

# CLIMATE AND HEALTH COUNTRY PROFILE – 2015

## LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC



World Health  
Organization



United Nations  
Framework Convention on  
Climate Change



### OVERVIEW

The Lao People's Democratic Republic [Lao PDR] is a lower-middle income country with one of the fastest growing economies in the Asia Pacific region [World Bank Country Overview, 2016]. The landlocked country has a tropical climate, with a rainy season from May to November and a dry season from December to April.

Already vulnerable to extreme weather events, Lao PDR is predicted to experience rising temperatures, increased rainfall variability and more severe and frequent floods and drought [LAO PDR INDC, 2015]. The increased incidence of extreme weather events could exacerbate food insecurity, increase the risk of disease, threaten drinking-water supply and damage healthcare infrastructure [World Bank Climate Risk and Adaptation Country Profile, 2011].

Approximately 70% of the population of Lao PDR relies on natural resources for their livelihoods. With nearly 30% of GDP coming from the agriculture sector, climate change poses a major threat to food security [Lao PDR INDC, 2015].

The National Strategy on Climate Change (NSCC) of Lao PDR was approved in early 2010 with the specific aim to 'secure a future where Lao PDR is capable of mitigating and adapting to changing climatic conditions in a way that promotes sustainable economic development, reduces poverty, protects public health and safety, enhances the quality of Lao PDR's natural environment, and advances the quality of life for all Lao People' [Lao PDR INDC, 2015]. Lao PDR aims to increase forest coverage to 70% of total land area by 2020, reducing the risk of flooding and acting as a carbon sink, and aims to increase renewable energy to 30% of energy consumption by 2025 [Lao PDR INDC, 2015].

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- In Lao PDR, under a high emissions scenario, mean annual temperature is projected to rise by about 4.5°C on average

from 1990 to 2100. If global emissions decrease rapidly, the temperature rise is limited to about 1.4°C [page 2].

- In Lao PDR, the population at risk of malaria is projected to decline towards 2070, however, it is estimated that a low emissions scenario will lead to a greater decline in population at risk [page 3].
- In Lao PDR, the mean relative vectorial capacity for dengue fever transmission is projected to increase under a high emissions scenario from the baseline of 0.55 to about 0.62 towards 2070 [page 3].
- In Lao PDR, under a high emissions scenario heat-related deaths in the elderly (65+ years) are projected to increase to about 72 deaths per 100,000 by 2080 compared to the estimated baseline of about 3 deaths per 100,000 annually between 1961 and 1990. A rapid reduction in global emissions could limit heat-related deaths in the elderly to about 15 deaths per 100,000 in 2080 [page 4].

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

Lao PDR has an approved national health adaptation strategy and is currently implementing projects on health adaptation to climate change. Additionally, Lao PDR is implementing actions to build institutional and technical capacities to work on climate change and health and increase the climate resilience of health infrastructure. Country reported data [see section 6] indicate that there remains opportunities for action in the following areas:

#### 1) Adaptation

- Conduct a national assessment of climate change impacts, vulnerability and adaptation for health.

#### 2) Mitigation

- Conduct a valuation of the health co-benefits of climate change mitigation policies.

### DEMOGRAPHIC ESTIMATES

Population [2013] <sup>a</sup>	6.58 million
Population growth rate [2013] <sup>a</sup>	1.6%
Population living in urban areas [2013] <sup>b</sup>	36.5%
Population under five [2013] <sup>a</sup>	12.7%
Population aged 65 or over [2013] <sup>a</sup>	3.7%

### ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

GDP per capita [current US\$, 2013] <sup>c</sup>	1,701 USD
Total expenditure on health as % of GDP [2013] <sup>d</sup>	2%
Percentage share of income for lowest 20% of population [2012] <sup>c</sup>	7.6
HDI [2013, +/- 0.01 change from 2005 is indicated with arrow] <sup>e</sup>	0.569 ▲

