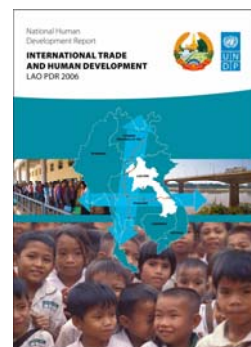


# Press Release



Lao PDR

National Statistics Centre –  
National Human Development Reporting Project  
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for immediate release

## Empowerment through kWh

**Vientiane, Laos:** The electricity flowing through the forest into village huts and houses has changed many lives for the better forever. The latest National Human Development Report (NHDR), published in December 2006 and distributed the first time during the Round Table Meeting, demonstrates clearly the importance of further rural electrification for national development and points out the multiple potential benefits of rural electrification for the well being of rural population and especially for women and girls.

Because of electricity exports, dams have been built bigger and faster than they otherwise would have been. Since 1999, ten percent of the power generated by the dams is set aside for domestic use including rural electrification which, as a result, has occurred faster than it otherwise would have. However, Lao PDR power supply is still at an early stage of development, with only a little bit over one third of all villages supplied with electricity.

Ms. Pafoualee Leechuefoung, one of the researchers for the National Human Development Report 2006, a UNDP-supported project based at the National Statistics Center says, *"The provision of electricity is a basic ingredient in the development of our country. Rural Electrification will take investments into the villages, provide jobs to village youth and make them stay at home and not drift into the cities. Bringing power to the people is one sure way of empowering people, making them capable of wriggling out of misery and disease."*

The NHDR clearly shows the multiple potential benefits, particularly for girls and women, from rural electrification. Among these benefits is the improved health of women and girls from less indoor air pollution from charcoal, wood and other bio-mass cooking fuels, for example. The Lao Women's Union reported that women must carry 120-150 loads of firewood per year for a family of 5-6 people. Particularly in rural areas, women will carry each load of firewood on their backs or shoulders. Electricity could help reduce the burden.



Rural electrification is also directly related to increased school enrollment and continued attendance, particularly of girls. At the same time, electricity could increase women's incomes through better illumination at night. Women can weave or cross-stitch at night after the housework. As a result, their incomes and other opportunities might be increased.

Electricity not only makes it easy for women to work at night, it also creates a safer environment for women to move around at night and thus increases women's political participation in night-time meetings. A woman in Ban Kengbit said that in the past, only men were allowed to go to the community meeting and it was considered inappropriate for women to go out at night for security reasons. Nevertheless, this

limited the involvement of women in activities and decisions that affected them.

Rural electrification can also increase access to information – in particular via television and mobile phones.

Mr. Bounthavy Sisouphanthong, Vice President of CPI and Co-Author of National Human Development Report says, *"Exports of*

electricity and minerals can contribute positively to the development of our country if revenues from these exports are used to improve the life of Lao people. But dams need to be carefully planned so as to not harm the environment or create any adverse social impacts. Especially ethnic groups are often affected by hydro power projects, because living nearby. It is really important that compliance with international resettlement standards and environmental protection is assured. Households resettled by dam (or mining) projects should be "first in line" for electrification."



Even if most of the resettled villages have access to electricity, not all households can afford the connection fees (ranging from US\$50 to \$100) or the monthly charges – in part because agricultural land and water have not yet been provided as promised in the resettlement agreements. The monthly rates in the rural areas are often the same as in the urban areas, but money is less available. "I don't eat electricity. There is no rice and no water. What is electricity for?" a man in Ban Phou Kao Keo said, during an interview conducted by NHDR researcher.

"Electricity is a basic development component. Providing it to the people across the whole country does not lie solely on building more and more power plants. We must ensure that the electricity is delivered even to the remote areas and it has to be affordable. Involved parties have to look carefully if all promises are kept, after entire villages - because of the construction of a new dam - are resettled", Mr. Bounthavy Sisouphanthong said. "Renewable energy, hybrid systems and new technologies shall be used as well. The future of our country will largely be determined by how we generate and apply technological innovations, but without electricity for everyone even the most ambitious development plans will have it hard to take off."

Small amounts of electricity can free large amounts of human time and labor. In the poorest areas of Lao PDR, people still carry water and fuel by hand, their food storage is limited, and their activity is limited to daylight hours. Adding electric-powered well for clean water prevents many water-borne

diseases. Refrigerators increase the time that food can be stored, directly reducing hunger and increasing health. Providing even minimal evening lighting and radios vastly increases a community's income and leisure time, access to education, crop prices and information.

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A version of the third "National Human Development Report Lao PDR 2006 – International Trade and Human Development" is available on request.

For more information please contact Oliver Schoenweger (Communication Specialist for the NHDR-Project) or

Ms. Souphavone Dalavong (Project-Coordinator) at the National Statistics Centre.

+ (856 21) 243670, + (856 20) 7801032, oliver.schoenweger@undp.org,

+ (856 21) 243670, nhdr@etllao.com

Notes for editors:

National Statistics Centre (NSC) is the hub in Lao PDR's statistical work by using, producing and coordinating all official statistics. National Statistics Centre supplies support and satisfies Governmental Institutions and other public, private and international users with data and information.

The National Human Development Report is not a single report, but a periodic publication. And the NHDR project is not merely about a report but about a process. The overall goal of the NHDR project is to create a national dialogue that widens the development choices for sustainable and equitable growth and to increase public awareness of the real human situation, drawing attention to critical concerns. It is a tool for policy makers in development planning and resource allocation. The NHDR 2006 which has been published recently looks at the multiple impact of international trade on "human development" in the Lao PDR. The overall finding is that the increasing international trade has benefited Lao people and Lao development. In addition to economic growth, International Trade benefits human development via five "pathways": cross border trade, labor migration and remittances, employment, rural electrification, and improved information.

The next NHDR, which will be the fourth of its kind, will deal with the issue **Labour force** and its multiple aspects and challenges for the Human Development in the Lao PDR