

Developing capacity for gender-sensitive parliament:
a gender mainstreaming strategy for the National Assembly

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

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GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Project background

Gender mainstreaming is a component of UNDP Project LAO/01/M01, the objective of which is to clarify and strengthen the National Assembly legislative process and its oversight functions. Achieving this objective requires a robust human resource development strategy, designed to enhance technical capacity and management skills in both members and officials of the Assembly.

The development of a gender mainstreaming strategy within this broad framework will assist members to aim for gender awareness in their decision-making, improve the capacity of officials to provide gender-sensitive information, and ensure that personnel policies and practices are gender inclusive.

Methodology

A gender consultant was contracted to conduct a participative planning process for the development of a gender mainstreaming strategy. The consultancy took place over six weeks in April-June 2003. A working party comprising members and staff of the National Assembly was formed to direct the process. The consultancy also benefited from the generous support of the UNDP project team. The names of the working group members, the project team and the persons interviewed are listed at Appendix 1.

The methodology agreed by the working party was to conduct semi-structured interviews with members and officials, at both national and provincial levels. The purpose of the interviews was twofold; to raise awareness of the gender mainstreaming component of the UNDP project, and to collect qualitative data for gender analysis. Due to time and availability restrictions the provincial interviews were held in two provinces only, Luang Namtha and Oudomxay.

The qualitative information thus obtained was blended with quantitative data to extend the gender analysis of the National Assembly and provide the basis for the mainstreaming strategy and action plan. Drafts of the strategy were revised according to working party and project team input.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Executive Summary

Background

UNDP Project LAO/02/M01 aims to strengthen and clarify the National Assembly legislative process and its oversight functions. The gender mainstreaming strategy and action plan is an essential component of the project, and will assist members to consider the gender implications of their decision-making processes.

The strategy was developed in consultation with the Women's Caucus and other nationally-based and provincially-based members of the National Assembly, and national and provincial officials.

Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy which aims to achieve substantive gender equality. It has evolved from early unsuccessful attempts to address gender issues in development. The theory of gender mainstreaming is that gender equality cannot be achieved unless and until all government processes – policy, programs, and projects – take gender issues into account and are designed according to this principle.

The gender mainstreaming strategy for the National Assembly therefore addresses the whole of the Assembly structure, and not just the Women's Caucus. The structure of the National Assembly consists of the Assembly itself, the Women's Caucus, and the support mechanism, the National Assembly secretariat.

Gender analysis

The first step in the development of a mainstreaming strategy is to undertake a gender analysis of the institution. An analysis of the Assembly structure was carried out with the aid of the project team and the personnel department. The detailed findings are at Chapter Two. Below is a summary of the findings.

- § the gender composition of the National Assembly (22.9% women) compares favourably with other countries in the region
- § 64% of the female members were newly elected in 2002
- § female membership is stronger in the smaller provinces, and in the northern region of the country
- § female membership is weakest in the provinces with large numbers of representatives
- § committee membership is very patchy, with the majority of women situated in the Social and Cultural Affairs portfolio
- § the Social and Cultural Affairs portfolio does not have a member on the Standing Committee
- § women are very poorly represented in Economics, Law and Security committees
- § there are no female provincial delegation chiefs

- § there is one female provincial standing member (out of eighteen)
- § the secretariat of the National Assembly has a staff ratio of 28% women, 72% men
- § in eleven departments at the national level, there is only one female Director
- § there are no female managers at the provincial level, so in total there is one female manager out of twenty-eight positions
- § in the national office, the balance between women and men in committee departments is very uneven
- § there are no women in the Economy and Finance Department, similar to the composition of the Assembly committees

Gender planning

The mainstreaming strategy is developed from the findings of the gender analysis. It is based on two guiding principles:

1. Gender equality, guaranteed by the constitution, should be recognisable in all facets of life in Lao PDR. Women must be able to exercise their rights
2. The realisation of the aim of poverty eradication in Lao PDR will only happen when women and men enjoy substantive equality

The structure of the action plan for gender mainstreaming is composed of three separate but interlinked sections:

- § The National Assembly
- § The Women's Caucus
- § The Secretariat

In each section there are a set of goals and objectives, with appropriate actions to realise the goals and objectives. The major goals for each section are set out below:

A) the National Assembly

1. The National Assembly is a gender-sensitive institution and contributes to substantive gender equality in Lao PDR through fully informed decision-making
2. Women parliamentarians actively and effectively participate in all decision-making bodies in the National Assembly
3. The National Assembly effectively contributes to gender equality through its oversight function, particularly in Socio-Economic Planning and budgeting
4. Legislative processes of Lao PDR are gender sensitive and do not discriminate against women or men

5. Public consultation and representative functions are designed to be gender sensitive

B) the Women's Caucus

1. The Women's Caucus Strategic Plan is developed
2. Women parliamentarians are effective and influential in the National Assembly
3. Women parliamentarians participate in all National Assembly Committees
4. Women regard the National Assembly as a career
5. Women's representation in the National Assembly is equitable in all constituencies

C) the National Assembly Secretariat

1. HRD policies are transparent and aim for gender equality
2. Women are represented at all levels of decision-making, both in the national office and in the provinces
3. Women are represented in all Departments of the Secretariat
4. The secretariat is a competent gender sensitive institution, assisting parliamentarians to make well informed decisions
5. All documents submitted to National Assembly Committees have been analysed for gender inclusions
6. All documents initiated by the National Assembly are gender sensitive

Specific objectives and actions to realise these goals can be found at Chapters 4-6.

There are two important factors to be understood when examining the strategy. The first point is that the strategy and the action plans are not complete. They are the initial steps in mainstreaming gender into National Assembly structure and operations. In the future, as Assembly members and staff become more skilled in the application of gender analysis and gender planning, this strategy and its accompanying plans will need to be revised. Some activities will change, and some new activities will be added as experience is gained. This is to be expected in a dynamic environment, and will strengthen the outcomes of the strategy.

The second factor is that there is as yet no agreed structure to guide the implementation of the strategy and action plans. As it stands, there are no clear lines of responsibility. It will be essential for the successful outcome of the strategy that an implementation framework is established. This framework would initially consist of a Planning Committee or working group comprising both women and men to take the strategy forward. Responsibilities will include prioritising and coordinating activities, setting timelines, and guiding and overseeing the implementation process.

Introduction

The Government of Lao PDR is committed to social justice for all citizens, regardless of age, sex, or ethnicity. The Constitution of Lao PDR highlights that all citizens are equal before the law (Chapter 3, Article 22) and that Lao citizens of both sexes enjoy equal rights in political, economic, cultural, social and family affairs (Chapter 3, Article 24). Despite this, there are indications that women in Lao PDR have often borne the burden of under-development, and that their right to equality is not always realised. Studies have shown that women work longer hours than men, they have less access to education, their specific health needs are often not met. In paid employment their wages are lower, they hold fewer positions of authority in both the private and the public sector. Their ability to influence policy is limited, either because of lack of representation or lack of skills and experience, and their position in household economics (expenditure and consumption, resource distribution) is unclear.

Chapter 4 of the Constitution (Article 39) establishes the role of the National Assembly as the legislative organ which has the right to decide the fundamental issues of the nation. The National Assembly supervises and oversees the functioning of the executive and judicial organs of government; its rights and duties, as set out in Article 40, include the following –

- § Consider, approve, amend, or abrogate laws;
- § Determine, change or abolish taxes and duties;
- § Consider and approve strategic plans of socio-economic development and the budgets of the state;
- § Approve the establishment or dissolution of ministries and equivalent agencies;
- § Supervise the observance of the Constitution and the law.