### HEALTH ESTIMATES

Life expectancy at birth [2013] <sup>f</sup>	66 years
Under-5 mortality per 1000 live births [2013] <sup>g</sup>	71

a World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, UNDESA [2015]  
b World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision, UNDESA [2014]  
c World Development Indicators, World Bank [2015]  
d Global Health Expenditure Database, WHO [2014]

e United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Reports [2014]  
f Global Health Observatory, WHO [2014]  
g Levels & Trends in Child Mortality Report 2015, UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation [2015]

# CURRENT AND FUTURE CLIMATE HAZARDS

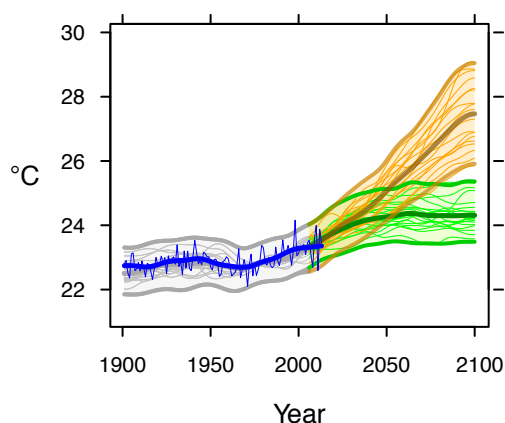
Due to climate change, many climate hazards and extreme weather events, such as heat waves, heavy rainfall and droughts, could become more frequent and more intense in many parts of the world.

Outlined here are country-specific projections up to the year 2100 for climate hazards under a 'business as usual' high emissions scenario compared to projections under a 'two-degree' scenario with rapidly decreasing global emissions. Most hazards caused by climate change will persist for many centuries.

## COUNTRY-SPECIFIC CLIMATE HAZARD PROJECTIONS

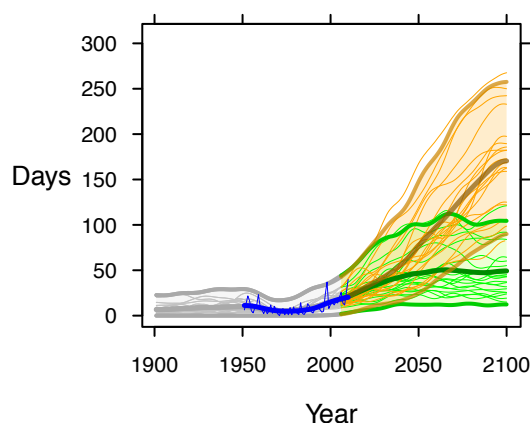
The model projections below present climate hazards under a high emissions scenario, Representative Concentration Pathway 8.5 [RCP8.5] (in orange) and a low emissions scenario, [RCP2.6] (in green).<sup>a</sup> The text boxes describe the projected changes averaged across about 20 models (thick line). The figures also show each model individually as well as the 90% model range (shaded) as a measure of uncertainty and, where available, the annual and smoothed observed record (in blue).<sup>b,c</sup>

### MEAN ANNUAL TEMPERATURE



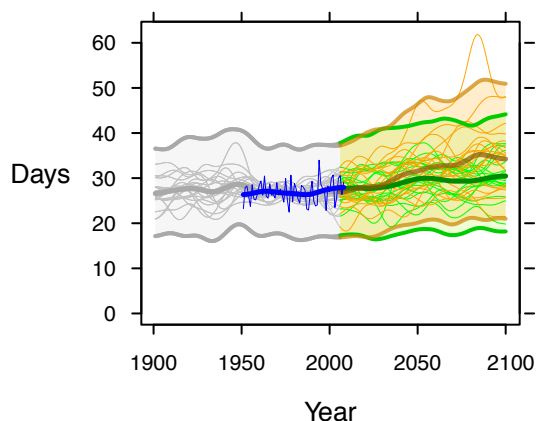
Under a high emissions scenario, mean annual temperature is projected to rise by about 4.5°C on average from 1990 to 2100. If emissions decrease rapidly, the temperature rise is limited to about 1.4°C.

