



## **LAO WOMEN'S UNION**

### **PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF LAO WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

#### **I. Introduction:**

1. Lao Women's Union (LWU) is a mass and social organization of women at all strata throughout Lao P.D.R. It is part of Lao People's Democratic Republic system. It was officially established in 1955. The history of LWU was closely attached to the country's history for national liberation and development. The organizational system of LWU operates throughout the country at four levels, namely: central; provincial/ministerial, district/municipal and village ones with a total membership of 1,015,506 women.

2. Functions and mandates of the LWU:

- Mobilize and unite Lao women to actively involve in the national protection and development process. Protect the rights and interests of the Lao multi-ethnic women and children.
- Promote the implementation of the policy on gender equality and the advancement of women in the implementation of national socio-economic development.
- Educate women of all ethnic groups and social strata to have a proper understanding of the government's policies, constitution, laws and various international instruments concerning the legitimate rights and interests of women adhered to by the Lao PDR.
- Make considerable contributions toward the protection and the support of the rich customs, fine traditions of the people and of the Lao women of all ethnic groups in particular.

#### **II. Achievements in the protection and promotion of Lao women's rights:**

3. The government of the Lao PDR puts considerable efforts to encourage, promote and protect the legitimate rights and interests of Lao women in all fields: political, economic, social, cultural and family as provided for in the policy of the government, the Constitution and laws. The National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW) has been established by the government of Lao PDR. The Commission chaired by a deputy prime minister has given responsibilities to the line ministries, organizations and provinces to draw up strategies and plans of action in order to mainstream gender into all sectors at the central, provincial, district and village levels under the leadership of NCAW. One of the main responsibilities of NCAW is the preparation of a national periodic report on the implementation of CEDAW and programs of action for consideration by the government and submission to the concerned international bodies.

4. Representing the legitimate rights and interests of women and children, the LWU executive committees at all levels have actively participated in the process of drafting and revising of the Constitution, legislations and policies to ensure the legitimate rights and interests of women and children are reflected therein. They were leading in coordinating among the organizations concerned in drafting laws relating to human rights including Law on Development and Protection of Women, which was approved by the National Assembly and then officially promulgated by the President of the Lao PDR in 2004. LWU at the village level are part of Village Mediation Committees, ensuring women are represented and women's rights are protected.

5. LWU has been taking the lead in advocating, disseminating and advising on the implementation of the Constitution, laws and regulations of the government, the international instruments concerning the legitimate rights and interests of women including: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Regarding the Law on Development and Protection of Women, LWU has conducted dissemination and monitoring its implementation throughout the country by organizing workshops, seminars, publication of handbooks as well as communicating through newspapers, TV programme and radio broadcasting in three main ethnic languages, namely Lao, Khmu and Hmong.

6. LWU has carried out a five-year plan on women development for the period of 2006-2010. The plan consists of five programmes, 16 development projects. The main activities of the projects were to organize trainings on improving knowledge and capacity of women in such fields as development of women and children, promotion of gender equality, anti-trafficking in women, domestic violence against women, basic health services, preservation and promotion of national culture and the fine culture concerning particularly women. Focus was also made on trainings on improving vocational-technical skills, provision of jobs and appropriate knowledge on technology, promotion of commercial production, reduction of hardship of women, provision of loans and revolving funds, promotion of handicrafts and agricultural work with a view to income generation for their families, thus gradually reducing poverty.

7. The Lending and Saving Projects, Saving Groups, Village Development Funds are being carried out at central and provinces in order to be a reducing poverty mechanism, social welfare providing and make a contribution to the socio-economic at grass-root levels; and such funds has resulted in the improvement of the financial status and quality of life of women, their families and the society as a whole

8. The Training Center for Lao women has organized trainings in the area of women's rights protection, cultural preservation, income generating activities, health care and vocational trainings for women.

9. The Center for Counseling and Protection of Women and Children was established in Vientiane Capital City. It has been provided consultations, psychological counseling and a temporary safe shelter, short period of vocational training, legal and health advise; cooperated and provided useful evidence for the case procedures and protected the legitimate rights and interest of the survival of trafficking and domestic violence. LWU

has improved their counseling network, organized trainings to improve knowledge, technical skills on counseling for the LWU leadership and some technical officials from the central and local levels; established a counseling centre in 5 target provinces, 16 districts and 32 villages.

10. Cooperating in the implementation of the Land Titling Project in order to protect the legitimate rights and benefits of Lao multi-ethnic women regarding the land rights ownership; making understanding and trust upon the right to equal access to land; creating opportunity and conditions which allow women to have better understanding about their land rights and how to put their names on a land title certificate. As a result of the collaboration of LWU and Land Management Authority at all levels, it can be seen clearly that number of female ownership is greater than that of men, if compared to the figure before the Land Titling Project

11. Five Gender Resource Information and Development Centers (GRID) were established across the country. The centres organized a series of research to promote knowledge and information concerning gender and development in Lao PDR; ensuring gender mainstreaming into the planning process in all areas and government sectors; conducted a number of trainings on gender perspective for government officials at all levels; conducted researches on violence against women and children.

