

ເອົາ “ຜູ້ຜະລິດເປັນສູນກາງໃນວຽກກະສິກໍາ”:
ຄິດ-ພິຈາລະນາຄືນ ກ່ຽວກັບແຮງງານ, ການຈ້າງງານຊາວໜຸ່ມ ໃນ
ຊົນນະບົດ ແລະ ການຫັນປ່ຽນຮູບແບບກະສິກໍາ ໃນ ສປປ ລາວ



Towards 'People Centered Agriculture':
Rethinking rural labour, youth employment
and the agrarian transition in Laos



Department for Policy and Legal Affairs
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
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FOREWORD

A people-centred approach to agricultural development requires that policy-makers give as much attention to rural jobs and incomes as they do to production targets. As the sector transforms from subsistence to commercial modes of production, such an approach is needed more than ever before.

During the past two decades, the agriculture sector has made significant progress in terms of production growth and contribution to the national economy. However, the sector still faces a number of challenges such as low efficiency of production, poor rural infrastructure, weak links between production, processing and markets, limited mechanization, and inadequate knowledge and skills of agricultural labour. These challenges affect the ability of both public-sector projects and private-sector companies to achieve their goals, but first and foremost they affect the ability of rural people to improve their lives. This is not a homogenous group of 'farmers' but a diverse set of people with different needs and opportunities. We need a better understanding of the constraints and opportunities they face if we are to provide them with better support.

This report, produced by the Department of Policy and Legal Affairs (DOPLA) in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, summarizes various research and studies related to labour and migration in Laos. Data, cases and recommendations have been compiled from more than 65 sources. This study has been made possible through the support of the Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS), with funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). I would like to thank Annie Shattuck, the consultant researcher for this study, who worked closely with the team at DOPLA, including Vongpaphane Manivong and Somsamai Vongthilard.

This is a work in progress and we welcome comments for further improvement of the draft report. I hope this synthesis provides insights into the changing structure of the agricultural sector that will encourage all of us to rethink the issue of rural youth in Laos, so that future policies and activities are identified and targeted to different groups, thus creating employment and increasing income for the next generation.

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ບົດສະຫຼຸບຫຍໍ້

ໃນສອງທົດສະວັດທີ່ຜ່ານມາ, ສປປ ລາວ ມີຄວາມຄືບໜ້າກ່ຽວກັບການແກ້ໄຂຄວາມທຸກຍາກ ໃນເຂດຊົນນະບົດ, ການຜະລິດກະສິກໍາໃນຂອບເຂດທີ່ໜ້ອຍໄດ້ ທີ່ເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ ແລະ ມີສະບຽງ ອາຫານທີ່ພຽງພໍ. ການສົ່ງອອກດ້ານການກະສິກໍາເປັນສິນຄ້າ ກໍາລັງເຕີບໂຕ, ເປັນແຫຼ່ງລາຍ ຮັບ ແລະ ການຈ້າງງານ ສໍາລັບປະຊາຊົນໃນຊົນນະບົດ. ລະບົບການຜະລິດກະສິກໍາເພື່ອກຸ້ມກິນ ໄດ້ກ້າວໄປສູ່ການຜະລິດເປັນສິນຄ້າ, ໂຄງສ້າງການຈ້າງງານຊົນນະບົດ ກໍາລັງມີການປ່ຽນແປງ. ການຫວ່າງງານຂອງແຮງງານໜຸ່ມ ມີຄວາມທ້າທາຍເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ. ປະຊາກອນເຄິ່ງໜຶ່ງ ແມ່ນມີ ອາຍຸຕໍ່າກວ່າ 24 ປີ ແລະ ກໍາລັງປະເຊີນກັບການຂາດໂອກາດການເຮັດວຽກທີ່ເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ.

ກະຊວງກະສິກໍາ ແລະ ບໍາໄມ້ ຈະຊ່ວຍແນວໃດ ເພື່ອຮັບປະກັນອະນາຄົດທີ່ດີກວ່າເກົ່າ ສໍາລັບ ຊາວໜຸ່ມໃນຊົນນະບົດ? ເພື່ອຕອບຄໍາຖາມນີ້ ກົມນະໂຍບາຍ ແລະ ນິຕິກໍາ ຈຶ່ງໄດ້ສຶກສາກ່ຽວ ກັບ “ຜູ້ຜະລິດເປັນສູນກາງ ໃນວຽກກະສິກໍາ”. ການສຶກສານີ້ ໄດ້ສັງລວມການຄົ້ນຄວ້າ ໃນທົ່ວ ຂະແໜງການກະສິກໍາ ເພື່ອກໍານົດໂຄງປະກອບການຜະລິດກະສິກໍາ ແລະ ການຈ້າງງານ ຊົນນະບົດ ທີ່ມີການປ່ຽນແປງ, ໂດຍສຸມໃສ່ຊາວໜຸ່ມ. ແທນທີ່ຈະສຸມໃສ່ແຕ່ພືດ ຫຼື ຂະແໜ ງການສະເພາະໃດໜຶ່ງ, ພວກເຮົາ ຖືເອົາຫຼັກການ “ຜູ້ຜະລິດເປັນສູນກາງ”, ໂດຍການກວດ

ສະຫຼຸບສະຖິຕິ: ສະພາບຂອງຊາວໜຸ່ມໃນຊົນນະບົດ

- 1/2 ຂອງປະຊາກອນຂອງປະເທດ ມີອາຍຸຕໍ່າກວ່າ 24 ປີ.
- 70% ຂອງຊາວໜຸ່ມ ແມ່ນອາໄສຢູ່ເຂດຊົນນະບົດ.
- ອັດຕາການຫວ່າງງານຂອງຊາວໜຸ່ມຢູ່ຊົນນະບົດ ແມ່ນຫຼາຍກວ່າ 20%.
- ມີພຽງ 28% ຂອງຊາວໜຸ່ມ ອາຍຸ 15-24 ປີ ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມໃນກໍາລັງແຮງງານ.
- ສໍາລັບຜູ້ໃຊ້ແຮງງານເຫຼົ່ານັ້ນ, 43% ແມ່ນແຮງງານທີ່ເຮັດວຽກຕໍ່າກວ່າກໍາລັງ - ໝາຍຄວາມ ວ່າ ເຮັດວຽກແບບບໍ່ເຕັມເວລາ ຫຼື ບໍ່ແນ່ນອນ.
- 40% ຂອງຊາວໜຸ່ມທີ່ຫວ່າງງານ ມີວຽກເຮັດໃນຜ່ານມາ - ໝາຍຄວາມວ່າ ວຽກສ່ວນຫຼາຍ ແມ່ນບໍ່ປົກກະຕິ.
- ຊາວໜຸ່ມຢູ່ຊົນນະບົດ ແມ່ນມີການສຶກສາຕໍ່າ. 85% ຂອງນັກຮຽນໃນເມືອງ ເຂົ້າຮຽນຊັ້ນ ມັດທະຍົມຕົ້ນ, ມີພຽງ 54% ຂອງນັກຮຽນໃນຊົນນະບົດ ເຂົ້າຮຽນຊັ້ນມັດທະຍົມຕົ້ນ. 64%

ສອບສິ່ງທ້າທາຍຕ່າງໆ ທີ່ເກີດຂຶ້ນກັບຊາວກະສິກອນ ແລະ ຜູ້ອອກແຮງງານໃນຊົນນະບົດ. ພວກເຮົາ ກໍານົດນະໂຍບາຍ ແລະ ກິດຈະກຳ ໂດຍວາງເປົ້າໝາຍໃສ່ກຸ່ມເຫຼົ່ານີ້ ເພື່ອສ້າງການ ຈ້າງງານໃຫ້ຊາວໜຸ່ມ ແລະ ເພີ່ມລາຍຮັບໃນຊົນນະບົດ.

ໃນປະຫວັດສາດຂອງ ສປປ ລາວ ແມ່ນປະເທດທີ່ຂາດແຄນແຮງງານ. ແຕ່ນັ້ນອາດຈະມີການ ປ່ຽນແປງ. ອີງຕາມສະຖິຕິຂອງລາວ, ໃນປີ 2017 ມີທັງໝົດ 1,8 ລ້ານຄົນ ທີ່ໄດ້ຮັບການຈ້າງງານ ໃນ ສປປ ລາວ. ການມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມໃນກໍາລັງແຮງງານ ສໍາລັບຜູ້ທີ່ຢູ່ໃນເກນອາຍຸເຮັດວຽກ ແມ່ນ ມີພຽງ 40% ຂອງທັງໝົດ (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017).¹ ອັດຕາການຫວ່າງງານຂອງຊາວ

¹ ຜູ້ທີ່ເຮັດວຽກພຽງແຕ່ເພື່ອກຸ້ມກິນເອງ - ສ່ວນໃຫຍ່ຂອງປະຊາກອນລາວ - ແມ່ນບໍ່ຖືກພິຈາລະນາວ່າເປັນການ

ໜຸ່ມຜູ້ຊົນນະບົດ ແມ່ນຫຼາຍກວ່າ 20%. ມີພຽງ 28% ຂອງໄວໜຸ່ມ ອາຍຸ 15-24 ປີ ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມໃນ ກຳລັງແຮງງານ. ຈຳນວນຊາວໜຸ່ມຊົນນະບົດ ທີ່ຂາດໂອກາດການເຮັດວຽກ ແມ່ນເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ ມີ ສາເຫດຈາກສາມຢ່າງຄື: ຈຳນວນຊາວໜຸ່ມທີ່ເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ ຢູ່ ສປປ ລາວ, ຄວາມຕ້ອງການແຮງ ງານໂດຍລວມແລ້ວຫຼຸດລົງ ເມື່ອມີການຜະລິດກະສິກຳເປັນການຄ້າ, ແລະ ການຜະລິດກະສິກຳ ເພື່ອກຸ້ມກິນຫຼຸດລົງໃນໄລຍະຍາວ. ໝາຍຄວາມວ່າ, ຄວາມຕ້ອງການວຽກຂອງຄົນໜຸ່ມ ໃນ ເຂດຊົນນະບົດ ຄາດວ່າຈະຂະຫຍາຍ ຕົວເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ.

ຈຳນວນຂອງຊາວກະສິກອນຂະໜາດນ້ອຍ ໃນ ສປປ ລາວ ສືບຕໍ່ເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ ເຊັ່ນດຽວກັນ - ເພີ່ມ ຂຶ້ນ 17% ຈາກປີ 1999 - 2011. ເນື້ອທີ່ດິນຜະລິດກະສິກຳ ມີຂະໜາດນ້ອຍ, 54% ຂອງຄົວເຮືອນ ແມ່ນມີດິນ 2 ເຮັກຕາ ຫຼື ໜ້ອຍກວ່າ (MAF 2014). ນີ້ສົ່ງຜົນໃຫ້ມີເນື້ອທີ່ດິນໜ້ອຍເຫຼືອໄວ້ໃຫ້ ຄົນລຸ້ນຕໍ່ໄປ ຖ້າບໍ່ມີບຸກເບີກທີ່ດິນການຜະລິດໃນພື້ນທີ່ປ່າໄມ້. ລະບົບການຜະລິດເພື່ອກຸ້ມກິນ ຊຶ່ງຜ່ານມາແມ່ນອາໄສຜະລິດຕະພັນຈາກປ່າໄມ້, ໄດ້ຫຼຸດລົງ ໃນຫຼາຍທົດສະວັດທີ່ຜ່ານມາ, ແຕ່ ກໍຍັງສືບຕໍ່ເປັນສິ່ງປ້ອງກັນທີ່ສຳຄັນໃຫ້ແກ່ຊາວໜຸ່ມລາວ.

ສະຫຼຸບສະຖິຕິ: ສະພາບຂອງແຮງງານໃນຊົນນະບົດ

- 1.8 ລ້ານຄົນ ແມ່ນໄດ້ຮັບການຈ້າງງານ ໃນ ສປປ ລາວ.
- ການມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມໃນກຳລັງແຮງງານ ສຳລັບຜູ້ທີ່ຢູ່ໃນເກນອາຍຸເຮັດວຽກ ແມ່ນມີ 40%.
- ໃນເຄິ່ງໜຶ່ງຂອງແຂວງ, ຈຳນວນຄອບຄົວທີ່ບໍ່ແມ່ນກະສິກຳ ເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນພຽງແຕ່ 2% ຫຼື ຕໍ່າ ກວ່າ ຈາກປີ 1999 - 2011, ໝາຍຄວາມວ່າ ວຽກທີ່ບໍ່ແມ່ນກະສິກຳ ແມ່ນມີບໍ່ຫຼາຍໃນຂອບ ເຂດທົ່ວປະເທດ.
- ຢູ່ເຂດຊົນນະບົດ ທີ່ມີການຜະລິດກະສິກຳແບບກຸ້ມຕົນເອງເປັນຫຼັກ, ການມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມຂອງ ກຳລັງແຮງງານແມ່ນຍັງຕໍ່າ ມີພຽງ 13,8% ຢູ່ແຂວງເຊກອງ ແລະ 15,1% ຢູ່ແຂວງສະຫວັນ ນະເຂດ.
- ຄ່າຈ້າງແຮງງານໃນຊົນນະບົດ: ກະສິກຳ, ການປະມົງ ແລະ ປ່າໄມ້, ການຂາຍຍົກ ແລະ ຂາຍຍ່ອຍ ສະເລ່ຍແມ່ນ 1,5 ລ້ານກີບ/ເດືອນ.
- ສຳລັບຊາວໜຸ່ມຊົນນະບົດ ອາຍຸ 20-24 ປີ, ຄ່າຈ້າງສະເລ່ຍ ແມ່ນປະມານ 1.344.000 ກີບ/ ເດືອນ.
- ສະເລ່ຍລາຍຮັບໃນທົ່ວປະເທດ ແມ່ນ 1,8 ລ້ານກີບ/ເດືອນ.

ຈ້າງງານ, ໂດຍເປັນໄປຕາມຄຳນິຍາມຂອງການຈ້າງງານທີ່ໄດ້ບັບບຸງໃໝ່. ນີ້ເຮັດໃຫ້ການມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມໃນກຳລັງ ແຮງງານ ແມ່ນຂ້ອນຂ້າງຕໍ່າກວ່າໃນປີ 2010 (77.7%), ຊຶ່ງອີງຕາມການນຳໃຊ້ຄຳນິຍາມຂອງການຈ້າງງານເກົ່າ ແລະ ການນຳໃຊ້ແຮງງານທີ່ບໍ່ເຕັມປະສິດທິພາບ. ຄຳນິຍາມຂອງການຈ້າງງານໃນປະຈຸບັນ ແມ່ນບັບບຸງໄປຕາມ ການປ່ຽນແປງ ທີ່ໄດ້ຖືກຮັບຮອງໃນກອງປະຊຸມສາກົນ ກ່ຽວກັບສະຖິຕິແຮງງານ (ICLS) ຄັ້ງທີ 19 ໃນປີ 2013. “ການຄາດຄະເນອັດຕາການມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມໃນກຳລັງແຮງງານ ນຳໃຊ້ແນວຄິດໃໝ່ນີ້ ສະແດງໃຫ້ເຫັນວ່າ ຄວາມ ແຕກຕ່າງຢ່າງຈະແຈ້ງ ຈາກການຄາດຄະເນທີ່ຜ່ານມາ ທີ່ສັດສ່ວນສ່ວນໃຫຍ່ຂອງພົນລະເມືອງ ແມ່ນມີສ່ວນ ຮ່ວມໃນ ກິດຈະກຳ ທີ່ບໍ່ແມ່ນເພື່ອສະໜອງໃຫ້ຕະຫຼາດ, ກໍຄືເພື່ອກຸ້ມກິນ.” (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017).