### DAYS OF WARM SPELL ('HEAT WAVES')



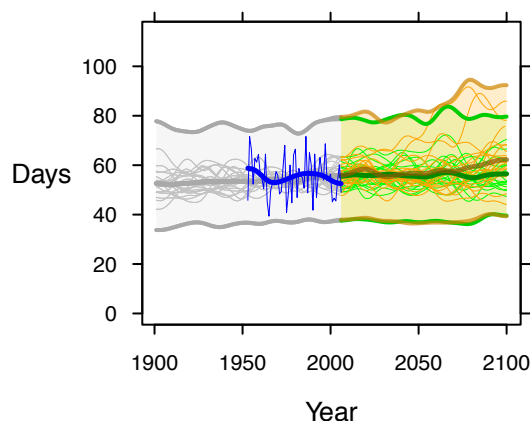
Under a high emissions scenario, the number of days of warm spell<sup>d</sup> is projected to increase from less than 10 days in 1990 to about 170 days on average in 2100. If emissions decrease rapidly, the days of warm spell are limited to about 50 on average.

### DAYS WITH EXTREME RAINFALL ('FLOOD RISK')



Under a high emissions scenario, the number of days with very heavy precipitation [20 mm or more] could increase by about 7 days on average from 1990 to 2100, increasing the risk of floods. Some models indicate increases outside the range of historical variability, implying even greater risk. If emissions decrease rapidly, the risk is much reduced.

### CONSECUTIVE DRY DAYS ('DROUGHT')



Under a high emissions scenario, the longest dry spell is indicated to increase by about 10 days on average, from about 55 days on average in 1990, with continuing large year-to-year variability. If emissions decrease rapidly, the increase is limited to less than 1.5 days on average.

<sup>a</sup> Model projections are from CMIP5 for RCP8.5 [high emissions] and RCP2.6 [low emissions]. Model anomalies are added to the historical mean and smoothed.

<sup>b</sup> Observed historical record of mean temperature is from CRU-TSv3.22; observed historical records of extremes are from HadEX2.

<sup>c</sup> Analysis by the Climatic Research Unit and Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, University of East Anglia, 2015.

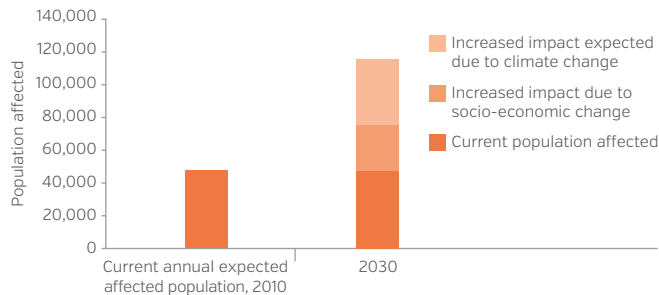
<sup>d</sup> A 'warm spell' day is a day when maximum temperature, together with that of at least the 6 consecutive previous days, exceeds the 90th percentile threshold for that time of the year.

## CURRENT AND FUTURE HEALTH RISKS DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Human health is profoundly affected by weather and climate. Climate change threatens to exacerbate today's health problems – deaths from extreme weather events, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, infectious diseases and malnutrition – whilst undermining water and food supplies, infrastructure, health systems and social protection systems.

### EXPOSURE TO INLAND RIVER FLOODING

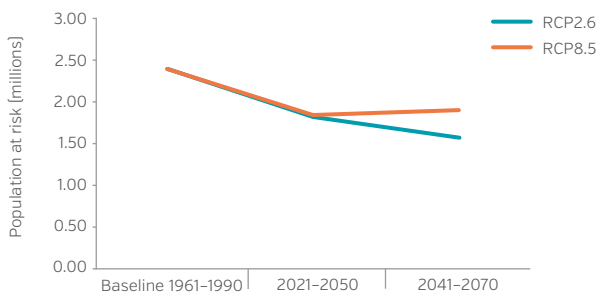
Population affected by inland river flood risk in Lao PDR



