



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

**Concept note: Lao People's Democratic Republic**

# Pilot Programmatic Partnership

Increasing capacities and scale for anticipatory action including  
through social protection systems







# Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms. . . . .	iv
About the Pilot Programmatic Partnership . . . . .	1
Country risk profile at a glance . . . . .	3
<b>Review of national disaster preparedness, anticipatory action and shock-responsive social protection systems. . . . .</b>	<b>4</b>
Disaster preparedness systems. . . . .	4
Anticipatory action systems. . . . .	5
Shock-responsive social protection systems . . . . .	5
<b>Key gaps and opportunities . . . . .</b>	<b>6</b>
Coordination and institutionalization. . . . .	6
Geographic and hazard scope . . . . .	6
Triggers . . . . .	6
Anticipatory action and shock-responsive social protection delivery . . . . .	7
Financing . . . . .	7
Collection of evidence . . . . .	7
<b>Expected results: year 1 . . . . .</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Way forward . . . . .</b>	<b>9</b>

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>AA</b>	Anticipatory action
<b>AAP</b>	Anticipatory action protocol
<b>ADPC</b>	Asian Disaster Preparedness Center
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>CREWS</b>	Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems
<b>DG ECHO</b>	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO)
<b>DMH</b>	Department of Meteorology and Hydrology
<b>DRM</b>	Disaster risk management
<b>DRR</b>	Disaster risk reduction
<b>ECHO</b>	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
<b>EW</b>	Early warning
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>LacSA</b>	Laos Climate Service for Agriculture
<b>MAF</b>	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
<b>MoLSW</b>	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
<b>NDMO</b>	National Disaster Management Office
<b>PPP</b>	Pilot Programmatic Partnership
<b>RIMES</b>	Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia
<b>SP</b>	Social protection
<b>SRSP</b>	Shock-responsive social protection
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

# About the Pilot Programmatic Partnership

Extreme weather events are increasing in frequency and intensity due to climate change, while conflicts are driving consistent and unsustainable increases in humanitarian needs. Combined, they are pushing acute hunger to new heights reaching a five-year high in 2020.

A strategic shift from responding to predictable shocks to anticipating their impacts has the potential to break the cycle of growing dependence on humanitarian aid. This approach, commonly known as anticipatory action, establishes risk-monitoring systems linked to flexible finance and standard operating procedures by delivering support to protect people's lives and livelihoods ahead of forecast shocks.

Anticipatory action can be delivered through a variety of modalities, including through national social protection systems. Social protection systems consist of policies and programmes designed to address economic,

environmental and social vulnerabilities to food insecurity and poverty. Linking anticipatory action to social protection means making better use of existing infrastructure to reach and proactively support vulnerable populations ahead of forecast shocks.

Recognizing the clear effectiveness of this approach, the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) established a three-year **Pilot Programmatic Partnership (PPP)** with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to explore and strengthen the critical link between these two approaches.

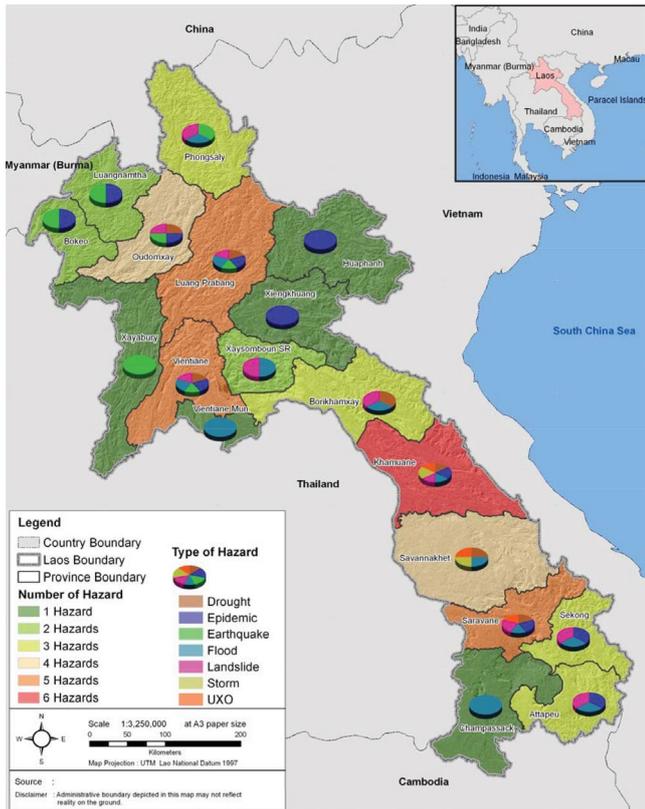
The partnership aims at scaling up anticipatory approaches to crises, with an initial focus on the Asia region including Bangladesh, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Pakistan, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