ໃນປະຈຸບັນ ຊາວກະສິກອນ ຍັງເຮັດອາຊີບເປັນກຳມະກອນ ແລະ ດຳລົງຊີວິດທີ່ອາໄສຈາກຫຼາຍແຫຼ່ງ - ບໍ່ພຽງແຕ່ຜະລິດເພື່ອເປັນອາຫານເທົ່ານັ້ນ. 40% ຂອງຊາວກະສິກອນ ຍັງມີວຽກສຳຮອງເຮັດ. ການຜະລິດກະສິກຳເປັນສິນຄ້າ ຂະຫຍາຍຕົວຢ່າງໄວວາ. ໃນປີ 2011, ສັດສ່ວນຂອງຄົວເຮືອນທີ່ຂາຍຜົນຜະລິດສ່ວນໜຶ່ງຂອງເຂົາເຈົ້າ ຢູ່ຕາມຕະຫຼາດ ແມ່ນມີ 71%, ສະແດງໃຫ້ເຫັນການເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ. ບ່ອນທີ່ຊາວກະສິກອນ ມີການນຳໃຊ້ເຕັກນິກປະຫຍັດແຮງງານຕ່າງໆ ເຂົ້າໃນການຜະລິດ, ເຫັນວ່າສ່ວນໃຫຍ່ ເວລາທີ່ປະຫຍັດໄດ້ ແມ່ນບໍ່ໄດ້ນຳໃຊ້ເພື່ອເພີ່ມການຜະລິດກະສິກຳ, ແຕ່ເພື່ອຮັບຈ້າງການຜະລິດກະສິກຳໃຫ້ຄົນອື່ນ, ເຮັດທຸລະກິດຂະໜາດນ້ອຍ ແລະ ວຽກອື່ນໆ.

ໃນເລິ່ງໜຶ່ງຂອງແຂວງ, ຈຳນວນຄອບຄົວທີ່ບໍ່ແມ່ນກະສິກຳ ເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນພຽງແຕ່ 2% ຫຼື ຕໍ່າກວ່າ ຈາກປີ 1999 - 2011, ໝາຍຄວາມວ່າ ວຽກທີ່ບໍ່ແມ່ນກະສິກຳ ແມ່ນມີບໍ່ຫຼາຍໃນຂອບເຂດທີ່ວ່າ ປະເທດ. ແທນທີ່ຈະຫັນປ່ຽນ ອອກຈາກກະສິກຳ, ຊາວກະສິກອນລາວ ແມ່ນຫາລາຍໄດ້ເພີ່ມ ຈາກການເຮັດວຽກຮັບຈ້າງການຜະລິດກະສິກຳໃຫ້ຄົນອື່ນ ໃນຂະນະທີ່ຍັງເຮັດການຜະລິດຂອງຕົນເອງ - ເຮັດໃຫ້ຄວາມຕ້ອງການຕະຫຼາດແຮງງານໃນຊົນນະບົດເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ. ນີ້ເຫັນໄດ້ຢ່າງຈະແຈ້ງ ໃນເຂດໃກ້ກັບຕົວເມືອງ: 47% ຂອງຄົວເຮືອນ ກໍຍັງກ່ຽວຂ້ອງກັບ ການຜະລິດກະສິກຳ ໃດໜຶ່ງ.

ການຜະລິດເປັນສິນຄ້າ ແມ່ນສ້າງທັງຄວາມຮັ່ງມີ ແລະ ຄວາມທຸກຈົນໃໝ່. ຕົວຢ່າງ, ໃນແຂວງອຸດົມໄຊ ຊຶ່ງເປັນແຂວງທີ່ມີລະດັບການຜະລິດເປັນສິນຄ້າປານກາງໃນທົ່ວປະເທດ, 34% ຂອງຄົວເຮືອນ ລາຍງານວ່າມີລາຍຮັບເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ ໃນຂະນະ 26% ລາຍງານວ່າມີລາຍຮັບຫຼຸດລົງ. ໃນ 4 ແຂວງຊົນນະບົດ - ອັດຕະປື, ຈຳປາສັກ, ເຊກອງ ແລະ ບໍ່ແກ້ວ, ຄົວເຮືອນ ມີລາຍໄດ້ຫຼຸດລົງ ຫຼາຍກວ່າ ຄົວເຮືອນທີ່ມີລາຍຮັບເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ. ໃນລະດັບປະເທດ ເຫັນວ່າ 5-8% ຂອງແຮງງານ ແມ່ນຜູ້ທີ່ເຮັດວຽກປະຈຳ, ທີ່ມີດິນທີ່ຄອບຄອງເປັນຂອງຕົວເອງໜ້ອຍ. ກຸ່ມແຮງງານຊົນນະບົດທີ່ຂາດດິນທຳການຜະລິດ ແມ່ນຂ້ອນຂ້າງໃໝ່ ໃນ ສປປ ລາວ.

ການຜະລິດພືດລົ້ມລຽກເປັນສິນຄ້າຂະໜາດໃຫຍ່ ເປັນຕົ້ນແມ່ນສາລີ ແລະ ມັນຕົ້ນ ຊ່ວຍສະໜັບສະໜູນທີ່ສຳຄັນ ໃຫ້ແກ່ການສົ່ງອອກ ແລະ ຄວາມຮັ່ງມີໃນເຂດຊົນນະບົດ. ການຜະລິດພືດເປັນສິນຄ້າ ຍັງເຮັດໃຫ້ດິນເຊາະເຈື່ອນຫຼາຍຂຶ້ນ, ແລະ ສະມັດຕະພາບຜົນຜະລິດຂອງຊາວກະສິກອນເຂດດິນຄ້ອຍຊັນ ຫຼຸດລົງ. ພືດເຫຼົ່ານີ້ ຕ້ອງການການຜະລິດຂະໜາດໃຫຍ່, ນຳໃຊ້ພື້ນທີ່ດິນທີ່ກວ້າງຂວາງ ແລະ ການຈ້າງງານ ໃນໄລຍະຍາວ.

ໃນຂະນະທີ່ ຄວາມຍາກຈົນແບບເກົ່າຂອງການຜະລິດກະສິກຳເພື່ອກຸ້ມກິນ ກຳລັງຫຼຸດລົງ, ຄວາມທຸກຈົນແບບໃໝ່ ກຳລັງຂະຫຍາຍຕົວໃນເຂດຊົນນະບົດ ບ່ອນທີ່ມີການຜະລິດເປັນສິນຄ້າ ໃນເນື້ອທີ່ດິນຂະໜາດນ້ອຍ ບໍ່ສ້າງຜົນກຳໄລທີ່ພຽງພໍ. ຊາວກະສິກອນເຫຼົ່ານີ້ ຕ້ອງການການບໍລິການ ແລະ ກາລະໂອກາດ ແຕກຕ່າງຈາກຊາວກະສິກອນຜູ້ທີ່ປະສົບຜົນສຳເລັດໃນການຜະລິດເພື່ອເປັນສິນຄ້າ. ຖ້າບໍ່ມີການສະໜອງການບໍລິການຕ່າງໆ ໃຫ້ແກ່ຊາວກະສິກອນຜູ້ທີ່ມີລາຍຮັບຫຼຸດລົງ ໃນຂະນະການຂະຫຍາຍຕົວຂອງການຜະລິດເປັນສິນຄ້າ, ການກ້າວໄປ

ເປັນປະເທດທຳກຳລັງພັດທະນາ ແລະ ການລົບລ້າງຄວາມທຸກຈົນ ໃນຊົນນະບົດ ກໍຈະຫຍຸ້ງສະ ງັກ.

ຄ່າຈ້າງແຮງງານ ໃນບັນດາຂະແໜງການ ທີ່ຈ້າງງານຄົນສ່ວນໃຫຍ່ໃນຊົນນະບົດ - ກະສິກຳ, ປະມົງ, ປ່າໄມ້, ການຄ້າສົ່ງ ແລະ ຄ້າຍ່ອຍ - ແມ່ນຕ່ຳ. ໃນຂະນະທີ່ ຂະແໜງການເຫຼົ່ານີ້ ວ່າຈ້າງ ແຮງງານ ທີ່ມີສິນເຊີງງານຕ່ຳ, ແຕ່ຮອດຕອນນີ້ ສິນເຊີງງານລາວ ແມ່ນສາມາດຕອບ ສະໜອງຕາມທີ່ຕ້ອງການຂອງບັນດາບໍລິສັດໃນປັດຈຸບັນ. ການຂາດສິນເຊີງງານນັ້ນ ເບິ່ງຄືບໍ່ ແມ່ນປະເດັນຫຼັກໃນການຖ່ວງດຶງຂະແໜງການ. ມີພຽງແຕ່ 12,8% ຂອງຟາມຂະໜາດກາງ ແລະ 4,9% ຂອງບໍລິສັດບຸກຄົນ ທີ່ຮ່ວມໃນການສຳຫຼວດ ກ່າວວ່າການຂາດສິນເຊີງງານ ຂອງ ແຮງງານລາວ ເປັນບັນຫາສຳຄັນສຳລັບທຸລະກິດຂອງພວກເຂົາ (GIZ 2017).

ການຜະລິດກະສິກຳແບບມີສັນຍາຜູກພັນ ກຳລັງຂະຫຍາຍຕົວ. ເຊັ່ນດຽວກັບການຜະລິດເພື່ອ ເປັນສິນຄ້າຮູບແບບອື່ນ, ການຈັດການແບບມີສັນຍານີ້ ສາມາດສ້າງຜົນປະໂຫຍດສຳລັບຊາວ ກະສິກອນ ແລະ ສ້າງວຽກເຮັດງານທຳ - ແຕ່ກົງກັນຂ້າມ ຊາວກະສິກອນ ສາມາດສູນເສຍເງິນ, ກໍໃຫ້ເກີດຄວາມທຸກຈົນແບບໃໝ່ ແລະ ການຫວ່າງງານ. ຄວາມສຳເລັດຂອງການຜະລິດກະສິ ກຳແບບມີສັນຍາຜູກພັນ ຂຶ້ນກັບວິທີການຈັດການ ແລະ ການບັງຄັບໃຊ້ສັນຍາ. ສວນບູກໄມ້ ສາມາດສ້າງໂອກາດການຈ້າງງານຫຼາຍ ຖ້າວ່າບໍລິສັດຕ່າງໆ ປະຕິບັດຕາມກົດໝາຍແຮງງານ, ແລະ ບົກປ້ອງສຸຂະພາບຂອງແຮງງານ ແລະ ໂອກາດທາງການສຶກສາຂອງລູກຫຼາກຂອງພວກ ເຂົາ.

ສະຫຼຸບສະຖິຕິ: ການຜະລິດເປັນສິນຄ້າ ແລະ ການປ່ຽນແປງຂອງແຮງງານ

- ການຜະລິດເພື່ອເປັນສິນຄ້າ ແມ່ນສ້າງທັງຄວາມຮັ່ງມີ ແລະ ຄວາມທຸກຈົນໃໝ່.
- ແຂວງອຸດົມໄຊ ຊຶ່ງເປັນແຂວງທີ່ມີລະດັບການຜະລິດເປັນສິນຄ້າບານກາງໃນທົ່ວປະເທດ, 34% ຂອງຄົວເຮືອນ ລາຍງານວ່າມີລາຍຮັບເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ ໃນຂະນະ 26% ລາຍງານວ່າມີລາຍຮັບ ຫຼຸດລົງ ໃນທົດສະວັດທີ່ຜ່ານມາ.
- ໃນແຂວງອັດຕະປື, ຈຳປາສັກ, ເຊກອງ ແລະ ບໍ່ແກ້ວ, ຄົວເຮືອນ ມີລາຍໄດ້ຫຼຸດລົງ ຫຼາຍກວ່າ ຄົວເຮືອນ ທີ່ມີລາຍຮັບເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ.
- ຈຳນວນຊາວກະສິກອນຂະໜາດນ້ອຍ ເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ 17% ຈາກຊ່ວງປີ 1999-2011.
- ເຊັ່ນດຽວກັນ 40% ຂອງຊາວກະສິກອນ ມີອາຊີບສຳຮອງ.
- 71% ຂອງຄົວເຮືອນກະສິກອນ ໄດ້ຂາຍຜົນລະຜະລິດຂອງພວກເຂົາບາງສ່ວນ ຫຼື ທັງໝົດ ສູ່ ຕະຫຼາດ.
- 5 - 8% ຂອງແຮງງານ ແມ່ນຜູ້ທີ່ເຮັດວຽກປະຈຳ, ທີ່ມີດິນທີ່ຄອບຄອງເປັນຂອງຕົວເອງໜ້ອຍ.
- 47% ຂອງຄົວເຮືອນໃນຕົວເມືອງ ກໍຍັງກ່ຽວຂ້ອງກັບການຜະລິດກະສິກຳໃດໜຶ່ງ.

ການເຄື່ອນຍ້າຍແຮງງານ, ທັງໄປຕ່າງປະເທດ ແລະ ເຂດຕົວເມືອງ ພາຍໃນປະເທດ, ກຳລັງ ກາຍເປັນປັດໄຈສຳຄັນຂອງການຫັນປ່ຽນຮູບແບບກະສິກຳ. ຢູ່ປະເທດໄທ ແລະ ເຂດ ຊົນນະບົດຂອງ ສປ ຈີນ, ຟາມຜະລິດກະສິກຳຂະໜາດນ້ອຍ ໄດ້ຮັບການສະໜັບສະໜູນບາງ

ສ່ວນຈາກເງິນທີ່ສົ່ງມາຈາກການເຮັດວຽກບ່ອນອື່ນ - ບໍ່ແມ່ນການໂຮມດິນເພື່ອການຜະລິດກະສິກໍາຂະໜາດໃຫຍ່ - ເປັນເລື່ອງບົກກະຕິ. ປະກົດການນີ້ ກໍກໍາລັງເກີດຂຶ້ນຢູ່ ສປປ ລາວ ໃນລະດັບໃດໜຶ່ງ - ອົງການສາກົນສໍາລັບການເຄື່ອນຍ້າຍແຮງງານ ຄາດຄະເນວ່າ ເງິນທີ່ສົ່ງກັບບ້ານຂອງແຮງງານລາວທີ່ເຮັດວຽກຢູ່ໄທ ອາດກວມຫຼາຍເຖິງ 25%-50% ຂອງລາຍຮັບໃນຊົນນະບົດ ໃນຫຼາຍໆຂົງເຂດ. ສໍາລັບຊາວໜຸ່ມໃນຊົນນະບົດຈໍານວນຫຼາຍ, ການເຄື່ອນຍ້າຍແຮງງານ ແມ່ນໂອກາດທີ່ເປັນຈິງທີ່ຈະຮຽນຮູ້ທັກສະໃໝ່ໆ ທີ່ບໍ່ສາມາດຫາໄດ້ໃນເຂດບ້ານ. ການເຄື່ອນຍ້າຍແຮງງານພາຍໃນປະເທດ ເປັນອີກຊ່ອງທາງໜຶ່ງຂອງການຫາວຽກເຮັດ ສໍາລັບຊາວໜຸ່ມໃນຊົນນະບົດ. ຊາວໜຸ່ມຈາກແຂວງພາກເໜືອ ເຄື່ອນຍ້າຍມາເຮັດວຽກໃນນະຄອນຫຼວງວຽງຈັນ ແບບກະແຈກກະຈາຍ. ເງິນທີ່ສົ່ງກັບບ້ານຈາກການເຄື່ອນຍ້າຍມາເຮັດວຽກໃນຕົວເມືອງ ອາດເປັນແຫຼ່ງລາຍຮັບສໍາຄັນ ສໍາລັບຄອບຄົວໃນຊົນນະບົດ, ແຕ່ກໍບໍ່ມີການຄາດປະມານຕົວເລກທີ່ແນ່ນອນ ໃນ ສປປ ລາວ. ຢ່າງໃດກໍຕາມ, ເຫັນວ່າ ຄ່າແຮງງານ ແມ່ນຕໍ່າຫຼາຍ ໃນຂະແໜງ ອຸດສາຫະກໍາ ໃນນະຄອນຫຼວງວຽງຈັນ, ໂດຍແຮງງານໃນພາກອຸດສາຫະກໍາຕັດຫຍິບສ່ວນຫຼາຍ ບໍ່ສາມາດປະກອບ ສ່ວນເຂົ້າໃນຊີວິດເປັນຢູ່ຂອງຄອບຄົວເຂົາເຈົ້າໄດ້ ໃນຊົນນະບົດ. ການສໍາພາດແຮງງານທີ່ເຄື່ອນຍ້າຍໄປເຮັດວຽກຢູ່ຕ່າງ ປະເທດ ສະແດງໃຫ້ເຫັນວ່າ ຫາກມີໂອກາດການຈ້າງງານເກີດຂຶ້ນໃນເຂດພື້ນທີ່ບ້ານເຂົາເຈົ້າ, ແຮງງານດັ່ງກ່າວ ກໍຈະກັບຄືນມາເຮັດວຽກໃນ ສປປ ລາວ, ໂດຍນໍາເອົາທັກສະ ແລະ ປະສົບການໃໝ່ໆ ມາພ້ອມ.