Lao PDR faces inland river flood risk. It is projected, that by 2030, an additional 40,400 people may be at risk of river floods annually as a result of climate change and 27,800 due to socio-economic change above the estimated 48,200 annually affected population in 2010.<sup>a</sup>

### INFECTIOUS AND VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

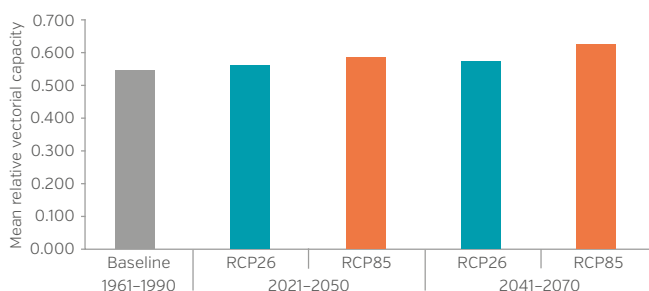
Population at risk of malaria in Lao PDR (in millions)



Population at risk of malaria is projected to decline towards 2070 however, it is estimated that a low emissions scenario will lead to a greater decline in population at risk. By 2070, under a high emissions scenario about 1.9 million people are projected to be at risk of malaria annually, this estimate drops to about 1.6 million annually if there is a rapid reduction in global emissions.

Source: Rocklöv, J., Quam, M. et al. 2015.<sup>d</sup>

### Mean relative vectorial capacity for dengue fever transmission in Lao PDR



#### KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH

In addition to deaths from drowning, flooding causes extensive indirect health effects, including impacts on food production, water provision, ecosystem disruption, infectious disease outbreak and vector distribution. Longer term effects of flooding may include post-traumatic stress and population displacement.

#### KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH

Some of the world's most virulent infections are also highly sensitive to climate: temperature, precipitation and humidity have a strong influence on the life-cycles of the vectors and the infectious agents they carry and influence the transmission of water and food-borne diseases.<sup>b</sup>

Socioeconomic development and health interventions are driving down burdens of several infectious diseases, and these projections assume that this will continue. However, climate conditions are projected to become significantly more favourable for transmission, slowing progress in reducing burdens, and increasing the populations at risk if control measures are not maintained or strengthened.<sup>c</sup>

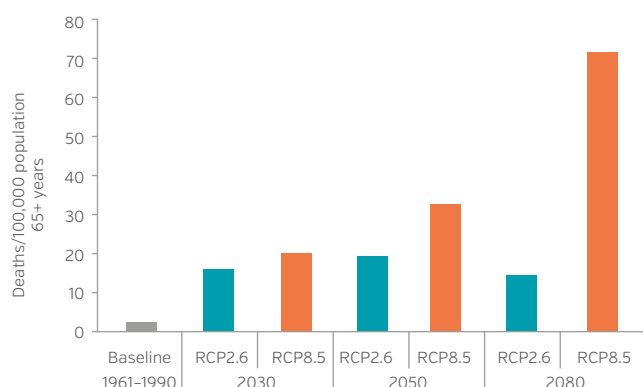
The mean relative vectorial capacity for dengue fever transmission is projected to increase under a high emissions scenario from the baseline of 0.55 to about 0.62 towards 2070. If global emissions decrease rapidly the mean relative vectorial capacity for dengue transmission could be limited to about 0.57 by 2070.

Source: Rocklöv, J., Quam, M. et al., 2015.<sup>d</sup>

a World Resources Institute, <http://www.wri.org>. Aqueduct Global Flood Analyzer. Assumes continued current socio-economic trends [SSP2] and a 25-year flood protection.  
b Atlas of Health and Climate, World Health Organization and World Meteorological Organization, 2012.  
c Quantitative risk assessment of the effects of climate change on selected causes of death, 2030s and 2050s. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2014.  
d Country-level analysis, completed in 2015, was based on health models outlined in the Quantitative risk assessment of the effects of climate change on selected causes of death, 2030s and 2050s. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2014. The mean of impact estimates for three global climate models are presented. Models assume continued socioeconomic trends [SSP2 or comparable].

