

Introduction:

The United Nations General Assembly declared October 11 as the International Day of the Girl Child in Resolution 66/170 adopted on December 19, 2011. Since then, October 11 is celebrated every year as the International Day of the Girl Child to recognize the rights of girls and the unique challenges faced by girls around the world.

In 2016, Lao PDR launched the Noi ecosystem approach having Noi, which represents all adolescent girls (over 700,000) in the country. She was created as an entry point for dialogue and to draw attention to the unique needs of adolescent girls as well as boys. Since then the Noi's anniversary is celebrated every year on October 11 to highlight the progress related to adolescent programming, partnership building and to reinforce our commitment to promote empowerment of adolescent girls and boys with a vision of 'leaving no one behind'

The first International Day of Girl Child in Laos PDR was led by the Ministry of Planning and Investment in 2016 under the theme: 'Investing in Adolescent Girls for Sustainable Development of Lao PDR'. Since then, the celebration continues to be hosted by different government entities with a new theme each year. This year, Noi celebrated her 15th Anniversary. It was organized by Lao Youth Union and UNFPA with support from various partners: UN agencies, INGOs, CSOs and private sector partners. The theme of the celebration was **'Digital Generation: Technology and Innovations as Accelerators of Girls' Bodily Autonomy'**.

The objective of the IDGC event and associated activities was to encourage active and inclusive participation of young people, policymakers, and the development community, focusing on solutions for the wellbeing of adolescents and highlighting the collective efforts and joint achievements. Issues and challenges of adolescent girls in the context of the implementation of 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDPlan) in the post COVID-19 situation.

Furthermore, this year's event focuses on 5 priority areas of national youth and adolescent development strategy 2021-2030: 1) Health and wellbeing, 2) Education, Sport, and Training, 3) Employment and Entrepreneurship, 4) Social Protection and 5) Civic Engagement and Participation. The presentation at the event made by the concerned line ministries and mass organizations also focussed on progress made in 5 indicators of the Noi 2030 Framework linked to 5 SDGs: SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic growth).

Opening Session:

The event started with welcoming guests and participants both in the meeting room and zoom. It was followed by an opening speech from H.E Mr. Alounxai Sounnalath (Secretary-General of Lao Youth Union). He highlighted the theme and reminded the challenging context of COVID-19 that hit the world and Lao PDR, threatening to roll back the progress made for all adolescent girls. He called to maintain the efforts to improve the lives of young girls across the country, through; (i) proceeding with the ICPD 25 commitment with United Nations, (ii) creating a critical process in rights especially with gender equality in remote areas, and (iii) raising awareness about gender equality, particularly in rural areas, and fighting the causes of inequality. He recalled the findings of the Youth and Adolescent Situation Analysis on adolescent girls: girls suffer from anemia, poor nutrition, early marriage, and have dropped out of school, especially among ethnic ones. He saluted the Lao government's efforts to promote SRH, family planning, gender roles by making information and services available for young people, through the hotlines and a large choice of health services.

Cooperation between LYU, UNFPA and development partners the Youth and Adolescent Development Strategy 2021-2030 with 5 key areas: 1) Health and wellbeing, 2) Education, Sport, and Training, 3) Employment and Entrepreneurship, 4) Social Protection and 5) Civic Engagement and Participation. Succeeding to implement those pillars for the huge percentage of youth in Laos, will allow the country to increase socio-economic development by 60%. He emphasized on the importance of innovation such as the LYU youth platform named 'Khang Sinxay', which serves as a database for the youth who are seeking information. Success in innovation needs the involvement of partners and the positive engagement of men and boys. He concluded by presenting his gratitude for the productive cooperation with Lao women Union, UNFPA, and Development Partnership and their support both technically and financially.

Ms. Mariam A. Khan, UNFPA Representative, Lao PDR in her opening remarks also mentioned that she is impressed by the enthusiasm of the Lao Youth Union in organizing the event. She mentioned that technologies play an important role in young people's access to information. The statistics from the hotline revealed that there are many young people using the hotline service including the telehelp from Quarantine or Isolation stations. Ms Khan also brought attention to the disadvantages of technology when it is used inappropriately. She mentioned how impressed she is, to see partners supporting Noi for the last 5 years, whether they are Government, INGO, CSO, or development partners. Today 35 partners are collaborating on the Noi

ecosystem. She thanked all sectors who created the strategy together to protect adolescents and young girls. Those included LYU who conducted many activities in schools, and the Ministry of Education and Sports who integrated the CSE into primary, secondary and TVET curriculum. Results showed that over 6000 young girls are getting access to the information and services. The establishment of boys, parents and village authorities' engagement initiatives brought positive change to women and girls. The campaign 'Me, My body, My future' encourages young women to speak out and stand up for their rights, including through the use of technology