ສະຫຼຸບສະຖິຕິ: ການເຄື່ອນຍ້າຍແຮງງານ ແລະ ການສົ່ງເງິນກັບ

- ແຮງງານຍ້າຍຖິ່ນ ແມ່ນເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ ຊຶ່ງເປັນສ່ວນໜຶ່ງຂອງຍຸດທະສາດການຜະລິດກະສິກໍາທີ່ຫຼາຍຫຼາຍ.
- ປະຊາກອນລາວ 1,3 ລ້ານຄົນ ອາໄສຢູ່ນອກປະເທດ, 923.000 ຄົນ ຢູ່ປະເທດໄທ.
- ຫຼາຍກວ່າ 31% ອາດບໍ່ສາມາດສົ່ງເງິນກັບຄືນບ້ານ.
- ການສົ່ງເງິນກັບ ຈາກປະເທດໄທ ສາມາດກວມເອົາ 25-50% ຂອງລາຍຮັບໃນຊົນນະບົດ ໃນຫຼາຍໆພື້ນທີ່.
- ການເຄື່ອນຍ້າຍແຮງງານ ແມ່ນວິທີທາງຫຼັກທີ່ຊາວໜຸ່ມ ຮຽນຮູ້ທັກສະໃໝ່.
- ແຮງງານຍ້າຍຖິ່ນ ໃນການສໍາຫຼວດຫຼາຍຄັ້ງ ຈະກັບຄືນມາບ້ານ ຖ້າມີໂອກາດໃນການເຮັດ

ໃນໄລຍະທໍາອິດຂອງການຜະລິດກະສິກໍາເປັນສິນຄ້າ ແມ່ນສ້າງການປ່ຽນແປງທີ່ກວ້າງຂວາງ ແລະ ປະສົບຜົນສໍາເລັດໃນລະດັບໃດໜຶ່ງ. ເກີດມີທັງຜູ້ປະສົບຜົນສໍາເລັດ ແລະ ຜູ້ລົ້ມເຫຼວ. ໃນໄລຍະໃໝ່ ແມ່ນຈໍາເປັນຕ້ອງມີການກະຈາຍຜົນປະໂຫຍດ. ພວກເຮົາ ບໍ່ສາມາດເວົ້າກ່ຽວກັບຊາວກະສິກອນ, ແຮງງານໃນຊົນນະບົດ ຫຼື ຄອບຄົວຊາວກະສິກອນ ແບບທົ່ວໄປ ອີກຕໍ່ໄປ; ມີຫຼາຍປະເພດຂອງການຈ້າງງານ ສໍາລັບຄົນໃນຄົນຊົນນະບົດ ທີ່ແຕກຕ່າງກັນ, ແລະ ພວກເຂົາກໍຕ້ອງການການສະໜັບສະໜູນທີ່ແຕກຕ່າງກັນ. ມັນຈຶ່ງຕ້ອງການວິທີການແບບປະສົມປະສານ ເພື່ອການພັດທະນາກະສິກໍາ ທີ່ສຸມໃສ່ຄວາມຕ້ອງການຂອງຄົນທີ່ແຕກຕ່າງກັນ. ຄວາມຈິງກໍຄື ຊາວກະສິກອນ ບໍ່ໄດ້ຖືກປະກະສິກໍາຢ່າງຂາດຕົວ ຫຼື ອາໄສແຕ່ການຜະລິດກະສິກໍາພຽງຢ່າງດຽວ. ການຜະລິດກະສິກໍາ ກາຍເປັນແຫຼ່ງລາຍຮັບໜຶ່ງ ຂອງຄົວເຮືອນຊົນນະບົດ.

ຄິດ-ພິຈາລະນາຄືນກ່ຽວກັບແຮງງານ ໃນໄລຍະການຫັນປ່ຽນຮູບແບບກະສິກໍາ #1: ການຈັດແບ່ງປະເພດທີ່ຕາຍໂຕ		
ຊົນນະບົດ	ຫຼື	ຕົວເມືອງ
ຂະແໜງການຜະລິດ	ຫຼື	ຂະແໜງອຸດສາຫະກຳ ແລະ ບໍລິການ
ເຮັດວຽກບໍ່ເຕັມເວລາ	ຫຼື	ເຮັດວຽກເຕັມເວລາ
ແຮງງານຍ້າຍຖິ່ນ	ຫຼື	ແຮງງານໃນປະເທດ
ກຸ່ມກິນ	ຫຼື	ຄ້າຂາຍ
ຂາດທັກສະ	ຫຼື	ມີທັກສະ
ແນວຄິດດັ່ງກ່າວນີ້ ສົມມຸດວ່າແຮງງານ ເໝາະສົມຈັດຢູ່ປະເພດໃດໜຶ່ງສະເພາະ, ແລະ ບົດບາດຂອງນະໂຍບາຍ ແມ່ນຕ້ອງຊ່ວຍຄົນເຫຼົ່ານັ້ນ ຍ້າຍຈາກປະເພດໜຶ່ງ ໄປເປັນອີກປະເພດໜຶ່ງ.		

ຄິດ-ພິຈາລະນາຄືນກ່ຽວກັບແຮງງານ ໃນໄລຍະການຫັນປ່ຽນຮູບແບບກະສິກໍາ #2: ຫຼັກການທີ່ຖືເອົາຜູ້ຜະລິດເປັນສູນກາງ		
ຊົນນະບົດ	ຄອບຄົວ ມີສະມາຊິກຫຼາຍຄົນ ອາໄສຢູ່ຫຼາຍບ່ອນທີ່ແຕກຕ່າງກັນ	ຕົວເມືອງ
ຂະແໜງການຜະລິດ	ແຫຼ່ງລາຍຮັບ ມາຈາກຫຼາຍຂະແໜງການ ທີ່ແຕກຕ່າງກັນ	ຂະແໜງອຸດສາຫະກຳ ແລະ ບໍລິການ
ເຮັດວຽກບໍ່ເຕັມເວລາ	ວຽກມີການປ່ຽນແປງ ໄປ ຕາມລະດູການຜະລິດ ແລະ ໂອກາດໃນການຫາວຽກເສີມ	ເຮັດວຽກເຕັມເວລາ
ແຮງງານຍ້າຍຖິ່ນ	ການເຄື່ອນຍ້າຍແຮງງານຊົ່ວຄາວ ອາດຊ່ວຍສ້າງຄວາມອາດສາມາດ ສໍາລັບການຈ້າງງານພາຍໃນປະເທດ	ແຮງງານໃນປະເທດ
ກຸ່ມກິນ	ການຜະລິດແບບເຄິງກຸ່ມກິນ ເປັນການ ປະຕິບັດປົກກະຕິ, ການຜະລິດພືດ ທັງເປັນອາຫານ ແລະ ເປັນສິນຄ້າ	ຄ້າຂາຍ
ຂາດທັກສະ	ການຢູ່ລອດ ແລະ ການປະສົບຜົນສໍາເລັດ ຂຶ້ນຢູ່ກັບການມີທັກສະທີ່ຫຼາກຫຼາຍ	ມີທັກສະ
ຄິດເຮືອນສ່ວນໃຫຍ່ ແມ່ນຢູ່ກວມລວມ, ບໍ່ຕົກຢູ່ໃນປະເພດໃດໜຶ່ງສະເພາະ. ນະໂຍບາຍ ຄວນຈະແກ້ໄຂບັນຫາ ບ່ອນທີ່ພວກເຂົາຢູ່, ບໍ່ແມ່ນບ່ອນ ທີ່ພວກເຮົາຕ້ອງການໃຫ້ເຂົາເຈົ້າເປັນ.		

ໃນໄລຍະຜ່ານມາ ການເພີ່ມການຜະລິດ ແລະ ການບັນລຸເປົ້າໝາຍຫົວຫຼ່ວຍການຜະລິດເປັນ ໂຕນ ແມ່ນເປົ້າໝາຍຍຸດທະສາດພັດທະນາກະສິກໍາ. ໃນທາງປະຕິບັດ, ສິ່ງນີ້ໄດ້ຜັນຂະຫຍາຍສູ່ ການລົງທຶນໃນການຜະລິດສິນຄ້າກະສິກໍາ ຈຳນວນຫຼາຍ ເຊັ່ນ: ສາລີ, ມັນຕົ້ນ, ອ້ອຍ ແລະ ຢາງພາລາ ສໍາລັບການສົ່ງອອກ, ເວົ້າອີກຢ່າງໜຶ່ງ ຖືເອົາກະສິກໍາ ເປັນຂະ ແໜງການສໍາຄັນ ສະໜອງໃຫ້ອຸດສາຫະກຳ ຄ້າຍຄືກັນກັບບໍ່ແຮ່ ແລະ ພະລັງງານໄຟຟ້າ. ໃນໄລຍະຕໍ່ໄປຂອງການ ຜະລິດເປັນສິນຄ້າ, ການສ້າງວຽກເຮັດງານທຳ ແລະ ການເຕີບໂຕຂອງລາຍຮັບ ຈະເປັນເປົ້າໝາຍ

າຍທີ່ສໍາຄັນຫຼາຍ ສໍາລັບລັດຖະບານ. ຊຶ່ງຕ້ອງນໍາໃຊ້ຫຼັກການທີ່ແຕກຕ່າງກັນ ສໍາລັບກຸ່ມຊາວກະສິກອນ ແລະ ຊາວໜຸ່ມໃນຊົນນະບົດ ທີ່ແຕກຕ່າງກັນ, ຂຶ້ນກັບຄວາມຕ້ອງການ ແລະ ຊັບສິນ ຂອງເຂົາເຈົ້າ. ຍຸດທະສາດເພື່ອການສ້າງວຽກເຮັດງານທຳ ແລະ ເພີ່ມລາຍຮັບ ສໍາລັບຊາວໜຸ່ມໃນຊົນນະບົດທີ່ຫວ່າງງານ ຈະຕ້ອງແຕກຕ່າງຍຸດທະສາດສໍາລັບຊາວກະສິກອນທີ່ຜະລິດເປັນສິນຄ້າຕັ້ງແຕ່ເວລາ ທີ່ສາມາດເຂົ້າເຖິງຕະຫຼາດໃນເມືອງ. ນະວັດຕະກຳທີ່ຊ່ວຍປະຫຍັດແຮງງານ ອາດມີຄວາມສໍາຄັນເປັນຢ່າງຍິ່ງ ສໍາລັບຊາວກະສິກອນທີ່ບໍ່ໄດ້ເຮັດການຜະລິດຕັ້ງເວລາ, ໂດຍຊ່ວຍໃຫ້ພວກເຂົາ ປະຫຍັດແຮງງານ ໄປເຮັດວຽກຮູບແບບອື່ນ ໃນຊົນນະບົດ ແລະ ທຸລະກິດຂະໜາດນ້ອຍ ນອກຈາກການຜະລິດກະສິກຳ. ຊາວກະສິກອນ ຜູ້ທີ່ມີລາຍຮັບຫຼຸດລົງ ຈາກການຜະລິດເປັນສິນຄ້າ ຈະຕ້ອງການຍຸດທະສາດທີ່ແຕກຕ່າງ ສໍາລັບຊາວກະສິກອນໃນເຂດເນີນສູງ ທີ່ຍັງທຳການຜະລິດ ທັງເພື່ອກຸ້ມກິນ ແລະ ເພື່ອຂາຍເປັນສິນຄ້າ. ການຫວ່າງງານໃນຊົນນະບົດ, ໂດຍສະເພາະ ສໍາລັບຊາວໜຸ່ມ ແມ່ນເປັນບັນຫາທີ່ກຳລັງເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ.

ຫຼັກການທີ່ຖືເອົາຜູ້ຜະລິດເປັນສູນກາງ, ໂດຍການກຳນົດຍຸດທະສາດ ນະໂຍບາຍ ໃຫ້ແກ່ກຸ່ມຕ່າງໆ ແລະ ກຳນົດການສ້າງວຽກເຮັດງານທຳ ແລະ ລາຍຮັບທີ່ເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ ເປັນເປົ້າໝາຍຂອງນະໂຍບາຍ, ສາມາດຊ່ວຍນໍາພາທິດທາງຕໍ່ໜ້າ ຂອງການຜະລິດກະສິກຳເປັນສິນຄ້າ ໃນ ສປປ ລາວ.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the last two decades, Lao PDR has made impressive progress against rural poverty, increasing agricultural production across the country, and becoming self-sufficient in food. Commercial agriculture exports are growing, providing a source of income and employment for rural people. As subsistence farming systems transition to commercially oriented production, the structure of rural work is changing. Unemployment for youth is a growing challenge. Half the population is under the age of 24, and are increasingly dealing with a lack of work opportunities.

How can the Ministry of Agriculture help ensure a better future for rural youth? The Department of Policy and Legal Affairs aims to answer this question through this study on 'People-Centered Agriculture'. This report synthesizes research across the agriculture sector to identify the changing structure of agricultural production and rural employment, with a focus on youth. Rather than focusing on a specific crop or sector, we take a 'people centered' approach, examining the different emerging challenges for different farmers and rural workers. We identify policies and activities targeted to these different groups to create youth employment and increase rural income.

