, as well as the maps on poverty and inequality, all maps were developed based on the statistical data of the PHCs of 2005 and 2015, combined with geographic village location and administrative boundary information from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and the National Geographic Department (NGD) respectively.

The geographic information on the location of each village was available in the form of coordinates for the main administrative centre of each village. For visualization purposes, the country's surface was divided into “village polygons” around each village centre point. The polygons are approximations and do not represent exact village boundaries. For a more detailed description of this, see Epprecht *et al.*, 2008).

The censuses were funded by the Government of the Lao PDR (GoL), with substantial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in 2005, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Government of the People's Republic of China, the World Bank (WB), and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2015.

The development of this atlas was made possible thanks to the contributions and support of a range of people and institutions. The LSB provided the necessary raw data from the censuses, based on which the many different variables and indicators used in this atlas were calculated. The atlas itself was developed within the framework of the Lao DECIDE info Project, which is funded by the Government of Switzerland through SDC. We would like to express our appreciation for the continued support of SDC in Bern, and the Swiss Cooperation Office in the Mekong Region in Vientiane.

A great number of people have contributed their technical and contextual knowledge to the development of this atlas, and are listed as co-authors of this atlas.

The atlas is structured similar to the Socio-Economic Atlas of 2005, (Messerli *et al.*, 2008) which allows for easier comparisons. As this new atlas presents the spatial patterns of the situation as of 2015, along with the various changes that were observed in the 10 years between the two latest censuses, it is most valuable when consulted together with the earlier atlas. A brief introductory chapter is followed by a section on the general demographic characteristics of the population in the Lao PDR, before patterns of migration within the Lao PDR are highlighted in a subsequent chapter. The two chapters that follow first put a spotlight on education and then on insights into health issues that can be gleaned from the census data. The geographic distribution of the country's many ethnicities and religious practices is then presented, followed by descriptions of various economic characteristics of the population. The last two chapters focus on the living conditions of communities in the different parts of the country, and on the spatial distribution of the poor, as well as the dynamics of poverty in the Lao PDR.