She also reminded COVID-19 disastrous impact on girls, school drop-out increased by 5%, and domestic violence, child abuse and mental issues increased significantly. She also reiterated UNFPA commitment to promote and raise awareness on vaccination among young boys and girls. Ms Khan assured of UNFPA support to continue advancing the commitment of ICPD leaving no one behind.

After the Opening Speech and Opening remark by Mr. Alouxai and Ms. Mariam, Both of them and the representatives of young girls had cake cutting to officially celebrate the International Day of the Girl Child and Noi's 15th Anniversary.



Mr. Alounxai and Ms. Mariam Khan together with the representatives of adolescent girls cutting the cake to celebrate the International Day of the Girl Child and Noi's 15th Anniversary.

Session 1: A Video on Demographic Dividend

This video mainly shows the results of the Noi framework and the effectiveness of investing in adolescents and youth.

Session 2: Presentation on the progress of 5 indicators of Noi 2030 Framework

There were five [presentations](#) on progress of indicators in the Noi 2030 Framework. The first presentation was about 'SDG 2 Zero Hungry'. The second and third presentations were about 'SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing' and 'SDG 4: Quality Education'. The last two were about 'SDG 5: Gender Equality', and 'SDG 8: Decent work and Economic Growth'.

SDG 2: Zero hunger by National Nutrition Center, Ministry of Health

This presentation focused on malnutrition and poor health among adolescent girls. Anemia was a main concern of it. According to research data, it has increased from 35% in 2012 to 40% in 2017 (LSIS II). In order to achieve Noi 2030, the rate of anemic adolescent girls must be reduced by 4.3% per year. To proceed with the reduction of anemia and lack of nutrition, the Ministry of Health has provided iron-folic acid for young women and pregnant women, and also the iron pills have been stored in the provincial hospital and provincial warehouse. Furthermore, Anthelmintic medicine was distributed to women of reproductive age and children. Health education and counseling have cooperated with other sectors to improve policies and provide tools for it.

Anemia rate in Laos remains high (42.6%), MOH will continue to develop plans, policies, and strategies to reduce it. To develop the monitoring, evaluation and services management, multiple sectors cooperating and capacity among medical and technical staff are planned.

SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing by Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion, Ministry of Health

This presentation highlighted the importance of reducing early pregnancy, by raising awareness on early marriage disadvantages and enforcing family law. Since 2017 the birth rate has decreased by 2.2 births/1000 for adolescent girls per year. To reach zero by 2030, there should be a decrease of 6.38 births/1000 adolescent girls per year, which embodies providing services and information on family planning and health service in remote areas.

To end early pregnancy, MOH has improved policies to ensure the accessibility of adolescents and youth to universal coverage of SRH and friendly services with confidentiality and without discrimination. It also increased modern contraception, reduced unmet need for family planning, expanded and established youth-friendly services in all provincial and district hospitals along with revising the strategies and policies.

MOH rolled out the adolescent and youth-friendly services and improved the service facilities in Savannakhet, Oudomxay, and Vientiane. Along with collaborating with development partners, it also brought SRH to adolescent and young people to the communities, and developed the RMNCAH communication tools for village health volunteers. Furthermore, it also promoted tools that would help youth and adolescents get access to the SRH, family planning, and mental health information. Those included Hotline, Noi yakhoo application.

In the future, MOH will increase accessibilities of SRH information and services, and expand adolescent and friendly services for additional provinces. Also, it will reduce the unsafe abortion, formulating individual responsibilities to the law along with developing the National Adolescent and Youth-friendly standard.

SDG 4: Quality Education by Education and Sports statistic center, Ministry of Education

This session focussed on solving girls' drop-out issues and Comprehensive Sexuality Education(CSE). As was shown, 41.8% of girls aged 15-17 were currently out of school. When we look at the priority areas of the National Youth and Adolescent Development Strategy, 'Education,Sports and Training' the acceleration of school attendance for girls, especially for the young girls, who were from rural areas is a priority intervention. In order to reach zero drop-out rate by 2030, it is required to decrease the drop-out by 3.2% per year. According to the ICPD 25 commitment, by 2030, comprehensive sexuality education would be fully integrated into school curriculums nationwide, and the investment for adolescents and youth, including data collecting , analyzing and monitoring will be increased too. Those were linked to the 9th education and sports sector development plan 2021-2025, which included improving quality education, revising primary curriculum, rolling out new curricula, improving WASH facilities, extending NFE equivalency programmes, providing training and consultations with technological innovation assistance.

