



Country and Government Context

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is a landlocked country located in Southeast Asia, bordered by Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The capital, Vientiane, is a city of about 600,000 people and is located on the Mekong River.

The Lao PDR has a population of approximately 6.7 million, divided officially into 49 ethnic groups within four ethnolinguistic families: Lao-Tai (67% of the population), the Mon-Khmer (21%), Hmong-Lu Mien (8%), and the Chine-Tibetan (3%).^a The Lao PDR covers a land area of 236,800 square kilometers, with mountainous terrain along the eastern border and in the north of the country. Poverty levels have reduced rapidly in recent years: in 2008, an estimated 27% (from 46% in 1992) of the population earning less than \$1 per day;^b although large numbers of poor are marginally above this poverty line and, therefore, vulnerable to shocks. Poverty is concentrated in the mountainous areas, and much of the population remains agricultural workers with limited access to markets.

The Lao PDR is a republic with a unicameral legislature controlled by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. The legal system is a hybrid of socialist, French civil, and indigenous legal traditions. Current high levels of growth are being driven by the natural resource sectors, including commercial export agriculture, hydropower, and mining; however, most Lao citizens are subsistence farmers.

^a E. King and D. van der Walle. 2010. Ethnolinguistic Diversity and Disadvantage. Chapter 7 in *Indigenous People, Poverty and Development*. World Bank Discussion Paper. Washington, D.C. (Available online at <http://go.worldbank.org/1LHOIG110>)

^b United Nations Development Programme Lao PDR. 2009. *MDG Progress Report*. Vientiane. (Available online at www.undplao.org/mdgs/mdgs1.php)

Civil Society: An Overview

Civil society in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) during its years as a French Protectorate until independence in 1953 is not well-documented. Between the establishment of the Lao PDR and 1986, only three international NGOs (INGOs) were allowed to operate in the Lao PDR: the American Friends Service Committee, the Mennonite Central Committee, and Save the Children UK.¹ These organizations provided humanitarian and development services in restricted geographical areas, and operated under other administrative limitations, including on hiring of local staff. After the adoption of the New Economic Mechanism in 1986, gradually, more INGOs gained permission to operate in the Lao PDR, mostly working in community development and service delivery.

While the right of association has existed since the promulgation of the Constitution in 1991 (Article 44), only a few independent local organizations were active up to the 2009 legal changes (see *ADB-Civil Society Cooperation*). These groups generally existed under ad hoc arrangements, including being registered as companies or training institutes, or through arrangements with specific ministries. Many development functions that would be the work of CSOs in other contexts are fulfilled by the mass organizations, such as the Lao Front for National Construction, a party-sponsored sociopolitical structure that was founded in 1979. Its tasks include social mobilization and to extend government and party work through Lao society and all ethnic groups. It also oversees and coordinates the other mass organizations.

The role of civil society in the development of the Lao PDR, while being supported at the broad policy level, is still being defined, and collaboration and implementation mechanisms are only at a very early stage of development.² CSOs working in the Lao PDR generally work to implement, not challenge, government policy, although in recent years, some international advocacy groups have started to monitor developments in the Lao PDR from outside the country.

There are currently about 160 INGOs operating in the Lao PDR; about 66 of these are members of the INGO Network. INGOs with offices in the Lao PDR are, almost without exception,

focused on delivering development programs in sectors, such as agriculture and rural development, education, environment, explosive remnants of war, gender, health, and natural resource management. INGOs have also, in recent years, started to organize to influence development policy, especially through the yearly Round Table dialogue with development partners. In recent years, INGOs have presented statements on land issues and natural resource management, seeking donor and government support for more attention on these issues. Some INGOs, based outside the country, are involved in more direct advocacy, but there is a clear distinction between these organizations and the operational INGOs working in the Lao PDR.

Independent Lao CSOs are at an early stage of development, but are growing. Before April 2009, local CSOs (known locally as Non-Profit Associations [or NPAs]) were registered through various *de facto* means, usually through a personal connection to a government line agency or technical department. These included commercial and professional associations, such as the Luang Prabang *Tuk-tuk* Drivers Association, growers and producer groups, water users' associations and other CBOs, charity foundations, and a limited number of development associations.