Given the significance of these functions it is clear that the National Assembly has a major part to play in the pursuit of gender equality. The Assembly needs to be confident that its decisions will not impact adversely on any group of citizens, and that its decisions will have positive and equitable benefit for all groups. For this reason, it is essential that the National Assembly strengthens its capacity to function as a gender-sensitive parliament.

The National Assembly Gender Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan (NAGAP) provides a theoretical background and practical guide for mainstreaming gender issues into the activities of the National Assembly. It is designed to address the responsibilities of both members and officials at national and provincial level, with emphasis on the three major functions of the National Assembly – Oversight, Legislation, and Representation.

The first chapter of NAGAP describes the concept of gender mainstreaming. It sets out the background theory and provides definitions of the terms which are used throughout the document.

Chapter two provides a gender analysis of the National Assembly, its functions and its operations. This analysis is the foundation of the mainstreaming strategy and action plan.

Chapters 3-6 set out the mainstreaming strategy for the National Assembly. Chapter three is an overview of the NAGAP, establishing the guiding principles and key goals. This chapter provides the logic for the NAGAP. This chapter also gives examples of how gender mainstreaming can assist in the realisation of socio-economic development goals, and the links between gender mainstreaming and poverty eradication.

The NAGAP is subsequently divided into three separate sub-strategies, comprising –

- a) the National Assembly strategy (chapter four);
- b) the Women’s Caucus strategy (chapter five); and
- c) the Assembly secretariat strategy (chapter six).

Each sub-strategy consists of an outline, specific goals and detailed action plan.

Chapter One: What is Gender Mainstreaming

Gender inequality exists. Despite the equality guaranteed by the Constitution of Lao PDR, women appear to suffer a disproportionate burden of the effects of under-development, and their constitutional right to equality is not always realised. This situation is not unique to Lao PDR, and in fact is mirrored in many industrialised countries as well as in developing countries. Because of the universality of this experience of inequality (though to differing degrees in differing countries), it is possible to adapt theories and practices which have been developed in the international arena for use at the local level.

Gender mainstreaming is such a strategy, which aims to achieve gender equality. It has evolved from earlier efforts to overcome the disadvantaged position of women. The theory of gender mainstreaming is that gender equality cannot be achieved unless and until all government processes – policy, programs, projects – take gender issues into account, and all government activities are designed accordingly.

This chapter provides a set of definitions of gender terms in use throughout the document, and describes gender mainstreaming in detail.

Gender Definitions

Sex/gender: Sex refers to the biological characteristics that categorise someone as either female or male; whereas gender refers to the socially determined ideas and practices of what it is to be female or male

Gender equality means that women and men have the same status within a society. It does not mean that men and women are the same, or should do the same things, but rather that their contributions to society are recognised and equally valued. Gender equality means that women and men enjoy equal conditions for realising their full human rights, and have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from development.

Gender discrimination: The systematic, unfavourable treatment of individuals on the basis of their gender, which denies them rights, opportunities or resources.

Gender-blind is the lack of recognition of gender differences. Many government documents are gender-blind - based on assumptions that government activities, policies and programs will impact equally on men and women, and not taking into account their differing life experiences.

Gender-neutral: an activity that has no intrinsic gender impacts, or has equal impact on women and men.

Gender gap: a measure of gender inequality, such as a gap found when comparing boys' and girls' retention rates at secondary school.

Gender issue: a gender issue arises out of an identifiable gender gap. A gender issue is caused by the socially determined roles of women and men. In the example above, the gender issue is that girls and boys

do not enjoy the same right to secondary education. The right exists, but it is not enjoyed to the same extent by girls as it is by boys.

Gender roles: Gender roles describe the socially determined differences between women and men, rather than the biologically determined differences. Typically, the gender role of a woman is the care of children and the household, cooking, receptionist, typist. Male gender roles include soldier, driver, farmer. More often than not male roles also include boss, manager, government minister. Gender roles are not static; in different societies and at different times in history gender roles have been different, and they can also change in the future.

Gender relations/social relations: Social relations determine people's roles and responsibilities, their access to and control over resources, and their level of control over their own lives and those of others. If one group in a society has less control over resources than another group, then the social relations are unequal. Gender relations are social relations; they can change over time, and are influenced by changes happening elsewhere (for example, the changes brought about by war, drought, other natural disasters, and more recently globalisation).

Mainstream: When we talk of the mainstream, we are talking of the 'system' of a society. The 'system' is the dominant ideas and practices and institutions of a society, which determine 'who gets what'.

The institutions of the mainstream are those of governance; government ministries and administrative agencies, the legal system and the political structure – the decision-making system.

The dominant ideas and practices of a society are those which are accepted as the norm, even though those ideas and practices may discriminate against a section of that society. For example, if a dominant idea in a society is that women do not need to own land because men are the 'natural' landowners, it is obvious that women would be disadvantaged economically by this idea. These dominant ideas and practices can sometimes override constitutional rights – in this case the right of an individual to own land.

Gender mainstreaming

Early attempts to achieve gender equality and overcome the disadvantaged position of women in many developing countries were directed at the women themselves, with projects designed specifically for women (such as women's handicraft promotion). Often these well-meaning projects actually increased women's workload. This approach to gender issues is called the Women in Development (WID) approach. It focused on women only, without looking at the gender relations between women and men, or the systemic reasons for inequalities.

The transition to the Gender and Development (GAD) approach was a result of the obvious lack of progress made over time in lessening gender inequality. GAD recognises that men and women do not necessarily benefit equally from development activities, and that strategies should be developed to adjust to the differing needs and circumstances of women and men. Both WID and GAD theory and practice is positioned mainly at the project level.

Gender mainstreaming has evolved from WID and GAD. Instead of seeking gender equality at project level, gender mainstreaming is focused on the 'mainstream' of societies, seeking to ensure that gender issues are taken into consideration in all government policies and programs. This means that all government ministries and equivalent agencies should actively examine their policies and programs to determine the effect on women and men, and to ensure that women are not disadvantaged. It also means that ministries should develop specific policies and programs to promote gender equality, ensuring that both men and women benefit equally.

Gender mainstreaming also requires an understanding that women must participate equally in the 'mainstream' in order for their voices to be heard. This in turn means that strategies aimed at promoting gender quality must encompass political or governance spheres as well as social and economic spheres. Strategies should address the need for women to be represented on an equal basis with men at all levels in government – within ministries and equivalent agencies, and in governing structures at policy level.

To summarise: gender mainstreaming –

- examines practices which maintain gender inequality, and develops actions to overcome discrimination
- is not confined to 'women-only' projects, but aims instead for men and women to benefit equally from development
- understands that women must participate equally in 'the mainstream' – the institutions of governance
- aims to achieve gender equality in economic, social and political (governance) spheres

Gender mainstreaming is a process that involves several linked activities. The first step in this process is undertaking a gender analysis.

Gender analysis: How is gender mainstreaming carried out? Gender analysis and gender planning are the primary tools for mainstreaming gender into ministry programs and policies.

Gender analysis is the process undertaken to assess the impact of programs and policies on women and men, and also to examine the effect that gender roles have on the success or otherwise of development activities.

Although gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution and laws of Lao PDR, the reality is that women and men have differing life experiences, most often to the disadvantage of women. Gender analysis must be carried out in order to document and understand these differences, and to develop plans to address inequalities.

The primary tool for gender analysis is the provision and maintenance of sex-disaggregated data; without such information it is impossible to determine the impact of past and current policies and programs, or to measure the effectiveness of new initiatives. Also, without such data it is not possible to demonstrate that

there is a need for change. This data is usually quantitative; but qualitative or narrative data concerning the situation of women across sectors is equally valuable and important.

