

- A national family planning costed-implementation plan (CIP, 2017-2020) was launched in order to give Governors specific provincial-level plans for effective family planning programming. The plans are based on extensive research and modelling to offer strategic priorities in family planning programmes aligned with national priorities and strategies.
- The plan will be executed in the months following the Conference by the FP2020 Focal Points and ministers from MoH, with continued support from Track20, FP2020 and UNFPA.

[See box for more information]

COSTED-IMPLEMENTATION PLAN: A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE

The purpose of the family planning costed-implementation plan is to find a cost-effective roadmap for the country to arrive at their contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) objective: 65% mCPR by 2020 – an objective which aligns with RMNCH targets.

Three priority areas have been identified based on the different levels of global [high] impact and information on the challenges and context in Lao PDR. They are:

Priority 1: expanding access to long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARC) in both public and private sectors, *which is the main force for increasing CPR.*

Priority 2: reducing stock-outs of contraceptive commodities, *which in turn reduces unmet need.*

Priority 3: demand generation activities and youth-focused activities, *which were recognised as a priority in the modelling phase for the potential long-term benefits.*

At the Conference, each province was presented with a roadmap detailing their key priority areas in operational scenarios, 'A', 'B' and 'C'. As more resources become available, more activities can begin (A-> B -> C is a hierarchical guide).

The CIP also highlights areas for Government, DPs and IP collaboration – acknowledging the role of multi-sectoral engagement for full CIP dissemination. improved prioritisation and advocacy from key ministers during annual budget allocation.

Forging sustainable partnerships for high-impact family planning outcomes is essential

- Fostering strong partnerships between government, development partners, civil society organisations and the private sector is essential to increasing political and financial investments for family planning in Lao PDR.
- Engaging partners from multiple sectors in family planning financing and provision will: take financial pressure off the government; strengthen the impact of family planning services; and improve the sustainability of commodity supply.
- Government leadership at national and provincial level is pivotal to ensuring that family planning is prioritised, invested-in and effectively implemented.

DAY THREE: ROUNDTABLE MEETING AT THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

On Friday 5 May, the MoH hosted a high-level Roundtable Meeting with the purpose of bringing together key-players from Government and development partners (DPs) to discuss the follow up of the Conference.

The MoH articulated a clear plan for strengthening partnerships and increasing investments for family planning – recognising that strong leadership at central and provincial level is vital to developing successful family planning programmes. With the right policies and investments in family planning, maternal and child health, education and youth employment will lead to sustainable economic development and prosperity in Lao PDR. The following next steps were proposed:

THE WAY FORWARD

- Simplify messaging for advocacy on family planning, from “birth control” to quality of care for mother and child, including adolescents and young people.
- Disseminate and integrate the family planning CIP in the provincial RMNCH planning exercises with support from FP2020, Track20 and UNFPA
- Create a family planning 'Action Plan' with activities from now until 2020.
- Begin a 'Financial Sustainability Strategy' for family planning commodities, with support from UNFPA.
- Clarify the family planning budget needs and contributions from Government and Dps
- Ensure appropriate legal frameworks for all family planning methods.
- Establish a broad family planning advocacy committee with representation from different ministries

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The First National Conference on Family Planning: Investing in Family Planning for Economic Prosperity

3- 4 May 2017, Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR



TOWARDS PROSPERITY

Investing in family planning has enormous potential to save lives and resources. By prioritising family planning investments by 2020, Lao PDR will be able to dramatically improve the health of mothers and their children, save millions in healthcare resources and boost economic growth.

On 3 and 4 of May, 2017, 251 participants gathered in Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR at the *First National Conference on Family Planning*. The Conference was hosted by the Ministry of Health (MoH), with support from UNFPA and FP2020. Keynote speeches were delivered by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Regional Director of UNFPA Asia-Pacific. Attendees included high-level representation from central government, including the Minister of Health, Minister of Planning and Investment, Minister of Education as well as directors from 8 central departments. Vice governors from all 18 provinces attended alongside directors and deputies from 5 provincial departments. Ambassadors from 9 countries were present. Directors and high-level representatives came from over 13 international development partners, such as other UN agencies, World Bank, JICA, KOICA, USAID, EU, CHAI, PSI, PFHA, CARE International and Track 20.

The theme of the Conference was *Investing in Family Planning for Economic Prosperity*. The objective was to increase Lao leaders' and policy makers' understanding of the benefits of investing in family planning to help meet the targets needed to graduate from least developed country (LDC) status by 2020, reach universal health coverage (UHC) by 2025, achieve the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and realise a demographic dividend – the economic growth that may result from a rapid decline in fertility and subsequent changes in the country's population age structure.

