



The 6th Meeting of the AIPA Fact-Finding Committee (AIFOCOM)
to Combat the Drug Menace
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COUNTRY REPORT OF LAOS PDR

I. Overall Situation

In 1998 Laos was ranked as the third largest illicit opium producer, after Afghanistan and Myanmar and had one of the highest opium addicts in the world. From 1998 to 2005, opium cultivation was reduced by 93% and opium addiction by 68%. In the recent years, the Lao government has taken very decisive steps to cease opium cultivation nation-wide and in February 2006, the country was officially declared free from opium cultivation. So far, Laos is the only country to achieve the goal set forth by the UN Special Session on Drug Control Cooperation which called for elimination or significant reduction in global illicit drug cultivation. However, much more need to be done to make this most recent victory against drugs a lasting one. Without sustainable alternative livelihood, there is concern that some ex-opium farmers could return to opium poppy cultivation.

Since mid 1990s, Amphetamine-Type Stimulant (ATS) abuse has emerged as the most serious and fastest-growing drug threat to the country, especially its young population. With 5,083 Kilometers long borders shared with 5 neighbors, Laos is vulnerable to cross-border trafficking of narcotic drugs as well as their abuse. ATS seizure increased to 4,656,309 tablets in 2005 from 1,954,196 tablets in 2004, although the volume dropped to 1,755,989; 1,272,815 and 1,227,205 tablets in 2006, 2007 and 2008 respectively. There are thousands of ATS addicts in the country, with the lack of both financial and human resources, the Lao government is struggling to contain the threat.

II. Measures taken to contain narcotic drug problems

In handling the problem of narcotic drugs production, trade and abuse and their repercussion, the Lao Government recently had proceeded to take a more proactive step in enforcing the organization in charge of drug issues by which a Steering Committee on Supervision led by the Prime Minister was appointed IN January 2009 by presidential decree No.013/p. This new body is created to give directives and supervise closely the works of the National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision (NCDC). Following this new establishment, the Prime Minister of Lao PDR has issued directives No 10/pm dated 20 March 2009 detailing additional measures on the control, prevention and fight against narcotic drug issues. The directives provide a further solid base with regards to authority, incentives and penal for authorities dealing with the issue.

In containing the threat of narcotic drug, the National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision (NCDC) has in recent years implemented the following measures:

2.1. Eradication of opium poppy cultivation

The government through NCDC in cooperation with local authorities had taken a balanced approach to eradicate opium poppy cultivation in the Lao PDR through three main components as follows:

- A. Alternative Development (AD) to replace socio-economic incentives to produce opium. AD in Laos is based on a strong community centered approach that built on existing community skills and assets while promoting and ensuring community ownership and self help. AD efforts includes:
 - Infrastructure improvement
 - Providing access to health, education and safe water supply
 - Micro credit
 - Replacement opium cultivation with other cash crops such as rice, maize and livestock production.
- B. Drug (Opium) demand reduction (DDR) to eliminate the needs of addicts for opium through treatment and counseling.
- C. Law enforcement against narcotic drugs traffickers and abusers.

On 14 February 2006, the Lao Government together with other partners had officially declared Laos free from opium cultivation. Laos has now for the third year in a row been able to keep illicit opium poppy cultivation at insignificant level, this fact is confirmed by the LCDC/UNODC opium survey 2008.

2.2. Taking actions against ATS abuse

The actions taken include:

- A. ATS awareness campaigns aiming to create national awareness and mobilize all communities to form active and effective coalition against ATS trafficking and abuse within their communities.
- B. Capacity building for improving data collection on ATS and other drug abuse.
- C. Campaigns through mass media, namely radio and television.
- D. Training in precursor chemical control.
- E. Cooperation with sub-regional and international law enforcement.

2.3. Treatment and Rehabilitation of drug addicts

Efforts include:

- A. Training on drug counseling
- B. Establishment of drug treatment and rehabilitation centers with technical support provision
- C. Promotion of community participation in drug abuse treatment

In the last two years, about 10,000 opium addicts have benefited from the community participatory approach in drug abuse treatment and rehabilitation. However, there are still a large number of addicts needing to undergo treatment; they include opium addicts and ATS addicts. On average, there are about 1,500 ATS addicts have been rehabilitated in rehabilitation centers nation-wide yearly.