In addition to sex-disaggregated data, it is also necessary to develop 'gender-sensitive' indicators which demonstrate change over time, or which offer comparisons. For example, sex-disaggregated data might show that 45% of girls are literate in a particular province or city. Gender-sensitive indicators would show a comparison between boys and girls, between provinces, or between urban and rural areas within a province, and also how the situation has altered over time.

Gender planning: Gender mainstreaming is not simply an analysis of the current situation; it is also a strategy for change. In order to bring life to the gender analysis, gender planning must take place. Gender planning builds on the information received from the gender analysis to design and implement strategies or actions which address identified gaps in project, program or service delivery – which correct gender imbalances at all levels and across sectors.

Gender budgeting aims to ensure that gender sensitivity extends to the allocation of resources. A gender-sensitive budget is not a separate budget for women. It is a budget which provides an analysis of expenditure according to the differing impacts on women and men.

The development of a mainstreaming strategy for the National Assembly has followed these steps of gender analysis and gender planning. Chapter two sets out the gender analysis of the National Assembly, and Chapter three describes the outline Gender Action Plan. Chapters 4-6 set out the NAGAP in greater detail.

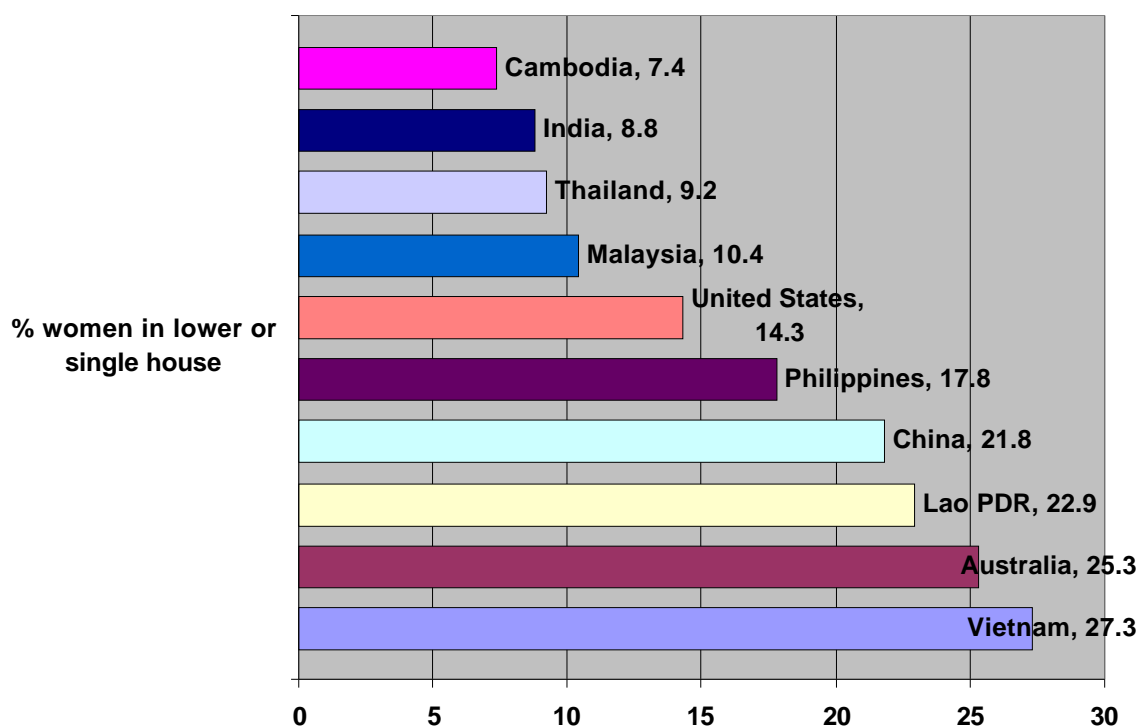
Chapter Two: Gender analysis of the National Assembly

This chapter provides an analysis of the National Assembly from a gender perspective. Qualitative and quantitative information was obtained through interviews with members and officials at national and provincial levels, and through data provided by the Personnel division of the National Assembly secretariat. The analysis is not comprehensive due to time and data accessibility constraints, but enough information is available to enable patterns to be observed and to assist in the formulation of gender mainstreaming strategies. Chapter three draws on the findings of the gender analysis to establish the direction of the National Assembly Gender Action Plan.

The analysis looks at the composition of the National Assembly and its Committees and the (probable/observable) status of women in decision-making. It also provides some insight into the operations of the Women's Caucus. The third area to be examined is the national and provincial support mechanism for the members, the National Assembly secretariat.

Gender composition of the Assembly

The 5th Legislature of the National Assembly of Lao PDR has 109 members, 25 of whom are women, representing a proportion of just under 23%. This proportion compares favourably with many industrialised and non-industrialised countries.



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Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, March 2003

Most of the female members of the 5th Legislature are newly elected. Two members have held office since the 3rd Legislature in 1992, another seven since the 4th Legislature in 1997, and the remainder (sixteen members or 64%) were elected in 2002.

In the 4th Legislature (1997-2002) there were twenty-one female members, but only nine of them still hold office. This could be significant in terms of the challenges facing female parliamentarians, but it should be noted that this situation is virtually replicated across the 5th Legislature. Approximately 60% of all members were elected for the first time in 2002. The attrition rate for all parliamentarians seems to be quite high, and further gendered research should be undertaken to determine the causes.

Geographic distribution

	Women	Men	Total	% of women
Xieng Khuang	2	2	4	50%
Oudomxay	2	3	5	40%
Luang Namtha	1	2	3	33%
Bokeo	1	2	3	33%
Phongsaly	1	2	3	33%
Attapeu	1	2	3	33%
Sekong	1	2	3	33%
Sayaboury	2	5	7	28%
Vte municipality	3	9	12	25%
Luang Prabang	2	6	8	25%
Bolikhambay	1	3	4	25%
Houaphan	1	4	5	20%
Savannakhet	3	13	16	18%
Vte province	1	5	6	16%
Khammouan	1	5	6	16%
Saravan	1	5	6	16%
Champassak	1	11	12	8%
Saysomboun	0	3	3	0
	25	84	109	

All provinces, except for Saysomboun Special Zone, have at least one female member of the National Assembly. Numerically, representation is strongest in the urban areas of Vientiane Municipality and Savannakhet, with three female members in each of the two provinces. Proportionally, the strongest representation is in Xieng Khouang, with 50% women members. Female representation appears to be higher in the northern provinces, with eight out of eleven provinces having 25% or higher female members (this includes Vientiane municipality). In contrast, four out of six southern provinces have less than 25% female representation.

Whilst the statistical significance may be minimal due to the small numbers of elected representatives there are some interesting features apparent in the geographic break-up. For example it appears that the greater the number of provincial members, the more difficult it is for women to gain a critical mass of membership. In Savannakhet province which has the largest number of members (16), women form 18% of the total membership, and in Champassak province there is only one woman out of a total of twelve members. In contrast, all provinces with three members except Saysomboun Special Zone have at least one female member.

In socio-economic terms women's representation appears to be strongest in the poorer provinces, with the exception of Houaphan. The reasons cannot be determined with any accuracy; it could be that ethnicity plays a part, or campaigning by women might be more effective at grassroots level in poorer provinces than in more wealthy areas. But this obviously does not apply in Houaphan, which is the poorest province in Lao PDR.

On the available evidence it would appear that efforts to increase the number of female parliamentarians in the future should particularly target the southern provinces, those provinces with a greater number of members, and the more wealthy provinces. In the provinces of Khammouan, Saravan and Champassak, standing female members were returned and no additional female members were elected.