12. The LWU's media actively carried out their duties through newspaper, magazine, radio and TV in order to disseminate the state's policies, laws and regulations, the culture and traditions of the Lao women and of the nation, the achievements of the Lao Women's Union and women of all ethnic groups, the international instruments concerning the legitimate rights and interests of women and various kinds of information for women.

13. In cooperation with the National Assembly, LWU organized the campaign on the promotion of gender equality through mainstreaming gender perspective in the work of the National Assembly and emphasizing the importance of women's participation in National Assembly. As a result, the number of female members of the National Assembly has increased. There are 29 female members (25%) out of its 115 members and one of them holds the post of Vice-President of the National Assembly for the second time.

14. In cooperation with the Ministry of Public Health, LWU has organized the training workshops, campaign on mother safety projects, vaccination for mother and child project, breast feeding from birth to 6 months old, H1N1 prevention, HIV/AIDS among couple in Lao PDR. Thus providing opportunities for all, especially mothers and children, poor people and people living in the rural and remote areas to have access to health care services. Over the past decades, the health status of women has generally been improved. The maternal mortality rate has decreased from 656 people per 100,000 births in 1995 to 530 in 2000, and to 405 people in 2005. Infant mortality rate has also dropped from 104 per 1000 infants in 1995 to 82 in 2000 and to 70 in 2005. Life expectancy was 61, it was 63 and 59 for women and men respectively.

15. In cooperation with LWU, the Ministry of Education has integrated gender-based approach into the curriculum, particularly of primary education; implementing basic education program (for girls), co-funding for the building female dormitories, food supplement program, adjusting timetables to be suitable to agricultural production

seasons and other activities in rural areas and adjusting timetables as to harmonize with girls' activities for helping their families and so on.

### **III. Challenges and difficulties:**

16. Due to the socio-economic environment, expansion of market force, particularly economic crisis in the regions has created the direct negative effect to the ideas and living conditions of women and society. Women have faced many difficulties in order to take care and discipline their children, lack of motivation in both self and family development.

17. Even though, the maternal mortality rate has decreased, many women still faced with poverty, hard work, lack of knowledge and skills, some of rural women are illiterate, have limited access to health care and some of detrimental traditions still prevent women from going to schools and participating in social activities. Women have limited access to legal information, making it difficult to protect their own legal rights.

18. Even though, the Lao women play an important role in the economic sector. They account for 52 percent of the overall labor force. Women in the rural areas still have limited level of education, labor skills and access to credit and business information. They usually engage in temporary and seasonal employment. Their job domestic opportunity is limited.

19. Because of less development and economic hardship, some women have to migrate to a neighboring country illegally, in order to seek employment, where some of them have been exploited while others are sold to prostitution and also at high risk of trafficking in women and children.

20. Although, the LWU' Committees at all every levels have the working plan, they cannot implement some of that activities due to budget constraints.

### **IV. Future actions:**

21. Improve the LWU's structures at each level, capacity building for both leaders and members of LWU in term of quality work.

22. Widely promote the advancement of women and the implementation of policy on gender equality and raise the role of women in both government and social positions.

23. Coordinate with organizations concerned in order to implement the government's policies, constitution, laws and various international instruments concerning the legitimate rights and interests of women by organizing seminars, workshops, trainings, disseminating and advocating through various kinds of media with an aim to increasing the legal culture among individuals, families and in the society at large so that individuals, families and the society obey and implement the laws.

24. Cooperate with land management bodies of different levels to continue dissemination of the protection of women's rights to ensure the wife's name must be properly put in the land title document

25. Improve and further expand institutional arrangements on counseling for women and children. At the same time, increase legal knowledge among the counselors and the

members of village mediation units so that they effectively represent women in the protection of their rights.

26.Coordinate with the education sector to encourage girls of the school age to attend school, create conditions to enable girls to complete elementary school according to the national strategy to promote education for all.

27.Coordinate with the health sector to encourage women to participate in vaccination for mother and child, breastfeeding from birth to 6 months, reproductive health, nutrition campaigns, fight against HIV/AIDS, H5N1 influenza, dengue fever and other infectious diseases through trainings, workshops, seminars and various kinds of campaigns.

28.Together with the agriculture sector to promote and create conditions for women to improve their production knowledge, develop their labour skills, encourage the processing of agriculture and handicrafts products as commodities, reduce hard work of women but ensure good production because women are half of the total labour in the agriculture. This will help create more job opportunities for women and thus family income.

29.Together with the industry and trade sector to create opportunities for women to access to financial resources, raise their knowledge on operating SMEs and access to markets for handicrafts and other products of which women are major labour force.

#### **V. Recommendations:**

30.Create opportunities for more women to take part in the justice administration through being appointed as judges, prosecutors, lawyers, members of village mediation units, etc. so that women will be representatives who effectively promote and protect the rights and interests of women and children

31.Coordinate with international organizations in the advocacy for and dissemination of the various human rights treaties, especially the international conventions concerning the rights and interests of women and children, human trafficking and violence against women.

32.Create conducive conditions for women to participate in the legal, health, credit, employment and welfare services.

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Lao Women's Union