Summary Statistics: The State of Rural Youth

- ½ the population of Lao PDR is under the age of 24.
- 70% of youth reside in rural areas.
- The unemployment rate for rural youth is above 20%.
- Only 28% of youth ages 15-24 participate in the labor force.
- For those that do participate, 43% are underutilized labor – meaning work is part-time or inconsistent.
- 40% of unemployed youth have held a job in the past – meaning jobs are often unstable
- Rural youth are under-educated. 85% of urban students attend lower secondary school; only 54% of rural students do. 64% of urban students and 28% of rural students attend upper-secondary school.

For most of its history Lao PDR was a labor scarce country. That may be changing. According to the Lao Statistics Bureau, in 2017 a total of 1.8 million people were employed in Lao PDR. Labor force participation for those of working age is 40% percent overall (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017).² The unemployment rate for rural youth is above 20%. Only 28% of youth ages 15-24 participate in the labor force at all. The number of rural youth who lack employment opportunities is a growing from three directions – the 'bulge' in the number of young people

² Those who work only for their own subsistence – a substantial portion of the Lao population – are no longer considered to be in employment, in keeping with an updated definition of employment. This makes labor force participation appear much lower than in 2010 (77.7%), when the previous definition of employment and labor underutilization was used. The current definitions follow the changes adopted by the 19th International Conference of Labor Statisticians (ICLS) in 2013. This "estimate of labor force participation rate using the new concept presents a significant break from the previous estimates in an agrarian economy with considerable proportion of the population in non-market, subsistence activities." (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017).

in Lao PDR, the lower overall labor requirements as agriculture commercializes, and the long term decline of subsistence farming. This means demand for jobs among young people in rural areas can be expected to grow.

The number of smallholder farmers in Lao PDR continues to grow as well - increasing 17% from 1999 - 2011. Land areas are small. 54% of households have access to 2 hectares or less land (MAF 2014). This leaves little land to pass to the next generation without opening new farmland in forest areas. Subsistence systems which once depended on forest products, have been in decline for decades, but still constitute an important safety net for Lao youth.

Summary Statistics: The State of Rural Labour

- 1.8 million people are employed in Lao PDR.
- Labor force participation for those of working age is 40%
- In half of provinces, the number of non-farm households grew by only 2% or less from 1999 - 2011, meaning that non-farm jobs remained largely out of reach in much of the country.
- In rural areas where subsistence agriculture dominates, labor force participation can be as low as 13.8% in Sekong and 15.1% in Savannakhet.
- Wages in rural sectors: agriculture, fishing and forestry and wholesale and retail trade average 1.5 million LAK/month.
- For rural youth ages 20 -24, average wages are approximately 1,344,000 LAK/month.
- National median income is 1.8 million LAK/month

Farmers are now also workers and make a living from multiple sources – not just food production. 40% of farmers also have secondary jobs. Commercial agriculture has expanded rapidly. In 2011, the percentage of households selling some part of their production in the market was 71%. That has undoubtedly increased. Where farmers are adopting labor saving techniques, often the time saved is not going into expanding or intensifying agriculture production, but to off-farm casual labor, small business and other work.

In half of provinces, the number of non-farm households grew by only 2% or less from 1999 - 2011, meaning that non-farm jobs remain largely out of reach in much of the country. Instead of a transition out of agriculture, Lao farmers are diversifying their off-farm income sources *while still farming* – putting more demands on the rural labor market. This is particularly true close to urban centers: 47% of urban households are also engaged in farming activities in some form.

Commercialization is creating both wealth *and* new poverty. For example, in Oudomxay, which has an average level of commercialization for the country, 34% of households reported increased incomes while 26% reported being worse off. In four predominantly rural provinces – Attepeu, Champasack, Sekong, and Bokeo, incomes have *fallen* for more households than it improved. Nationally, between 5 – 8 % of workers are full time casual labor, owning very little land of their own. This class of landless rural workers is relatively new in Lao PDR.

Commercialization of extensive annual crops including maize and cassava have provided a significant boost to export totals and rural wealth. They also have accelerated soil erosion, and yields are declining for farmers on sloping lands. These crops require extensive production, requiring large land areas to provide decent livelihoods and employment over the long term.

While the old poverty of subsistence farming is falling away, a new form of poverty is growing in rural areas where commercial agriculture on small plots of land is not producing adequate profits. These farmers will need different services and opportunities than those for whom commercialization is successful. Without addressing services to those farmers whose incomes have declined with the rise of commercialization, progress towards LDC graduation and poverty eradication in the countryside may stall.

Wages in the sectors that employ the most rural residents – agriculture, fishing and forestry and wholesale and retail trade – are low. While these sectors generally employ lower skilled labor, so far Lao workers’ skills have met demand from existing companies. A lack of skills per se does not seem to be the key issue holding back the sector. Only 12.8% of mid-sized farms and 4.9% of food processing companies in one survey said a lack of skills among Lao workers is a major problem for their business (GIZ 2017).

Contract farming is on the rise. Like other forms of commercialization, these arrangements can be beneficial for farmers and create jobs – or farmers can lose money, driving new poverty and unemployment. The success of contract farming depends on how contracts are managed and enforced. Plantation labor can offer opportunities for much needed employment if companies follow labour law, and protect workers’ health and their children’s educational opportunities.

Summary Statistics: Commercialization and Changing Labor Dynamics

- Commercialization is creating both wealth *and* new poverty.
- Oudomsay has the average level of commercialization in the country. 34% of households reported increased incomes, 26% reported being worse off over the last decade.
- In Attepeu, Champasack, Sekong, and Bokeo, incomes *fell* for more people than they grew.
- The number of smallholder farmers *increased* 17% from 1999 – 2011.
- 40% of farmers also have secondary jobs
- 71% of farming households sell some or all of their goods on the market
- 5 – 8 % of workers are full time casual labor, owning very little land
- 47% of urban households are also engaged in farming activities

Migration, both abroad and to urban areas within the country, is becoming a major input for agrarian systems. In Thailand and rural China, small scale farms partially supported by remittances – not land consolidation for large scale farming – is the norm. This dynamic seems to be developing in Laos to some degree as well – the International Organization for Migration estimates remittances from Lao migrants in Thailand could account for as much as 25%-50% of rural incomes in many areas. For many rural youth, migration is a realistic opportunity to acquire new skills that are not readily available in the village. Within- country migration is another source of employment for rural youth. Youth from Northern Provinces disproportionately migrate to Vientiane for work. Remittances from urban migration may

also be a significant source of income for rural families, but no reliable estimate of remittances from within Laos exist. Anecdotally however, wages are much lower in industrial sectors in Vientiane, with many garment industry workers largely unable to contribute significantly to their family's livelihoods in rural areas. Interviews with international migrants consistently show that were there employment opportunities in their home areas, migrants would return to work in Laos, bringing back new skills and experiences.

Summary Statistics: Migration and Remittances

- Migrant labor is increasingly part of a diversified farming strategy
- 1.3 million Lao citizens live outside of the country, – 923,000 in Thailand.
- As many as 31% may be unable to send money home.
- Remittances from Thailand could account for 25-50% of rural incomes in many areas
- Migration is a major way rural youth acquire new skills.
- Many surveyed migrants would come back if there were job opportunities.

The first phase of agricultural commercialization has created sweeping changes and some broad successes. It has also created both winners and losers. A new phase is needed to spread the benefits. We can no longer talk about a typical farmer, rural worker or farming family; there are different types of employment for rural people, and they need different types of support. This demands a nuanced approach to agriculture development centered on different people's needs. The fact is that farmers are neither moving out of agriculture completely or completely dependent on farming. Instead farming is becoming one source of income for rural households among many.

Re-thinking labour during the agrarian transition #1:
A false dichotomy

Rural	OR	Urban
Farm Sector	OR	Manufacturing and Services
Under-employed	OR	Fully employed
Migrant worker	OR	In-country worker
Subsistence	OR	Commercial
Unskilled	OR	Skilled

This kind of thinking assumes that labour fits into one category or the other, and the role of policy is to help people move from one box to another

Re-thinking labour during the agrarian transition #2:
A people-centred approach

Rural	<i>Families have inter-dependent members in different locations</i>	Urban
Farm Sector	<i>Multiple sources of income across different sectors</i>	Manufacturing and Services
Under-employed	<i>Variation in workload according to seasonality and casual job opportunities</i>	Fully employed
Migrant worker	<i>Temporary migration may help build capacity for in-country employment</i>	In-country worker
Subsistence	<i>Semi-subsistence farming is the norm, producing a mix of food and cash crops</i>	Commercial
Unskilled	<i>Survival and success depends on being multi-skilled</i>	Skilled

Most households occupy the centre ground, not fitting into one box or the other. Policy should address where people are, not just where we want them to be.

In the past increasing production and meeting growing targets for tons of production were the goal for agricultural development strategies. In practice, this translated into investments in the production of bulk commodities such as maize, cassava, sugar and rubber for export markets, in other words treating agriculture as an extractive industry similar to mining and hydropower. In the next phase of commercialization, job creation and income growth will be much more important targets for government to meet. This requires a different approach for different groups of farmers and rural youth, depending on their needs and assets. Strategies to grow jobs and incomes for rural unemployed youth will be different than for full time commercial farmers with access to urban markets. Labor saving innovations may be especially important for farmers that don't farm full time, allowing them to save labor for other forms of rural work and small business in addition to farming. Farmers whose incomes

have decreased with commercialization will require different strategies than upland farmers who are still practicing a mix of subsistence and commercial production. Rural unemployment, especially for youth is a growing issue.

A people-centered approach, targeting policy strategy to different groups, and using job and income growth as policy targets, can help guide the next phase of agricultural commercialization in Lao PDR.

(I) INTRODUCTION: CHANGING LABOR DYNAMICS FOR RURAL YOUTH

How can the Ministry of Agriculture help ensure a better future for rural youth? That is the question that the Department of Policy and Legal Affairs aims to answer through its study on 'People-Centred Agriculture'. As a starting point, this report synthesizes existing knowledge on how agricultural commercialization is impacting rural labour and employment, and identifies some of the policy questions raised by this information.

Lao PDR is in the midst of a dramatic transition. In 2015, half the population was under the age of 24, and two thirds lived in rural areas (Lao Statistics Bureau 2015). As agriculture commercializes, it will likely require less labor. At the same time, the coming 'youth bulge' will create more demand for decent employment in an economy that over the last 20 years has produced impressive, if jobless economic growth. Between 2005 – 2018 Lao PDR had the highest average economic growth in the region at 7.66% but according to the National Institute for Economic Research, poverty levels in Laos only fell by 1% (Phouthonesy 2019). Mainly resource-driven and capital intensive growth meant that GDP per person employed grew without generating a sufficient number of decent employment opportunities. The National Institute for Economic Research concluded that growth over this period resulted in a growing income gap between the rich and poor, rather than widespread poverty alleviation. This means that when Lao PDR graduates from LDC status in 2024 as it is likely to do, it will arrive in an economy that has only improved for a minority of the population, potentially threatening economic growth and political stability.

Officially rural areas appear to have achieved full employment with jobless rates hovering at 1.4% (Lao Statistics Bureau 2015). The Ministry of Labor and Social Work and the International Labor Organization have recently adopted a broader definition of the unemployed which views those producing exclusively for their own subsistence as outside the labor force. Using this updated definition, rural unemployment stands at 12.4%, with the unemployment rate for rural youth above 20%, and an additional almost 2 million people counted as outside the labor force and engaged exclusively in subsistence production (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017). As agriculture commercializes, the effects are uneven – with commercialization bringing jobs and prosperity in some places and eroding natural resources and creating more entrenched poverty in others. The rural employment that exists often does not pay well enough to eliminate poverty and meet SDG goals. Around 36 per cent of employed people belong to the two poorest quintiles of the household population. Consequently, migration from rural areas is an increasingly prevalent fact of life. The best estimate indicates 1.3 million Lao citizens live outside of the country, with the vast majority – 923,000 in Thailand (UNDESA 2017). This number appears somewhat startling in comparison with the latest data from the Ministry of Planning and Investment and the Lao Statistics Bureau, which count 1.8 million people among the active labor force in Lao PDR (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017). In villages close to the Thai border, remittances have become an essential economic input for agrarian systems (Manivong, Cramb, and Newby 2014; Lestrelin 2015). These migrant workers are disproportionately vulnerable – and as many as 31% may be unable to send money home (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017), meaning their labor is unavailable to support economic development or the security of their communities.

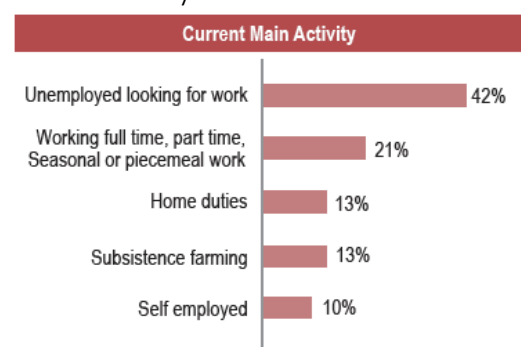
The 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan recognized allocation of the labor force, growing rural-urban inequality, a lack of industrial processing, public / private labour force capacity, and high rates of labour migration as key challenges. Specifically, the 8th NSEDP calls for diverting more labor from agriculture to industrial and service sectors, increasing non-agricultural sector employment and value-added industries, linking small towns in rural areas to regional production facilities, and generating rural employment and income-generating activities for poor and vulnerable rural households. This requires turning vulnerability into opportunity – with a special focus on small-scale farmers, youth and women. Targets concerning labor in the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan were not met partially “because of [a] shortage of clear information on the labor market, resulting in inability to meet labor market demand and development.” While numerous Ministries and development partners have collected information on rural labor and employment, such data has not been brought together for a comprehensive policy analysis. To this end, we synthesize this research, in order to analyze policy opportunities for the Ministry of Agriculture’s efforts to grow decent employment for rural youth. We identify emerging and outstanding issues, and outline policy opportunities to meet national socio-economic development goals.

THE STATE OF RURAL YOUTH

Lao DPR is a young country, with half the population estimated to be under 24 years of age (Lao Statistics Bureau 2015). In 2017, 923,000 youth aged 15 - 24 lived in rural areas, compared with 360,000 in urban areas (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017). This means that over 70% of Lao youth reside in rural environments. Fertility rates in Laos are declining. Working adults now support fewer children and elderly family members than fifteen years ago. The dependency ratio – a measure of how many people each working adult must support - declined from 77% to 57% between 2005 and 2015 (Epprecht et al. 2018). This can result in more resources for economic development and less government spending on social services (Lao Statistics Bureau 2015). However, this demographic dividend depends on there being decent work for youth in the areas in which they live.

Nationwide, only 28.4% of youth ages 15-24 participate in the labor force (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017). A recent survey of 1200 youth in all 17 provinces found that youth unemployment is a significant issue (GIZ 2016). Of the 37% of youth 10-25 who were not currently studying, more than half had never been employed at all. 42% were unemployed and looking for work, while 13% were engaged exclusively in subsistence production, and another 13% were devoted to duties at home (GIZ 2016). 10% were self-employed. Two of every five young people that had previously been employed youth were unemployed at the time of the survey, meaning that jobs for young people, when available, are often unstable (GIZ 2016).

Main activities for youth ages 10 -25 not currently in school. Source: GIZ



While economic development in rural areas has been growing, unemployment is still a

growing challenge for Lao youth. Of the 1200 youth surveyed, 38% said unemployment was a significant challenge in their lives, while 20% added that earning enough money to buy food was a challenge. For the most vulnerable young people – rural youth, young women, ethnic minorities, and those who did not complete secondary school – the main challenges were unemployment (49%), access to education (35%) and insufficient income for food (32%) (GIZ 2016).