# Country risk profile at a glance

Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR, or Laos) is a landlocked country that comprises a wide range of ecosystems, with only about 6.2% of the total land area classified as arable due to its mountainous topography. Although Lao PDR is ranked 127 in the latest World Risk Index 2020 and is considered "low risk", floods, droughts and storms – which are the prominent hazards – are increasing in severity and frequency due to climate change, causing more human and economic losses to the country.<sup>1</sup> These trends will have significant impacts on the agriculture and forestry sector, a critical part of the national economy, representing about 47% of gross domestic product (GDP) and more than 80% of employment. More specifically, it will lead to longer and more intense droughts affecting livelihood groups in the southern parts of the country, as well as more severe floods occurring during July and August in central and southern parts of the country.

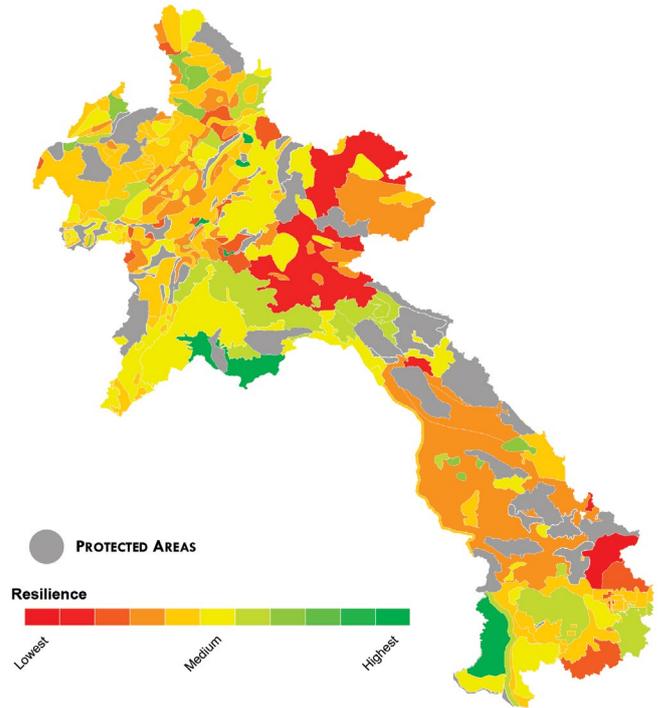
It is important to note that rice is the foundation of the agricultural production, accounting for 85% of the total output and contributes to 39% of the agricultural GDP.<sup>2</sup> Thus, extreme hydrometeorological events affecting paddy fields may have detrimental impacts on food security and livelihoods especially on the most vulnerable farmers.

