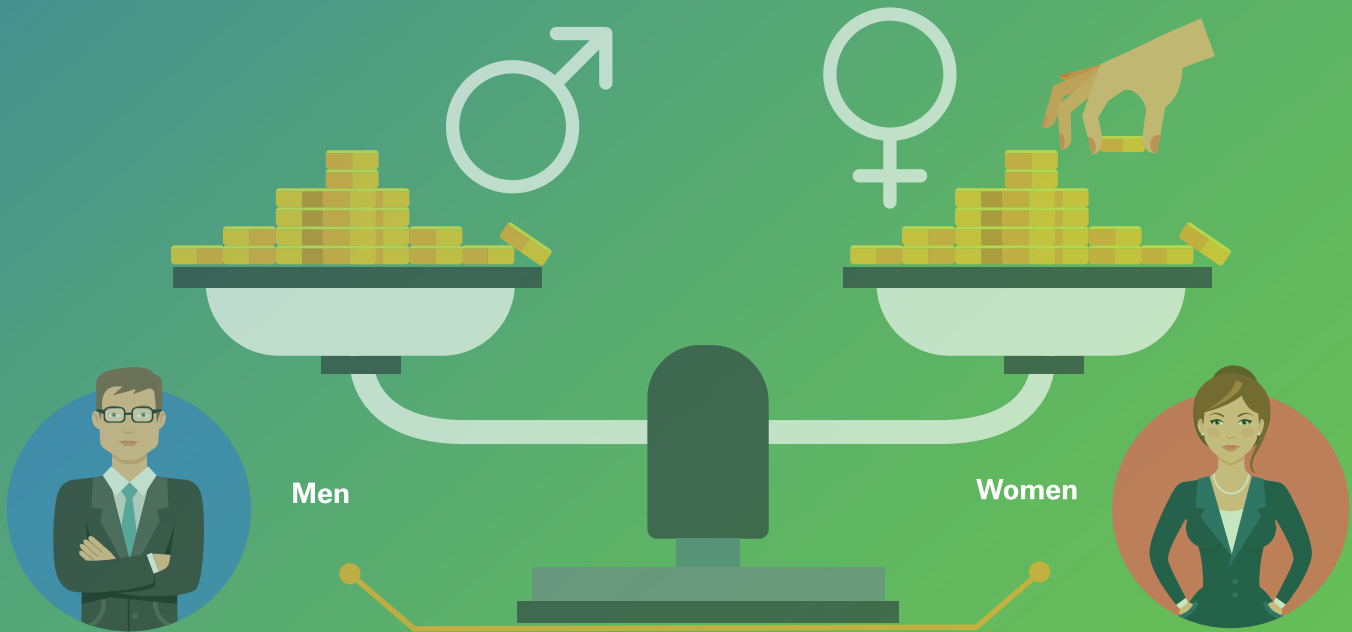


GENDER

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Lao Competitiveness and Trade (LCT) Project

By: National Implementation Unit



ສະໜັບສະໜູນ ໂດຍ:
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Acronyms and abbreviations

BAF	Business Assistance Facility
BoL	Bank of the Lao PDR
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
DERM	Department of Enterprise Registration Management
DPC	Department of Planning and Cooperation
GFP	Gender Focal Point
IA	implementing agency
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LBF	Lao Business Forum
LCT	Lao Competitiveness and Trade Project
LNCCI	Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry
MFI	microfinance institution
MoIC	Ministry of Industry and Commerce
MSMEs	micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
NBFI	non-bank financial institution
NCAWMC	National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children
NIU	National Implementation Unit
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
TFA	Trade Facility Agreement
WTO	World Trade Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) has shown strong commitment and determination to graduate from the status of least-developed country by 2020 and to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Lao PDR also has a strong legal framework for promoting gender equality and three solid women's institutions that complement each other. The Lao Women's Union and the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children complement each other's work, taking a comprehensive approach to gender issues at policy, institutional and practical levels. Under the direct supervision of the National Assembly Standing Committee, the Women's Caucus is an organization for women parliamentarians which advocates on women's issues, leadership and decision-making.