## HEAT-RELATED MORTALITY

Heat-related mortality in population 65 years or over, Lao PDR  
(deaths / 100,000 population 65+ yrs)



Under a high emissions scenario heat-related deaths in the elderly (65+ years) are projected to increase to about 72 deaths per 100,000 by 2080 compared to the estimated baseline of about 3 deaths per 100,000 annually between 1961 and 1990. A rapid reduction in global emissions could limit heat-related deaths in the elderly to about 15 deaths per 100,000 in 2080.

Source: Honda et al., 2015.<sup>a</sup>



## KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH

Climate change is expected to increase mean annual temperature and the intensity and frequency of heat waves resulting in a greater number of people at risk of heat-related medical conditions.

The elderly, children, the chronically ill, the socially isolated and at-risk occupational groups are particularly vulnerable to heat-related conditions.

## UNDERNUTRITION

Climate change, through higher temperatures, land and water scarcity, flooding, drought and displacement, negatively impacts agricultural production and causes breakdown in food systems. These disproportionately affect those most vulnerable people at risk to hunger and can lead to food insecurity. Vulnerable groups risk further deterioration into food and nutrition crises if exposed to extreme climate events.<sup>b</sup>

Without considerable efforts made to improve climate resilience, it has been estimated that the global risk of hunger and malnutrition could increase by up to 20 percent by 2050.<sup>b</sup>

In Lao PDR, the prevalence of stunting in children under age 5 was 43.8% in 2012, the prevalence of underweight children and wasting in children under 5 was 26.5% and 6.4%, respectively, in 2012.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Country-level analysis, completed in 2015, was based on health models outlined in the Quantitative risk assessment of the effects of climate change on selected causes of death, 2030s and 2050s. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2014. The mean of impact estimates for three global climate models are presented. Models assume continued socioeconomic trends (SSP2 or comparable).

<sup>b</sup> World Food Project 2015 <https://www.wfp.org/content/two-minutes-climate-change-and-hunger>

<sup>c</sup> World Health Organization, Global Database on Child Growth and Malnutrition [2015 edition]. Please see source for definition of child malnutrition measures.

## CURRENT EXPOSURES AND HEALTH RISKS DUE TO AIR POLLUTION

Many of the drivers of climate change, such as inefficient and polluting forms of energy and transport systems, also contribute to air pollution. Air pollution is now one of the largest global health risks, causing approximately seven million deaths every year. There is an important opportunity to promote policies that both protect the climate at a global level, and also have large and immediate health benefits at a local level.

### OUTDOOR AIR POLLUTION EXPOSURE



#### KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH

Outdoor air pollution can have direct and sometimes severe consequences for health.

Fine particles which penetrate deep into the respiratory tract subsequently increase mortality from respiratory infections, lung cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Data for outdoor air pollution in Lao PDR was not available in the WHO ambient air pollution database [WHO, May 2014].

### HOUSEHOLD AIR POLLUTION

#### LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Percentage of population primarily using solid fuels for cooking [%], 2013



**RURAL  
AREAS**  
**>95**



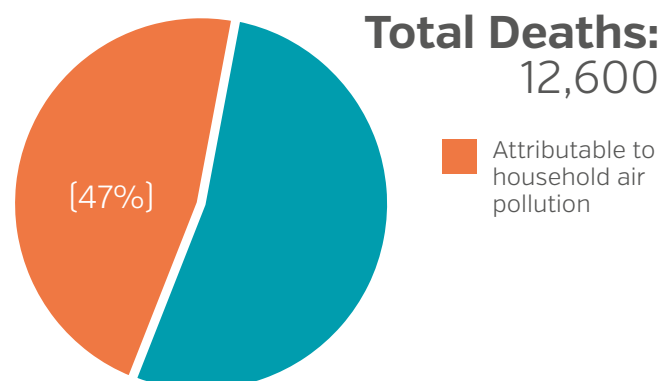
**URBAN  
AREAS**  
**92**



**NATIONAL  
TOTAL**  
**>95**

Source: Global Health Observatory, data repository, World Health Organization, 2013.