Fig 1a: Number of hazards per province



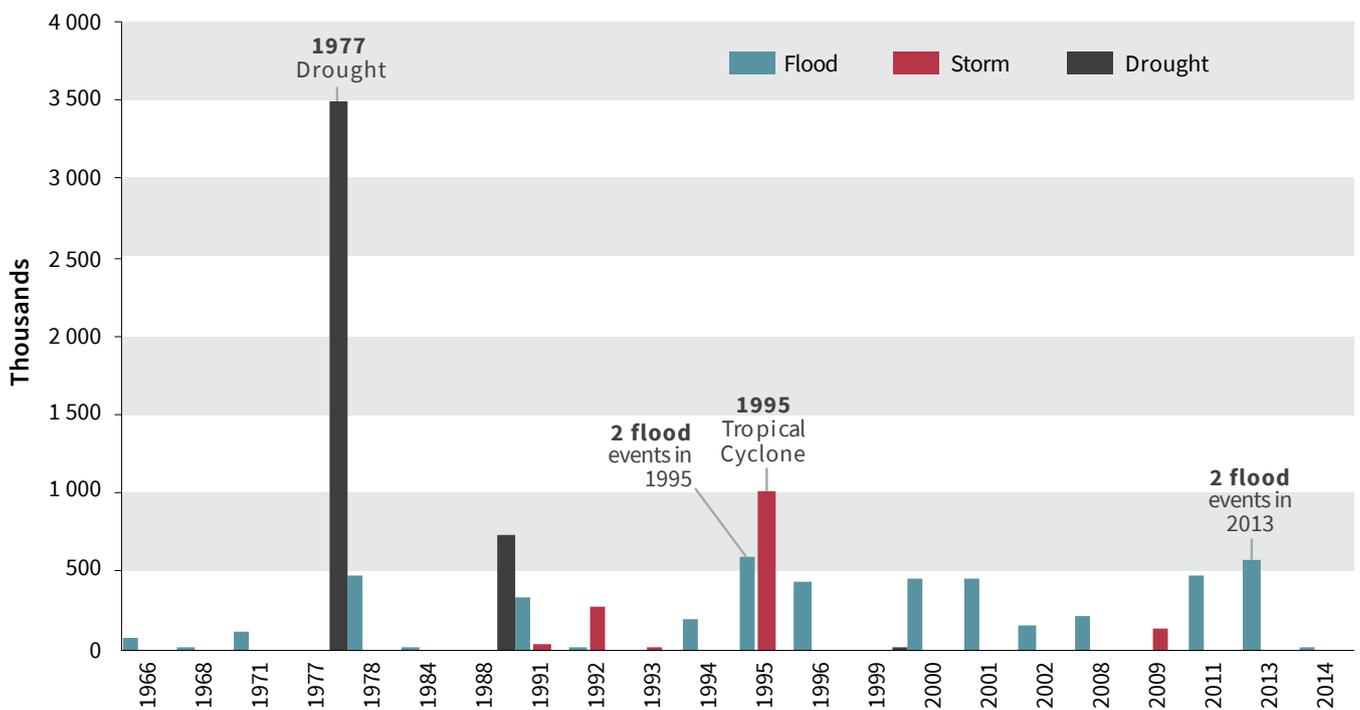
Source: Asian Disaster Preparedness Center. 2010. *Developing the National Risk Profile of Lao PDR*. [adpc.net/igo/category/ID275/doc/2013-sWN61-ADPC-Final\\_Report\\_Part1.pdf](http://adpc.net/igo/category/ID275/doc/2013-sWN61-ADPC-Final_Report_Part1.pdf)

Figure 1b: Resilience by livelihoods zone



Source of map: Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and the World Food Programme. 2016. *Lao People's Democratic Republic, Consolidated Livelihood Exercise for Analyzing Resilience (CLEAR)*. [cdn.wfp.org/wfp/publications/LAO\\_CLEAR-%20English%20version-FINAL%201-9-2016-standard.pdf?\\_ga=2.122047624.2002834826.1644446845-1354178178.16440005975](http://cdn.wfp.org/wfp/publications/LAO_CLEAR-%20English%20version-FINAL%201-9-2016-standard.pdf?_ga=2.122047624.2002834826.1644446845-1354178178.16440005975)

Figure 2: Number of people affected annually by natural disasters in Lao PDR (1966–2014)