Operations of the Assembly

The Constitution of Lao PDR states that the National Assembly is the legislative organ, which has the right to decide the fundamental issues of the nation. It is the organ that supervises and oversees the functioning of the executive and judicial organs (Article 39). The National Assembly meets twice each year, in February (or March or April) and in September. The September session is the budget session, when the Socio-Economic Development Plan and the State Budget are presented for approval.

The National Assembly elects a Standing Committee to maintain the responsibilities of the Assembly during the period when the Assembly is in recess. The Standing Committee has the responsibility to 'interpret and explain the provisions of the Constitution and the various laws', and to 'supervise and oversee the functioning of the executive and judicial organs during the recess of the National Assembly' (Article 43).

The Standing Committee is composed of the President and one or more Vice-Presidents of the Assembly, plus other members. One of the vice-presidents of the National Assembly is currently the only female member of the Standing Committee.

National Assembly Committees

In addition to the Standing Committee there are six functional committees:

1. Law

2. Economy and Finance
3. Social and Cultural Affairs
4. Ethnic Affairs
5. Foreign Affairs
6. Defence and Security

These Committees were established to assist the Assembly and the Standing Committee in their legislative and oversight responsibilities. They are scheduled to meet twice a year, prior to the National Assembly sessions. All member of the National Assembly are members of a committee.

The ratio of men to women on committees is shown below:

	Women	Men	Total	% of womer
Law	2	19	21	9%
Economy and Finance	1	23	24	4%
Social and Cultural	11	12	23	47%
Ethnic Affairs	5	12	17	29%
Foreign Affairs	5	7	12	41%
Defence and Security	0	12	12	0%
Total	24	85	109	100%

Discussions held with female parliamentarians suggest that preference is taken into account when members are assigned to Committees. Other reasons given for the committee gender profiles is that women parliamentarians generally have a background in the caring professions and the social sector – particularly health and education, and consequently have little experience in economics or other fields. It was not clear from discussions whether or not male parliamentarians preferred to work in committees associated with their previous professional background, or were more ‘adventurous’ in their committee selection.

If women are to have an effective voice in parliament they must be able to take their place in all committee work, and particularly in those committees which are seen as outside the norm for women – economics, finance, defence, law, etc. Capacity development for women members should address the building of confidence in these ‘non-traditional’ functional areas as well as in overall parliamentary performance. Women must have opportunities to develop expertise in the content as well as in the process of debate, and this should not be in isolation of the workings of the Assembly. It is important that the opportunities include action learning, or on-the-job training within committees, and not be confined to one-off external events.

From the table showing Committee membership it is clear that there is a need to increase women’s participation in the key Committees of Economy and Finance, Legislation, and Defence. If, as has been

suggested, women are reluctant to enter into fields where they lack experience; this could be overcome by a system of mentoring by more experienced committee members, combined with a training program designed to broaden the skills base of all women members.

Decision-making

The current situation for women in decision-making in the National Assembly is less than ideal, given the disproportionate committee membership and the feminine bias in favour of Social and Cultural Affairs. The Social and Cultural Affairs Committee does not have a seat on the Standing Committee, which is the decision-making body when parliament is in recess. Instead the Standing Committee refers all social and cultural matters to the President of the Committee prior to taking decisions.

The lack of female membership on the committees which do have a seat on the Standing Committee, provides clear constraints on the ability of female members to participate in decision-making at the highest level, although current conventions allow for consultation.

Gender mainstreaming is not solely a matter of increasing the numbers of women in each committee, although there is little doubt that a critical mass of women is a factor in bringing about gradual change in the behaviour and attitudes of an institution. A proportionate committee profile of 23% women could assist in the process of gender sensitisation, but the assurance of numbers does not necessarily ensure that women's voices will be heard in the decision-making process.

Nor is gender mainstreaming just a matter of increasing the skills of women in non-traditional areas, although this is necessary to avoid the quantity versus quality argument. It is also a strategy to enhance the ability of each committee member to take gender issues into account during the decision-making process, when performing the functions of oversight, legislative review, and representation. Whilst aiming to strengthen the capacity of women to perform effectively in parliament and to participate effectively in decision-making, gender mainstreaming places the responsibility of gender-sensitive government on the shoulders of all parliamentarians.

Whether or not women increase their numbers in non-traditional committees, the simple fact is that men are now, and will probably continue to be, in the majority in parliament and in all committees. This begs the question of how the minority can seek to have their voices heard, bring their issues to the foreground, and participate effectively in decision-making. Any decisions that are made in committee are by majority vote, so women, with a numerical disadvantage, will need to build up their advocacy and lobbying skills in order to offset this disparity.

Provincial operations of the National Assembly

At the provincial level National Assembly members carry out the key functions of Oversight, Legislative review and Representation. Each province has a Chief of the provincial delegation of members; there are no women holding this office. In addition, there is one full-time or Standing Member in each province working out of the National Assembly office (most National Assembly members hold other full-time positions, generally as government officials). The Standing member has responsibility for day-to-day operational planning of National Assembly business, liaison with the central level, membership on provincial committees, etc. At present there is only one woman Standing member, in Vientiane Municipality.


The secretariat of the National Assembly

The secretariat of the National Assembly consists of committee and administrative support at national and provincial levels. At the national level the secretariat structure reflects that of the National Assembly, with a functional department matching each National Assembly committee. Additionally, there are several departments with a more general secretariat focus. In all, there are eleven departments with a total of 80 staff. At the provincial level the secretariat provides administrative and logistical support and policy advice to the local members and liaises with the national secretariat. Analysis of the staffing profile for the secretariat shows that of the overall staff, 28% are women.

The gender gap in both number and status is evident from the following break-up, as is the gendered composition of the various departments. In eleven departments at the national level, there is one female head; there are six division heads or deputy department heads (16 male) and sixteen general staff (31 male). The composition of the departments is similar to that of the Committees themselves, with a distinct gender bias away from women in economics and defence.

Provincial staffing varies according to the size of the constituency. The two provinces visited during the course of the consultancy were Luang Namtha and Oudomxay. The Luang Namtha office has six permanent and one temporary staff, the Oudomxay office has four permanent and four temporary staff. In the two offices visited, directors and deputies were all male, and the female staff members were finance clerks, computer operators, receptionists, etc. No staff in either province had undergone gender training.

Committee staff: These are officials directly responsible for support to the National Assembly functional committees.



Secretariat staff: These comprise departments such as Personnel, Administration, the Library & Information Centre, and the Research & Documentation Department.

Provincial staff: Within the provincial National Assembly offices, there are a total of 87 officials, 63 of whom are men. No women operate at management level in the provinces.

Total staff: national and provincial levels

Further analysis reveals the status of women vis-à-vis department functions.