2.4. Building Legal basis and law enforcement

The Lao PDR recognizes the need of adhering to international treaties concerning narcotics drug control and has acceded over the past few years to a number of multilateral treaties. The country is party to the 1988 UN convention against illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and is party to the three drug control conventions.

The Drugs Law was adopted by the National Assembly in December 2007, this is the first ever narcotic drugs related law in Lao PDR and is the main legal instrument facilitating the works of the officials concerned in dealing with drug issues. Even before this law, the penal law of the Lao PDR provided a very strong measures in handling drug related crime, article 146 of the Penal Law of the Lao PDR amended in November 2005 poses harsher penalty, including life imprisonment and death penalty for drug related crime.

The national Assembly of Lao PDR has been an active partner in the fight against illicit drug abuse and trafficking, besides creating legal tools necessary, the Committee on Social-Culture Affairs of the National Assembly is active in the promotion of awareness (including law awareness) and public participation campaigns against illicit drugs through activities of its members and in cooperation with other government agencies and partners such as UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP and others.

In addition, supporting activities for law enforcement have also been under taken, they include:

- Training courses to enhance knowledge and capability of police and custom officers on narcotic drug investigation.

- Cross border cooperation with neighboring countries, e.g. Establishment of border liaison offices (BLOs), so far 9 has been in operation and another 2 is under preparation.

2.5. International Cooperation

The National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision (NCDC) is in active cooperation with counterpart agencies of neighboring countries as well as the international community and organizations concerned. The United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) has been a leading partner assisting Laos' effort in fighting drug threat during the last decade. The country's lack of funds and expertise are being complimented by international cooperation. In the last two years the NCDC had mobilized funds from international donors for four projects designed to assist former opium growers finding alternative livelihood which is in line with poverty reduction policy of the country. Another project is for drug law dissemination; the amount of funding under these five projects is around US\$ 6.9 million. Drug treatment Rehabilitation Centers have been established nation wide with the support of friendly countries, namely Brunei Darussalam, China, Japan, Thailand, USA and UNOCD.

III. Lessons learnt

1. Encouraging public participation is vitally necessary to ensure success in the fight against drug menace.
2. The population, especially the youth should be protected from drug abuse through awareness raising campaign to inform people about the danger of drug abuse.
3. Investment should be made towards providing alternative livelihood for opium farmers in order to discourage them from returning to opium cultivation.
4. The capacity of the state authorities concerned should be strengthened in terms of financial, material and human resources necessary to handle drug problem, both in terms of prevention and treatment. To compliment country's effort, international cooperation will greatly contribute to achieving the objectives.
5. Legal framework should continue to be developed and strengthened; it includes integration with regional and international legal system; while at the same time, promoting law enforcement.

- **Issues needing further attention**

1. Due to remoteness of villages with difficult road access and with the lack of both financial and human resources to dedicate to drug problem, a large number of opium addicts did not receive appropriate treatment and assistance for alternative livelihood. Some of them are at high risk of returning to opium cultivation for their own consumption and for commercial purposes.
2. Difficulty in employing legal measures to tackle drug issues due to the lack of funds, tools and personnel on the side of the authorities concerned. On the

other hand, the drug traffickers are well equipped with funding, vehicles and are well organized.

3. Public participation in the fight against narcotic drug is not strong enough due to fear and reluctance of the people in the community.

IV. Further steps taken by the government

At present, a new and comprehensive five-year National Drug control Master Plan for 2009-2013 is under preparation, this new master plan will define an updated five-year strategy to address the illicit drug problem in the Lao PDR. Nine key areas that the new master plan will address have been identified, they include:

- Data collection, Trend Analysis and Risk Assessment
- Alternative development
- Drug demand reduction, HIV and AIDS
- Public awareness
- Law enforcement
- Criminal justice
- Chemical precursor control and forensics capacity development
- International cooperation
- Institutional capacity building.

With regard to harmonization of laws on the fight against narcotic drug, the National Assembly of Lao PDR is committed to join efforts with other parliaments in the region and within the AIPA framework to make laws of the Lao PDR consistent with general and universal principles accepted by the international community and other Asean countries.



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