In April 2009, the Prime Minister signed the Decree on Associations, allowing for central registration of local associations for the first time. The Decree, which came into force in November 2009, requires organizations registered through other channels to reregister under the new scheme. According to a 2009 study, there were only about 20 experienced NPAs capable of administering small grants funds.³ By the end of 2010, the number of organizations applying for registration under the new decree had reached 80,⁴ suggesting that many citizens of the Lao PDR had been interested in being involved in CSOs, but were waiting for the political and legal environment to change. However, like in many other countries in the region, Lao civil society retains close links to government and emphasizes personal ties.

Lao mass organizations—quasi-governmental party organizations—continue to fulfill many civil society roles. As in neighboring countries, there is controversy over whether mass organizations can be considered civil society, as their primary accountability is to the state, not their members. However, some mass organizations play a very active role in development at the sub-national and national levels, including through providing training and capacity development, organizing community-based activities, and acting as facilitators for development partners in the rural areas. In the Lao PDR, mass organizations are characterized by strong vertical networks, most having a representative in each village

linked to the district, provincial, and national levels. The following are the main mass organizations:

The **Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC)** is responsible for building national solidarity and for ensuring that the interests of ethnic minority groups are recognized. It has members throughout the political system from the national level to the village level. The LFNC is also responsible for coordinating mass organizations and other sociopolitical groups and for religious affairs. Although it has limited project implementation capacity, it has undertaken research and coordination and liaison tasks on behalf of government and donors.

The **Lao Women's Union (LWU)**, established in 1995, has more than 800,000 members with strong grassroots linkages. It is involved in community-level socioeconomic development work in many parts of the Lao PDR, with most projects aimed at reducing poverty and increasing women's knowledge and skills through vocational training and micro business development. The LWU is active as an implementer of donor-funded projects and has some experience with participatory methodologies, although capacity and experience levels are dependent on individuals in certain locations. The LWU also maintains a development policy research center, the Gender Resource Information and Development Center in Vientiane, which has undertaken research tasks on issues, such as violence against women and gender budgeting on behalf of donors.

The **Lao Federation of Trade Unions (LFTU)** was established in 1996 and is the only national workers' organization. It maintains the status of a ministry with government budget support (staff and activities). While mainly responsible for representing workers' rights, the LFTU also gives priority to workers' education, including responding to the transition to a market economy. The LFTU has been involved in dissemination of HIV/AIDS prevention materials in the workplace.

The **Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union (LYU)** was modeled on the LWU. The LYU is involved in some vocational training and development activities. It operates youth centers and handicrafts marketing outlets, such as the Youth Textile Handicraft Workshop in Luang Prabang. It also is involved in youth initiatives of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Government–Civil Society Relations

Civil society's formal relationship with government is not well-defined. For example, CSOs are not officially represented in the formal donor partnership mechanisms, the Round Table Process (RTP), or in the sector working

groups associated with the RTP. INGOs have had greater success in working through donors in these forums, but NPAs are as yet silent in formal development coordination. Part of the issue with defining a role for civil society lies in the difficulty of distinguishing the roles of NPAs from mass organizations. It also reflects concern that NGOs may criticize government—especially in an environment where this is not readily tolerated. There is also a lack of understanding of why government, particularly at the local levels, would view NGOs as competitors for limited donor funding. The functional view of civil society’s possible role in the development process anticipated in the Decree on Associations does not answer these uncertainties fully, and the idea of civil society, therefore, still requires socialization within government and the community.

This uncertainty about civil society also has implications for the ability of CSOs to mobilize projects. Because CSO activities are welcome, but only when in line with government policy and under the control or supervision of government agencies,⁵ INGOs face confusion about their roles and mandate within the Lao system. For example, many INGOs have strong technical relationships with line agencies and provincial and district governments, but there is still a level of wariness within government. INGOs are, in some circumstances, treated as donors, bringing welcome funding, but at other times as civil society actors, and subject to tight control of their activities. The impact of this, according to some INGOs, is that project approvals and decisions can take a long time, as the relevant government actors are not sure how to classify INGO assistance.