Committee staff

Department	Head of Dept		Deputy/ division head		Staff		Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Law		1	1	1	1	1	5
Economy & Finance	1		3		2		6
Social & Culture	1		2			1	4
Ethnic Dep't	1		3				4

Defence & Security	1		1		5	1	8
Foreign Affairs	1			2	2	1	6
Total	5	1	10	3	10	4	33

Non-committee staff

Department	Head of Dept		Deputy/ division head		Staff		Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Research & Documentation	1		2	1	5		9
Div. of Complaints	1				3		4
Personnel	1		1	1	1		4
Admin & Finance	1		2	1	7 ¹	10 ²	21
Library & Information	1		1		5	2	9
Total	5	0	6	3	21	12	47

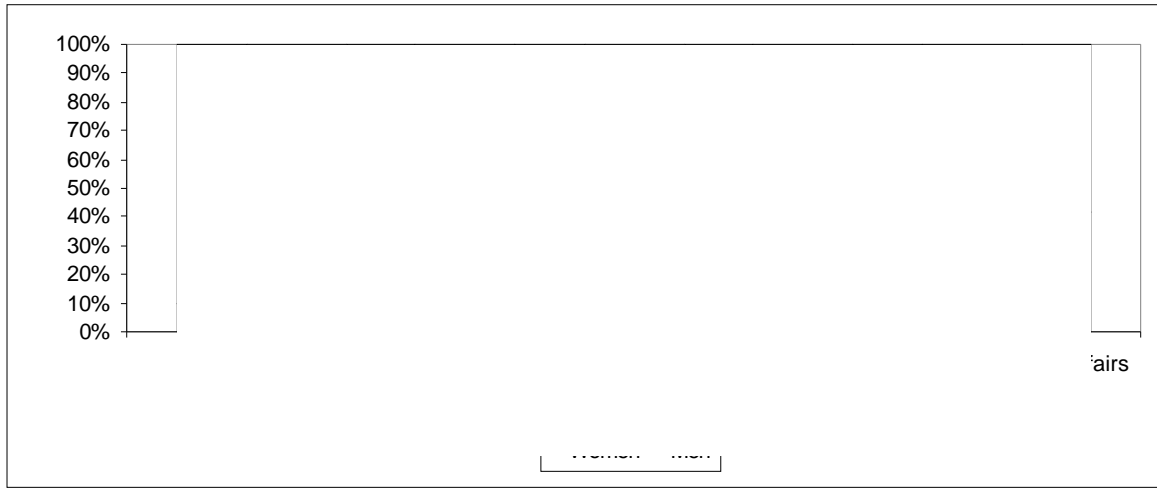
There is room for improvement in the gender composition of the secretariat staff, and in the status of women throughout the institution. A further analysis of qualifications and length of service should be undertaken to provide a deeper understanding of the existing situation. This analysis would then provide a basis for examination of personnel policies to determine their impact, and to take steps to ensure equal opportunity for advancement for both women and men. This examination would include duty statements, job descriptions and selection criteria, as well as an analysis of historical access to training, training topics, etc.

The support for National Assembly members from secretariat staff is crucial to informed decision-making. To achieve a gender sensitive parliament it will be necessary to ensure that the information provided to members is analysed for gender inclusiveness. This will require a long-term training program for National Assembly staff rather than static gender training. As well as examining personnel practices to determine their impact on women and men, and developing a coherent and ongoing gender training program, attention should also be given to the composition of the departments which support the National Assembly committees.

¹ Includes 5 drivers

² includes cleaning staff

National Assembly Committee members



National Assembly officials, by committee



It is obvious from these tables that the gender gaps in the National Assembly are matched in the department staff, with the exception of the Foreign Affairs Department, and the Law Department, which has a female Director. In discussions held with the Director of Personnel it was suggested that women graduates in economics are attracted to the private sector rather than the public sector because of higher wages offered in the private sector. If this is the case, and if there are, as was suggested, well educated and talented women working in other departments in the secretariat, efforts should be made to ensure that these women have access to training in alternative disciplines such as economics or security.

Recruitment procedures should also take account of the gender gap, and steps should be initiated to actively encourage women to apply for non-traditional positions. The third factor to be noted is that if women are attracted to the private sector, apart from higher wages the attraction might be that timely career advancement is more likely to occur there than in the public sector.

Whatever the reasons, it is clear that the key sector of economy and finance – the committee which carries the responsibility of analysis and approval of the Socio-Economic Plan and the State Budget – does not at present have significant input from women at committee level. It is also clear that the economy and finance department suffers the same disadvantage.

Strategies must be devised to offset this asymmetry and ensure that women have access to planning and budgeting at committee level, and that they also have gender-sensitive advice from the secretariat support. This is an integral step in the process of making the Socio-Economic Plan and the Budget more responsive to the separate and different needs of men and women, boys and girls, and making certain that the outcomes of public expenditure are fair to all members of society.

Chapter Three: Gender Mainstreaming in the National Assembly

As described in Chapter one, gender mainstreaming is a strategy to ensure that decision-making institutions and systems become sensitive to issues of gender. The National Assembly, with the significant responsibilities of overseeing executive and judicial processes, is a key decision-making body in Lao PDR. The development of the gender mainstreaming strategy for the National Assembly is an important statement about the commitment of Lao parliamentarians to substantive gender equality, and it provides strong leadership for government ministries and equivalent agencies. This chapter describes the context for gender mainstreaming, and sets out the major goals to be achieved over the lifetime of the National Assembly Gender Action Plan.

It is important to understand that any strategy for gender mainstreaming does not occur in a vacuum. There is a broad international framework provided by the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). From a national perspective, the Lao Women's Union has developed Planning Guidelines for gender mainstreaming across all government ministries (Towards a National Gender Action Plan, or NGAP), and the government has approved the establishment of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW-Lao).

The international conventions and agreements comprise a solid foundation, and this is reinforced by the government's commitment to national measures such as the NGAP and the NCAW-Lao. As well as the mandate provided by international agreements and conventions, there is also a considerable body of evidence from development studies showing that socio-economic results are enhanced when gender is specifically included in all facets of development initiatives, and when there is a significant degree of gender equality. In other words, if the differing needs and voices of women are taken into account there is more likelihood of project success, and consequently of socio-economic development goals being met.

Locally, the Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) of Lao PDR, carried out in 2000, also found that where the gender division of labour was more equitable, rice sufficiency was higher. 'the lowest rice yields are found in societies where women's labour inputs are highest' (ADB p.128). Put differently, the greater degree of gender equality, the better the socio-economic results.

This is particularly significant for the National Assembly because of the establishment of the National Poverty Eradication Program (NPEP). The National Assembly will want to ensure that all efforts to eradicate poverty are gender sensitive; and that programs and projects are examined to ensure women are not disadvantaged. In order to achieve this level of scrutiny it is necessary to take steps to increase the capacity of the National Assembly in gender analysis, gender planning and gender budgeting. In other words, it is necessary for gender to be mainstreamed throughout all the processes of the Assembly.

Oversight, legislation and representation

The main responsibilities of the National Assembly are described as Oversight, Legislation and Representation. Gender mainstreaming will assist members both to perform these processes in a gender sensitive manner, and to ensure that the outcomes of these processes strengthen gender equality.

Oversight: Gender sensitive oversight will mean that members will have the capacity to examine executive policies, programs and projects to determine whether the activities are designed to increase gender equality. Members will also be able to make recommendations for change if the gender analysis demonstrates some shortcomings. For example, the National Assembly oversight of the Socio-Economic planning process and the State Budget will pay particular attention to the way in which the Plan and the Budget address gender issues. Some questions that could be asked of the Executive might be:

How does a particular program benefit women – does it benefit women and men or boys and girls equally?

Does it improve both women and men's access to economic resources?

Did women actively participate in the design of the program?

Does the program reinforce the rights of women?

Does the program include indicators which will demonstrate changes over time?

At the provincial level, members and officials who have undergone training in gender issues will ask similar questions about local projects, and produce reports for the National Assembly which reflect a solid understanding of the differing impacts of development on women and men. Gender mainstreaming in the oversight function will emphasise the aim of gender equality and contribute to improved socio-economic outcomes.

Legislation: Similarly, the equal rights of women must be integral to the development of all legislation, and draft legislation must be scrutinised from a gender perspective. This relates not only to the legislation itself but also to the accompanying regulations. In its carriage of the responsibility for legislative review the National Assembly should carefully consider whether or not proposed legislation and regulations could have a differing impact on women and men. The aim of legislative review should be that no legislation impacts unfairly on women or men and the National Assembly must satisfy itself that this is the case, so as to ensure that the intent of the Constitution is realised in terms of gender equality. This scrutiny should also be applied to current legislation if it has not already taken place during the course of the implementation of CEDAW.