2. Promoting gender equality is a core development objective for Lao PDR, especially by encouraging men and women to play an equal role in socioeconomic development and managing natural resources. As Lao PDR continues on its development path, the empowerment of women and girls, in urban and rural areas alike, is one of the key ways of translating the country's economic growth and the energies of its young people into equity growth and improved living standards that benefit both men and women. To realize gender equality, the Government has periodically formulated five-year strategies to advance women and promote gender equality: the five-year Action Plan (2016–2020) and the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2016–2025) align with the recent 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and with SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls).

3. Lao PDR promotes equality for all Lao citizens regardless of their gender and ethnicity, and therefore the legal and regulatory frameworks – including laws, Government instruction orders and administrative procedures related to business and trade – are gender-neutral. However, despite gender neutrality in the legal framework, men and women do not enjoy the same equality in reality. Gender disparities in social, political and economic opportunities have been identified and discussed in all documents consulted. Lao women entrepreneurs account for more than 45% of registered businesses and domestic investment. However, their areas of business are not sufficient to enter the formal workforce. It is important to note that women in general are still far from receiving the full benefits that trade could bring. According to the International Labour Organization's *Global Wage Report 2018*, women are still paid 20% less than men for the same work and their access to higher-quality employment opportunities remains restricted.

4. The Human Development Index 2018 states that in Lao PDR, the share of women in waged employment is low in all sectors, at an average of 35%. Most of the documents consulted during the gender assessment suggested that while women are more active than men in socioeconomic and livelihood development activities, and more women are actively engaged in business and trade activities, especially micro and small businesses, they often face a number of legal and cultural barriers that prevent them from participating in trade, entering the workforce, setting up a business, and owning land or assets. This Gender Strategy found that gender neutrality and the gender insensitivity of the legal framework and official administration – together with social norms and expectations that women bear the majority of domestic work in households – often undermine women's roles and involvement in business. This not only affects

women's ability to register and grow their businesses but also decisions on firm size and sector of operation.

5. This Gender Strategy presents several key challenges facing Lao women entrepreneurs. Most of the identified challenges are the same as pending issues that still require attention. Most of the existing literature expresses similar views: that while women entrepreneurs and traders in Lao PDR are broadly understood, both understanding of specific challenges and reliable evidence remain limited. However, the available information suggests that there is ample evidence of persistent gender differences in social, political and economic opportunities due to the quality of education, geographic boundaries and remoteness, ethnicity and cultural gender norms.

6. The gender assessment found that Lao women entrepreneurs have limited knowledge of and low capacity for business and financial management. They also have weak market positions while facing strong competition from within and outside the country. The study also found that at the institutional level, gender knowledge and expertise – especially related to business and trade – is low. Meanwhile, the study confirmed that the legal framework, including policy and official administration for business and trade, is gender-neutral but insensitive and unresponsive to specific gender needs.

7. On a positive note, the number of women entrepreneurs is steadily increasing in both the informal and formal sectors, and those women entrepreneurs make significant contributions to economic growth and poverty reduction in Lao PDR. The gender assessment found that women play a crucial role in stimulating national economic growth. This Gender Strategy recognises that the relationship between trade policies and how different trade reforms will affect women and men is complex. It also recognises that understanding the channels through which trade and trade openness can have an impact on gender is key to achieving higher gender equality. Therefore, women's involvement in trade consultations and negotiations is vital to ensure women fully gain from trade and that their voices and entrepreneurial interests are taken into account.