At present, the integration of CSE with school teaching has been implemented and will be scaled up to more provinces and schools by 2030. At the same time, online CSE teaching and learning were advocated nationwide. Activities like Nang Noi girls group, boys engagement, Me, My body, My Planet, telephone helpline, Noi Yakhoo mobile application achieved great success during the COVID-19. It was of importance to be aware that COVID-19 had brought great challenges, either in accelerating drop-out, early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, child labor, or in increasing mental and psychosocial and online abuse of students.

For the future plans, more financial support to adolescents and mitigation of COVID-19 impact on education and extending life-skill training through social media were planned.

SDG 5: Gender Equality by Department of Planning and International Cooperation Lao women's Union

This presentation mainly focused on gender inequality, which impeded Nang Noi framework and accounted for child marriage. Strategies included running awareness campaigns for adolescents and youth, aiming to persuade girls not to engage in early marriage and protect them from gender-based violence, like sexual violence, drug abuse, alcoholism and trafficking. It was highlighted that more investment should increase to train Nang Noi mentors, so as to provide space for helping vulnerable adolescent girls to build their social, health, cognitive and economic assets, vocational skills, protection and participation. At the same time, to attract more adolescents to join technical and vocational education programs, more financial resources should be dedicated to scholarships, infrastructure and residential facilities improvement. Furthermore, LYU and LWU should hold more campaigns about it too.

LWU has made great efforts and achievements. Those included ESP (essential service package) with Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) focus program, Psycho-Social Support, Women's 3 goods family and Village projects. During the pandemic lockdown, the expansion of hotline service provided tremendous help to women and girls who were suffering from psychosocial issues. And male engagement in GBV prevention and SRH promotion, parenting support for young children through the 'Love and Care For Every Child' Initiative have also been promoted. Training for gender equality among adolescents, parents and other stakeholders, especially for very young adolescents will be implemented.

As girls' drop-out, girls' marriage and girls' childbearing were still severe, nation's policies and implementations should integrate and work together.

SDG 8: Decent work and Economic Growth by Department of Labour Management, Ministry of labor, and Social welfare

This presentation started with the definition of Child Labor (depriving children from attending school and causing harm to their health both physically and mentally). Due to lack of protection, 42.4% of female adolescent aged 15-17 were involved in child labour, to eradicate child labor by 2030, there must be a reduction of 3.3% per year. There were many listed hazardous jobs that exploited children, but some of them were still under debated whether they belong to using child labor or not.

At present, the numbers of labor users who infiltrate child labor issues and child abuse in the form of abuse is not available, as there is no database or information system. One of the challenges was that there is a general belief that child labor is "normal". The change of mentalities requires time and effort. Furthermore, the limitations of resources for data collection, monitoring and reporting, and lack of effective coordination mechanisms make problem-solving more difficult.

Solutions like encouraging children to get educated, establishing legislation, laws and regulations that are strict in preventing the child labor, creating and improving coordination, monitoring and reporting mechanisms, and cooperation among child-parents, governments and other organizations are needed.

Session 3 A video from Mentors of Nang Noi Girls Groups

The content of the video was about the Nang Noi girls' feelings, ideas and lessons that they have learned from joining the Nang Noi Girls Groups as mentors.

Session 4: Handing over ceremony for the host 2022 & Comments

This part refers to the handover of the International Day of the Girl Child 2022 celebration to Lao Women's Union (UNFPA and LWU). Following it, Madam Inlavanh Keobounphanh delivered her comment on the handover ceremony, she mainly expressed her thanks to the participants and endeavours of all partners. At the end, Ms. Khan gave a brief comment on the morning agenda. She congratulated the fantastic presentations and progress made, and depicted that some areas were still looking for partners. At the end, she highlighted her thankfulness to the LYU and the

leadership of the government of Laos and expressed her wishes to make what we have started in the capital go down to the provinces, districts and villages. She also looked forward to strengthening cooperation in supporting the young people in Lao PDR.



