

UNICEF LAO PDR
CLIMATE STRATEGY
2024-2026





Preface

Climate based threats and hazards are now becoming increasingly evident in Lao People Democratic Republic (PDR). The alluvial plains of the Mekong and its tributaries experience annual flooding and landslides during the monsoon season, while in 2019, the Mekong River recorded the lowest water levels in a century due to prolonged drought. Air quality in Laos ranks among the poorest in the region due to the burning of forests, crops, and waste. Heatwaves have become more common and severe.

Storms, floods, landslides, droughts, heatwaves and air pollution have significant impacts on almost every economic sector, region, and population group of Lao PDR. This interplay of natural hazards and human-induced risks has drastically exacerbated existing vulnerabilities – particularly among women, youth, and children. Lao PDR has a Children Climate Risk Index (CCRI) score of 6.7 and ranks 40th out of the 163 countries and regions measured by the CCRI, placing children in Laos at ‘High Risk’. Prioritizing child-centered and risk-informed programming is an imperative for child well-being and development in Lao PDR.

As part of the new UNICEF Lao PDR Country Program Document (CPD) 2022-2026, UNICEF Laos has identified the climate crisis as a key challenge to tackle due to the enormous impact it has on child rights and community well-being.

The Country Office (CO) has outlined specific child rights that are potentially at risk due to climate threats along the lower Mekong River Basin. Furthermore, multi-sectoral climate risk assessments linked to threats, vulnerabilities, geography, and child-poverty have been carried out to develop evidence informed climate and environment programmes in Lao PDR.

UNICEF Lao PDR’s Climate Strategy 2024-2026 is a systemic effort to leave no child behind in Laos in the face of the climate crisis and put children at the heart of the organization’s climate action. Lao PDR requires targeted interventions to strengthen the understanding of climate risks facing children and their supportive communities, as well as how these threats influence mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Lao PDR is at a critical development point, especially in pledges made to support Generation 2030, and positioned to ensure children, adolescents, and youth are a key priority in the 10th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED). UNICEF is committed to working in collaboration with the Government of Laos, private sector, communities, and other stakeholders to keep children and youth at the heart of climate change policies, practices, and programming.

Climate Risk in Lao PDR

Lao PDR has historically been affected by climatic extremes of distinct nature, intensity, and range.

36 percent of children are exposed to riverine flooding in Laos, with areas along the Mekong River's low-lying plains being particularly vulnerable. Flash flooding and landslides are also frequently experienced and are dangerous to children because of their quick onset and destructive nature, causing mass damage to critical infrastructure and leaving children and their families with little warning to prepare and respond. The total population expected to be affected by riverine flooding annually is expected to double by 2030.

76 percent of children are exposed to heatwaves and climate projections predict an increase with up to 110 more days exceeding temperatures above 35°C. Heatwaves and extreme heat exacerbate crop failure and food insecurity, with severe impacts on child nutrition. Additionally, 2.8 million children are exposed to ambient air pollution, primarily driven by slash and burn agricultural practices.

85 percent of children are exposed to extensive cyclone winds (within a 100-year return period). Five tropical cyclones have affected Lao PDR over the past two decades, impacting over 1.5 million people when combined with the effects of south-west monsoons.

While climate change often manifests in disaster events, it is also embedded in social, political, economic, and institutional contexts. Lao PDR is recognized as vulnerable to climate change impacts due to its particularly high dependence on climate-sensitive natural resources and the country's low adaptive capacity. The annual cost of environmental degradation (reduced natural capital from depletion and reduced human capital from pollution) was estimated at 19.3 percent of GDP (Gross Domestic Product).

Thus, climate and environmental threats impose severe risks for the population, especially for children and their future. They impact education, food security, health, water and sanitation and child protection services. The need to develop mitigation and adaptation strategies and actions is urgent, as is the requirement to ensure preparedness and response readiness. New approaches and strategies are needed to ensure that Lao PDR has the capacity to promote sustainable development and achieve the SDGs, which will fully depend on the provision of resilient social services.