Source: World Bank. 2017. *Disaster Risk Finance Country Diagnostic Note: Lao PDR*. [https://www.rccr-resilience-southeastasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/world\\_bank\\_et\\_al\\_2016\\_lao\\_pdr\\_disaster\\_risk\\_financing\\_draft-diagnostic-report.pdf](https://www.rccr-resilience-southeastasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/world_bank_et_al_2016_lao_pdr_disaster_risk_financing_draft-diagnostic-report.pdf)

# Review of national disaster preparedness, anticipatory action and shock-responsive social protection systems

## Disaster preparedness systems

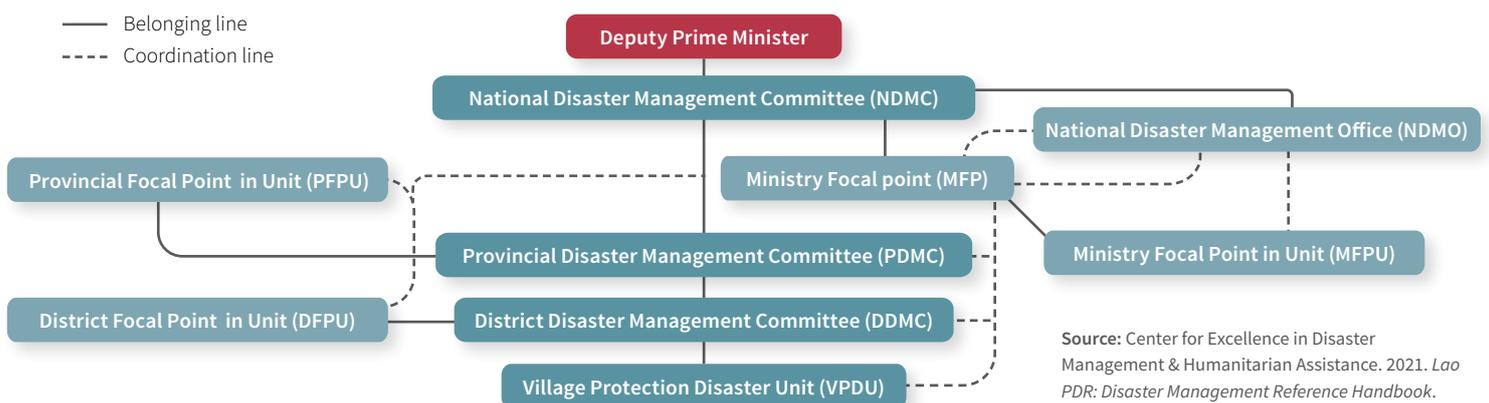
Several policies and plans supporting preparedness for response in Lao PDR have been recently developed, or updated:

- The **law on disaster risk management (2019)** clarifies roles and responsibilities in disaster risk management (DRM), including for preparedness. According to the law, the disaster management committee at each level shall create a disaster management plan, including urban planning, land use planning, provision of settlements and livelihoods, construction of infrastructure and development projects, to become more resilient to disasters.<sup>3</sup>
- The **national strategy on disaster risk reduction (2021-2030)** states objectives on building resilience, improving early warning (EW) systems, strengthening capacity in response, and enhancing capacity in post-disaster recovery planning.<sup>4</sup>
- The **decree on disaster management fund** - No. 631/GOV of December 2020 - is setting out the principles and regulations on the management and utilization of the Fund for emergency assistance.
- The **national social protection strategy: vision 2030, goal 2025**, identifies some key elements of shock-responsive social protection (SRSP). The primary objective of the strategy is to help reduce poverty, close the inequality gap and promote economic development and social cohesion with a special attention to the most vulnerable and deprived population.<sup>5</sup>

The key agencies in charge of disaster management in Lao PDR are:

- The national disaster management committee, chaired by the vice prime minister and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW), coordinates and plays a leading role in disaster preparedness, EW, emergency response and recovery activities.
- The MoLSW is also in charge of social protection (SP).
- The Department of Meteorology and Hydrology (DMH), under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, is responsible for monitoring, forecasting, and EW of hydrological and meteorological hazards. A National Early Warning Centre for meteorology and hydrology was recently established with the aim to help reduce the impact of disasters through the provision of reliable and timely flood and drought forecasts and warnings.
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) is a key actor in Lao PDR. Specifically, the Department of Planning and Finance under MAF is assigned to be the focal point on Disaster Management, and prepared a National DRM Action Plan. The Department of Agriculture, the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute and the Department of Irrigation under MAF, will also be pivotal to involve in anticipatory actions (AAs) towards extreme climatic events.
- At subnational level, provincial disaster management committees, district disaster management committees and village disaster management committees are in charge of disaster management activities.