The higher a young person's educational level, the more likely they are to participate in the labor force. Overall, 77.2 per cent of the working age population with university education and above took part in the labor force compared to only 41.1 per cent for those with less than a primary school education (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017). Young women, and rural and ethnic minority youth are the least likely to finish school or be gainfully employed (GIZ 2016). Education rates for primary and lower secondary school have improved, with only 16% of children of lower secondary school age not attending school (Lao Statistics Bureau 2018).

There are significant differences in school completion and attendance in rural and urban areas. Rural youth are less educated. In Sekong, Saravane, and Savannakhet Provinces for example, less than half of students complete lower secondary school. In Houaphanh, Sekong, Saravane, Savannakhet, and Attapeu 25% or fewer youth finish upper secondary school (Lao Statistics Bureau 2018). Attendance diverges dramatically after primary school in rural and urban areas. 85% of urban students attend lower secondary school; only 54% of rural students do. 64% of urban students and only 28% of rural students attend upper-secondary (Lao Statistics Bureau 2018).

There is also a large gap between what young people want, and what is accessible in terms of education. In one national survey, over one third of youth (38%) hoped to complete a university degree in the future while 35% hoped to go to vocational school (GIZ 2016). While university graduates participate in the labor force at much higher rates than those without higher education, there is a perceived lack of market for university level qualifications, with stronger job markets for technicians in agriculture, construction and mining (LYU 2014). Youth clearly want stable employment. In a survey of 1200 youth from every province, 48% said they wanted a permanent job. More than half (55%) wanted to work with the government and a similar number wanted to set up their own business (56%) (GIZ 2016).

THE STATE OF RURAL LABOR MARKETS

According to the Lao Statistics Bureau, in 2017 a total of 1.8 million people were employed in Lao PDR. The formal sector accounts for 26.5 per cent of employment overall. Labor force participation for those of working age is 40.8 percent (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017). Those who work only for their own subsistence – substantial portion of the Lao population – are no longer considered to be in employment, in keeping with an updated definition of employment³ (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017). In rural areas, labor force participation peaks for

³ This makes labor force participation appear much lower than in 2010 (77.7%), when the previous definition of employment and labor underutilization was used. The current definitions follow the changes adopted by the 19th International Conference of Labor Statisticians (ICLS) in 2013. This “estimate of labor force participation rate using the new concept presents a significant break from the previous estimates in an agrarian economy

young adults aged 30 – 34 at just 45% percent (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017). Nearly all – 91% - of those considered outside the labor force in rural areas are engaged in agricultural production for their own subsistence (NRES 2019). These rates can differ significantly between provinces. In rural areas where subsistence agriculture dominates, labor force participation can be as low as 13.8% in Sekong and 15.1% in Savannakhet. Rural areas of Sayabouly had the highest rate of labor participation at 68.9 percent (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017).

Urban and rural labor force participation rates by province Source: Lao Statistics Bureau

Code	Province	Total			Urban			Rural		
		Both sex	Male	Female	Both sex	Male	Female	Both sex	Male	Female
1	Vientiane Capital	62.6	69.6	56.3	63.4	69.4	57.7	60.9	70.0	53.4
2	Phongsaly	50.8	55.7	45.8	58.9	63.4	54.2	47.4	52.4	42.4
3	Luangnamtha	42.3	50.4	34.6	55.7	59.6	52.1	34.7	45.2	24.5
4	Oudomxay	41.0	48.0	34.3	53.9	62.6	45.8	35.9	42.3	29.6
5	Bokeo	37.7	48.3	26.0	47.7	56.9	38.9	33.9	45.4	20.6
6	Luangprabang	36.6	41.2	32.1	46.5	48.0	45.2	32.3	38.3	26.2
7	Huaphanh	36.8	38.4	35.2	50.7	53.0	48.4	33.3	34.6	32.1
8	Xayabury	68.7	73.7	63.6	68.1	74.7	61.5	68.9	73.3	64.5
9	Xiengkhuang	58.5	60.0	57.0	83.5	83.7	83.2	49.8	51.7	48.0
10	Vientiane	39.6	42.7	36.5	57.5	64.3	51.6	33.8	36.4	31.3
11	Borikhamxay	33.0	36.0	30.2	30.3	33.8	27.3	36.4	38.7	34.0
12	Khammuane	30.0	33.0	27.3	42.3	42.6	42.0	25.2	29.2	21.5
13	Savannakhet	16.5	19.2	13.7	26.6	33.8	19.4	15.1	17.3	12.9
14	Saravane	23.0	25.2	20.9	58.7	58.2	59.3	18.4	20.8	16.1
15	Sekong	18.5	21.6	15.7	40.0	46.0	34.8	13.8	16.5	11.4
16	Champasack	47.1	52.4	42.2	51.2	55.6	47.3	45.0	50.8	39.6
17	Attapeu	37.5	44.7	30.9	51.1	51.3	51.0	32.4	42.3	23.1
18	Xaysomboun	36.9	42.1	31.7	53.6	60.5	47.0	31.4	36.2	26.3
	Lao PDR	40.8	45.2	36.5	53.8	58.6	49.3	34.6	39.0	30.4

In 2017, there were 604,000 thousand people whose labor was underutilized, meaning they were either underemployed, unemployed or in the potential labour force⁴ (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017). The youth labor underutilization rate is 43.2 per cent, meaning nearly half of youth do not get their needs for work met. This rate is significantly higher than the 25.8% for the whole labor force. In rural areas the situation for young people is even more difficult, with rural labor underutilization at 48.5% (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017).

Approximately 24% of rural workers work for wages – the rest work for family labor or on their own account. Wages in the sectors that employ the most rural residents – agriculture,

with considerable proportion of the population in non-market, subsistence activities.” (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017).

⁴ The potential labor force describes those not actively looking for work but otherwise available for employment, or those that could become available to work. https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/statistics-overview-and-topics/WCMS_470306/lang--en/index.htm

fishing and forestry and wholesale and retail trade – are low. Average wages are approximately 1.5 million LAK/month. For rural youth ages 20 -24 average wages are approximately 1,344,000 LAK/month. This is significantly lower than national median income 1.8 million LAK/month (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017).

An increasing number of people who do work on their own farms work for others as well. The percent of the rural population aged 15 and above that carried out their main work on their own farm as well as other work increased from 24 percent in 1998/999 to 40 percent by 2010/2011. (Santoyo Rio 2018).

Key labour market indicators, 2017. Table from National Rural Employment Strategy. Data from 2017 Labor Force Survey

Indicator	LAO PDR	RURAL
Working age population	4 758 031	3 227 961
Labour force	1 940 230	1 117 265
Employment	1 757 733	978 666
Labour force participation rate (%)	40.8	34.6
Unemployment rate (%)	9.4	12.4
Composite rate of labour underutilization (%)	25.8	33.1
Youth unemployment rate, aged 15-24 (%)	18.2	20.2
Share of wage workers in total employment (%)	32.4	24.7
Average gross monthly income, employees (Laotian Kip)	2 481 000	2 412 000
Out of labour force	2 817 801	2 110 696
Of which: Own-use production worker (subsistence)	2 455 328	1 912 995

An International Labor Organization study of ASEAN (2016) employers found only one-third of respondents agree that the skills of secondary graduates in Lao PDR match enterprise needs (ILO 2016). However, in agriculture, forestry, food processing and other rural sectors in Laos, the picture is somewhat more complicated. Gaps between workers’ skills and company demand appears to be much better matched in these sectors. In a review of 17 labor market studies, only 6 reported the need for additional skilled labour (LADLF 2017). None quantified such demand or projected those needs into the future (LADLF 2017). One study of agricultural and forestry related businesses found that the central problems for mid-scale farms and food processing companies is access to capital or credit and competition with other firms. Human resources seems to be a minor problem, with only 12.8% of farms and 4.9% of food processing companies saying a lack of skills among Lao workers is a main problem for their business (GIZ 2017). In interviews with food-processing firms, managers tend say they do not have difficulty finding workers with the required skills and education. For example, in grain milling firms a clear majority of managers believe jobs in their company require no more than a lower secondary education (GIZ 2017). Where relevant skills are in short supply are for qualified mechanics, machinery operators and veterinarians (GIZ 2017).

There are few medium sized registered commercial farms operating in Lao PDR – less than 100 by one estimate, employing some 1500 people (Santoyo Rio 2018). Most have less than 10 workers each. Existing demand for workers on mid-sized farms is presently in the low to mid hundreds, and according to farm managers, will likely increase to the high hundreds in

the next 3 -4 years (Santoyo Rio 2018). There are some 4,000 food processing firms in Laos – about half are rice milling companies, and another 25% are water bottlers. Overall, surveys of managers indicate the need for extra workforce in the food processing sector is currently low (Santoyo Rio 2018).

(II) OUTSTANDING AND EMERGING ISSUES

Commercialization and Changing Labor Dynamics among Smallholder farmers

There are many ways to create jobs for youth in rural areas Agricultural commercialization can contribute both employment in secondary sectors – processing, inputs, shipping, and others – and directly by providing opportunities to make farm livelihoods financially viable. How and if commercialization contributes to rural employment outcomes depends on how and in what way farmers interact with the market.

The Agricultural census in 2011 estimated that 33% of households were engaged in production for the market, up from 8% in 1999. The percentage of households selling some part of their production in the market increased over that period from just 35% to 71% - meaning that the vast majority of Lao farmers are engaged with the market in one form or another (MAF 2014). This development has brought a widespread reduction in poverty (Epprecht et al. 2018).

The Lao Statistics Bureau recently measured income growth across the country. Rural incomes are predominantly increasing with the rise in commercialization, but the picture is mixed. For example in Oudomxay, which has an average level of commercialization for the country (Epprecht et al. 2018), 34% of households reported increased incomes while 26% reported being worse off (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017). However, in four predominantly rural provinces – Attepeu, Champasack, Sekong, and Bokeo, incomes have *fallen* for more households than it improved (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017).

As commercialization proceeds, there are clear winners and losers among households. A 2009 study of over 2000 households in 20 villages found that between 5 – 8 % of workers were full time casual labor, owning very little land of their own (World Bank 2009). The growth in landless workers in the countryside is exerting a downward pressure on wages (World Bank 2009). In that sample, up to 56% of the rural workforce wished to work more or in a different capacity than was available (World Bank 2009).

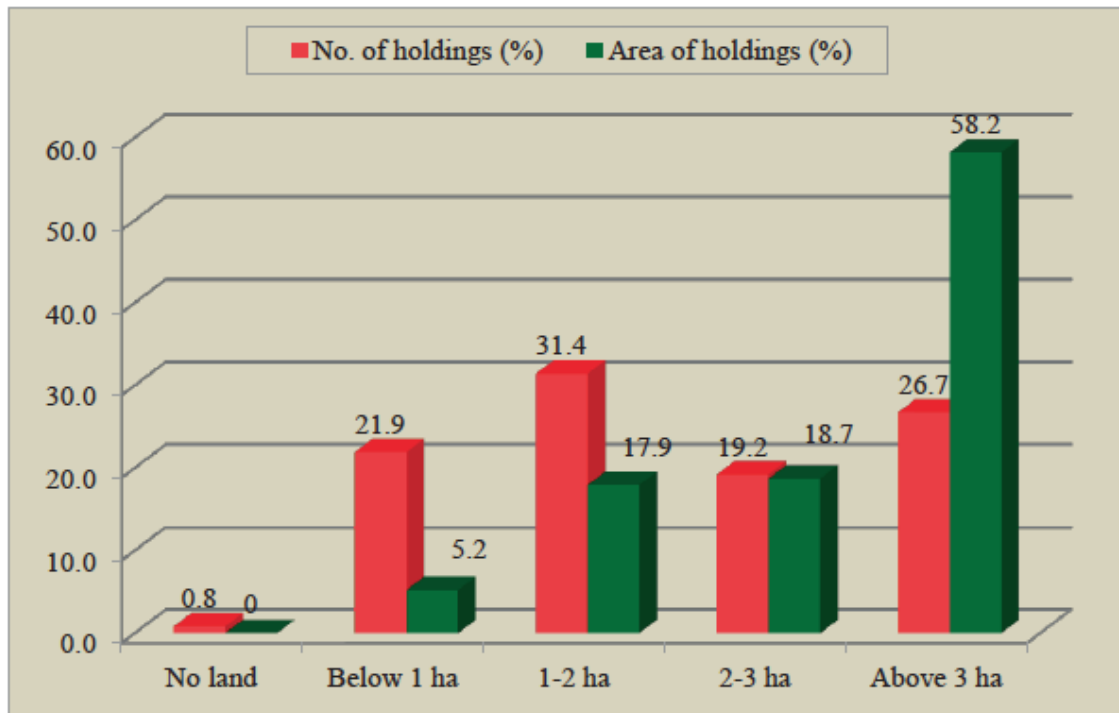
The number of smallholder farmers in Laos is still growing. The most recent agricultural census counted 1.1 million farm households, an increase of 17% since 1999. In most provinces 80% percent of households continue to engage in agricultural activity, even as commercialization brings more cash to rural areas. While the number of non-farm households is growing across the country, this is relatively concentrated in Vientiane Capital and other urban areas in Savannakhet and Champasack. In half of provinces, the number of non-farm households grew by only 2% or less, meaning that non-farm jobs remain largely out of reach in much of the country. Agriculture still remains an important part of livelihoods even for urban residents – 47% of urban households are also engaged in farming activities in some form (MAF 2014).

As farms commercialized over the last 15 years, a rural labor market emerged. 45% of farm households now employ outside labor (MAF 2014). Farmers also increasingly have off-farm jobs to support what are still predominantly agrarian lives. 40% of farmers have a secondary job (MAF 2014).

Farms in Lao PDR are also getting larger – a dynamic which is unique in the Mekong region. Most farms in the region including Thailand, Vietnam and China are still very small, landownership is fragmented, and farms are not growing in size. In Laos average farm size increased by almost 50% from 1.6 to 2.4 hectares between 1999 – 2011 (MAF 2014). However, this increase in Laos is likely due to expanding agricultural land area – the land under crops grew 66% between 1999 – 2011 (MAF 2014). Most larger farms are not irrigated (MAF 2014). Previous census data on land area did not include long term fallows in the calculation of average farm size. As agricultural commercializes, many farmers have turned former fallow upland rice fields into maize, rubber, cassava and other commercial crops, which represents an intensification of agricultural land use in many cases rather than an absolute increase in farm size.

Still most farmers are only able to access small plots of land. In the Central region for example, 25% of households are farming one hectare or less. Nationwide, 54% of households have access to 2 hectares or less land (MAF 2014). These farmers – now near half of farmers in Lao PDR, will have difficulty passing on land for their children to farm without opening new farmland in forest lands. Options for commercialization on small land holdings are limited to crops that have a higher value or value-added potential. Extensive commodity production is unlikely to provide decent livelihoods and employment for the majority of farmers on small land areas over time without incorporating some kind of off-farm labor or remittances.

