

DEVELOPING THE STATISTICS LAW OF THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC 2020

Documentation of process
and results



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This is a study documenting the context and process of reviewing and updating the Statistical Law of Lao PDR.

The study is one of a series of five on successful statistics development initiatives implemented as part of the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics (RPES) in Asia and Pacific. The studies are intended to inspire and support other countries that may wish to replicate the initiatives in their own national context.

The present study has been prepared by the Lao Statistics Bureau and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) with funding support by the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (previously Department for International Development).

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Acronyms

ACSS	ASEAN Community Statistical System
DFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific
FPOS	Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LSB	Lao Statistics Bureau
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NA	National Assembly
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NSCC	National Statistical Coordination Committee
NSS	National Statistical System
PSC	Provincial Statistics Centre
RPES	Regional Programme on Economic Statistics
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNSD	Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nation

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lao People's Democratic Republic introduced its first Statistics Law in 2010, which gave the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) the mandate to produce the official statistics of the country. Within a few years, it became clear that adjustments were needed to modernise statistics production and improve alignment with international standards.

To identify priority changes to the statistics law and draft new legislation, the LSB initiated an assessment in 2016. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) provided technical advice to ensure the new law would consider good practices from around the world and adhere to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. The assessment revealed the following challenges:

- a. lack of coordination of the National Statistics System (NSS)
- b. data collections across agencies were not systematic or harmonized thus complicating data integration and aggregation at the sectoral and provincial levels
- c. statistical products and services did not sufficiently meet the needs of the users
- d. vital statistics and statistics on the environment were absent or insufficient
- e. staff of the NSS lacked the required level of knowledge, ability, and experience to produce, use, or disseminate statistics
- f. staff of the NSS lacked skills and other capacity to use the available information and communications technology and infrastructure
- g. international statistical standards were not being followed
- h. the budget for statistical work was insufficient

Developing the law followed a carefully planned process and was supported by national stakeholders, ESCAP, and national and international consultants. The process involved seven steps:

Step 1. Planning

Step 2. Establishing a law review committee

Step 3. Assessment of existing law

Step 4. Drafting a law

Step 5. Review by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and the government

Step 6. Adoption of the new law by National Assembly

Step 7. Promulgation of the law by the President

The efforts resulted in a new statistics law, which came into force in 2017. The new law brought significant positive changes to the production of official statistics in the country. The impacts have been both direct and indirect. Key changes included:

- an increase in the number of LSB staff from 48 in 2010 to 149 in 2018, with continuing support for further increases,
- the establishment of a more formal structure and reporting system for the national statistical system,
- more statistics being produced from administrative sources,
- a shift from primarily donor-funded to primarily government-funded censuses and surveys, and
- a strengthening and improved implementation of the General Data Dissemination System by enforcing consequences on non-compliance among respondents and data producers.

The development of the new statistics law in Lao PDR was a successful undertaking which generated several lessons and recommendations for other countries considering changes to their statistics legislation:

- ensure stakeholders are engaged throughout the process with a highly participatory approach to drafting and disseminating the new law.
- allocate enough time and budget for sub-national offices to participate and provide critical inputs.

- ensure meetings with stakeholders are efficient by sharing documents with briefing instructions prior to the meeting so everyone can prepare.
- the ten fundamental principles of official statistics could have been incorporated, but, in the end, only five major principles were included.

The new law has strengthened the LSB by defining and cementing its role as the lead agency for statistical work and by outlining the support and responsibilities of relevant agencies and line agencies who also produce statistics. Between 2020 and 2022, the effectiveness of the new law will be evaluated. In addition, regular reviews of the functioning of the national statistical system will be conducted to inform future reviews and adjustments to the law.

II. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) has the mandate to produce national, official statistics. LSB leads the production, and coordination of official statistics in Lao PDR. It ensures the quality of statistics produced by other government entities, supports the monitoring and evaluation of national and international commitments (e.g. the National Socio-Economic Development Plan, Sustainable Development Goals, and Least Developed Country indicators), and provides official statistics to a wide range of users.

The 2010 Statistics Law

The first ever Statistics Law in Lao People's Democratic Republic was passed in 2010. The Law provided the legal framework for producing national statistics. It defined the rules, regulations, and measures for the organization, management, and inspection of statistical activities. It set out the responsibility of the LSB to coordinate statistical tasks and integrate data into a national database as well as to support data monitoring and participate in the quarterly and annual meetings for evaluation of national, sectoral, and local

organization with four departments and 13 divisions.³ With the 2010 law, the budget for LSB was made independent which means budget for each statistical activity is allocated and approved directly by the government as opposed to being integrated in the general budget of the MPI. The 2010 Statistics Law also provided the legal basis for the implementation of the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics, 2010-2020.

Rationale for the new law

The revision of the 2010 Statistics Law was initiated to ensure alignment to the changed national constitution, the new national development strategy⁴ and the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Taking the opportunity, LSB leveraged the process to align the law more closely to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and with Lao PDR's commitments as a member the ASEAN Community Statistical System (ACSS). Moreover, provisions were introduced or strengthened to ensure data security (confidentiality); support the generation of statistics from new data sources for better informed

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