An assessment of climate and environmental risks and the vulnerability of children in Lao PDR was undertaken by UNICEF encompassing five social services sectors: education, nutrition, WASH, health, and child protection. The underlying rationale for this analysis is that all sector planning must be informed by risk assessments - including hazard characterization, exposure, vulnerability, and risks identification. This will ensure that sectors identify mitigation and adaptation priorities and take action to become more resilient and likely to withstand shocks and stresses caused or aggravated by climate change. The participatory assessment involved government planners, decision-makers, and practitioners to ensure that climate resilience is considered in strategies, plans and approaches with clear solutions identified that could help each sector address the prioritized risks.



Vision

Adaptation, anticipatory action, and resilience building are the most effective ways to protect children's lives and family livelihoods from the immediate and expected impacts of climate change. The vision of the Climate Strategy is to ensure that every child, young person, and community member in Lao PDR, especially the most disadvantaged, live in a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment; are adapted and resilient to climate and environment-related shocks and disasters; and are empowered as agents of change.

Programmatic response

To ensure that every child, young person, and community in Lao PDR lives in a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, UNICEF has identified three key pillars and eight cross-cutting approaches building upon local challenges, emerging context, and UNICEF's comparative advantages.

UNICEF will support the Government of Lao PDR to foster a paradigm shift for climate resilient social services based on enhanced use of digitization tools and situational analysis. Three areas are being proposed for this transformation: i) data driven planning; ii) engagement of youth; and iii) mainstreaming climate change in key social sectors across the five goals of UNICEF's global strategy.

These complimentary actions will be critical in enhancing climate resilient social services for the most vulnerable children and youth in the country. They will be underpinned by cross cutting elements such as awareness raising and communication, community engagement, digital transformation, data and research, gender transformation, innovation, partnerships, resilience building, and systems strengthening.

UNICEF will focus its operations at four administrative levels, national, province, district, and village and focus on those areas where children have been found to be at highest risks to the climate crisis. Identification of best practices and findings from project implementation will be used for the integration of climate change and disaster reduction strategies into sectoral policies and plans for Child Protection, Education, Health, Nutrition, Social Policy, and WASH.

UNICEF will also commit to reducing emissions and its environmental footprint, while advocating for the fulfilment of ambitious international sustainability and climate change agreements.



Objective:

Improve child and youth lives in Lao PDR, ensuring sustainable futures and resilience to climate and disaster impacts through adaptive and climate-responsive social service delivery in high-risk districts with a focus on the most vulnerable households

Addressing Inequities

Systems Strengthening

Advocacy and Communications

Resilience in Programming

Partnerships

Innovation Technology

Gender Transformation

Data Research

Climate Risk Informed Programming

Develop subnational Children's Climate and Disaster Risk Index

Enhance emergency preparedness and response processes at the district-level

Develop community-based disaster risk reduction plans in selected high risk villages

Empower Children & Youth

Engage youth environmental champions

Support child- and youth-sensitive climate policies and strategies

Empower children and youth with green and transferable skills

Mainstreaming climate change

Climate-resilient and sustainable healthcare

Climate-smart nutrition services

Disaster risk reduction and sustainable energy in schools

Climate resilient child protection systems and protection services

Climate resilient WASH resources, systems, and technologies

Shock-resilient cash transfers for social services

UNICEF GLOBAL GOAL AREA
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Walk the Talk

Cross-cutting approaches

I. Addressing inequities. Undertaking systematic efforts to ensure that UNICEF interventions and solutions address the most vulnerable, excluded, and hard-to-reach children. This includes accounting for and integrating their special needs arising from, but not limited to, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, care status, migration status, language, context, and economic or social status.

II. Systems strengthening. Supporting the Lao PDR Sam Sang model. The government is continuing to pursue a devolution strategy known as the Sam Sang (Three Builds) directive, to alleviate poverty and enable Lao PDR to graduate from the United Nations' list of least developed countries in 2026. The Sam Sang directive aims to build up provinces as strategy-making units, with districts to be strengthened for service delivery, and villages to become development units.

III. Advocacy and communications. Utilizing UNICEF's convening power and credibility to influence decision-makers and duty bearers to act in the best interests of children and to recognize that the climate crisis is a child rights crisis. This includes creating an enabling environment for climate and environmental policies to be child-inclusive and sustainably financed.