Figure 4.1: Distribution of farm landholdings and area in Lao PDR 2010/11



Demand for employment in rural areas is growing as subsistence livelihoods in many places no longer yield enough to support households needs. Non-timber forest product collection has been on the decline for decades; people increasingly substitute products they used to collect with products from the market (World Bank 2009). Access to forest lands in many places has been reduced. Demographic pressures due to village consolidation in many places has left less land for long fallow rotations and which reduced yields in upland crop production. At the same time, growing access to education, health care, and modern conveniences like motorbikes have increased the need for cash in rural areas beyond what traditional livelihoods can provide. The result is an increase in the necessity for wage labor and commercial crop production opportunities.

Smallholder commercialization has had mixed effects. Overall, commercialization has played a major role in reducing poverty, but those gains are uneven and in many cases, unstable. For example, an analysis of 44 case studies of smallholder maize development found rising incomes and prosperity in some places and greater poverty in others, with farmers' vulnerability to global market prices, weather and soil erosion on the rise everywhere (Castella 2017). The history of the maize boom in Northern Laos is illustrative of these dynamics. In 2000 – 2001 the Charoen Pokphand (CP) Group began buying maize from Lao smallholders in Sayabouli Province for its animal feed processing facilities in Thailand. The first few years of maize production in Sayabouli saw a rapid reduction in poverty (Lestrellin 2015). Agricultural areas expanded into what had been forest and fallow land, often in steep areas (Lestrellin 2015). Between 2007 and 2013 yields decreased, slopes became heavily eroded, and the available land for agricultural expansion was largely already cleared. Poverty began to rise again. Of 21 villages that participated in a survey in 2007 and again in 2013, poverty increased in 2/3 of them (Lestrellin 2015). For example, in Houyaped and Kensao

villages, poverty increased 4% every year; by 2013, 25-30% of households were again living below the poverty line (Lestrellin 2015). In many of the surveyed villages where incomes increased, the growth in income was due to remittances from family members who migrated to work in Thailand (Lestrellin 2015).

In Houaphanh Province, maize production caused an expansion of agricultural area and a growth in shifting cultivation for upland rice. (Vongvisouk et al. 2014). In this area, land availability was not constrained as in Sayabouli, but there were only a few traders with whom to negotiate prices, and capital to build maize roads was limited. In a survey of Houaphanh maize producers in 2013, only 18% of farmers said their incomes were higher than they had been ten years prior, before the start of the maize boom (Vongvisouk et al. 2014). Household income in that area declined 46% over ten-years, and annual expenses increased 66% (Vongvisouk et al. 2014). In this case maize commercialization brought neither jobs nor prosperity.

In a survey of eight villages in Xieng Khouang, incomes increased due to maize cash cropping, but erosion, water shortage and rice insufficiency were common problems, and opportunities for off-farm income were limited. Overall the effects of maize on poverty was ambiguous (Castella and Nanthavong 2014). Another study of maize producers in neighboring Luang Prabang province found that poverty decreased, but vulnerability to low prices, erosion and poor weather conditions increased as communities reduced the diversity of their livelihoods (Castella et al. 2012). In Kham District, many farmers who did well with commercial maize growing invested in building irrigated paddy fields, which yields a better return on land and labor than maize (Castella 2017).

Contract farming has had a similarly mixed track record in terms of both creating jobs and creating rural development more broadly (NERI 2014; NAFRI 2016) A study of four contract farming schemes – banana in the north, cassava in Vientiane and Savannakhet provinces, and maize in Salavan - showed very limited contributions to rural employment other than standard crop production and transport work (NERI 2014). Farmers contracted to produce cassava ended up with reduced incomes than those who had alternative livelihoods due to the scheme; maize farmers had modest income growth of approximately 1,100,000 LAK per year on average, and banana contract farmers improved their incomes dramatically (NERI 2014). In cases that were not successful, a lack of domestic agribusiness led to rent-seeking behavior by firms in a near monopoly position - farmers had no other choice of who to sell to. Without infrastructure for storage, easier export procedures and enforcement of contract terms, Lao farmers are missing out on the opportunities presented by contract farming arrangements (NAFRI 2016).

A recent NAFRI study of vegetable, rice and pig contract farming identified several constraints to more successful contract farming, including that no specific ministry was assigned to manage contract farming. Overall most contract farming operations abide by government policy – substantial involvement of the government to protect farmers from exploitation and strong independent farmers' organizations are needed to make sure that small farmers benefit from such arrangements (NERI 2014; NAFRI 2016).

Recommendations

We can no longer talk about a typical farmer or farming family; there are different types of employment for rural people, and they need different types of support. Some farmers with greater land areas will be able to successfully navigate commodity production as a main livelihood strategy. Others will not be able to do so. Contract farming schemes need active intervention from government to ensure contract terms are not exploitative (NERI 2014; NAFRI 2016).

Contract farming for low-value goods and extensive commodity production have produced limited employment. Yields are declining as farmers mine natural soil fertility for such extensive cultivation. Diversified production of higher-value products could reverse this trend. Markets for such goods exist, but linkages to those markets have yet to be built. A lack of domestic agribusiness firms; small and medium enterprises; storage, processing and transport infrastructure; and market linkages limit the growth of high value products and the secondary jobs that could come with their production. These investments require patient capital to create markets for Lao products.

EMERGING ISSUES: PLANTATION LABOR

Large scale plantations have expanded over the last 20 years, bringing investment and jobs to rural areas. A recent assessment of the quality of those investments documented the impacts of 296 large scale land deals in detail (Hett et al. 2019). These deals created nearly 40,000 new rural jobs. About a third of those jobs were only available while projects were in the start-up phase. Most jobs (85%), were seasonal and casual. Only 5% offered salaries or fixed-term contracts. Those year-round jobs often went to foreign workers (Hett et al. 2019). In the sample of investments, 75.1% of jobs were in tree plantations, and 19.6% were in agriculture. In a study of thirteen villages in Southern Laos near large scale plantations, local casual workers were employed an average of about 20 days in the dry season and 30 days in the wet season (Molina 2011).

Wages on foreign investment plantations and agriculture projects are generally low. Average wages across surveyed tree plantations for security guards, weeding, land preparation, planting, spraying agrochemicals were all below the national minimum of 45,000 kip per day (Hett et al. 2019). Agriculture projects were broadly the same, with the exception of spraying agrochemicals, which paid more than twice as much as land clearing or digging on average.

Still, in many cases these wages can still be attractive. Hmong migrant workers to banana plantations in Bokeo for example, are able to send \$689 USD / year to their families on average – comparable to what international migrants are able to send home from Thailand (Ling 2015). For couples contracted for a whole season, net incomes on banana plantations run between 85,000 and 100,000 THB (Ling 2015). Casual laborers are paid 200-300THB per day. These wages are broadly in line with minimum wage laws. For migrant families, those left behind in their home villages are often too old or too young to work (Ling 2015). In a survey of banana plantation workers in Bokeo – of those surveyed 39% reported they did not have sufficient land for agriculture in their home villages, which prompted them to migrate.

There is evidence that banana companies in Bokeo have no difficulty attracting workers (Ling and Xiong 2017).

However, some safeguards are needed to ensure the quality of investments for workers. Issues including delayed payment, wage theft, and violations of payment terms are common complaints across the sector (Hett et al. 2019). Such issues were reported in 33% of all villages affected by land deals (Hett et al. 2019). There is strong evidence that the conditions of labor and can be more important for local workers than issues around access to land (Baird 2011). Wages also differ by plantation and crop. Some crops are subject to boom and bust cycles which can put downward pressure on wages. Three years after the global rubber price began to decline, rubber tappers in Southern Laos in 2014 earned between 500,000 and 1,000,000 kip on average, which workers deemed insufficient to support a decent livelihood (Baird and Fox 2015). In recent years, rubber plantations in Northern Laos have stopped harvesting all together, waiting for prices to recover (Vongvisouk and Dwyer 2016).

In a national survey of plantations, the vast majority provided some benefits or employed at least one person from local villages – with agriculture plantations providing some benefits to 73% of sampled villages, and tree plantations providing benefits to 65%. Some 11% of sampled companies did not employ any local community members. The majority of those companies said that locals did not want to work for the company because they had better employment opportunities within their own communities (Hett et al. 2019). Only four companies said they did not hire locally due to lack of skilled labor.

Lao government regulations restrict foreign investors from hiring foreign labor. No more than 15% of total required physical labour and 25% of management or technical staff should be from outside Lao PDR. However, plantation companies routinely hire more foreign laborers than the law permits. 41% of surveyed companies hired more foreign migrants than the law permits, with more foreign labor on tree plantations than in crop production (Hett et al. 2019). Foreign laborers do approximately 30% of harvest labor for tree plantations (Hett et al. 2019). In some places, these numbers can be even higher – one study reported 93% of all employees in a large scale rubber plantation were Vietnamese (Baird 2019). Migrant laborers from Vietnam also get involved with supplemental employment locally, such as working in or owning restaurants, repair shops, or raising poultry (Baird 2019). Pay rates for labor in the rubber sector can be up to twice as high as in Vietnam, making such jobs attractive to Vietnamese migrants (Baird 2019). Others reported that Lao citizens were unwilling to work consistently, making foreign workers preferable (Baird 2019) In some cases plantation jobs are not attractive to Lao workers. 8% of companies told researchers that locals did not want to take jobs with plantations because they were not desirable (Hett et al. 2019). In other places, there are significantly more workers who want jobs with plantations than are being employed full time (Baird 2011).

The wages gained from plantation work may not be enough to replace the products from gardens, forests, wildlife and NTFPs lost to concessions. Where this happens, plantations may drive more demand for jobs than they are able to create. In 38% of land deals nationally, NTFP collection decreased by more than 50% (Hett et al. 2019). Food availability decreased in 25% of surveyed villages near a large scale land deal, largely due to the loss of common and forest lands and NTFP collection (Hett et al. 2019). In other places the impact of plantation development on nutrition is mixed – with banana plantations in Bokeo reportedly improving nutrition for some children, and worsening it for others (Ling 2015). Loss of land can make it difficult to maintain subsistence and own-account production, compelling households to take

up labor on plantations if available or migrate for work opportunities (Baird 2011). For example, in a survey of 189 families in villages affected by rubber plantations, the number of families who were able to produce enough rice to last the year fell from 80% to 20% in just four years (Baird 2010).

In plantation areas in Bokeo, less than 1/3 of the children of migrant workers are attending primary school (Ling 2015). Still, in these camps, the majority of workers told researchers they were satisfied, willing to put up with difficult living situations and for the opportunity to earn cash (Ling 2015). These workers were predominantly poor ethnic minorities with limited land in their home villages (Ling 2015).

Recommendations

Plantation jobs can be an important source of employment in rural areas – but without effort to ensure the quality of foreign investments, these jobs may not pay enough to be attractive or improve rural poverty. Labor rights, as described in the Lao labour law, are not fully realized in many cases (Ling and Xiong 2017). These jobs may be more attractive if local government had the mandate and resources to enforce labor laws, such as minimum wages and protections against wage theft. Standardized contracts that protect workers may reduce conflict between companies and labourers. Hiring more foreign workers than the law allows may be necessary in some cases. It may also put downward pressure on wages and working conditions, and disincentivize plantation managers from training and retaining Lao nationals for higher paying more technical positions.

School attendance for the children of migrant workers is generally low. Outreach to migrant parents about schooling options and schools near migrant worker camps could help increase education rates in plantation workers' households, and increase the earnings of the next generation (Ling and Xiong 2017).

EMERGING ISSUES: MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES IN RURAL AREAS

While migration is generally associated with “a gradual transformation of the rural labor market away from farming to nonfarm wage and overseas work” (Estudillo, Mano, and Seng-Arloun 2013: 1007), it does not always work in such a simple way. In Thailand for example, families are increasingly holding on to agricultural land and livelihoods which migration helps to support, rather than leaving farming (Rigg et al. 2018). Similar processes are at work in rural China, where households farming on less than one hectare of land have improved yields and incomes in part by treating migrant labor as a part of a diversified farming strategy (van der Ploeg and Ye 2016). These regional dynamics seem to be developing in Laos as well, with migration increasingly forming part of rural livelihood strategies.

Migration, both internal and cross-border, forms an important livelihood strategy for a growing number of households in Lao PDR, making it a critical consideration in national development planning. The majority of migrants are young, poor, and under-educated. Just over 1.3 million people, around 18% of the Lao PDR population, are international migrants, with an estimated 923,000 Lao citizens in Thailand (UNDESA 2017), though these estimates are difficult to verify. Another frequently cited estimate is that at any given time there are

approximately 300,000 Lao PDR migrants in Thailand (Southichack 2014; IOM 2016), representing about 8% of the Lao PDR labor force.⁵ Most are low-skilled workers with employment concentrated in industries such as agriculture, construction and domestic work. Given the prevalence of informal/illegal migration from Lao PDR to Thailand the actual number could be higher (Smith, Lim, and Harkins, 2019; Southichack 2014). These remittances are increasingly important for livelihoods, especially in the south. An estimated 11.5% of the adult population received international remittances in 2014: varying from nearly 20% in the south to only 2.7% in the north. Approximately 2/3 those who were presently living abroad sent cash or goods home in the last year (Lao Statistics Bureau 2017). Current projections indicate a steady demand for migrant labor in Thailand for the foreseeable future at the same time that social networks facilitating migration from Lao PDR into Thailand continue to be strengthened (IOM 2016; Phouxay 2010). In anticipation of ongoing migration from Lao PDR into Thailand, there has been considerable government cooperation in recent years, although further work remains to ensure protections for migrants.

Recent census data on internal migration indicates that as of 2015, roughly 17% of the population were considered ‘lifetime migrants’ meaning their current district of residence was different from their district of birth, while 7.4% of the population aged 10 and above were ‘recent migrants’ meaning they had migrated within the past 10 years (Lao Statistics Bureau 2015). The main destination for internal rural-urban migrants is Vientiane Capital, as well as the surrounding Vientiane Province, where mainly young people come in search of work, particularly in the garment, commerce and tourism industries, as well as opportunities for secondary education (Phouxay 2010). Internal migration is enabling some to leverage new opportunities toward better quality of life for themselves and their families, albeit not without major challenges. For many, the experience is mixed. A majority of rural-urban migrants into the Vientiane Capital area come from northern upland provinces such as Huaphanh, Xiengkhuang, Luanprabang and Phonsaly, while those from the south are more likely to migrate across the Thai border (Phouxay, Malmberg, and Tollefsen 2010)(Phouxay, Malmberg, and Tollefsen 201) see also Lao Statistics Bureau 2015).

Remittances sent home by migrants are serving as a lifeline for many households, and for some, providing new opportunities for commercial development and expansion. The IOM estimates that remittances from Lao PDR migrants in Thailand alone could account for as much as 25%-50% of rural incomes (IOM 2016). Other potential benefits of migration include the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, as well as new life experiences and increased empowerment (IOM 2016; Phouxay, Malmberg, and Tollefsen 2010). On the flip side, migrants are disproportionately exposed to “a range of decent work deficits, including occupational injury or illness, weak representation, and threats and extortion by police and other authorities” (Government of Lao PDR and International Labor Organization (ILO) 2017) Furthermore, young female migrants are especially vulnerable and are the most common victims of human trafficking (Phetsiriseng 2007). The World Bank estimates total remittances into Lao PDR by international migrants to be valued at 123 million USD as of 2017, up from 116 million USD in 2016 (World Bank 2018). This accounts for approximately .8% of GDP, although the true economic contribution of international remittances could be significantly higher.