8. The Lao Competitiveness and Trade (LCT) Project (hereafter 'the Project' or 'LCT') is committed to addressing the specific challenges affecting women traders and entrepreneurs. This will be achieved by: addressing the need to gain a better understanding of those challenges; identifying the institutional needs and priorities to tackle gender issues; providing support through capacity-building of key staff and partners; and directly supporting business owners and traders. It proposes four main strategic approaches at project level. Each responds to identified challenges in different LCT pillars (see Table 4). The strategic approaches are to:

- First, gain better understanding by generating and consolidating evidence on the current situation of women entrepreneurs, with an attempt to provide gender-sensitive solutions, and reflect and make sense of practical experience. The objective is to learn from women entrepreneurs and adjust the management and implementation of the project accordingly.
- Second, improve women's ability to access regulatory frameworks by providing gender-sensitive procedures, and spaces and platforms that enable public-private dialogue on trade and gender and enhance the voice of women-led enterprises.
- Third, strengthen women's competency at both institutional and firm level, with the objective of promoting gender-competent counterparts.

- Finally, provide inclusive, productivity-led growth and increased market opportunities for women-led firms/women entrepreneurs.

9. To effectively achieve the expected LCT objectives and outcomes, the Gender Theory of Change in Table 3 illustrates that the gender dimension outcomes depend largely on the Project's ability to deliver several gender-related outputs, which can be incorporated into its main pillars: gender-sensitive facilities; gender-responsive policies and procedures; women's competency; and women's economic empowerment. To achieve the aforementioned gender outcomes, specific activities such as gender-sensitive guidance and training sessions will be designed and supported under the Project components to ensure that, to the extent possible, each contributes to the program's gender outputs, outcomes and goal, to: stimulate more trade to increase the volume and value of product transactions conducted by women; make it easier to trade by simplifying the rules, regulations and procedures of trade, including those that particularly affect women; and reduce costs and increase competitiveness in business and trade.

10. The key strategic actions shown in Table 4 aim to address identified challenges and strengthen gender mainstreaming in all levels of project interventions, including business environment reforms as well as access to regulatory information and business development services. This strategic actions commit to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment because they are essential to achieving equitable growth, reducing poverty and improving prosperity, in line with the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2016–2025), World Bank guidelines (2016–2023) and the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Five Year Plan of Action for Gender Equality (2016–2020). Efforts to ensure gender sensitivity and gender-differentiated procedures are intended to safeguard women and men so that they can enjoy equal opportunities in doing business and trade. LCT is also actively supporting its Government partners to enhance their gender competency and therefore to reach their own, as well as mutual, objectives for gender mainstreaming and equality.

I. INTRODUCTION

11. This Gender Strategy is for the LCT, which has the objectives of simplifying business regulations, facilitating trade and improving firm-level competitiveness. The Strategy is designed to assist the National Implementation Unit (NIU) of the Department of Planning and Cooperation, Ministry of Industry and Commerce (DPC, MoIC), and other implementing agencies (IAs) to implement the LCT in an inclusive and gender-sensitive manner. During Project design and preparation, it was recognized that despite impressive improvements in economic growth, especially in business and trade, attention needs to be paid to gender equality and women's empowerment. Extensive research, studies and lessons learned suggest that women not only participate in a higher percentage of micro and small enterprises than men, but also play a crucial role in economic activities. However, only a few women entrepreneurs hold medium-sized and larger firms in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR).

12. The Project identified that while general constraints affecting women traders in Lao PDR are broadly understood, understanding of specific challenges and reliable evidence both remain limited. In addition, institutional gender expertise in NIU and IAs is low. It was thus agreed to engage a Gender Advisor who will assist the Project in developing a Gender Strategic Action Plan to guide executing agencies in mainstreaming gender activities into their implementation plans. The Gender Advisor will also work on the design and subsequent delivery of a series of capacity-building activities on gender – first targeting NIU members and then expanding to other IAs – with the aim of progressively strengthening gender capacity within those institutions. As part of the design process, a Gender Specialist will be recruited to conduct a gender analysis aimed at expanding the current base of knowledge and evidence available on gender-specific trade, competitiveness, and business environment constraints affecting women-led enterprises in Lao PDR. This activity is also aimed at assisting the Project to support and include women entrepreneurs in a gender-sensitive manner.