Similar questions can be asked about prospective legislation:

Does it benefit women and men equally? Has sufficient research been carried out so that the impacts on women and men are easily identifiable?

Have women been able to participate in the legislative review, so that their opinions have influenced the legislation?

Does the legislation reinforce the rights of women?

At the provincial level, it is important that the consultative process is strengthened so that both women and men have the opportunity to provide comments on proposed legislation.

Representation: The third significant responsibility of representation will also benefit from the application of a gender mainstreaming strategy. During discussions held with provincial members and officials it was suggested that there are sometimes difficulties inherent in the consultation process, especially in the more remote areas. Women are said to be less likely to attend meetings, or to speak out at meetings. Although it was not stated, it is also possible that they are less likely to bring complaints, given language or other cultural constraints. In one province visited the Provincial Complaints Committee had no female representatives, due to the composition of the Committee (at least Director level).

As National Assembly members develop capacity in gender analysis they will be able to contribute to more equitable processes at the local level. Strategies will be developed to increase the participation of women at public meetings, to make certain that their voices are heard. Members should also be able to influence other local activities to increase gender equality in process (such as in the Complaints Committee), which will in turn lead to greater gender equality in outcomes. One outcome will be more skillful and effective decision-making, as decisions will be based on more comprehensive data (the opinions, ideas, and experiences of both men and women).

The women's parliamentary caucus

The Women's Caucus, composed of all female members of the National Assembly, was formed in the 5th Legislature in recognition of the need to address the issues faced by women in parliament, and to provide a platform from which members can seek to enhance their parliamentary skills.

The present structure and operational style of the National Assembly does not actively encourage the reinforcement of the Caucus as a support mechanism for women parliamentarians. Without a specific budget there is little possibility of inter-session meetings, and communication resources are limited in some provinces. Currently it would seem that the Caucus is not able to function fully as an active support for women members or as a lobby group to influence parliamentary decisions; this situation needs to change. The strategy for gender mainstreaming, although it stipulates that all members have responsibility for enhancing gender equality, nevertheless will need an active Caucus to promote, monitor and evaluate the mainstreaming activities.

Strategic planning

If the Caucus is to be an effective support, it should be encouraged to formulate a strategic plan which sets out specific goals to be achieved in the lifetime of the 5th Legislature, and ideally beyond that. The development of a strategic plan should be undertaken as a capacity-building exercise, with the active participation of all women members. The project proposal developed by the Caucus in November 2002 is a step in the right direction, and could be used as the foundation for further strategic planning. Some elements of this project proposal have been expanded and incorporated into the NAGAP, but it is important that the strategic planning process is carried out by the women themselves as an ongoing and iterative activity. The development of strategic planning skills is a core requirement for this process.

Some ideas/issues which could be considered in the strategic planning exercise include:

- § How does the National Assembly and the Women's Caucus work to ensure the rights of women are protected in fact as well as in law? Examples might be
 - ? the oversight of CEDAW;
 - ? the implementation of the Platform for Action [which of the twelve issues are yet to be addressed by the executive or the judiciary?];
 - ? at the provincial level, oversight of development activities to ensure they are sufficiently sensitive to the rights and needs of women (particularly in regard to employment opportunities, informal education opportunities, HIV (AIDS), people trafficking, etc)
- § what resources does the Women's Caucus need in order to make fully informed decision in the National Assembly? Examples might be
 - ? timely access to information (communication resources such as fax and phone, internet)
 - ? research assistance (dedicated and well trained gender resources within the Secretariat)
- § could the Caucus work with the NCAW-L to develop a national gender policy?
- § what specific tasks can individual members of the Caucus undertake between sessions to promote gender mainstreaming, particularly at provincial level? What resources are needed? What are the constraints for women parliamentarians and how can the constraints be overcome?

Training

Most women members are newly elected and they are conscious of the need to strengthen their existing skills and to gain confidence in their ability to participate in parliamentary debate. Many women are professionals in health or education so their existing skills level is significant. In order to make inroads into

parliamentary decision-making it will be vital for them to develop the skills that will help to overcome their numerical disadvantage as well as increase their confidence.

The Caucus will be more effective if it works as a collective; training should focus on leadership, networking, group formation and maintenance, negotiation, consultation, advocacy and lobbying. Apart from the content of the training, it is essential that training efforts include all women members, and particularly target those members in smaller, remote and poorer provinces which lack the facilities of the larger, more urban centres.

Gender awareness training for all National Assembly members is a key component of the gender mainstreaming strategy. This training should be based on the Gender Resource Kit developed specifically for the National Assembly. In addition, the Women's Caucus would benefit from the translation into Lao language of relevant international publications, papers, etc, dealing with gender and politics.

The Strategy

The gender mainstreaming strategy consists of guiding principles and major goals, with associated action plans for implementation. The principles and goals are described below, and the action plans form Chapters 4-6.

Guiding principles

The guiding principles are the foundation stones for building a strong mainstreaming strategy. All goals and objectives are based on these principles.

Principle one: gender equality, guaranteed by the Constitution, should be recognisable in all facets of life in Lao PDR. Women must be able to exercise their rights.

Principle two: the realisation of the aim of poverty eradication in Lao PDR will only happen when women and men enjoy substantive equality.

Structure

The gender mainstreaming strategy and National Assembly Gender Action Plan (NAGAP) is divided into three separate but interlinked sections:

- § the National Assembly
- § the Women's Caucus
- § the Secretariat

As the analysis (Chapter two) demonstrates, there are gender issues which occur in the operations of the National Assembly and in the staffing profile of the secretariat. These are in addition to the issues previously identified by the Women's Caucus in the capacity building proposal developed during the first year of the 5th Legislature. Increasing the capacity of the National Assembly in gender issues means that the strategy must target all members and staff, and not concentrate solely on the Women's Caucus.

This means in turn that the strategy will include actions to be implemented in the short term, and meet the practical needs of women parliamentarians, and actions that will be implemented in the long term, meeting the strategic needs of both women and men.

Major goals

The major goals for the National Assembly Gender Action Plan are:

- A) the National Assembly
 1. The National Assembly is a gender-sensitive institution and contributes to substantive gender equality in Lao PDR through fully informed decision-making
 2. Women parliamentarians actively and effectively participate in all decision-making bodies in the National Assembly
 3. The National Assembly effectively contributes to gender equality through its oversight function, particularly in Socio-Economic Planning and budgeting
 4. Legislative processes of Lao PDR are gender sensitive and do not discriminate against women or men
 5. Public consultation and representative functions are designed to be gender sensitive

- B) the Women's Caucus
 1. The Women's Caucus Strategic Plan is developed
 2. Women parliamentarians are effective and influential in the National Assembly
 3. Women parliamentarians participate in all National Assembly Committees
 4. Women regard the National Assembly as a career
 5. Women's representation in the National Assembly is equitable in all constituencies

- C) the National Assembly Secretariat
 1. HRD policies are transparent and aim for gender equality
 2. Women are represented at all levels of decision-making, both in the national office and in the provinces
 3. Women are represented in all Departments of the Secretariat
 4. The secretariat is a competent gender sensitive institution, assisting parliamentarians to make well informed decisions
 5. All documents submitted to National Assembly Committees have been analysed for gender inclusions
 6. All documents initiated by the National Assembly are gender sensitive.

Action Planning and Implementation

The following Action Plans have been developed in consultation with National Assembly members and secretariat staff, on the basis of the gender analysis described in Chapter two.