Figure 3: Disaster Management organizational structure in Lao PDR



Coordination of preparedness between the government, the United Nations, the international non-governmental organizations, is supported by the **disaster risk management climate change working group**, which also convenes in times of emergency to collect information, coordinate and share updates on the emergency situation and the response activities implemented by the humanitarian community. There is also an **emergency task force**, which is co-chaired by the head of the Resident Coordinator Office and the MoLSW. An inter-agency Contingency Plan for rapid onset disaster was finalized in September 2019, presenting the coordination arrangements in managing the response, as well the types of outputs and services the emergency response should include.<sup>6</sup>

## Anticipatory action systems

When it comes to the progress of AA in the country, there are no direct related projects but rather a few initiatives that contribute to the approach:

- The 2019 law on DRM establishes a **disaster risk information system**, linked with the national statistical information database. Each provincial and district disaster management committee establishes, improves, manages, and applies a database to be linked with the disaster risk information system at central level, including providing and sharing disaster information at its locality.
- The Laos Climate Service for Agriculture (LacSA) System is supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) under the *Strengthening Agro-climatic Monitoring and Information System* project. It provides forecasts to farmers in all provinces through various channels, including social media.
- The World Food Programme (WFP) is currently conducting studies with the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia (RIMES) and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) to respectively review drought threshold and AA triggering mechanism, and to assess capacities of impact-based forecasting in Lao PDR.
- The World Bank is financing the *Lao PDR Southeast Asia Disaster Risk Management Project* that aims to reduce the impacts of flooding in Muang Xay, Oudomxai Province, and enhance the government's capacity to provide hydrometeorology services and disaster response.

- The SERVIR-Mekong project, a joint initiative by the United States Agency for International Development and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, is helping five countries in the Lower Mekong Region (including Lao PDR) to use information provided by Earth observing satellites and geospatial technologies to manage climate risks. A combined drought index has been customized by ADPC for Lao PDR (combining SPI-3, soil moisture and fAPAR) and integrated into the LacSA system.
- The recently launched Climate Risk and Early Warning System (CREWS) project aims to strengthen capacities at national and regional level for hydrometeorology, EW and response services to ensure that vulnerable populations in Lao PDR are reached through inclusive risk-informed EW services.<sup>7</sup>

## Shock-responsive social protection systems

As for the SRSP progress in Lao PDR, a case study was prepared by WFP, FAO, the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) under the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) funded, *Strengthening the capacity of AMS to develop risk informed and shock-responsive social protection for resilience* project. This project aimed to identify factors that would enable national social protection systems to be responsive to shocks. Although few opportunities for shock-responsive social protection programming were identified, the study highlights the need for improved coverage of social protection to help build the resilience of the rural poor in the face of increased exposure to climate change risks.

Below are a couple ongoing initiatives on SP at country level:

- Under the United Nations Joint Programme, UNICEF, ILO and the United Nations Capital Development Fund are working with the MoLSW to pilot the *Mother and Early Childhood Grant* aiming to reach 11 611 pregnant women and children (age two and under) with cash transfers; and 15 000 children in school age with school meals in Attapeu and Savannakhet provinces.
- The World Bank is working with the MAF, to implement a cash pilot focusing on eligible pregnant women and mothers of children (age two and under), aiming to reach 42 743 beneficiaries, in the four northern provinces of Huaphanh, Xieng Khuang, Phongsaly and Oudomxay.