13. This Gender Strategic Action Plan has been developed to earmark gender targets set in the Project's Results Framework, and to identify gender mainstreaming, tagging and approaches within Project activities. The Strategy was prepared in consultation with the guidelines and requirements specified in the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2016–2025), the World Bank guidelines (2016–2023) and the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Five Year Plan of Action for Gender Equality (2016–2020). These strategies share ambitious visions to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment as a key pathway toward lasting poverty reduction and shared security and prosperity. Their commitments are to: address the specific challenges affecting women traders and entrepreneurs in the selected sectors; reveal the need to gain a better understanding of those challenges; and identify the institutional needs and priorities of key programs and current initiatives on the trade and gender front.

14. In line with the aforementioned strategies' objectives, this Gender Strategic Action Plan includes extensive gender analysis and assessment, which was accomplished by conducting a literature review and stakeholder consultations. The analysis includes a brief evaluation of the status quo of women entrepreneurs, and provides brief information on the overall gender situation in Lao PDR. It provides five main chapters: (i) an introduction; (ii) assessment methods; (iii)

literature review; (iv) LCT strategic interventions and recommendations; and (v) gender actions and implementation plan.

II. ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

15. The assessment took place from March to July 2019, and included a literature review and key informant interviews and stakeholder dialogue sessions. The desk review mostly took place in March and April, while stakeholder consultations and interviews took place during the World Bank Review Mission in late May and again from late June to early July. The review studied relevant documents from key Project donors such as the World Bank, GIZ, Australian Aid, and the Asian Development Bank. Other development partners and associations, such as the Lao Business Forum (LBF), were also sourced and studied to enrich the gender assessment.

16. Key informant interviews and dialogue sessions involved several key Project IAs within MoIC, the Ministry of Investment and Planning, the Ministry of Health, the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (NCAWMC), and key women-owned businesses and representatives of women-led social enterprises. The interviews and dialogue sessions also included: the private sector, banking sector and individual business owners; civil society stakeholders such as the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI); women's non-governmental organizations; the Lao Business Women's Association; and multilateral and bilateral development agencies including the United Nations Development Programme, UN Women and the United States Agency for International Development.

17. During the review mission in May, the assessment had an opportunity to observe key sectors: (i) legal and procedural development; and (ii) information dissemination. There were also opportunities to and meet and talk to counterparts: (i) key implementing partners; and (ii) Project donors, together with their technical experts in different fields, including gender experts who have considerable skills and experience with women and business and trade.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. General Information on Gender in Lao PDR

18. Lao PDR is a landlocked and mountainous country, which has huge implications for business and trade. It is divided into 18 provinces including Vientiane Capital. The majority of the population resides in rural areas – estimates vary from 71% of the total population (according to a 2013 survey) to 68% (a survey conducted in 2015) – and includes a multitude of ethnic groups. There are 50 different officially recognized ethnic groups that consist of more than a hundred subgroups. The Government promotes equal rights and opportunities among all Lao citizens and has declared under its Constitution that all ethnic groups are equal by law in terms of dignity and rights. There are four main ethno-linguistic groups (Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, Hmong-Lu Mien and Chinese-Tibetan).

19. Lao-Tai is the official language; however, it is not fully spoken by many ethnic groups in remote mountain areas. Based on the United Nations Development Programme country assessment 2017–2021, Lao PDR is one of the few countries left in the world where matrilineal

residence, matrilineal inheritance, and bilineal descent and kinship still exist for a large group of women, notably women of the Lao Loum tradition, indicating that Lao women play a crucial role in the household and social arenas. According to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2015, the majority of the other non-Lao ethnic groups inhabit rugged mountain territory and experience high levels of marginalization. It is important to note that most of the non-Lao-Tai groups practice patriarchal inheritance, often experience perpetual poverty, and lack infrastructure and public services.