IV. Resilience in Programming. The UNICEF WASH section has completed flood resilient water and toilet designs for communities, schools, and health centers in flood prone areas, helped build the capacity of Village Prevention Disaster Units through training, and developed Disaster Risk Reduction plan with communities together with Lao Red Cross.

V. Partnerships. The strategy will be implemented across all programmatic areas in a coordinated manner to ensure efficiency and cost-effectiveness, creating alliances and partnerships across the region that leverage the unique capacities of each partner to achieve greater results for children and youth.

VI. Innovation and technology. Accelerating the development and scale-up of new, promising, and innovative solutions and technologies to address the most pressing climate and environmental problems facing children, while supporting and promoting youth-led ideas and solutions.

In terms of technology, WASH in regional and country offices are focusing more on solarized systems for water pumping in communities, schools, and health centers aiming to mitigate climate change in long-term.

VII. Gender transformation. Adolescent girls, already disadvantaged by discriminatory gender norms that heighten their risks and weaken their resilience to shocks, continue to disproportionately bear the harmful impacts of climate change. These impacts include increased risks of early marriage, being forced out of school, or suffering various forms of gender-based violence following disasters. Informed by gender analysis, UNICEF employs a gender transformative approach that responds to the distinct needs of girls, women, boys, and men in disaster preparedness and climate action, while advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

VIII. Data and Research. Conducting analysis and generating the right information so we and our partners can prioritize children most in need, in the most efficient way. This means increased investments in data to promote evidence-based essential social services and systems that can strengthen children's adaptive capacity to climate impacts and withstand shocks.



Pillar One - Data driven climate responsive programming and resilience building

Definition: “Improve knowledge and data generation on children’s exposure, vulnerabilities, and risks to identify those children most in need and incorporate the ‘child-lens’ and climate and multi-hazards perspectives in preparedness planning and policymaking.”

Climate-risk informed programming should be strengthened to address the current and future challenges posed by climate change to children and the communities they live in. In Lao PDR this is critically important as the current and the potential future climate risk impacts intensify, compounded by growing populations, which is likely to widen the existing gaps in provision of social services to children. A system will be developed that captures data on children and their communities affected by climate extreme events with disaggregation by age and including metrics that capture climate risks and levels of vulnerability of infrastructure and services provided to children.

A Lao PDR Children’s Climate and Disaster Risk Index (CCDRI) will be developed to improve the understanding and management of risks that children, young people, families, and their communities face from climate, environmental and other natural hazards, shocks, and stresses using a subnational risk assessment model and interactive geo-spatial platform. This can be used for analysis, prioritization of emergency preparedness and response processes,

and enhance cross-sector coordination and decision-making based on a unified understanding of climate and disaster risk at the Provincial and District level. These efforts will be combined with the scaling-up of Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction and Management planning in villages with meaningful participation of children and youth and in close collaboration with the Lao Red Cross and other civil society organizations working on DRR.

The CCDRI methodology is based on a rigorous scientific approach, which incorporates the latest research and data on multi-hazard risks; and promotes evidence-based policies and programmes that can improve the resilience of children, young people, families, and their communities to these risks. The subnational CCDRI employs an array of indicators to evaluate two sets of underlying factors:

Set 1: Shock exposure to capture the likelihood of children, young people, and communities in an area to be exposed to hazards, shocks, and stresses.

Set 2: Vulnerability to capture the underlying factors that render exposed children, young people, their families, and communities susceptible to the negative effects of hazards, shocks, and stresses.

The model also considers economic, political, and social characteristics and circumstances of communities and systems that reflect their readiness and ability to withstand harmful effects of hazards, shocks, and stresses.



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Pillar Two - Children and Youth Engagement and Empowerment

Definition: “Support, empower, and engage children and youth in climate, environmental, and disaster risk actions and advocate for inclusive, child-centered climate, environment, and disaster risk policies, plans and budgets.”

In Lao PDR almost 60% of the population demographic are children and young people under the age of 25. UNICEF’s global strategic plan (2022-2025) has an explicit focus on engaging and partnering with young people as “problem-solvers and agents of change”, while the UNICEF Lao PDR Country Programme Document 2022-2026 commits to “enhanced engagement of adolescents in programming, particularly on climate action”. This includes partnership with the Lao Youth Union and youth-led organizations.