Despite these difficulties, there are several examples of successful government–civil society cooperation in ADB projects in the Lao PDR (see *ADB–Civil Society Cooperation*), mostly through the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Program. It may be that the regional, transboundary nature of the GMS Program has provided a good environment for leveraging regional experience with CSOs into new ways of working with the Government of the Lao PDR.

In some sectors as well, there is strong government support for community participation-based CSOs, such as Village Education Development Committees. These CBOs are a policy of the Ministry of Education, and their role is envisaged to cover a very active citizenship and involvement in increasing the quality of education and community support for educating children.

Legal Frameworks for Civil Society

There are two key Prime Ministerial Decrees that regulate civil society activity in the Lao PDR, both recently promulgated. The Decree on Associations (Decree 115)

is new and signals a policy change from government that local civil society has a place in the development process, while INGO Decree (Decree 13) is a revision of a previous decree. Both Decrees can be downloaded from the LaoFAB Document Repository (www.laofab.org/).

The Prime Minister signed the long-anticipated **Decree 115** in April 2009. Registrations began in November 2009; however, by early 2011, no organization had completed the process and achieved permanent registration. The delays reflect the length and complexity of the registration process, which involves formation of several committees and steps in registration with the Public Administration and Civil Service Authority (PACSA) and appropriate line or technical agencies at the national level, and the Provincial Governor’s office and provincial or district line agencies if the NPA wishes to work in one province or one district, respectively.

PACSA has indicated that several other pieces of legislation dealing with other forms of associational life, including foundations (nonmembership organizations) and cooperatives, will be developed over the coming years. Some tax and finance issues, including tax status, receiving funding from donors, and how civil society will take part more formally in government planning processes, are not yet addressed in the legal framework for local organizations.

Decree 13 was passed in early 2010 and replaces the previous INGO Decree 71 (1998), which was considered to be not detailed enough to provide an efficient framework for INGO registration and operation in the Lao PDR. The Department of International Organizations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs administers the Decree and forms the Secretariat of the Committee on Management and Coordination of INGOs, established by Article 20 of the new Decree.

Decree 13 sets out the requirements for INGOs (defined as organizations working for development assistance or humanitarian aid without profit) to operate in the Lao PDR. These include applying for operating permits, office approval, project approval, approval to recruit staff, and approval to undertake activities not linked to a project. Operating permits are the first requirement for an INGO that wishes to set up operations in the Lao PDR.

Once an operating permit is granted, the INGO is then able to develop a project proposal and memorandum of understanding with its appropriate government counterparts. Experience under the previous decree was that this process is lengthy, sometimes taking over a year, causing difficulties with donor timelines for disbursement of funding. The new decree, however, provides for a slightly more streamlined process, although it is not

clear yet whether this will lead to fewer delays. INGOs are required to report yearly to their government counterparts and, on completion of their projects, to the Department of International Organizations.

Networks and Coordinating Bodies

The **INGO Network** was established in January 2005, with initial support from the World Bank Small Grants Program. By June 2005, the first INGO Network Committee was established, with representatives from seven INGOs working in the Lao PDR. The INGO Network is currently funded entirely by membership fees. The INGO Network has 66 members and maintains a comprehensive online directory of INGO members and their projects. The INGO Network promotes the interests of, coordinates, and provides services to its members to enhance their contribution to the development of the Lao PDR.

The INGO Network supports sector working groups that support the implementation of the INGO Network's mission and support to members through sharing research, lessons learned, and best practice; identifying and working on common themes; and sector coordination. In 2010, there were working groups in the following sectors: civil society and governance, education, health, human resources, land issues, mental health, and unexploded ordnance (UXO). The INGO Network website includes a current list of sector working groups and their contact people.