20. These factors exacerbate the structural marginalization associated with limited access to education, healthcare, opportunity, political participation, and representation. They also have a huge impact on men's and women's roles in social, cultural, economic and political arenas. Very often the division of labor between men and women in Lao PDR is very clear and also important for families' and tribes' development and preservation. However, some of the Lao and ethnic groups' traditions place women in a vulnerable position and create elements of gender inequality. With economic change comes social change, affecting both the family and the community. With recent economic development, more women have accessed and are taking part in business and trade and this has affected women and men differently.

B. Legal Framework on Gender

21. Addressing gender equality is required by Lao legal frameworks. This is an astute move economically because greater gender equality can enhance productivity, improve development outcomes for the next generation and make institutions more representative. Lao PDR has shown a strong commitment and determination to graduate from the status of least-developed country by 2020 and to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 (18 SDGs for Lao PDR¹). In late 2015, the Government began 'localizing' the SDG agenda to the national context. Gender equality is a core development objective, especially in encouraging men and women to play an equal role in socioeconomic development and the management of natural resources. As Lao PDR continues on its development path, empowering women and girls in both urban and rural areas is one of the keys to translating the country's economic growth and the energies of its young people into improved living standards that benefit both men and women.

22. Previous government measures to realize gender equality include: a five-year strategy to advance women and promote gender equality; the long-term 'SDG Vision 2030'; and a new five-year plan (2016–2020) that aligns with the recent 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan.. The latest version of the Gender Strategic Action Plan is known as the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2016–2025), which was derived from the Second National Strategy for the Advancement of Women and approved by the Prime Minister in March 2016. It presents the achievements and shortcomings in the implementation of the Second National Strategy for the Advancement of Women and the Five Year Plan of Action for Gender Equality (2016–2020).

23. Lao PDR adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981. This testifies to the country's political will to work in partnership with the international community to advance and protect the legitimate interests of Lao women in general and women of all ethnic groups in particular. In conjunction with the

¹ Lao PDR has included an SDG target for UXO clearance.

protection and promotion of women's rights in political and socioeconomic fields, the Government has given due attention to establishing a domestic legal system that will gradually meet international standards.

24. The Constitution, which was established in 1991 and revised in 2003, is a legal guarantee of equality between men and women in the arenas of politics, the economy, culture and society, and the family (Articles 22, 24 and 27). The revised Constitution has a greater focus on protecting women's interests and developing their advancement. The principle of equality is also reflected in several national laws such as the Labor Law (1994), which requires non-discrimination in employment (Article 2) and equal pay for work of equal quantity, quality and value (Article 39).

25. Similarly, the Family Law (1990) states that "the husband and wife have equal rights in all aspects within the family. The husband and wife together make decisions on their own family matters, and are mutually obliged to love, show mutual respect and share a joint obligation for child-rearing and education and build a genuine family bond, happiness and advancement" (Article 13). In addition to these laws and regulations, the Government has expressed its commitment to promoting gender equality in a number of policy documents. It approved the Development Plan for Lao Women (1998–2003), which led to the establishment of the NCAWMC in 2003. The plan has been revised every five years and includes goals and programs to promote Lao women's legal awareness, improve their education, skill levels, health, nutrition and income-generating opportunities, and reduce their workload.

C. Women's Institutions and Representation

26. Officially, Lao PDR is equipped with solid women's institutions. The national apparatus for gender equality and women's empowerment consists of three institutions, including the NCAWMC, which supports the Government in researching policies and strategies for women's advancement. The Commission also coordinates the implementation of policies on gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women with national and international stakeholders. The Women's Caucus, known as the Commission's Secretariat, has the mandate to: assist in research strategies, action plans, laws and projects on gender equality; implement CEDAW; promote women's empowerment; and carry out training. It also focuses on improving coordination with national and international organizations, monitoring and reporting. The Lao Women's Union is present at national, provincial, district, and village level. It receives technical and financial support to interpret policies and provide guidance to the Party, and to implement Government strategies aimed at protecting the rights of women and children.