Government leaders, technical experts and development partners explored the cost-benefit of investing in family planning to meet the family planning needs of women, couples and youth and particularly of vulnerable ethnic groups in Lao PDR. They collectively voiced their support for increased financial investment for family planning commodities, prioritising family planning in the national policy agenda and supporting the launch and implementation of the family planning costed-implementation plan (CIP).

Five key outcomes emerged during the Conference. They reflect an improved understanding of family planning, increased commitment to national and international family planning agendas and meeting the reproductive needs of women from a health and human-rights perspective. They also reflect increased dialogue and partnership between government, private sector and civil society:

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Family planning is not about limiting the number of children but improving the health of mother and child by ensuring children are planned and well-spaced;
2. Investing in family planning is the keystone to achieving targets in national development agendas and graduating from LDC status;
3. Improving access and availability to family planning commodities requires increased national financial investments;
4. Sharing and understanding the family planning needs, resources and investments at provincial level is vital to successful programming strategies; and
5. Forging sustainable partnerships for high-impact family planning outcomes is essential.

Family planning is not about limiting the number of children but improving the health of mother and child by ensuring children are planned and well-spaced

- There was a broad consensus among high-level leaders from central government that voluntary family planning should be understood as improving the opportunity for women to access safe, effective, timely contraceptives for planned pregnancies and better birth spacing.
- New definitions marked a shift from previous rhetoric and concerns that family planning was about limiting the number of children, thereby threatening population growth and potential economic prosperity.
- The Vice Minister of Health suggested simplifying family planning messaging from “birth control” to quality of care for mother and child as a means of creating stronger advocacy campaigns.



“Quite simply, family planning provides choice to individuals and families, helping us work towards a future where every pregnancy is wanted and every childbirth is safe” – Excellency Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bounkong Syhavong, Minister of Health, Lao PDR

Investing in family planning is the keystone to achieving targets in national development agendas and graduating from LDC status

- Family planning plays a significant role in the 8th National Social Economic Development Plan (2016 – 2020) as access to comprehensive family planning services is critical for avoiding unintended pregnancy and missed opportunities in education, employment and lifetime earnings.
 - Family planning investments influence the indicators in relation to human assets, such as maternal mortality rate, under-five mortality and reducing stunting. These indicators are equally important to reach LDC graduation by 2020 and targets of the SDGs by 2030.
 - Graduating from LDC status requires addressing indicators in income, education and nutrition, which are influenced by family planning.
- **Income:** Family planning improves the economic wellbeing of families and communities.
 - **Education:** Improved family planning increases the chances for girls to stay in school, gain higher education and, as such, increase her overall earning potential.
 - **Nutrition:** Well-spaced and planned births is associated with improved nutritional outcomes for mother, infant and child.

- Investing in young people and turning the youth bulge into a demographic dividend can be achieved through supportive policies in family planning, education and labour markets. This requires strong stewardship from Government.
- Reaching UHC by 2025 can only be achieved if the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised are met. Therefore, family planning programmes should specifically address the needs of youth,

- ethnic groups and those living in rural areas.
- Policy frameworks and implementation strategies for the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Strategy (RMNCH, 2016-2025) could be utilised to push a national family planning agenda



“Investing in family planning contributes to the long-term prosperity of our country under the umbrella of the 2030 Agenda” – Excellency Dr. Sonexay Siphandone, Deputy Prime Minister of Lao PDR

Improving access and availability to family planning commodities requires increased national financial investments

- Leaders from different ministries recognised that national investments for contraceptive commodities must be increased in order to meet demand and account for withdrawing donor support.
- Increasing investments in family planning was presented as being a cost-effective investment for Government: spending \$1 dollar on contraceptives can reduce the cost of pregnancy-related care by \$7 dollars – saving millions of dollars

- in associated healthcare costs.
- The costs of commodities could also be lowered by providing more choice, increased counselling and promoting long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) which are less-costly, less vulnerable to stock-outs and provide long-term protection.
- Increased investments for commodities can be made at central and provincial level through



“Family planning is about saving lives, working on quality of life and having an influence on economic prosperity and social development” – Ms. Frederika Meijer, Representative UNFPA Lao PDR

Sharing and understanding the family planning needs, resources and investments at provincial level is vital to successful programming strategies

- Strategies for successful implementation of family planning programmes were offered by experts from provinces performing particularly well on supply-chain management, training, supply and demand.