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The **Lao NPA Network (LNN)** is an informal network of Non-Profit Associations (NPAs) involved in development work in the Lao PDR, which has been legally registered under several government agencies, such as the Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC), and the Lao Union of Science and Engineering Associations (LUSEA). The LNN was set up in early March 2009, with the objective of sharing information and promoting effective and efficient work practices.

Today, the LNN is a nonofficial, nonpolitical network of Lao organizations with the main goal of enhancing mutual coordination, cooperation, and solidarity; sharing information and assistance between network members; and for joint capacity building of its members. The network also seeks for partners to implement and fund specific network projects to contribute to poverty

eradication in the Lao PDR. The German Development Service (DED) and Concern Worldwide have supported capacity development for network members and provided the network with office space. The LNN maintains a website and an office in Vientiane:

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www.lao-npa-network.org/eng/

Gender and Development Group (GDG) is a well-known local network of organizations working on gender issues. It has been operational since 1991 (when it was known as Women in Development) under the umbrella of various hosting organizations. While GDG's main role remains in building networks and capacity of NGO staff on gender issues, it also offers consultancy and training services to other organizations, including government agencies.

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NGO Principles, Mandates, and Standards

Lao CSOs have not yet developed self-governance standards or mechanisms. Registration requirements for INGOs and NPAs cover some minimum standards for operation, although these may be more apposite for controlling CSO activities than promoting good civil society governance. For NPAs, this includes having a board that meets at least once a year, officers, regular reports, and work plans. INGOs are required to obtain permits for operation, including hiring staff, opening offices, and launching projects.

Funding of Civil Society Organizations

The Lao PDR continues to remain highly dependent on external assistance to finance its public investment program, with official development assistance (ODA) accounting for about 85%–90% of total public sector capital outlays in 2006–2008. According to the Ministry of Planning and Investment's Foreign Aid Report, in

Since 1999, ADB in the Lao PDR has actively sought ways to engage with civil society and NGOs [and] now maintains a regular dialogue with CSOs of various types.

2006–2007, NGOs contributed \$16.47 million (or 3.8%) out of the total \$432.76 million foreign aid flows into the Lao PDR. In 2007–2008, this figure was increased to \$17.88 million (or 4.3%) out of the total \$413.44 million. These official figures do not capture some sources of foreign aid, particularly from bilateral sources, and it is not clear whether the contribution of INGOs is entirely 'new' funding from sources outside the country. These figures reflect, however, that the share of development funding brought by NGOs to the Lao PDR is on the high side for the region.

Local NPAs have, in recent years, begun to access funding sources within the Lao PDR through various donor small grants mechanisms. The European Commission, United Nations agencies, the World Bank, and several bilateral donors have begun to offer small grants to local organizations working on poverty alleviation projects within the Lao PDR.

According to one study, the recommended approach to supporting civil society through this early stage should be both top-down and bottom-up.⁶ That is, development partners should work to improve understanding and acceptance of civil society among policy makers while also working with citizens, CSOs, and the community to increase the space for legitimate and active involvement. This might require engagement at the policy level and through formal development coordination mechanisms, while also seeking opportunities to engage CSOs in roles bridging communities, donors, and the government.⁷

NGO Capacity

Over the past few decades, several INGOs have accumulated valuable experience working in the unique Lao sociopolitical environment, particularly in participatory community development. Staff members in some of the more established INGOs have linguistic and cultural resources and ways of working with isolated and very poor communities that are unavailable elsewhere. For this reason, INGOs can make very appealing partners

in the preparation, monitoring, and delivery of projects. However, it must be recognized that INGOs in the Lao PDR may have limited experience with ADB systems and processes, and adequate time and resources must be dedicated to any partnership to ensure that the experience is positive, and successes are replicable in future. Government partners may also be unfamiliar with NGOs and the reasons why it may be desirable to include them as project partners.