27. The Lao Women's Union and the NCAWMC complement each other's work, taking a comprehensive approach to gender issues. The Women's Caucus, however, is an organization for women parliamentarians under the direct supervision of the National Assembly Standing Committee. It assists the National Assembly in: mainstreaming gender into laws; overseeing the implementation of the Constitution and laws and policies related to gender equality, women's advancement and mother-and-child health; promoting development; and protecting the interests of women and children.

28. Lao PDR has one of the highest percentages of female parliamentarians in Asia and the world. With 27.5% of members of parliament being female, Lao PDR is well above the global

average (22.5%). However, the proportion of women in decision-making positions in district, provincial and national Government agencies is only 5% (as of 2012).² The highest proportion of women in the Government can be found in the legislative branches at national level (more than a quarter). The lowest proportion of women beyond administrative support roles can be found at provincial and district level.

29. A positive trend is that there has been a steady increase in the number of female parliamentarians in each legislature. For instance, the number increased from four women (10% of 45 total members) in the First Legislature of the People's Supreme Assembly to five (6% of 79 total members) in the Second Legislature; eight (10% of 85 total members) in the Third Legislature; and jumped to 21 women (21% of 99 total members) in the Fourth Legislature. By the Seventh Legislature, there were 33 women (25% of 132 members) and presently there are a total of 149 parliament members, of which 41 are women (28%). The number of eligible voters for the Eighth Legislature was 3.73 million, of which 1.85 million were female. Recorded registered voters stood at 97.9%, or 3.65 million, of which 1.79 million were female. This trend indicates that more women than ever are engaged in leadership positions.

D. Gender and Economic Opportunity

30. Extensive research suggests that Lao women play an important role in agriculture, small-scale businesses and services such as the retail, restaurant and hotel industries. Furthermore, they are engaged in the manufacturing sector (garments), and the provision of basic public services such as education and health. The 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan includes a target to have women placed in 20% of decision-making positions. This can increase to up to 45% depending on the sector. For instance, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has set a target of 45% of women farmers from poor households to participate in all activities such as those involving technical training and access to new technologies, shelter and stable employment. In response to this Government strategy, there is an increasing number of women involved in economic activities. Women in urban areas are able to find opportunities in information technology, tourism and business services. However, many are also primarily responsible for maintaining the household, and the family's food security and health.³ Many studies suggest that women in rural areas are more active than men in socioeconomic and livelihood development activities, and that more women are actively engaged in business and trade activities, especially micro and small businesses.

31. Increasing private sector investment has created new opportunities for entrepreneurs and employment. The Human Development Index 2018 states that an equal share of men and women make up the working population (77% each as of 2015), but women generally occupy the lower rungs of the labor market. Women are relatively more excluded from formal sectors and the social protection that this entails. In Lao PDR, the share of women in wage employment is low in all sectors, at an average of 35%. In contrast, women account for 70% of unpaid workers (2015), but only 32% are identified as 'own account workers' – which suggests that women are less likely to

² The United Nations in Lao PDR, 2015.

³ Ministry of Health (2016). *National Nutrition Strategy*. Available from http://www.nationalplanningcycles.org/sites/default/files/planning_cycle_repository/lao_peoples_democratic_republic/final_lao_version_nnsa_2016_matrix_updated_21_dec_2015_-_part_1_rta_.pdf.

be engaged in productive work with income they control. While Lao female entrepreneurs account for more than 45% of registered businesses, their businesses are too small to entail a workforce.

32. Gender differences in social, political and economic opportunities were identified in all consulted documents. Documents on gender differences in economic opportunities, endowments and agency indicate that women entrepreneurs face additional or more binding constraints than their male counterparts. The report *Toward Gender Equality in East Asia and the Pacific*⁴ described how skills and access to capital may differ by gender, putting female-owned enterprises – and notably, female-owned microenterprises – at a disadvantage. As in Lao PDR, many studies confirm that women in most, if not all, countries tend to bear the majority of domestic work, child care and elder care in households, which limits the amount of time they can spend on their businesses. Research thus suggests that women’s involvement in domestic chores affects their ability to grow their businesses and drives strategic business decisions, including firm size and sector of operation.

