

The Impact of Population on Human Resource Development

Mr. Bounthavy Sisouphanthong and Ms. Thirakha Chanthalanouvong *

1. Population structure in the Lao PDR

Lao PDR, like some other countries, has a small size of population compared with its land area. According to the results from the last two population censuses of the country its population has increased from 3.5 million in 1985 to 4.5 million in 1995 and in 2000 it was estimated to be 5.2 million. (See table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Distribution of population by years and sex

Number of population (person)	Years		
	1985	1995	2000(est.)
Female	1 827 688	2 332 616	2 651 164
Male	1 757 115	2 279 351	2 605 037
Total	3 584 803	4 611 967	5 256 201

Source: National Statistical Center (NSC) of Committee for Planning and Cooperation

(CPC), Results from the Population Census 1985 and 1995.

- 1985 population is not mid year population (30/3/1985).

There are 48 ethnic groups in the Lao PDR, and almost 53 percent of the Lao population are Lao ethnic, 11 percent Khmu ethnic, 10 percent was Phuthai, 6.9 percent are Hmong, 2.6 percent Lue, and other minority ethnic groups constitute 16.1 percent. (See table 1.2).

In total, the Lao women population is more than half of the total population and also in each main age group. Regarding the age structure, it is clear that the young population takes higher proportion than those in the age group of 65 and over. (See table 1.3 and chart1.1). It should be noted that the government may need to provide several different types of support to meet the needs of different age groups of young people, and to ensure that the social security is in place.

According to data for the year 2000, population who are at age 15-64 years old covers 52.9 percent, which is more than half of the total population. These people are considered to be in the labour force group and the quality of their manpower is one of the crucial factors of the inputs for development processes.

* National Statistical Center, Committee for Planning and Cooperation

Table 1.2: Percent distribution of Lao population by ethnic group and sex, 1995

Unit: Percent

Ethnic group	Women	Men	Total	
			percent	number
Lao	50.6	49.4	52.5	2 403 891
Phutai	50.8	49.2	10.3	472 458
Khmu	50.6	49.4	11.0	500 957
Kmong	49.9	50.1	6.9	315 465
Lue	50.7	49.3	2.6	119 191
Other	50.8	49.2	16.1	738 802
Don't know	48.1	51.9	0.5	24 084
Total	2 313 862	2 260 986	100.0	4 574 848

Source: National Statistical Center (NSC) of Committee for Planning and Cooperation (CPC), Results from the Population Census 1995

The age pyramid for Lao population (chart 1.1) displays the considerable decline of fertility for the last few years as it is seen in the short bar for population age 0-4. The two adjacent bars are bigger, which refers to the proportion of population who will be either in the economically active group or non-active. The bars for population age 15-64 show that population in this age group constitutes about 53 percent of the total population and this large proportion appears to help to reduce the dependency ratio from 93.5 in 1985 to 89 in 2000.

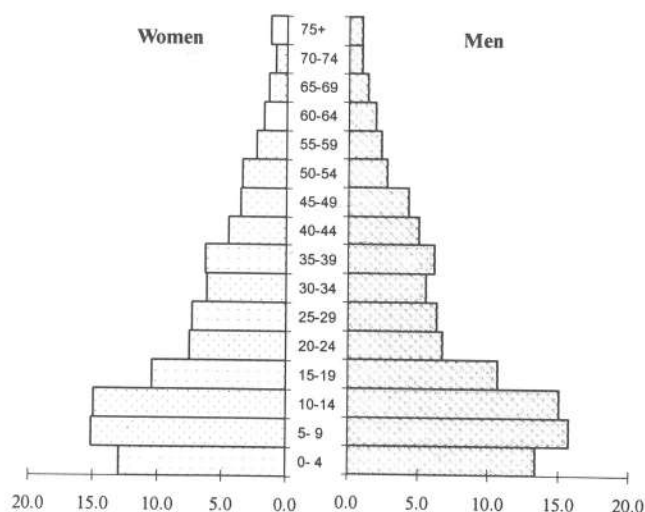
Table 1.3: Distribution of population by years, sex and main age groups

Unit: Percent

Background characteristics	1985			1995			2000 (est.)		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Age group									
0-14	42.5	46.0	44.2	43.0	45.5	44.2	42.9	44.3	43.6
15-64	53.4	50.0	51.7	53.2	50.8	52.0	53.6	52.3	52.9
65+	4.1	4.0	4.1	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.4	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Dependency ratio	87.4	100.0	93.5	87.6	96.7	92.1	86.8	91.2	89.0

Source: National Statistical Center (NSC) of Committee for Planning and Cooperation (CPC), Results from the Population Census 1985, 1995 and Lao Reproductive Health Survey 2000

Consequently, it seems to be very clear that human resources and economic development could not be separated and they support each other. However, if the supply does not respond to people's needs, the development process might get stuck or continue to grow slowly.

Chart 1.1: Age pyramid of Lao population for 2000

2. Population projection

It is apparent that population is a crucial factor in undertaking the social and economic development activities and it is the ultimate beneficiary of the development outputs. Population changes including population growth, age structure change and geographic distribution largely have an impact on socio-economic development, in particular on human resource development.

(1) Population projection

Population projection gives the view of its structural change as well as its growth in each period of time. The mid year population projection for Lao PDR between the periods of 1995-2005 is displayed in table 2.1. Generally, the female population is more than the male population in each period. In 1995 total Lao population was 4.6 million, 5.2 million were in 2000 and it will reach 5.9 million in 2005. The growth rate of natural increase tended to increase from 2.5 % in 1995 to 2.8 % in 2000. It will gradually decline to 2.6 % in 2005.