Mr. Alounxai and Ms. Mariam handing over the host of the International Day of the Girl Child on 2022 to Madam Inlavanh Keobounphanh, Lao Women Union

Session 5: Closing Session

In his closing remarks, H.E Mr. Alounxai Sounnalath, LYU thanked all the participants. He said we have seen the innovation of Nang Noi programs and saw the involvement and support from our partners. He especially thanked the financial and technological support from the UNFPA and concluded what we have seen in the morning.

In her closing remarks, Ms. Mariam A. Khan expressed her appreciation for all government ministries, mass organizations, development partners, INGOS, CSO and young people for working together on the Noi ecosystem approach for empowering adolescent girls and achieving gender equality. She also encouraged all stakeholders to continue working together and forging more partnerships for joint advocacy and programming for expanding the coverage.



Picture with participants from online and offline

Afternoon Session started from 13.30-15.30 PM via Live streaming through VTE9, Partnership Facebook Page (UNFPA, Save the Children, Plan International, etc)

Section 1: Opening Speech by Mr. Somkiao Kingsada (LYU)

Opening Remark by Ms. Mariam A. Khan (UNFPA)

Opening Remark by Ms. Vimala Dethvongsa (Plan International)

Section 2: Mr. Somkiao Kingsada summarized ICDG 2021 such as the successful of activities, indicators which have cooperated with partnership and planned forward from the morning session.

Section 3: Voices of the ethnic young girls from Bokeo and Oudomxay sharing their opinion about the important of sexual reproductive health in school, family planning, education, gender equality towards youth and adolescents and also the challenges in their community, which related to what they have learned. They also shared their opinion about what they are expect to see in their community and society for the future.

Section 4: Mentors from Nang Noi Girl group shared their experiences about Nang Noi girl group program such as Sexual reproductive health, Life skills, family planning, etc.

Section 5: Performance from Youth (LGBTQ, Ethnic group, etc)

Section 6: Youth Volunteers shared their experiences about their activities about Youth during COVID19 such as Hotline from LYU, Hand of hopes (Sign languages), Environmental and also encouraged other youths to get involved in the development process and oppose the COVID-19 as well.

Section 7: Closing performance by Youth

Annex 1. Agenda

Celebration of the International Day of the Girl Child 2021 and Noi's 15th Anniversary

Vientiane Capital, 11 October 2021

Theme- 'Digital Generation: Technology and Innovation as accelerators of girls' bodily autonomy'

Time	Contents	Responsible/Speaker
09:00-09:05	- Welcome guests and state the objectives	Mr. Thatsaphone Leudthavone Ms. Soumontha Songpatchai
09:05-09:15	- Opening Speech by LYU	Mr. Alounxai SOUNNALATH Secretary General of Lao Youth Union
09:15-09:20	- Opening Remark by UNFPA	Ms. Mariam A.Khan UNFPA representative, Lao PDR
09:20-09:30	- Ceremony International Day of the Girl Child 2021 & Noi's 15th Birthday Cake Cutting with Adolescent girls	Mr. Alounxai SOUNNALATH Secretary General of Lao Youth Union Ms. Mariam A.Khan UNFPA representative, Lao PDR
09:30-09:40	Group Photo and Coffee break	
09:40-09:46	Video Screening: Harnessing Demographic Dividend in Lao PDR	LYU and UNFPA
09:46-11:00	Presentation of the Progress of 5 indicators of Noi 2030 Framework <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SDG 2: Zero Hunger 2. SDG 3: Good Health & Well-being 3. SDG 4: Quality Education 4. SDG 5: Gender Equality 5. SDG 8: Decent Work & Economic Growth 	15 minutes for each presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Nutrition Center, Ministry of Health - Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion, Ministry of Health - Education and Sport Statistics Center, Ministry of Education and Sports - Department of Planning and International

		Cooperation Lao Women's Union - Department of Labour Management, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
11:00-11:02	Noi Mentor Video (2 minutes)	LYU and UNFPA
11:02-11:10	Handing over to the host of International Day of the Girl Child 2022 (Lao Women's Union)	Lao Youth Union & UNFPA Lao Women's Union
11:10-11:15	Closing Remarks by UNFPA	Ms. Mariam A.Khan UNFPA representative, Lao PDR
11:15-11:25	Closing Speech by LYU	Mr. Alounxai SOUNNALATH Secretary General of Lao Youth Union
11:25-11:30	Thanks and Closing	Mr. Thatsaphone Leudthavone Ms. Soumontha Songpatchai



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