E. Women Entrepreneurs

33. This assessment draws a very strong correlation between women entrepreneurs and the Lao market economy. An extensive literature review highlighted that more and more Lao women, urban and rural alike, are actively engaged in economic activities. There is also evidence that the majority of women in businesses are micro- and small-scale entrepreneurs, and that as firms get bigger, the number of women entrepreneurs decreases. The *Enterprise Survey 2016* for Lao PDR stated that the economy is dominated by low-income, low-growth and very small enterprises. A recent survey, conducted from May through October 2018,⁵ looked into business owners and top managers in 332 firms in Lao PDR. It classified these businesses into three main sectors: (i) manufacturing (42.77%); (ii) services (41.56%); and (iii) retail (15.66%). In addition, of these 332 businesses, 71.68% are small business (5–19 staff), 21.68% are medium-sized (20–99 staff) and only 6.62% are considered large firms (100+ staff). The Department of Enterprise Registration Management (DERM), MoIC, reports that female entrepreneurs account for 45.82% of all enterprises registered in Lao PDR.⁶ Female entrepreneurs’ share of total domestic investment is 44%; however, they share a mere 0.62% of foreign investment in Lao PDR. Overall, even though women share a slightly higher percentage than men, it is important to note that the share of women-owned businesses is larger among small firms but very small among large firms and in relation to foreign investment.

34. According the National Enterprise Database under MoIC, women and men share a similar interest in investing in businesses, with a few sectors showing a clear gap where they attract more women. Overall, there are more sectors attracting higher numbers of male enterprises. The data in Table 1 show that men invest more in sectors related to infrastructure development and engineering such as construction, transport and warehouses, and electricity and mining. Women

⁴ Mason, Andrew D. et al. (2012). *Toward Gender Equality in East Asia and the Pacific: A companion to the world development report (English)*. World Bank East Asia and Pacific regional report. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/270511468246373406/Toward-gender-equality-in-East-Asia-and-the-Pacific-a-companion-to-the-world-development-report>.

⁵ World Bank (2018). *Enterprise Survey 2018*. Available from <https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/data/exploreeconomies/2018/lao-pdr#gender>.

⁶ This percentage is from 2017. DERM is currently calculating data for the 2018 report and it expects an increase in the number of female entrepreneurs.

are more likely to invest in retail, small motorcycle repair and small restaurants. In general the data show that men have a slightly higher number of enterprises compared to women. It is interesting to note that both men and women have an almost equal number of enterprises in service sectors, indicating that both are interested in businesses related to providing services. These include official documentation for domestic and international matters, education and healthcare services, and financial services.

Table 1: Lao Registered Enterprises by Sector, 2008–2019

Sector		Enterprises	
		% of Women	% of Men
1	Agriculture, forestry, fisheries	27.14	72.86
2	Exploration and mining	19.35	80.65
3	Processing	34.94	65.06
4	Electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning	25.89	74.11
5	Water supply, waste management	30.40	69.6
6	Construction	21.69	78.31
7	Wholesale, retail; repair vehicles and motorcycles	59.67	40.33
8	Transport, logistics and warehouses	13.08	86.92
9	Hotels and restaurants	61.54	38.46
10	Information and communications	37.28	62.72
11	Financial and insurance	47.37	52.63
12	Real estate	39.14	60.86
13	Scientific and technical training	30.58	69.42
14	Administration and management services	36.95	63.05
15	National defense and social protection	38.24	61.76
16	Education (kindergarten to secondary school)	50.83	49.17
17	Public health and social work	48.96	51.04
18	Arts, entertainment and recreation	36.12	63.88
19	Other services	47.07	52.93
20	Home business/self-employed/household services	35.71	64.29
21	International organization services	51.72	48.28

Source: National Enterprises Database, <http://www.erm.gov.la/index.php/explore-data-la/statistics-la>.