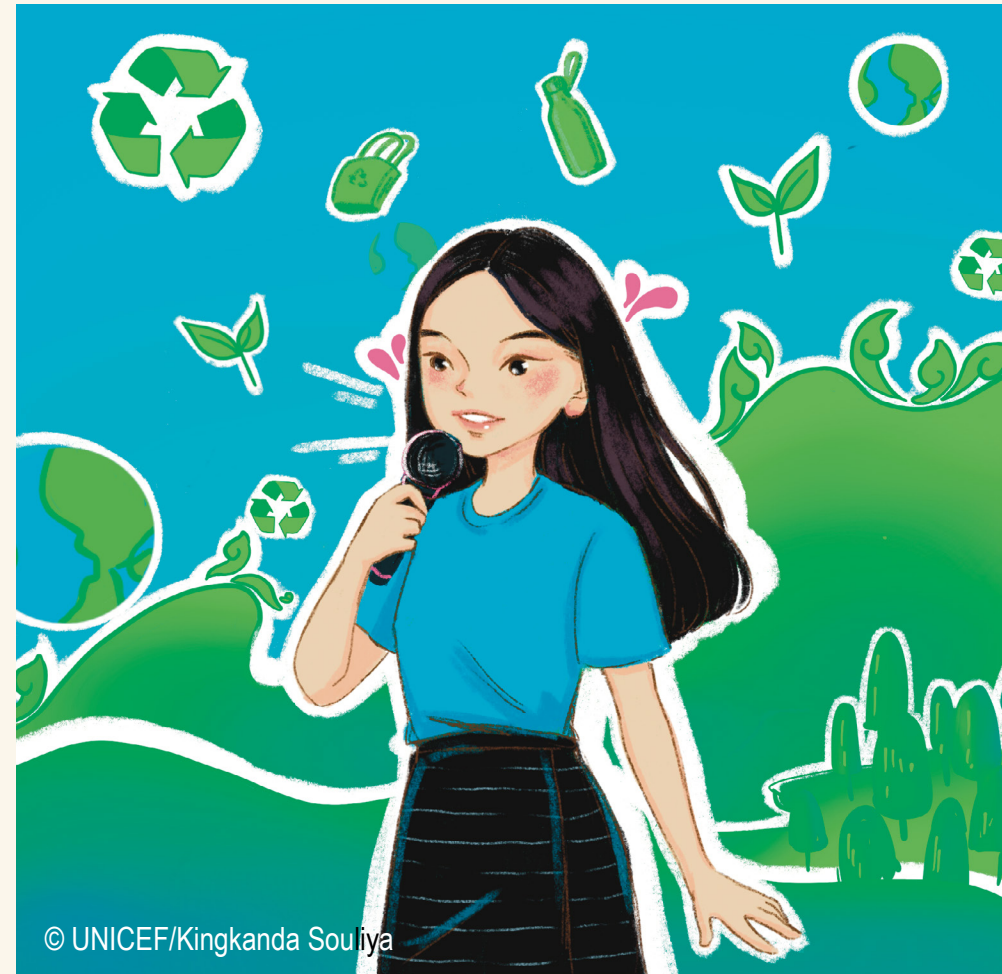
While children and youth are most vulnerable to, and affected by, climate change – they are also underrepresented in the process of making policies and disaster risk mitigation plans at all levels. Climate change affects children and young people’s access to basic social services such as WASH, education, and protection and their perspectives need to be reflected in all efforts to make systems more climate resilient. Engagement of children and youth should be made meaningful and measures to ensure their safety and psychosocial well-being should be put in place.

Young people should also be empowered with the skills to conduct research and analysis, identify key priorities related to addressing the climate crisis at the community level through consultations, and empowered to act through locally relevant initiatives for mitigation and adaptation. Girls' leadership, voice, and agency in climate action should also be promoted to ensure that policies and programmes are gender-responsive, and as a catalyst for girls' inclusion and participation across all sectors and contexts.