# Key gaps and opportunities

## Coordination and institutionalization

As AA and SRSP are relatively new concepts in Lao PDR, there is no dedicated coordination structure where the concerned stakeholders can exchange and align their approaches. Nonetheless, there is a high interest of the government as well as humanitarian and development partners with these approaches, as demonstrated in the workshop *Rolling out the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Guidelines on Disaster Responsive Social Protection for Increased Resilience and Anticipatory Action Approach in Lao PDR*.

To build on this momentum, it is recommended that a coordination structure is formed to maximize the efforts in AA between the government and partners, and to ensure the streamlining of methods as the concept grows. This is also important to ensure there is a **good technical basis and understanding** of the AA approach, which can be delivered through training and joint simulation exercises.

Based on its experience with the LacSA project, FAO is in a good position to establish and support a technical committee on EW and triggers for AA. This can be an appropriate starting point for federating the efforts of the numerous partners involved in predicting extreme climatic hazards, such as the CREWS project recently launched, or RIMES, involved in a study on drought trigger and thresholds with WFP. Further to this, the PPP can help to define with the NDMO the most appropriate/sustainable coordination mechanism for AA, through the creation of a dedicated working group, or through an already existing structure.

## Geographic and hazard scope

Drought and flood should be logically prioritized as their frequency and impact are increasing year after year due to climate change and land-use change. In line with the vulnerabilities assessed by WFP<sup>8</sup>, livelihoods relying exclusively on highland paddy have the lowest levels of resilience – particularly in Sekong, Huaphanh and parts of Xaysomboon. This pattern of resilience is linked to high levels of poverty, limited access to land (around one hectare per household), reliance on monocultures and the high climate-sensitivity of the main livelihood activities.

The *Drought Management Strategy for the Lower Mekong Basin 2020-2025* is shortlisting provinces at high risk of drought, based on historical records of droughts occurrence, loss of agricultural income, population density and geographical situation.<sup>9</sup> This strategy is highlighting that Savannakhet is the most vulnerable province for drought. As the Mekong corridor is particularly prone to flood, the PPP activities planned in year 1 in Savannakhet province will be an opportunity to collect data on both drought and flood risks, and better understand the respective patterns.

Additionally, UN-Habitat's *Lao PDR Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment* highlighted the high exposure of Luangprabang province as 62 percent of the villages experienced at least one drought episode in 2019.<sup>10</sup> The drought anticipatory action protocol (AAP) will be initiated in this province as well in year 1, providing complementary learning from a different agro-ecological zone (northern Lowlands). The drought AAP can be expanded to new provinces based on learnings and needs that will be gathered in the first year.

## Triggers

One challenge for correlating the intensity of hazards with a specific impact (and developing triggers for AA) is that disaster losses and damages are not properly documented. The CREWS project presentation note explains that Lao PDR's NDMO established the country's disaster loss and damage database using the methodology and analytics within Desinventar. Having said that, the database has not been updated since 2012, coinciding with institutional changes on disaster risk reduction (DRR) mandates.

Moreover, since the DMH is underfunded, it faces challenges to ensure the continuation of its services<sup>11</sup>, and capacities to provide adequate forecasts are remaining limited in the country. As pointed out in the CREWS project presentation note, while the DMH receives support through various projects and initiatives on the modernisation of its hydrometeorology network, there are limited capacities and resources to maintain this network.

The CREWS project for Lao PDR was officially launched on 4 October 2021, and is expected to contribute directly

to the enhancement of DMH capacities and to support AA implementation in the respective countries. Several studies (FAO-RIMES and WFP-ADPC) will also contribute to the development of triggers for drought and flood building off and into existing models in the country. Additionally, the Mekong River Commission (MRC) can be involved in the discussion around EW as it is providing flood and drought information on its website.

It is hence essential that all the stakeholders are **coordinating their efforts** to maximize the use of available forecasts and existing EW mechanisms (such as LacSA), to understand better the thresholds that would lead to an activation of AA and to make sure that the information is available on time to the whole community of practice.