NPAs are at an early stage of development in the Lao PDR, and most find their capacities stretched when applying for and administering small grants. There are some exceptions to this rule, in organizations that have been operational for a long period of time through other legal avenues, such as registering as a nonprofit business (for example, Sunlabob, a sustainable energy group), or as a 'graduated' project of an INGO (for example, the UXO-survivor assistance group, COPE). There have been no examples of local NPAs playing formal roles in ADB projects so far. Working with NPAs should take into consideration both the newness of civil society in the Lao PDR and the unfamiliarity of the concept to government partners, and potential capacity issues in conforming to ADB's processes. However, well-structured, small-scale engagement could yield benefits to ADB's projects through increased community ownership and sustainability.

Mass organizations, particularly the LWU, have taken on a greater role with donors in recent years. Their strength is their links to the grassroots, with some organizations having members in every village in the country.

Directories

The INGO Network maintains an online data base of NGO members and their projects (available at www.directoryofngos.org). Outside of Vientiane, provincial and district authorities can assist with identifying formal INGO projects in their areas. NPAs are less visible and are usually contacted through personal connections, although the LNN may be able to assist in identifying groups working in specific sectors or locations.

ADB–Civil Society Cooperation

ADB opened the Lao PDR Resident Mission (LRM) in July 2001. LRM coordinates high-level policy dialogue and aid, and assists with country programming, technical assistance, administration, project processing, portfolio management, and project administration. Since 1999, ADB in the Lao PDR has actively sought ways to engage with civil society and NGOs. LRM now maintains a regular dialogue with CSOs of various types

on ADB assistance in the country, including consultations during the formulation of the Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) and during new project formulation processes. LRM has a staff member designated as NGO Anchor, who is responsible for relationships with civil society in the Lao PDR and can provide advice on which NGOs to meet with for the various areas of ADB work.

ADB's sectors of work in the Lao PDR are determined, in conjunction with the government, through a rolling process of analysis and priority setting, and are outlined in the CPS 2007–2011. A new CPS for 2012–2016 is under preparation.

ADB also co-chairs the following sector working groups: Macroeconomic Issues and Private Sector Development Sector Working Group (chair: Ministry for Planning and Investment) and Infrastructure Sector Working Group (with Japan; chair: Ministry of Communications, Transport, Post and Construction). ADB also co-chairs the sub-working group for Environment and Natural Resources Management (with the Head of the Water Resources and Environment Agency), under the Agriculture and Natural Resources Working Group. Currently, CSOs are not represented in these sector working groups, although this is an area where some may have significant activities that may be appropriate to include in sector policy coordination. This would support the government view that CSOs may operate in the Lao PDR within the parameters of official policy.

ADB-Supported Activities Involving Civil Society

ADB recognizes CSOs, including NGOs, as significant players in the development process and cooperates with them to improve the impact, sustainability, and quality of its services. NGOs provide value addition in promoting sustainable development through innovation—identifying new approaches and models for specific development activities and drawing upon their close knowledge of local communities; accountability—helping ensure that project components are implemented as envisaged and planned; responsiveness—encouraging the implementation of projects to respond to local needs; participation—serving as bridges between project authorities and affected communities, and providing structures for citizen participation; and sustainability—nurturing continuity in project work, especially when implementing agencies lack capacity or when staffing changes.

ADB in the Lao PDR is implementing several projects that incorporate CSOs in various ways to capitalize on these areas of strength. One of the largest ADB-facilitated

projects involving CSOs in the region is now preparing a second phase.⁸ The previous phase, supported by the governments of Finland and Sweden, aims at mainstreaming environmental considerations into the transport, energy, tourism, and agriculture sectors of the GMS Economic Cooperation Program.⁹ It promotes the application of development planning tools that integrate environment into sustainable development. The GMS Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative (GMS BCI) aims at preventing ecosystem fragmentation that will result from pressures inherent in the economic development along GMS economic corridors, and has been working at six pilot sites in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

A pilot project implemented by an INGO, the SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, aims to improve the quality of life and livelihood opportunities of rural families, and to reduce biomass resource depletion in the Lao PDR by exploiting the market and nonmarket benefits of domestic biogas digesters. SNV has set up a series of biogas pilot activities to form the basis of a future larger biogas program that will establish a commercially viable domestic biogas sector. This pilot project is part of the GMS program.¹⁰