There are two important factors to be considered when the implementation phase is to begin.

- a) the plans are by no means complete, and the actions should be seen as initiating, rather than completing, a gender mainstreaming strategy. As the initial activities are undertaken it may become necessary to revise some actions, and to add others. The plans must be regarded as flexible documents which can be built on as both members and staff gain confidence in gender analysis.
- b) at present there is no agreed structure to guide the implementation. The purpose of the strategy will be defeated if the Women's Caucus has sole carriage of the implementation, so it is essential that a Planning Committee or working group is established to assist in the process. Ideally this would comprise provincial and national members and officials, both women and men. In the absence of sufficient resources and with competing workloads, the working group should comprise at least one member of the Standing Committee, one member of the women's Caucus at provincial and national level, plus one senior official from Personnel and one senior official from the Economy and Finance Department.

The role of the Committee or working group is to prioritise the activities, set concrete timeframes, and oversee the implementation process.

Gender mainstreaming is a long-term and ongoing activity. The achievement of the objectives of gender equality will not be immediate, but rather the result of careful planning, monitoring and review over a number of years.

Chapter Four: The National Assembly Action Plan

Outline

The mainstreaming strategy for the National Assembly is designed to produce an outcome of a gender sensitive parliament, where both women and men participate effectively in all functions of the Assembly (Oversight, Legislative Review and Representation), and participate equitably in all Committee operations. As skills develop over time, the National Assembly will oversee the socio-economic planning and budgeting processes of the executive with a view to ensuring positive gender outcomes – to achieve the aim of substantive gender equality, and to enhance the success of the National Poverty Eradication Program.

In the short term, some activities answer the practical needs of the Assembly in gender mainstreaming – eg, basic gender awareness training and the production of a Gender Resource Kit for all members. Many of the activities are long-term and ongoing, in recognition of the fact that gender mainstreaming is a process of gradual change and cannot be addressed by a series of short one-off training activities.

Action Plan

Goal A (1) The National Assembly is a gender-sensitive institution and contributes to substantive gender equality in Lao PDR through fully informed decision-making

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
<p>A gender resource kit is developed and available to all members</p> <p>All current members are trained in gender inclusive governance</p>	<p>Commission a gender adviser to produce a gender resource kit. This kit should comprise basic gender awareness, gender analytical frameworks, and the theory and practice of gender planning and gender budgeting, with reference to best practice from developing countries. It should also include international Conventions and Agreements such as CEDAW and the PFA.</p> <p>Identify competent gender training institutions within the region</p> <p>Seek expressions of interest from training institutions to develop a training program for National Assembly members</p> <p>Select an appropriate training institution, based on transparent criteria</p> <p>In collaboration with the selected training institution, and using the gender resource kit, design a training program to include all members. This program should take place over a period of four sessions commencing with gender awareness and progressing to gender planning and</p>	2003 - 2004	<p>Standing Committee, Secretariat</p> <p>Implementation working group</p>

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
	<p>budgeting</p> <p>Ensure that gender awareness is included in the orientation training for new members in each Legislature</p> <p>Issue periodic press releases to raise public awareness of the mainstreaming program of the National Assembly</p>		

Goal A (2) Women parliamentarians actively and effectively participate in all decision-making bodies in the National Assembly

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
<p>Women parliamentarians are trained in all facets of National Assembly operations</p> <p>Women parliamentarians participate effectively in all National Assembly Committees</p>	<p>Identify specific training needs of women members, particularly in the fields where their representation is limited</p> <p>Initiate a program to upgrade skills. Emphasis should be placed on macro- and micro-economics, economic analysis, program monitoring and evaluation. This program should include formal training and mentoring by more experienced members</p> <p>Investigate options for women to be included on committees other than Social & Cultural Affairs</p>	2004 - 5	

Goal A (3) The National Assembly effectively contributes to gender equality through its oversight function, particularly in Socio-Economic Planning and budgeting

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
<p>Gender analysis of the Socio-Economic Plan and the State Budget is standard procedure</p>	<p>Conduct gender planning and budgeting training for all members, based on the Gender Resource Kit</p> <p>Analyse the Plan and Budget from a gender perspective and provide recommendations for change if shortcomings are apparent</p> <p>Refer the Plan and Budget to concerned ministries for additional information where necessary</p> <p>Encourage the concerned ministries to provide gender sensitive documents</p> <p>Ensure that National Assembly press releases on the</p>	2003 and ongoing	Economic Committee, Secretariat

	Plan and Budget reflect a gender perspective		
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Goal A (4) Legislative processes of Lao PDR are gender sensitive and do not discriminate against women or men

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
Gender analysis of all legislation completed	Commission a gender analysis of the Constitution and current legislation if this has not taken place within the CEDAW reporting requirements	2004, ongoing	Law Committee, Secretariat
Gender analysis of new legislation is standard procedure	Examine all prospective legislation to ensure equality of impacts on women and men, and to ensure that women are not impacted unfairly		
	Examine prospective regulations to ensure equality of impacts on women and men, and to ensure that women are not impacted unfairly		
	Ensure that public consultation on prospective legislation is carried out in a gender inclusive manner, so that women and men have an equal opportunity to provide comment		
	Refer prospective legislation back to the drafting body when gender inequities are identified		

Goal A (5) Public consultation and representative functions are designed to be gender sensitive

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
Women and men have equal opportunities to provide input to the National Assembly	Ensure that public consultation meetings are held at times and in places accessible to both women and men; Where language is a problem, use local interpreters	2003, ongoing	All members, Provincial secretariats
	Where women are not accustomed to speaking in public, hold separate meetings for women only		
The views of both women and men are equally influential in all National Assembly functions	Promote gender issues and gender equity in local government processes such as committee membership, particularly with regard to processes which impact on the National Assembly functions of oversight, legislative review, and representation		

Chapter Five: The Women's Caucus Action Plan

'in any society and situation it is those most affected who must act to bring about change. Those who are privileged benefit, even unconsciously, from a system that marginalises others. Hence they cannot be depended upon to make the changes that will remove their privileged status' (Karam:4)

Outline

The mainstreaming strategy for the Women's Caucus takes into account the needs expressed by members of the Caucus and builds on them to include activities and responsibilities of the Secretariat and other sectors of the Assembly. This is in recognition of the fact that gender mainstreaming is not a responsibility of women only. However, it is also important to understand that women specific activities often are a prerequisite to realise mainstreaming for gender equality. Women-specific activities are focused at creating, enlarging and strengthening women's position in the parliament, and stem from the gender analysis.