### Anticipatory action and shock-responsive social protection delivery

While the AA approach has not yet been tested in the country, one foreseen challenge is the lack of a centralized database of poor and vulnerable persons. For instance, MAF has a database on poor populations by village and district but not by households or individuals. For rapid onset events such as flood, pre-identification of AA beneficiaries will be needed if existing registries are not sufficient. More generally, targeting of beneficiaries should be strengthened to benefit both the AA and SRSP initiatives. The PPP will help test the development of a unified registry in a given geographic area.

### Financing

Financing of AA and SRSP is a challenge because funding for disaster management is limited in Lao PDR and government priorities are primarily on relief and response activities (including repair of infrastructures). As available resources for disaster management are scarce, ex-ante financing will require tangible evidence before being scaled.

FAO's ongoing support to the development of a provincial DRM plan in Luangprabang will be an opportunity to advocate for the inclusion of AAs in the provincial plan as a flexible approach to address local vulnerabilities ahead of a shock with earmarked financing

### Collection of evidence

Once the AAPs are developed, it will be important for humanitarian and development partners to associate the government in capturing not only the effectiveness of acting early, but the progress in setting up the system as well.

# Expected results: year 1

Against this background, DG ECHO and FAO launched the PPP on ‘increasing capacities and scale for anticipatory action including through social protection systems’.

Below are the expected results of year 1 activities in Lao PDR

Result	Activities	Deliverables
<b>1. Anticipatory action systems are established and the capacity of national governments, humanitarian partners and local stakeholders to link early warnings to AAs is strengthened.</b>	1.1 Identify end-user needs regarding how EW information can inform site-specific AA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One AAP for drought</li> <li>• 70 partners trained</li> <li>• 250 people involved in the AAP development</li> </ul>
	1.2 Assess risk and humanitarian needs, prioritise hazards and vulnerable target populations. Identify or develop early warning systems and related AA triggers.	
	1.3 Develop AAPs including clear risk monitoring, trigger mechanisms, protocols and responsibilities, as well as pre-allocated flexible financial resources.	
	1.4 Strengthen national and local capacity to develop, monitor and implement AA systems.	
<b>2. Social protection systems are strengthened in terms of anticipatory capacity to allow national governments, humanitarian partners and local stakeholders to link social assistance programmes with humanitarian cash and cash+ mechanisms.</b>	2.1 Assess national social protection systems (policy, programmes and operational mechanisms) related to national policies to manage risk (this will include looking at DRM and DRR strategies) and link with humanitarian plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One feasibility assessment</li> </ul>
	2.2 Based on the feasibility assessments and using FAO’s established methodology, define suitable option to strengthen anticipatory capacity of national social protection and/or humanitarian cash programmes.	
	2.3 Organize national capacity development events on shock-responsive social protection and cash programming to channel anticipatory action.	
<b>3. FAO and DG ECHO partnership is enhanced so that multi-risk anticipatory actions are implemented, including via expanding or complementing national social protection systems, to protect lives and livelihoods ahead of a shock.</b>	3.1 Write the country PPP concept note, jointly with DG ECHO.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One concept note and corresponding work plan</li> <li>• One readiness plan for drought AAP and activation report (if any trigger is reached)</li> </ul>
	3.2 Regularly update the PPP steering committee on the progresses.	
	3.3 Map out and implement readiness activities to ensure the timeliness and effectiveness of drought AAs.	
	3.4 If pre-defined EW triggers are reached, implement AAs with the earmarked 40% PPP budget.	
<b>4. Learning and advocacy products are produced to improve future programming and accelerate a system-wide shift towards an anticipatory approach to disasters.</b>	4.1 Conduct an impact analysis if the AA system is activated. Alternatively, conduct a review at the end of year 1 on the process of setting up an AAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One impact analysis in case an EW trigger is reached</li> <li>• One learning and advocacy product</li> </ul>
	4.2 Conduct a communication campaign at the end of year 1 to highlight progress.	
	4.3 Support global and regional advocacy and policy engagement to bolster evidence-based decision making and uptake of anticipatory action and shock-responsive social protection by national and intergovernmental entities.	