Another GMS activity in the tourism sector works with the Lao National Tourism Authority alongside the INGOs SNV and the Wildlife Conservation Society to help local communities benefit from growing tourism in the Lao PDR. The project provides training to communities on tourist guiding, hospitality, cooking, tourism management, and marketing. The project also assists communities to build tourism infrastructures, such as guesthouses, toilets, rest areas, and trail improvement. It also supports the development of tourism products and tours designed and operated by local communities in partnership with the private sector, and supply-chain initiatives, linking the production of agricultural goods and handicrafts by poor communities to the local, regional, and national tourism economy. The project also aims at protecting ethnic cultures and minimizing adverse effects of tourism.¹¹

In 2010, ADB approved additional funding to continue progress and expand efforts under an ongoing project¹² to build community capacities to manage water supply and sanitation (WSS) facilities. The project supports water supply and associated urban improvements in 12 small towns in the poor northern regions of the Lao PDR. In 2009, in preparation for program expansion, ADB conducted workshops and established institutional frameworks in all 12 project towns. Community mobilization activities and physical construction works for Phase 1 towns were completed in 2009, while Phase 2 town activities were scheduled to take place in 2010.

The project includes significant community participation to strengthen local ownership of WSS facilities and to maximize poverty reduction and health benefits. In all 12 towns, there is strong support for community participation in project implementation. Mass organizations, such as the Lao Women's Union and Lao Front for National Construction, will be members of the project implementation unit to help facilitate community participation and awareness, especially among women. Community-based WSS units and community action teams have already been established and are actively supporting project implementation. To date, almost a third of the elected officers are women.

Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction

The Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR) is an untied grant facility established by the Government of Japan and ADB in May 2000. From an initial contribution of \$90 million, the Fund now stands at well over \$392 million, of which \$335 million has been committed. The JFPR assists ADB clients to provide direct relief to the poorest and most vulnerable segments of society while building up their capacities for self-help and income generation. Specifically, the JFPR initiates and supports innovative programs with high potential for improving the affected countries' situations; provides relatively rapid, demonstrable benefits through initiatives that can be developed and sustained in the long term; and helps local populations and civil society design and implement programs. The JFPR provides an opportunity for local communities and CSOs, including NGOs, to actively participate in the development process.

NGO participation is deeply ingrained in JFPR operations—the JFPR is widely recognized as one of the primary grant facilities available to NGOs. NGOs and community groups are routinely involved in project cycles' different stages. They take part as an executing agency; implementing agency; a resource NGO providing information, community organizing, or some other specialized service; or a consultant to ADB during the course of the project's supervision.

One recent JFPR project covered nine impoverished ethnic minority communities living in the mountainous northwestern Luang Namtha Province. The project supported the construction of on-farm infrastructure—including new irrigation systems for 30 hectares of paddy fields, as well as improved irrigation systems for another 65 hectares—that assisted conversion of their farming method from shifting cultivation to sedentary agriculture, which requires intensive, permanent land use. This project was complementary to a road built through the GMS Northern Economic Corridor Project. It was implemented by the INGOs

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA Lao) and German Agro Action (GAA).¹³

The JFPR also supports capacity building for project management among staff of the provincial agriculture and forestry office, the district agriculture and forestry extension office; the Lao Women's Union promotes capacity building for community-driven development.¹⁴

NGO Concerns about ADB Initiatives

ADB recognizes NGOs as development partners and aims to document and respond to any NGO concerns that materialize during the design and implementation of ADB-assisted projects and other initiatives. ADB's NGO Center collaborates with operational departments to inform senior staff, members of the Board of Directors, and management of any issues and to obtain feedback about how NGO concerns are being addressed. Specific concerns in the past have included implementation of social programs and monitoring of current and potential impacts in hydropower projects, including Nam Theun 2.

Resource Center

The Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management (PPP) Learning Resource Center (LRC), which is an information center open to the public with free internet access and a range of print and electronic resources, is located at LRM.