In Lao PDR, adolescents and youth are speaking up and leading change toward a more sustainable and equal world. While they stand ready to help shape our collective future, their voices and proposals often remain overlooked in the climate and environment decision making spaces.

Recognizing participation rights, incorporating them into laws, policies, practices, and providing the necessary budgetary support will ensure institutionalized participation rather than short-term, one-off participation activities. To ensure meaningful participation, children, adolescents, and youth must be equipped and empowered with information, knowledge, skills, and confidence through formal and non-formal climate, environment, and DRR (preparedness, response, and recovery) education, training, awareness, and access to information that is disability-appropriate and adolescent-friendly.

UNICEF will encourage and support child-, adolescent- and youth-led action and advocacy, accompanying them to become climate, environment, and DRR champions. This implies working for and with young people to elevate their own voices, perspectives, solutions and ideas through creative



platforms, advocacy, and participation at forums and summits, ensuring that they are heard at the highest levels. UNICEF will support, advocate for, and engage children and young people in designing and implementing innovations to solve climate and environmental challenges, with a particular focus on climate-resilient education, WASH, health and DRR youth-led solutions.



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Pillar Three - Mainstreaming climate change in social services

Definition: “Strengthen the resilience and continuity of social services to climate and environmental impacts and disasters in high-risk districts with a focus on the most vulnerable children and their families.”

Even under the most ambitious Green House Gas reduction scenario, global warming will continue due to emissions that have already been produced. Mitigation efforts will take decades to reverse the impacts of climate change, and for the children of today it will be too late. Urgent action to support adaptation, build resilience, and reduce the risk of disaster is needed to protect children’s lives and family livelihoods from the immediate and expected impacts of climate change.

However, protecting children and their communities from the impacts of climate change has traditionally been deprioritized in international climate action compared to reducing emissions.

More investments are needed to ensure that the services children need to survive, grow, and thrive are resilient to climate and environmental shocks. Lao PDR has limited capacity to deliver equitable social services. Barriers to, and constraints on, adaptation response arise from governance arrangements, financial resources, human capacity, and the limited capacity of institutional and legal systems to manage adaptation strategies at scale.

UNICEF will support national, provincial, and district level stakeholders to develop and scale-up child-sensitive risk-informed programmes to build coping capacity and resilience among communities to effectively address the impacts of climate change and disasters, and to reduce vulnerability among children, with a focus on the most vulnerable and risk-prone.

This will include programming and technological innovation, partnerships, research and evidence-based advocacy, capacity building, child, and youth engagement to build social services and systems that are climate-, environment-, and disaster-resilient. UNICEF will also advocate to ensure these are adequately funded, including new and existing social services:

- Climate-resilient and sustainable healthcare
- Climate-smart food and nutrition services
- Disaster risk reduction and sustainable energy in schools
- Climate resilient child protection systems and protection services
- Climate resilient WASH resources, systems, and technologies
- Shock-resilient cash transfers for social services.



UNICEF

Commitment - Greening Our Operations

The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 to end poverty, reduce inequality and build more peaceful, prosperous societies by 2030. UNICEF works with governments, partners, and other UN agencies to help countries ensure the Goals deliver results for every child – now and for generations to come.

UNICEF Lao PDR country office is making their own effort to reduce carbon emission. Low-carbon energy saving refers to the use of more environmentally friendly, efficient, and resource-saving ways of production, living and consumption, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect the environment, and promote sustainable development.

The Eco-Efficiency Initiative has remarkably contributed to the UNICEF office operations in Lao PDR. Changes include having a solar energy system, LED lights and lighting sensors in place to save resources and creating less waste and pollution that have already resulted in a significant reduction on electrical billing and Co2 saving. In addition, the office also actively grows plants to promote carbon circulation, reduce office energy consumption, reducing plastic waste, and distributing air purifiers to absorb the harmful gases that are found in the air.



Key partners

UNICEF will work with various stakeholders for the implementation of the Climate Strategy including government agencies, international organizations, NGOs, CSO, donors, Youth-led organization, and other stakeholders. UNICEF will seek to establish new partnerships where possible to strengthen UNICEF's position on climate and the environment.