# Way forward

Limited work has been done on AA and SRSP in Lao PDR, despite a growing impact from flood and drought on the most vulnerable population. Nonetheless, several projects are supporting the improvement of forecasting capacities in the country and can provide a relevant basis to impact-based forecasting for flood and drought, and support the triggering of AAs.

The PPP can help to introduce and test AAs in coordination with all the key actors. Building on other countries' experiences, such as Vietnam or Philippines, the process can begin with the consolidation of trigger methodologies up to the delivery of appropriate actions ahead of the extreme hazards. It is expected that the community of practice will generate concrete evidence around the AA approach for drought and flood, and will help the Government of Lao PDR progressively incorporate the concept into its DRM model.

Delivery of cash through the national SP system will also be explored, starting with the development of a unified registry of beneficiaries in a given geographic area, and through the involvement of the Cash Working Group in determining the most appropriate cash delivery modality. A case study will later be developed to highlight the main learnings and to provide recommendations on how SP can be made anticipative in the long term.

The learnings from the PPP in Lao PDR will further support the ASEAN Framework for AA and add to a collective and growing voice in the region on the approach.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> **Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft, Ruhr University Bochum – Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV).** 2020. *WorldRiskReport 2020*. Berlin and Bochum, Germany. <https://www.weltrisikobericht.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/WorldRiskReport-2020.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> **Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security.** Southeast Asia. <https://ccafs.cgiar.org/index.php/regions/southeast-asia/lao-pdr>
- <sup>3</sup> **Open Development Laos.** 2019. *Law on Disaster Risk Management*. <https://data.laos.opendevlopmentmekong.net/dataset/law-on-disaster-risk-management-lao-pdr-2019>
- <sup>4</sup> **Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.** 2021. *National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (NSDRR) 2021 - 2030*. Vientiane, Lao PDR. <https://lpr.adb.org/sites/default/files/resource/%5Bnid%5D/dm-eng.pdf>
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- <sup>7</sup> **Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems.** 2021. *Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR): Reinforcing the capacities of meteorological and hydrological services and enhancing the early warning systems*. <https://www.crews-initiative.org/en/projects/cambodia-and-lao-people%E2%80%99s-democratic-republic-pdr-reinforcing-capacities-of-meteorological>
- <sup>8</sup> **Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and the World Food Programme.** 2016. *Lao People's Democratic Republic, Consolidated Livelihood Exercise for Analyzing Resilience (CLEAR)*. [cdn.wfp.org/wfp.org/publications/LAO\\_CLEAR-%20English%20version-FINAL%201-9-2016-standard.pdf?\\_ga=2.122047624.2002834826.1644446845-1354178178.1640005975](https://www.wfp.org/publications/LAO_CLEAR-%20English%20version-FINAL%201-9-2016-standard.pdf?_ga=2.122047624.2002834826.1644446845-1354178178.1640005975)
- <sup>9</sup> **The Mekong River Commission Secretariat.** 2019. *Drought Management Strategy for the Lower Mekong Basin 2020 – 2025*. Vientiane, Lao PDR. <https://www.mrcmekong.org/assets/DMS2020-2025.pdf>
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- <sup>11</sup> **United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and ADPC.** 2019. *Disaster Risk Reduction in Lao PDR: Status Report 2019*. Bangkok, Thailand. [https://www.unisdr.org/files/68252\\_682303laopdrdmstatusreport](https://www.unisdr.org/files/68252_682303laopdrdmstatusreport)

FAO's Anticipatory Action approach uses risk analysis and forecasts to trigger interventions before a crisis escalates into a humanitarian emergency.

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## Contact

FAO Representation in  
Lao People's Democratic Republic  
FAO-LA@fao.org | Vientiane, Lao People's  
Democratic Republic

Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific  
FAO-RAP@fao.org | Bangkok, Thailand

Office of Emergencies and Resilience  
Anticipatory-Action@fao.org | Rome, Italy

**Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations**

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