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Vientiane, Lao PDR
www.adb.org/Documents/Phnom-Penh-Plan/LRMLRC-Brochure.pdf

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- ¹ ADB. 1999. *A Study on NGOs in the Lao PDR*. Vientiane. (Available online at www.adb.org/NGOs/docs/NGOLaoPDR.pdf)
- ² R. Delnoye. 2010. Survey on Civil Society Development in the Lao PDR: Current Practices and Potential for Future Growth. Vientiane. *SDC Mekong Region Working Paper Series*. No. 2.
- ³ Education Development Centre and SDC Lao PDR. 2009. *Feasibility of Various Responses and Interventions to Build Capacity of Civil Society in the Lao PDR*. Vientiane.
- ⁴ According to an October 2010 interview with staff of the Public Administration and Civil Service Authority, Vientiane.
- ⁵ R. Delnoye. 2010. p. 42.
- ⁶ R. Delnoye. 2010.
- ⁷ Article 49.1 of the Decree on Associations indicates government's intention of 'constantly increasing transfer

of public services to associations with detailed measures to encourage and promote associations in undertaking public services, social aid and poverty reduction.’ NPAs are seen as being able to work on the ground and have the local knowledge to provide services efficiently and effectively, and in a way that is complementary to government.

- ⁸ ADB. 2010. *Greater Mekong Subregion Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Project*. Manila.
- ⁹ ADB. 2005. *Greater Mekong Subregion Biodiversity Corridor Initiative Project*. Manila.
- ¹⁰ ADB. 2008. *GMS Climate-Friendly Bioenergy Project*. Manila.
- ¹¹ ADB. 2006. *GMS Sustainable Tourism Development Project*. Manila.
- ¹² ADB. 2010. *Northern and Central Regions Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project*. Manila.
- ¹³ ADB. 2005. *Sustainable Agroforestry Systems for Livelihood Enhancement of Rural Poor*. Manila.
- ¹⁴ ADB. 2007. *Enhancing the Capacity of Local Government and the Lao Women’s Union for Sustainable Poverty Reduction in Northern Lao PDR*. Manila.

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2009. *Feasibility of Various Responses and Interventions to Build Capacity of Civil Society in the Lao PDR*. Vientiane.
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- United Nations Development Programme Lao PDR. 2009. *MDG Progress Report*. Vientiane. (Available online at www.undplao.org/mdgs/mdgs1.php)

For more information on ADB’s work in the Lao PDR, visit www.adb.org/publications/lao-pdr-fact-sheet

Definition and Objectives of Civil Society Collaboration

Civil society is a very important stakeholder in the operations of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and its borrowers and clients. It is distinct from the government and the private sector and consists of a diverse range of individuals, groups, and nonprofit organizations. They operate around shared interests, purposes, and values with a varying degree of formality and encompass a diverse range—from informal unorganized community groups to large international labor union organizations. Of particular relevance to ADB are nongovernment organizations, community-based organizations and people’s organizations, foundations, professional associations, research institutes and universities, labor unions, mass organizations, social movements, and coalitions and networks of civil society organizations (CSOs) and umbrella organizations.^a

ADB recognizes CSOs as development actors in their own right whose efforts complement those of governments and the private sector, and who play a significant role in development in Asia and the Pacific. ADB has a long tradition of interacting with CSOs in different contexts, through policy- and country strategy-level consultation, and in designing, implementing, and monitoring projects.

In 2008, ADB launched Strategy 2020, which articulates the organization’s future direction and vision until 2020.^b Above all, Strategy 2020 presents three complementary strategic agendas to guide ADB operations: inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. These agendas reflect the recognition that it is not only the *pace* of growth, but also the *pattern* of growth, that matters in reducing poverty in the region. In this new strategic context, partnerships with a range of organizations, including CSOs, will become central to planning, financing, implementing, and evaluating ADB projects.

^a ADB. Forthcoming. *Strengthening Participation for Development Results*. Manila.

^b ADB. 2008. *Strategy 2020: The Long-Term Strategic Framework of the Asian Development Bank, 2008–2020*. Manila.

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