



## Introduction

The needs assessment mission for the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) was conducted September 8-12, 2014, by the Convention Secretariat jointly with the Ministry of Health of Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). The international team, which came at the government's invitation, included representatives of the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WPRO) and the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA). The team met with the leaders of government agencies, NGOs and civil society who are involved in implementing the WHO FCTC at country level.

## Tobacco control milestones in Lao PDR



- 2006** Lao PDR ratifies the WHO FCTC.
- 2009** Lao PDR passes the Law on Tobacco Control.
- 2010** Decree on Tobacco Advertising Ban.
- 2013** Lao PDR establishes the Tobacco Control Fund.

## About UNDAF

The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) is the strategic programme framework jointly agreed between the Government and the UN system outlining priorities in national development. The current UNDAF (2012-2016) includes prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). As implementation of the Convention is central to reducing NCDs and their burden, it is important to include support for the implementation of the WHO FCTC in the programme activities of the next UNDAF.

## Key facts



**24.6%**

of adults smoke **tobacco** daily.

**47.8%** of men  
**8.3%** of women

The average smoker **starts** when they are **17.5** years old.



**71.4%**

of daily smokers smoke manufactured **cigarettes**.

**80.8%** of men  
**33.2%** of women

**14.3%** of **boys** smoke **cigarettes**.



**1.1%** of **girls** smoke **cigarettes**.



**7.7%**

of **boys** use **tobacco** products other than cigarettes.

**5.3%**

of **girls** use **tobacco** products other than cigarettes.



### Domestic cigarettes

A Deng is priced at **US\$0.90** per pack of 20 cigarettes.

Dok Mai Deng is priced at **US\$0.39** per pack of 20 cigarettes.

### Imported cigarettes

Marlboro is priced at **US\$1.70** per pack of 20 cigarettes.

555 is priced at **US\$1.95** per pack of 20 cigarettes.

Benson is priced at **US\$1.95** per pack of 20 cigarettes.



## Main findings and recommendations

● Lao PDR is committed to fully implementing the WHO FCTC and has achieved significant progress in legislation, multisectoral coordination, tax increases and efforts to raise public awareness about the harm tobacco causes. A number of tobacco control laws have been passed. While these laws and regulations have strong provisions in some areas, they do not fully implement all WHO FCTC requirements.

**Recommendation:** Strengthen the laws and regulations to fully implement the WHO FCTC.

● Lao PDR is developing its eighth Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan, which covers 2016-2020, and has developed a strategic plan for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases and a separate action plan for tobacco control.

**Recommendation:** Implement the WHO FCTC through a whole-of-government approach in the eighth Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan and use the needs assessment report as a reference document to finalize the multisectoral tobacco control strategy and action plan.

● The tobacco control program is guided by the high-level National Committee for Tobacco Control, which is established by the Tobacco Control Law. The Tobacco Control Law also establishes a Tobacco Control Fund, though collection of levies for this amount from domestic companies has not been successful.

Although the Tobacco Control Law prohibits tobacco companies from impeding civil servants in their duties, it is reported that the tobacco industry has substantial influence on and access to high-level policymakers.

**Recommendation:** Government agencies should not receive any funds directly from the tobacco industry for the implementation of public policy and no voluntary agreement should be entered into with the tobacco industry for the prevention of illicit trade.

**Recommendation:** Take action to collect these taxes and make the Tobacco Control Fund operational as soon as possible, as well as appointing full-time staff for the tobacco control unit at the Ministry of Health, with staff time being allocated from other ministries to help coordinate WHO FCTC implementation.

● There is a 25-year Investment License Agreement between the LAO PDR and two tobacco companies that was signed in 2001 and establishes Lao Tobacco Limited as a joint venture between the two companies and the government. Under this agreement, the joint venture enjoys benefits including caps on the excise tax rate on tobacco products and exemption from certain other taxes and changes in the tax law. Though this agreement was entered into before Lao PDR's accession to the WHO FCTC, it appears to be in violation of Lao PDR's obligations under the WHO FCTC.

**Recommendation:** Nullify or amend provisions of the agreement that are not in keeping with Lao PDR's obligations under the WHO FCTC, as appropriate under due process of law.

● Taxes have been imposed on cigarettes, including a 60% excise tax on the wholesale price of cigarettes. The government's joint venture agreement with cigarette companies has prevented the enforcement of these taxes, meaning that taxes are responsible for less than 20% of the resale price of cigarettes.

**Recommendation:** Implement taxation according to WHO FCTC guidelines and raise cigarette taxes regularly. Alternative measures, such as licensing, registration and other fees, could be considered.

● The Tobacco Control Law has provisions for creating smoke-free environments, though it allows for designated smoking areas in public places and workplaces.

**Recommendation:** Amend the law to make it fully compliant with the WHO FCTC.

● Lao PDR has a requirement for textual warnings on cigarette packaging.

**Recommendation:** Adopt a requirement to include pictorial health warnings, with total warnings covering 75% of the front and back of all tobacco packaging.

● Lao PDR has a ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorships, but there is an exemption allowing tobacco advertising on outdoor umbrellas and the display of tobacco products at points of sale.

**Recommendation:** Bring the ban into compliance with the WHO FCTC.

● Education, communication, training and public awareness are important parts of the WHO FCTC.

**Recommendation:** Ministries should work together to develop a strategic communication strategy with the long-term goal of discouraging tobacco use, with particular attention paid to communities in remote and rural areas.

## Post needs assessment assistance available from the Convention Secretariat

● Providing technical assistance in facilitating the process of engaging potential partners and identifying internationally available resources to implement the WHO FCTC.

● Supporting and facilitating a national multisectoral stakeholder workshop

to consider the needs assessment report and prioritize actions for implementation.

● Providing other post-needs assessment assistance according to priorities jointly agreed with the Convention Secretariat and other partners.

## Outcomes



1) The needs assessment provided an evidence-base for policy, programmes, a plan of action and activities to support the National Tobacco Control Law and WHO FCTC implementation

2) As a result, efforts have been made to abolish the Investment License Agreement between the LAO PDR and two tobacco companies and activities were conducted to strengthen the capacity of the national tobacco control program and the high-level National Committee for Tobacco Control.

3) LAO PDR has been working on the development of a new decree on tobacco control.