Table 2.1: Mid year population projection for Lao PDR in 1995-2005

Population Characteristics	Unit: Person		
	1995	2000	2005
Female	2 332 616	2 651 164	2 998 423
Male	2 279 351	2 605 037	2 954 461
Total	4 611 967	5 256 201	5 952 884
Population age 15-19	-	601 900	688 300
Rate of natural increase (%)	2.5	2.8	2.6

Source: National Statistical Center (NSC) of Committee for Planning and Cooperation (CPC), Results from the Population Census 1985, 1995 and Loa Reproductive Health Survey 2000.

(2) Population growth

In 2000 the rate of natural increase was higher than it was in 1995. It is expected to turn to a lower rate in the next 5 years. The rate of growth in year 2000 did not really indicate the rapid growth of population in Lao, but there was a significantly sharp decline in mortality and a slight decrease in fertility. Therefore, the trend of demographic transition would be rather gradual with change in lower fertility and rapid decline of mortality.

The population growth is not really a significant issue of the Lao government compared to its land area. However the population growth would require some specific support from the government in order to meet the need of Lao people in different age groups.

3. Population and development

In general, the rapid increase of population tends to have a negative impact on national development. The rapid increase creates hardship in providing for employment, housing, education and health service, especially in a country having less potential and financial resources for development. These kinds of assistance will help to improve the quality of manpower to meet the need of development. The society will have progress if its population has a better quality of life. A country with a big population without quality and choices in their life would not be developed satisfactorily. In contrast, a country with a small population but a better quality life is likely to be developed in all spheres.

One of the key factors that indicate the quality of population is education training. Some main indicators that are usually generated to measure the quality of population are literacy rates and level of highest education. Lao is one of the less developed countries, which has a low adult literacy rate. According to UNDP, Human Development Report 2000, the literacy rate for Lao PDR in 1999 was quite low (47.3) compared with some other more developed countries that are in the same region such as Thailand (95.3%) Vietnam (93.1%) China (85.3%) and Malaysia (87.0%). (See table 3.1)

Based on the country's experience in the last decade, the Lao Government oriented a New Economic Mechanism, which is intended to encourage foreign investment and trade. With this implementation, the government intends to achieve higher output and reach preferable goals. Since then, there has been much greater need to improve human resource development.

Therefore, the first starting point for improving human resource development must be to educate people. This area of development can improve the health of mothers and their babies. The educational system should be expanded and improved so that all children can receive at least a primary school education and parents should be informed of the advantages of sending their children to school for longer periods of time.

In addition, the curriculum of upper secondary, vocational and technical schools, and of colleges and universities should be continuously updated to reflect the rapid changes taking place in the economy and labor market.

Table 3.1: Selected indicators of countries in East and South-East Asia, 1999

Country	Total Population (million)	Human Development Index	Adult Literacy Rate
China	1264.8	0.718	83.5
Combdia	12.8	0.541	68.2
Indonesia	209.3	0.677	86.3
Lao PDR	5.2	0.476	47.3
Malaysia	21.8	0.774	87.0
Myanmar	47.1	0.551	84.4
Philippines	74.2	0.749	95.1
Singapore	3.9	0.876	92.1
Thailand	62	0.757	95.3
Vietnam	77.1	0.682	93.1

Source: UNDP, Human Development Report 2000

Practically, the rapid growth of Lao teenagers who are university age level seems to meet with insufficient response from the government. According to the plan of Ministry of Education in 2001, only about 12,000 of population age 15-19 who were around at age of university level would be provided a place to study. But in the same year the actual increase of population for this group was estimated to be 23,300 people. It was very clear that almost half of them could not be offered any education and its impact on the society has to be acknowledged.

Current status of human development in the Lao PDR

Total population (est. 2002) ¹	5.5 Million
Rate of natural increase per year (2000) ¹	2.8 per 100 persons
Total fertility rate (2000) ¹	4.9 per one women
Life expectancy at birth (2000) ¹	
Total	59 years
Female	61 years
Male	57 years
Contraceptive prevalence rate (2000) ¹	32.2 percent
Under 5 mortality rate (2000) ¹	106.9 per 1000 births
Infant mortality rate (2000) ¹	82.2 per 1000 births
Maternal mortality rate (2000) ¹	530 per 100 000 births
Proportion of birth attended by health professional (2000) ¹	17 percent
Public access to safe drinking water (2000) ¹	13.7 percent
Proportion of population access to toilet (2000) ¹	37.6 percent
GDP per capita (2001) ²	US\$329
Net enrollment ratio in primary education (2000) ³	70.2 percent
Ratio girl to boy in primary education (2000) ³	82.4 percent
Net enrollment ratio in secondary education (2000) ³	77.3 percent
Ratio girls to boys in secondary education (2000) ³	68.4 percent
Proportion of pupils, reaching grade 5 of primary school (2000) ³	49.6 percent
Ratio of literate females to males of 15-24 years old (2000) ³	94.5 percent
Literacy rate of 15-24 years old and adults (2000) ³	81.4 percent
Proportion of seats in the parliament held by women (2000) ⁴	22.9 percent
Proportion of households with electricity (2000) ¹	38.2 percent
Main telephone lines per 100 population (2000) ³	1.1 lines
Personal computers in use per 100 population (2000) ³	0.26 unit

¹ Results of Lao Reproductive Health Survey 2000, National Statistical Center

² Estimated by National Statistical Center

³ Statistics Year Book 2001, National Statistical Center

⁴ Lao Women's Union