⁵ The Lao PDR labor force stands at an estimated 3,681,650 people as of 2018, according to World Bank data (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sl.tlf.totl.in>)

Migration is neither necessarily a net positive or a net negative in terms of rural employment – rather it depends on how, where and under what conditions migration is integrated into rural livelihoods. Strategizing toward a situation in which migration is safe, dignified and contributes to rural development however, requires a fuller picture of the intricacies of migration – including its drivers, forms and impacts – as well as how these intersect with other dynamics of rural transformation (Rigg 2007).

Voluntary migration is much more likely to generate wealth and improve livelihoods than involuntary movements Rigg (2007: 174). For poor families facing precarious existences, there is often a blurry line between “choice” and “necessity,” in which individuals may feel compelled to migrate for matters of survival (Manivong 2014). Those in such circumstances are more likely to migrate through informal and/or illegal channels, rendering them more vulnerable to scenarios of forced work, including in “dangerous, difficult and dirty (DDD)” jobs, “without protection and against their will,” as is the case for an estimated 5.8 % of Lao migrants in Thailand (MPI and UNDP 2009:161). There have been several documented cases in Laos where land access is affected by other developments and the line between voluntary and involuntary migration was further blurred (Barney 2009; 2012). This underscores the importance of strengthened social protection in rural areas coupled with protection of communities’ resource rights to ensure migration remains voluntary.

Rural households in Lao PDR and the broader region are increasingly diversifying their livelihood strategies through a combination of on-farm, off-farm and non-farm activities, in which migration forms an important option (see for example: Manivong, Cramb, and Newby 2014; Kelly 2011; Rigg 2006; Bouahom, Douangsavanh, and Rigg 2004).. While mainstream discourse tends to pit subsistence agriculture and rural livelihood diversification as oppositional, a closer look paints a much more nuanced picture. Bouahom et al. (2004: 609) have found that “sustaining subsistence agricultural production is becoming predicated on a certain level of engagement with the non-farm market economy” while a study by one of the authors (Manivong 2014) pointed to the potential of subsistence rice production to serve as a platform on which to construct a diversified livelihood strategy involving the use of family labor both within and beyond the farm. The latter study, which took place in the lowlands of Champasak Province in the south, noted a trend among households to first ensure that there is enough labor to meet their subsistence requirements for rice and then to release additional labor to earn higher returns away from the village. Such a diversification strategy has the potential to support households in meeting their food security needs while allowing remittances to be used for other purposes, including investment in farm and non-farm enterprises, as seen in a number of cases.

Among the determining factors for whether households opt for one or more of their members to migrate are amount of available labor in the household in relation to the labor required for meeting subsistence needs as well as the availability of income-generating off-farm opportunities in the vicinity (Manivong 2014). When faced with surplus labor in the household and limited viable income-generating opportunities locally, migration is a likely option. Within households, as mentioned above, youth aged 15-25 are those most likely to migrate (if one has not migrated by the age of 25, there is a lower chance that they ever will (UNESCO et al. 2018). The widespread phenomenon of youth migration in Lao PDR has

implications both for household dynamics and local labor dynamics. Households increasingly consist of the elderly and very young, with implications for how care work is managed across generations (Huijsmans 2013). Simultaneously, an outmigration of youth from the countryside is contributing to a labor deficit in many rural areas (UNESCO et al. 2018), with both the average age of farmers and rural wage rates on the rise (Manivong 2014). On the flip side, migration also has the potential to at least partly mitigate labor deficits, for instance, through the use of remittances to support agricultural intensification, including through purchase of inputs and machinery such as 2-wheeled tractors (Manivong 2014). The question of supporting farming households to adapt to decreased labor availability through efficient appropriate technologies is an area ripe for potential policy intervention.

While seasonal rural-rural migration has long formed a survival strategy among the rural poor, particularly during the dry season among farming households that do not have irrigation, more households are adding rural-urban as well as international migration to their livelihood strategies (UNESCO et al 2018; Manivong 2014; Phouxay 2010). These latter forms of migration tend to be longer-term, given the location of work sites and nature of the work. Furthermore, they are interconnected, with rural-urban migration believed to be placing additional strains on the existing job market, thus encouraging international migration (UNESCO et al. 2018). The majority of cross-border migration into Thailand is irregular, dependent upon informal and illegal channels (MPI and UNDP 2009; Estudillo et al. 2013).

For many, migration is part of a survival strategy, although concerns of survival may be mixed with other motivations, such as a desire for greater independence, the appeal of urban lifestyles, etc., and those motivated primarily by survival may also end up deriving additional benefits from migration (Bouahom et al. 2004; Manivong 2014). Others are drawn to migration as a strategy for the consolidation or accumulation of capital, although these represent a much smaller proportion of migrants. For instance, in the latest census, 25.7% of internal migrants surveyed listed searching for employment or the transfer of one's workplace as the primary motivation for migration, while only 2.3% listed business opportunities as the primary motivation (Lao Statistics Bureau 2015). Similarly, an ILO study of Lao PDR households receiving international remittances found that 32% of remittances went to daily expenses, followed by 19% for housing/home improvements and only 7% for investment in agriculture or business (Deelen and Vasuprasat 2010), although the use of remittances to cover basic living costs may free up other household funds for other uses (Barney 2012). The question of how migration might be more effectively oriented toward support for productive forms of investment among rural households thus merits much greater attention.

Migrants come from all income categories, although socio-economic status can shape vastly different migration experiences. Regarding internal migration, those in the middle- and upper- income brackets tend to migrate to Vientiane and other urban hubs for access to secondary and higher education opportunities, while those of lower incomes, particularly females, tend to migrate for work in low-paying jobs, such as in the garment industry, with some accessing limited education opportunities as possible (Phouxay, Malmberg, and Tollefsen 2010; Phouxay 2010). Even Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs, which in theory are intended to be more widely accessible, in reality remained skewed to those of more elite backgrounds (Chea and Huijsmans 2018). Regarding

international migration, a majority of Lao PDR migrants into Thailand come from the bottom fifth of the income bracket (Southichack 2014). The fact that the poor make up the majority of Lao PDR migrants into Thailand means that it is mainly poor households that are benefitting from remittances (Southichack 2014). Manivong (2014) notes that remittances can help poor families to reduce capital constraints, while Phouxay (2010: 57) cautions that “emigrants are seldom from the poorest of the poor households” making it important to be attentive to the ways in which migration may variously widen or narrow wealth disparities.

Gender is an absolutely essential piece of the broader conversation on migration in Lao PDR and beyond. In numbers alone, women are an estimated 59.3% of internal migrants (Lao Statistics Bureau 2015), and while they are believed to comprise just under half of Lao migrants abroad (UNDESA 2017), they are believed to comprise over half of Lao migrants in Thailand (Phetsiriseng 2007). The remittances from female migrants are of critical economic importance at the same time that they are challenging traditional gender norms (UNESCO et al. 2018; Phetsiriseng 2007). At the same time, women migrants are subject to numerous challenges. They tend to work longer hours for lower pay under worse conditions than their male counterparts and are more likely to receive arbitrary pay cuts and other forms of workplace abuse and exploitation, as well as facing discrimination and stigmatization (Phouxay and Tollefsen 2011; Phetsiriseng 2007). A main contributing factor is the unequal footing upon which female migrants start off due to disparities in access to education and training opportunities between girls and boys (Phetsiriseng 2007; Estudillo et al. 2013). Another issue is the lack of protection for female migrants due to the nature of their work. For instance, domestic work is not acknowledged as employment and thus not regulated and protected under the joint agreements between the Lao PDR and Thai governments, while it is known to be *the top form of work* by female Lao PDR migrants in Thailand, rendering them invisible under the law (Grimwade and Neumann 2019). Supporting female migrants thus involves both enhancing educational opportunities and other forms of support for girls to foster more equitable gender relations while recognizing and protecting the rights of female migrants under the law.

Lao PDR migrants are overwhelmingly young, with more than 70% of migrants aged between 15 and 25 years (Huijsmans 2013). Furthermore, among the migrating population, 21.5% are under 18 years old (Phetsiriseng 2007), technically placing them into the category of “children.” This is a delicate matter in that it is essential to ensure adequate protection of migrant children, including protections against child trafficking and other forms of exploitation, while also recognizing the agency of young migrants (Huijsmans 2011). As Barney (2012: 59) states, “a singular interpretation of youth migration as tied to coercion and child trafficking does not seem to account for the continued appeal of working abroad for young people from the Lao countryside.” As migration of young people is a reality, well-intentioned policies such as those requiring migrants to be 18 years old or above may in fact have the adverse effect of encouraging young people to migrate through more informal/illegal, and thus less protected, channels. For many rural youth, “labour migration often constitutes the most realistic route towards acquiring a skill that cannot be obtained through everyday work in the village.” (Chea and Huijsmans 2018: 43). However, on-the-job training alone is not necessarily sufficient for mastering vocational skills and point to the importance of often-overlooked informal and privately organized trainings and apprenticeships (Chea and Huijsmans 2018).

Research indicates that the choice of whether or not to migrate is often taken at the household level. The above-mentioned study in Champasak Province, for instance, suggests that “migration to Thailand is part of a conscious livelihood strategy in which households consider the available labour to maintain rice production and the use of labour in alternative livelihood activities (on-farm, off-farm, and non-farm) at home” (Manivong 2014: 212). At the same time, decisions taken at the household level are the products of complex power relations negotiated among individuals within a given household. Huijsmans (2012: 9) stresses the importance of “appreciating intra-household relations as gendered relations of relative seniority which are constantly made and remade, among other things, by young dependents through migration and staying.” A number of studies have looked in particular at the migration of young females, in which exertion of individual agency is balanced with gender norms and familial expectations, with cases both of females opting to migrate against the wishes of their families (who may nevertheless later come to accept and even rely upon such) and, conversely, being urged by their families to migrate out of necessity (Huijsmans 2013; Sisaleumsak 2012; Phouxay and Tollefsen 2011). As migration by young females continues to grow, the norms and power relations involved can be expected to shift over time.

As mentioned above, the World Bank estimates international remittances into Lao PDR by migrants abroad to be valued at 123 million USD as of 2017. However, Southichack (2014) has argued this to be a significant underestimate that is in turn based on an underestimate of Lao PDR migrants in Thailand due to an overreliance upon officially reported numbers. According to Southichack, remittances from Lao PDR migrants to Thailand account for an estimated 48%-59% of total remittances into Laos. Combining multiple data sets, he argues that a more realistic estimate of total remittances into Laos, as of 2013, was 204 million - 258 million USD, accounting for 1.9% - 2.5% of the country's GDP. Reliable figures on internal remittances from rural-urban migrants in Lao PDR are harder to come by, but several studies emphasize that internal migrants often struggle to meet remittance goals due to the low pay of the garment industry and other work that they are most commonly engaged in (UNESCO et al. 2018; Sisaleumsak 2012). The key issue regarding remittances, as stressed by numerous studies, is how they are used by recipient households and the extent to which they are able to be channeled toward productive investments in support of improved livelihoods.

Migrants commonly retain strong ties with their households and places of origin over the course of the migration experience, with those away often considered part of the household despite their physical absence (Huijsmans 2012). One of the ways in which ties are retained, along with periodic visits home as possible, is through remittances. An ILO study among Lao PDR migrants in Thailand found that 95% were sending remittances home and that the highest rates of remittances were being sent by those who had been in the country between 3-10 years (Deelan and Vasuprasat 2010). This indicates that it takes some time for migrants to become sufficiently established to send a maximum amount of remittances home but also that for those who stay longer than 10 years, their ties to their original households may lessen over time. Similar trends of lower remittance rates can be seen among migrants who have resettled in other countries as refugees without intention of returning home (Southichack 2014). A critical issue in terms of garnering benefits from migration for rural communities is the issue of return, through which returned migrants can contribute to ‘brain

gain' and reinvest their resources earned abroad in their home communities. In an IOM survey of Lao PDR migrants in Thailand, approximately half responded that they were not considering return to Lao PDR, while a majority of those who were considering returning had no particular time frame in mind (IOM 2016). Tellingly, nearly half of the respondents in the same survey expressed that the increase in minimum wage in Lao PDR would impact their decision to return home "very much or to a certain extent" (IOM 2016: 49), indicating that economic prospects back home are an important consideration in migrants' decisions on whether/when to return home and that "there is considerable potential for the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic to attract back large proportions of its migrant workers if the right policies are in place to ensure access to jobs, livelihoods, decent wages, and a reasonable standard of living upon return" (IOM 2016: 10).

Recommendations

If migration is acknowledged as a reality for the foreseeable future, key questions/concerns become: a) how to ensure that it's done by choice and not necessity; b) how to set prospective migrants up to derive maximum benefits from their migration experiences; c) how to facilitate safe migration; d) how to support the channeling of remittances into productive investments; and e) how to incentivize return of migrants ('brain gain' vs. 'brain drain'). These points largely boil down to the fundamental question of how can the reality of migration be harnessed in support of sustainable rural development as opposed to running counter to it.

The first point, on migration being an option as opposed to necessity, goes back to the critical issues of expanding social protection in rural areas (as well as urban areas that are receiving an influx of migrants), in accordance with national priorities (Government of Lao PDR and ILO 2017); protecting communities' resource rights and access; and fostering local economic development.

The second point, on setting prospective migrants up to derive maximum benefits from their migration experience, involves a focus on education. Of critical necessity is working to reduce disparities in educational access between males and females, as mentioned above. Also important, is recognizing the importance of less formal forms of education coupled with on-the-job training, including that gained through migration, for many young people in Lao PDR (Chea and Huijsmans 2018). This points to the potential for educational components to be intentionally built into the migration experience, in cooperation with host governments and employers. This also involves increasing domestic training opportunities that provide prospective migrants with skills to go into more lucrative trades. Additional areas of potential include a) financial literacy trainings for prospective migrants coupled with access to bank accounts for migrants and their families that facilitate both safe transfer of remittances and saving of earnings and remittances and b) trainings for migrants to understand their protections under the law (coupled, necessarily, with progressive efforts toward greater protection of migrants under the law).

The third point, on facilitating safer migration, involves implementing existing protections for both domestic and international migrants, as well as expanding existing protections where there are gaps, such as the need for full recognition and enforcement of the rights of Lao PDR

domestic workers in Thailand. There are several documents that already clearly spell out some important next steps in these areas, including, on the domestic front, *Decent Work Country Program for Lao PDR 2017-2021* (Government of Lao PDR and ILO 2017) (see summary of priorities pp. 16-18), and, in terms of protections needed for Lao PDR (and other) migrants in Thailand, *Thailand Migration Report 2019* (Harkins 2019: see, in particular, recommendations listed in conclusion, pp. 193-195, as well as recommendations at the end of chapters).

On last two points, of supporting the channeling of remittances into productive investments and on the issue of return of migrants, Deelen and Vasuprasat (2010: iii) make the key point that: “Enhancing migrant workers’ capacity to accumulate wealth, send remittances through reliable channels, access financial services, understand investment alternatives and reintegrate into the world of work at home is crucial for ensuring the full development impact of migration. It also will help reduce the need for re-migration.” Their report includes key proposals in each of these areas, complemented with case studies of best practices, including, critically, in the area of “improved delivery of business-development services, both to women and men. These services can include business training, marketing support and assistance in the creation and strengthening of business groups and associations. Improved agricultural and livestock extension services also would allow remittance-recipient families to secure a better future stream of income” (Deelen and Vasuprasat: 32). The gender dimension of these proposals is particularly key, as women account for more than half of newly registered SMEs in Southeast Asia, with considerable potential for Lao PDR to grow in this area (Government of Lao PDR and ILO 2017). Additional examples of productive investment of remittances can be found in the studies of Manivong (2014) and Barney (2009: 155). Finally, the critical issue of return of migrants, addressed in part by Deelen and Vasuprasat (2010), is the focus of Chapter 5 of the IOM (2016) report *Assessing Potential Changes in the Migration Patterns of Laotian Migrants and their Impacts on Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic*.