Action Plan

Goal B (1) The Women's Caucus Strategic Plan is developed

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
Strategic planning is undertaken by Women's Caucus A strategic plan is developed and implemented	Identify suitable strategic planning training available locally Seek funding for women to undertake strategic planning training. Ideally all women parliamentarians should be able to participate; if this is not possible, then preference should be given to new members and those from remote provinces With the input of all Caucus members, develop a strategic plan that sets out specific goals for the 5th Legislature; these goals should not be confined to passive activities such as undergoing training but should include specific tasks that members will undertake as 'champions' or promoters of gender mainstreaming.	2003	Women's Caucus

Goal B (2) Women parliamentarians are effective and influential in the National Assembly

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
Women members are skilled in National Assembly procedures	Identify specific training needs of women in parliamentary processes Initiate a program to upgrade parliamentary skills for women – for example research skills, public speaking,	2003 - 2005	Women's Caucus Secretariat Donors

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
<p>Women have an effective voice in the National Assembly</p> <p>Sufficient and relevant resources are available</p>	<p>formulating arguments, debate, etc.</p> <p>Develop and deliver a separate training program centred on advocacy skills, networking, group formation and maintenance, participatory planning and consultation processes</p> <p>In conjunction with possible funding agencies, develop a Terms of Reference for a program of study tours for women parliamentarians, particularly those newly elected from remote and smaller provinces. The Terms of Reference would include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> § Objectives of the study tours § Outcomes sought § Detailed justification for study tour destinations, and relevance to Lao PDR conditions § Criteria for selection of participants § Obligations of participants <p>Commission a gender adviser to develop a gender resource kit (see Goal A(1))</p> <p>In conjunction with possible donors, develop a communication strategy designed to strengthen the effectiveness of the Caucus. This strategy should include the provision of internet access where electricity and telephones are generally available</p> <p>Develop strategic alliances with national organisations such as the NCAW-Lao, and international organisations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union</p> <p>Seek funding to translate additional written resources, particularly aligned to parliamentary responsibilities</p>		

Goal B (3) Women parliamentarians participate in all National Assembly Committees

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
<p>Women are represented on all Committees</p> <p>Gender issues are an integral factor in Committee debate</p>	<p>Identify specific training needs of women members, particularly in the fields where their Committee representation is limited.</p> <p>Initiate a program to upgrade skills. Emphasis should be placed on macro- and micro-economics, economic analysis, program monitoring and evaluation. This program should include formal training and mentoring by more experienced members</p> <p>Investigate options for women to be included on committees other than Social & Cultural Affairs during</p>	2003 - 2004	Secretariat, HRD/personnel

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
Committee decisions reflect gender sensitivity	the course of the 5th Legislature Where Committee membership of women members is not possible, establish a system to ensure gender-sensitive input to Committee decision-making – either from members or gender-trained officials. This could include submission of papers to gender focal points, a gender clearance checklist, or similar		

Goal B (4) Women regard the National Assembly as a career

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
Women remain in parliament longer than one term	Investigate the reasons for the high attrition rate. If systemic problems within the National Assembly are identified, bring these to the attention of the Assembly and take remedial steps to encourage experienced women to remain in public life.	2005 - 2006	Women's Caucus, Secretariat

Goal B (5) Women's representation in the National Assembly is equitable in all constituencies

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
Women's representation is increased to 30% in all constituencies	Future efforts to strengthen membership and representation should be targeted to those constituencies identified as needing improvement: in the southern, more populous and more wealthy provinces	2006	

Chapter Six: Action Plan for National Assembly officials

Outline

Gender mainstreaming for secretariat officials is threefold: creating a more gender equitable environment in terms of the status of women officials; ensuring that women have the opportunity to be employed in all facets of National Assembly activities; and allowing all officials to gain the skills necessary to be able to provide members with gender-sensitive analysis of government policies, programs and other activities, especially the Socio-Economic Plan and the State Budget.

Action Plan

Goal C (1) HRD policies are transparent and aim for gender equality

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
<p>Women are represented at all levels of decision-making, both in the national office and in the provinces</p> <p>Women are represented in all Departments</p>	<p>Undertake an analysis of qualifications, length of service, etc, to provide a basis for gender planning in the HRD strategy</p> <p>Ensure equal opportunities for female staff in all staff development activities, especially in remote areas</p> <p>Identify specific training needs for female staff, particularly in 'non-traditional' functional areas such as economic and security, and in remote areas</p> <p>Provide opportunities for female staff to engage in non-traditional functional activities</p> <p>Establish a mentoring system for female staff</p> <p>Investigate options for staff rotation across Departments</p> <p>Develop recruitment policies to attract women to non-traditional areas</p>	2003 - 2004	Secretariat

Goal C (2) The secretariat is a competent gender sensitive institution, assisting parliamentarians to make well informed decisions

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
All staff are trained to deliver gender-sensitive advice to NA members	<p>Identify competent gender training institutions within the region</p> <p>Seek expressions of interest from training institutions to develop a training program for National Assembly staff [see Goal A(1)]</p>	2003	Secretariat/HRD

	<p>Select an appropriate training institution, based on transparent criteria</p> <p>Establish an ongoing gender training program, commencing with gender awareness and progressing specifically to competencies in gender analysis. This program should be delivered to all secretariat staff, with particular focus on the provincial level.</p>		
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Goal C (3) Gender analysis of documents is standard procedure

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
All documents submitted to National Assembly Committees have been analysed for gender inclusions	<p>Establish a system within each Department for gender analysis of documents prior to presentation to members.</p> <p>If necessary for gender analysis, refer to the concerned ministries for additional information</p> <p>Encourage concerned ministries to present information in which gender issues are clearly defined</p> <p>Ensure that all documentation has been examined from a gender perspective, and provide information to parliamentarians which clearly addresses gender implications of policies, programs, projects, etc.</p>	2004 ongoing	Secretariat

Goal C (4) National Assembly documents are gender sensitive

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe	Responsibility
All documents initiated by the National Assembly are gender sensitive	Ensure that documents such as the National Assembly Magazine, press releases, etc, are gender sensitive in terms of language, photographs, and content	2004 ongoing	Secretariat

Appendix 1

Gender Mainstreaming

Persons interviewed in Vientiane

National Assembly members and officials:

Hon. Mme Pany Yathotou,	Vice-President of the National Assembly
Hon. Viseth Svengsuksa,	Vice-Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
Hon. Bouasy Lovanxay,	Chair, Economy & Finance Committee
Dr. Thongphanh Chantalanonh,	Chairperson, Socio-Cultural Affairs Committee
Dr. Bounnong Bouphe,	Member for Savannakhet
Dr. Bang-One Xayarath,	Member for Vientiane Municipality
Mr. Khampeng Vilaphanh,	Director, Personnel Dept
Mr. Sisouvanh Sompheth,	Deputy-Director, Administration & Finance Division
Mr. Vilay Sengphouthay,	Deputy-Head, Library & Information Centre
Mr. Sing Leuangvihane,	Deputy-Head, Ethnic Division
Mr. Souban Savabout,	Deputy-Director, Economy & Finance Dept

Interested parties interviewed:

Mme Thoumally Vongphachanh,	Deputy Director Women's Rights Dept, LWU
Jun Yoshida,	UNDP Gender Focal Point
Mr. Viengsamay Vongkhamkao,	Program Officer, UNDP

Gender Mainstreaming Working Group members:

Dr. Bounnong Bouphe	
Dr. Bangon Sayarath	
Mr. Chanhpeng Bousavanh,	Director, Socio-Cultural Department
Mrs. Manivanh Litsomphanh	

Project Team:

Mr. Thongda Souphasith,	National Project Director
Mr. Herseng Yiapaohet,	Project Manager
Mr. Paul Waite,	Project Advisor
Ms. Phatsalinh Souphavong,	Project Assistant/Admin
Mrs. Viengkham Leuandvihane,	General Assistant (p/t)
Mr Phansa Phoummala,	Driver

Provincial interviews:

Mr Dang Chualoungkhamny,	Director Luang Namtha NA Office
Hon Aloun Lokhamloy,	Standing Member & Chief of Delegation for Luang Namtha
Hon Bounlom Xayyavong,	Chief of Delegation for Oudomxay
Hon Yaleu Tongneng,	Standing Member for Oudomxay, Deputy-Chief of Delegation
Mme Somchanh Chitvongdeuan,	Member for Oudomxay
Mr Somchanh Thipphouka,	Director of Provincial NA Office

Appendix 2

Gender Mainstreaming

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[Useful web sites for gender mainstreaming include -](#)

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<http://www.genie.ids.ac.uk>

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<http://www.thecommonwealth.org/gender>

<http://www.undp.org>

<http://www.unifem.org>

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<http://www.worldbank.org/gender>