Percent of total deaths from ischaemic heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (18 years +) and acute lower respiratory infections (under 5 years) attributable to household air pollution, 2012



Source: Global Health Observatory, data repository, World Health Organization, 2012.



#### KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH

Air pollution in and around the home is largely a result of the burning of solid fuels [biomass or coal] for cooking.

Women and children are at a greater risk for disease from household air pollution. Consequently, household air pollution is responsible for a larger proportion of the of total number of deaths from ischaemic heart disease, stroke, lung cancer and COPD in women compared to men.<sup>a</sup>

In Lao PDR, about 63% percent of an estimated 2,800 child deaths due to acute lower respiratory infections is attributable to household air pollution [WHO, 2012].

a Annu. Rev. Public. Health. 2014.35:185-206. [http://www.who.int/phe/health\\_topics/outdoorair/databases/HAP\\_BoD\\_results\\_March2014.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/phe/health_topics/outdoorair/databases/HAP_BoD_results_March2014.pdf?ua=1)

## CO-BENEFITS TO HEALTH FROM CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Health co-benefits are local, national and international measures with the potential to simultaneously yield large, immediate public health benefits and reduce the upward trajectory of greenhouse gas emissions. Lower carbon strategies can also be cost-effective investments for individuals and societies.

Presented here are examples, from a global perspective, of opportunities for health co-benefits that could be realised by action in important greenhouse gas emitting sectors.<sup>a</sup>

### Transport

Transport injuries lead to 1.2 million deaths every year, and land use and transport planning contribute to the 2–3 million deaths from physical inactivity. The transport sector is also responsible for some 14% (7.0 GtCO<sub>2</sub>e) of global carbon emissions. The IPCC has noted significant opportunities to reduce energy demand in the sector, potentially resulting in a 15%–40% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and bringing substantial opportunities for health: A modal shift towards walking and cycling could see reductions in illnesses related to physical inactivity and reduced outdoor air pollution and noise exposure; increased use of public transport is likely to result in reduced GHG emissions; compact urban planning fosters walkable residential neighborhoods, improves accessibility to jobs, schools and services and can encourage physical activity and improve health equity by making urban services more accessible to the elderly and poor.



### Electricity Generation

Reliable electricity generation is essential for economic growth, with 1.4 billion people living without access to electricity. However, current patterns of electricity generation in many parts of the world, particularly the reliance on coal combustion in highly polluting power plants contributes heavily to poor local air quality, causing cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory disease. Outdoor air pollution is responsible for 3.7 million premature deaths annually, 88% of these deaths occur in low and middle income countries. The health benefits of transitioning from fuels such as coal to lower carbon sources, including ultimately to renewable energy, are clear: Reduced rates of cardiovascular and respiratory disease such as stroke, lung cancer, coronary artery disease, and COPD; cost-savings for health systems; improved economic productivity from a healthier and more productive workforce.



### Household Heating, Cooking and Lighting

Household air pollution causes over 4.3 million premature deaths annually, predominantly due to stroke, ischaemic heart disease, chronic respiratory disease, and childhood pneumonia. A range of interventions can both improve public health and reduce household emissions: a transition from the inefficient use of solid fuels like wood and charcoal, towards cleaner energy sources like liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), biogas, and electricity could save lives by reducing indoor levels of



### Healthcare Systems

Health care activities are an important source of greenhouse gas emissions. In the US and in EU countries, for example, health care activities account for between 3–8% of greenhouse gas (CO<sub>2</sub>-eq) emissions. Major sources include procurement and inefficient energy consumption. Modern, on-site, low-carbon energy solutions (e.g. solar, wind, or hybrid solutions) and the development of combined heat and power generation capacity in larger facilities offer significant potential to lower the



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