EMERGING ISSUES: RURAL SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Small and medium enterprises have grown dramatically in the last ten years. The number of registered businesses in Laos doubled between 2008 and 2018 (Enterprise Management and Registration Department 2019). About half of domestic enterprises are registered in Vientiane Capital or Vientiane Province. Another 15% are registered in Luang Prabang and Champasack. Rural provinces have relatively few registered domestic enterprises in comparison. In 2018 for example, Attepeu had just 96 registrations; Oudomxay had 285. Cooperative establishment is proceeding slowly, with 12 cooperative enterprises registered in 2018.⁶

The best available data indicates some 470,000 people work in the Small and Medium Enterprise sector as a whole, meaning businesses with less than 100 employees. SME employment is spread relatively evenly throughout the country – the portion of the total labor force and the portion of the country’s SME workers in a given province are closely

⁶ See national Statistics from the Enterprise Management and Registration Department available at <http://www.erm.gov.la/index.php/en/statistics>

matched. The very small business sector is an important, but often overlooked source of employment. Over half of SME workers – some 276,000 people – are employed at businesses with less than five employees. Small village level business in and small businesses in remote areas were not counted in this estimate, meaning that this is likely a significant underestimate.⁷

SME Labor Force by Province and Enterprise Size: Source SME Promotion and Lao Statistics Bureau

Province	Small and Medium Enterprise Size					Total SME Labor Force	% of all SME workers	% of total Lao labor force
	Less than 5 employees	5 - 9 employees	10 - 99 employees	Over 100 employees	Total			
1 Vientiane Capital	73,509	26,076	49,626	49,507	198,718	149,211	31.6%	14.0%
North	68,434	17,563	22,593	11,440	120,030	108,590	23.0%	43.0%
2 Phongsaly	3,690	722	1,249	-	5,661	5,661	1.2%	2.6%
3 Luangnamtha	4,839	1,191	2,228	168	8,426	8,258	1.7%	2.7%
4 Oudomxay	8,508	1,453	2,278	5,008	17,247	12,239	2.6%	4.5%
5 Bokeo	5,103	1,759	3,102	3,228	13,192	9,964	2.1%	2.5%
6 Luangprabang	21,490	5,861	6,399	1,298	35,048	33,750	7.1%	6.2%
7 Huaphan	5,269	1,230	2,056	463	9,018	8,555	1.8%	4.1%
8 Xayyaboury	19,535	5,347	5,281	1,275	31,438	30,163	6.4%	6.4%
Central	90,470	23,037	30,298	26,090	169,895	143,805	30.4%	35.8%
9 Xiengkhuang	9,263	2,123	3,203	503	15,092	14,589	3.1%	3.7%
10 Vientiane	25,253	5,224	7,420	6,403	44,300	37,897	8.0%	6.8%
11 Bolikhamxay	10,514	2,441	4,555	1,331	18,841	17,510	3.7%	4.6%
12 Khammuan	13,794	3,946	5,233	6,996	29,969	22,973	4.9%	6.1%
13 Savannakhet	31,646	9,303	9,887	10,857	61,693	50,836	10.8%	14.6%
South	44,098	12,119	14,706	13,909	84,832	70,923	15.0%	19.8%
14 Saravanh	7,530	1,959	1,894	862	12,245	11,383	2.4%	5.1%
15 Xekong	3,238	675	1,033	1,019	5,965	4,946	1.0%	1.5%
16 Champasack	25,882	7,398	8,857	12,028	54,165	42,137	8.9%	11.2%
17 Attapeu	7,448	2,087	2,922	-	12,457	12,457	2.6%	2.0%
Total	276,511	78,795	117,223	100,946	573,475	472,529	100.0%	

There are close to 4,000 food processing firms in Lao PDR. Approximately 80% of firms are very small companies, largely processing rice (around 50%), making noodles or snacks, or purifying water and making ice for local markets (Santoyo Rio 2018). The food processing sector is generally divided between these micro firms and a few large processing facilities for major commodities like maize, cassava, coffee, and sugar.

There are few medium sized agricultural farms operating in Lao PDR – less than 100. Most have less than 10 workers. GIZ estimates the number of people working in medium sized farms and agricultural firms is close to 1500 (Santoyo Rio 2018). The demand for workers in existing agricultural farms is currently in the low to mid-hundreds, and will likely increase to the high hundreds in the next 3-4 years (Santoyo Rio 2018). As it is now, the need for additional workers in the food processing industry is limited (Santoyo Rio 2018).

⁷ Based on an analysis of 2013 Lao Statistics Bureau data provided to the office for SME promotion.

(III) POLICY OPPORTUNITIES – A ‘PEOPLE-CENTRED’ APPROACH

In the next ten years, there is a potential for a large increase in youth unemployment, especially in rural areas. With many young people newly joining the labor market, reduced ability for young people to access land for subsistence agriculture, and reduced labor demand in commercial agriculture the need to create jobs in rural areas is urgent. This can come in the form of formal jobs, for example through support for small and medium enterprise, or through managing the transition to commercial agriculture in a way that creates more stable sources of income for farmers.

Farming must be seen as one source of income among many. The dichotomy between subsistence and commercial farmers is breaking down. The vast majority of Lao farmers are now engaged in both. Rural households increasingly include a family member who has migrated and whose wages support family back on the farm. Young people are cycling in and out of the labor market. A large number of farmers also have a secondary job – working for wages or running a small business. There is no longer a ‘typical’ Lao farmer. Farmers are confronting these trends in different ways, and require different resources.

Re-thinking labour during the agrarian transition #1:
A false dichotomy

Rural	OR	Urban
Farm Sector	OR	Manufacturing and Services
Under-employed	OR	Fully employed
Migrant worker	OR	In-country worker
Subsistence	OR	Commercial
Unskilled	OR	Skilled

This kind of thinking assumes that labour fits into one category or the other, and the role of policy is to help people move from one box to another

Re-thinking labour during the agrarian transition #2:
A people-centred approach

Rural	Families have inter-dependent members in different locations	Urban
Farm Sector	Multiple sources of income across different sectors	Manufacturing and Services
Under-employed	Variation in workload according to seasonality and casual job opportunities	Fully employed
Migrant worker	Temporary migration may help build capacity for in-country employment	In-country worker
Subsistence	Semi-subsistence farming is the norm, producing a mix of food and cash crops	Commercial
Unskilled	Survival and success depends on being multi-skilled	Skilled

Most households occupy the centre ground, not fitting into one box or the other. Policy should address where people are, not just where we want them to be.

There are many activities from both government and donors that address various aspects of youth development, agriculture, and rural employment. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach to policy, a people-centered approach identifies the different needs of different groups, and targets policies to address people’s needs. Each of these groups presents a different policy opportunity, and requires a different approach to be successful.

Full time commercial farmers with access to urban markets may benefit from most conventional agricultural extension and marketing support. Support for farmer group formation, infrastructure for processing and crop storage, and access to credit activities already supported by MAF will directly benefit this group. Efforts to facilitate direct sales to large institutions like hotels, hospitals, and restaurant groups can create market access and help farmers keep more value added of their produce. Mobile phone technologies can be developed to facilitate direct to consumer sales and accurate price information.

Upland farmers practicing a hybrid of commercial and subsistence agriculture need different kinds of support. Many upland farmers are growing low value crops sold as raw commodities that deplete upland soils. These areas could produce a diverse set of products at a higher

Examples: Different farmers, different strategies

- Full time commercial farmers in proximity to urban markets
 - Direct to consumer sales – use mobile technology to coordinate local market access
 - Support for farmer groups
 - Access to credit
 - Development of agriculture – institutional sales, infrastructure for storage and processing
 - Business development and financial literacy training
- Upland farmers – hybrid commercial / subsistence
 - Crop storage infrastructure
 - Green extension for diversified crop production
 - Promote higher value crops
 - Patient investment to create market links for high value green products
- Lowland producers – rice, vegetables and other local products
 - Low cost labor saving technologies to help people better incorporate labor, small business and farming activities into rural livelihoods
 - Business development and financial literacy training
- Failing commercial farmers – the newly poor
 - Green extension to shift to higher value crops, diversification
- Multi-cited households – Households including migrants to cities or neighboring countries
 - Incentivize return of migrants with new skills – small business loans
 - Safe homecoming – legal framework for returning from informal migration networks
- Unemployed rural youth
 - Small business development training
 - Access to irrigated land
 - Improved access to education and technical training
 - Scholarships for technical education
- Subsistence farming as a safety net – ‘natural social welfare system’
 - Support for land access and subsistence livelihoods until development has progressed to the point that there is an alternative social safety net.
 - Opportunities for diversification of livelihoods

value, and establish more permanent agricultural production that conserves upland soils. Demand for clean agriculture products especially in China, is growing. It will take patient capital – investment that is unlikely to turn a profit for many years – to develop the market links, infrastructure, storage and processing facilities that can facilitate a conversation from low value commodities to diverse high value specialty products. Green extension approaches can help deliver the technical expertise to support this shift.

Many lowland rice farmers are rapidly adopting labor saving technologies, including small scale mechanization and direct seeding. The labor saved from these technologies however is by and large not going into expanding agricultural operations or intensifying farming. Instead farmers are incorporating off-farm work into their livelihoods with time saved from these innovations. These small scale farmers can be well served by small business development credit and training to make their other, off-farm activities more profitable. Additional labor saving techniques, seed varieties and cropping systems can help farmers save time in order to diversify their forms of income.

Those farmers whose incomes have fallen as agriculture has commercialized are a special case. Failing commercial farmers, farmers whose previous subsistence practices are no longer possible, newly landless workers and the other new rural poor need very specific forms of assistance. Without addressing the needs of this group, LDC graduation and rural poverty eradication goals may not be met. As with hybrid upland commercial/subsistence farmers this group may benefit from extension activities to diversify production.

Subsistence systems in Laos still play a significant role in food provisioning and providing employment of a sort. 91% of those considered to be outside the labour force make their living from subsistence agriculture. Without the continued stability of subsistence systems the pressure to create jobs in rural areas is likely to increase faster than even rapid economic growth could create them. Continued support for semi-subsistence livelihoods will be an important component of rural employment strategy for some time.

Similarly, unemployed rural youth have specific needs. Access to irrigated land, small business development, and other efforts to create jobs in rural areas will be essential to making sure that rural youth have opportunities for decent work. Scholarships for technical and vocational training will be important to ensuring youth have options. Migration is an increasingly important venue for rural youth to acquire new skills. Ensuring safe modes of return for migrant youth can ensure migrants come home with enough resources to their home villages. Incentives for returning migrants to start small businesses including low interest loans can make the most of returning migrants new skills.

In the past increasing production and meeting growing targets for tons of production were the goal for agricultural development strategies. In practice, this translated into investments in the production of bulk commodities such as maize, cassava, sugar and rubber for export markets, in other words treating agriculture as an extractive industry similar to mining and hydropower. In the next phase of commercialization, job creation and income growth will be much more important targets for government to meet. This requires a different approach for different groups of farmers and rural youth, depending on their needs and assets. Strategies to grow jobs and incomes for rural unemployed youth will be different than for full time commercial farmers with access to urban markets. Labor saving innovations may be

especially important for farmers that don't farm full time, allowing them to save labor for other forms of rural work and small business in addition to farming. Farmers whose incomes have decreased with commercialization will require different strategies than upland farmers who are still practicing a mix of subsistence and commercial production. Rural unemployment, especially for youth is a growing issue.

A people-centered approach, targeting policy strategy to different groups, and using job and income growth as policy targets, can help guide the next phase of agricultural commercialization in Lao PDR.

ANNEX: EMERGING POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK⁸

There are several recent changes in Lao law and policy that affect rural labour and youth employment. The issue of rural labor and youth employment are partially addressed in the National Green Growth Strategy focus areas on agriculture, forestry and tourism. There are five cross-cutting priorities identified in the National Green Growth Strategy: strengthening investment management, scientific policy and technological research, strengthening environmental management, promoting green lifestyles and consumption, and gender equality. The realities of youth unemployment will impact the way these priority activities are developed and carried out.

The Agricultural Development Strategy 2025 update process will build on previous goals for greater food security, greater cross-government collaboration, and value chain development that positively impacts poor households. The Food Security and Commercial Crops Strategy also includes attention to migration, working conditions, employment, and occupational health and safety.

The 8th National Social and Economic Development Plan provides the overarching framework for rural development and is aligned to the Lao PDR Socio-Economic Development Strategy, the Lao PDR Vision 2030 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare is also developing a National Rural Employment Strategy process with inputs from every province. Outputs of the 8th NESDP with specific relevance to the National Rural Employment Strategy and the Ministry of Agriculture's efforts to deliver employment to rural youth include:

Outcome 1, Output 1: Ensuring sustained and inclusive economic growth

Outcome 1, Output 5: Improved public/private labour force capacity

Outcome 1, Output 6: Local entrepreneurs are competitive in domestic and international markets

Outcome 2, Output 1: Improved Living Standards through Poverty Reduction

Outcome 2, Output 2: Food security ensured and malnutrition reduced.

Outcome 2, Output 5: Extended access to social protection

Outcome 3, Output 2: Prepare to Cope with the Disaster Risks and Impacts from Climate Change

Cross-cutting Output 8.21.2: Promote and develop gender equality, juveniles and youth

Additional legal frameworks with relevance to rural employment, youth and agrarian transitions include:

Amended Labour Law ("2013 Labour Law)

Effective on 4 November 2014.

- Intended to address concerns of the Lao Federation of Trade Unions (LFTU) that the 2006 labour law was inadequate for the protection of workers. Changes include:
 - Obligation of employers to provide training to develop employees' skills.
 - Assurance of safe and sanitary working conditions.

⁸ This section is reproduced and adapted from the draft National Rural Employment Strategy (NRES 2019).

- Limitations on the hours of work, overtime work and weekly rest, sick leave and leave entitlements.
- Special provisions for pregnant women and women who have delivered.
- Compulsory social security for employees in accordance with the new Social Security Law.
- Collective bargaining and resolution of disputes
- Minimum wage and other regulations covering and salaries and wages

Social Security Law 2013

- The social security benefit areas include health, sickness, work injuries and work related disease, unemployment, old age and the birth of a child. Rural outreach and incorporating the informal sector are a key identified challenges for implementation.

Technical and Vocation Education Law 2019

- Prioritizes national certification for skills in demand in rural areas
- Commitment to entrepreneurship trainings

Law on the Promotion of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises 2011

- Productivity and technology promotion
- Access to business development services, finance and markets,
- Entrepreneurship development and value chain promotion

Law on Investment Promotion 2016

- Establishes strategic sectors
- Prioritizes the creation of local jobs
- Encourages Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), especially in infrastructure development

ILO Conventions Ratified by Lao PDR.

- ILO Core Conventions ratified covering:
 - forced labour,
 - equality,
 - discrimination
 - child labour (Convention No. 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, and Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour).

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