35. Since most of the data suggest that most women entrepreneurs fall into the category of micro and small enterprises, it is worth noting that data from the Economic Census (2013), which looked into 178,557 enterprises, suggested that 89.9% (or 158,915 enterprises) were small (employing between 10 and 99 workers). Another survey, conducted by FinScope in 2014 and supervised by the Bank of the Lao PDR (BoL), suggests that a whopping 99.8% of Lao enterprises are officially categorized as micro, small or medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). This study found that most enterprises are located in urban areas (65.9%), with 34.1% in rural areas. It further stated that most enterprises in big cities are businesses that relate to trade, services, merchandising,

wholesaling, retailing, and car and motorcycle repairs. Of these aforementioned businesses, women entrepreneurs tend to invest their effort in services, retail shops, service industries, handicrafts and garment factories, where the proportion of businesses is relatively small: for instance, the services sector only stood at 11.7%. Meanwhile, men often invest in a business where the percentage of businesses is much higher. For instance, construction and industrial processing accounts for 12.5% of urban businesses. This survey suggests that most production of goods and services is for domestic consumption, at 94.4%.⁷

36. Women's involvement in micro- and small-scale economic activities is not only found in Lao PDR but around the globe. The World Bank in Gender⁸ reports that female-run enterprises are steadily growing all over the world, contributing to household incomes and the growth of national economies. The 2013 World Development Report on Jobs⁹ states that there are about 1.5 billion people worldwide engaged in small businesses and the informal sector, and that the percentage of women in these sectors is higher than men in almost all countries. This report also states that East Asia and the Pacific has the highest ratio of employment in MSMEs in the world. Similarly, a 2 May 2018 article from International Labour Organization News stated that about 1.3 billion people (or 68.2% of the employed population in Asia–Pacific) make their living in the informal economy.¹⁰ It further states that South Asia and South-East Asia and the Pacific have higher shares of informal employment than East Asia. In 2016, the shares were 50.7% in East Asia, 75.2% in South-East Asia and the Pacific, and 87.8% in South Asia. The economic development of countries in the Asia and Pacific region varies considerably, and this is reflected in the proportions of informally employed. The share of informal employment is on average 71.4% in developing and emerging Asian countries and 21.7% in developed Asian countries. At the country level, the share of informal employment ranges from the highest level – over 90% (94.3% in Nepal, 93.6% in Lao PDR and 93.1% in Cambodia) – to the lowest, with proportions below 20% in Japan.

37. There are also reports stating that the number of female entrepreneurs is steadily increasing in both the informal and formal sectors. As in Lao PDR, female entrepreneurs make significant contributions to economic growth and poverty reduction around the world. According to the World Bank,¹¹ in the United States, women-owned firms are growing at more than double the rate of all other firms, contribute nearly \$3 trillion to the economy, and are directly responsible for 23 million jobs. Female entrepreneurship is also increasing in developing countries. There are about 8–10 million formal small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with at least one female owner.¹²

⁷ FinScope Lao PDR (2014). Lao Statistics Bureau under the auspices of BoL.

⁸ World Bank (2019). The World Bank in Gender. Available from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender>.

⁹ Beegle, Kathleen G.; Hentschel, Jesko S.; Rama, Martin G. (2012). *World Development Report 2013: Jobs*. Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. Available from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/263351468330025810/World-development-report-2013-jobs>.

¹⁰ International Labour Organization (2018). More than 68 per cent of the employed population in Asia-Pacific are in the informal economy, 2 May. Available from https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS_627585/lang--en/index.htm.

¹¹ World Bank (2019). Op. cit.

¹² Ibid.

F. Education and Financial Literacy

38. At national level, Lao PDR has made great progress in net enrolment in primary school, which increased from 92% in 2008/2009 to 96.6% in 2012/2013. However, the Early Grade Reading Assessment conducted in 2012 by the Ministry of Education and Sports shows that there are important disparities across geographic regions (provinces, districts, urban versus rural), ethno-linguistic groups and gender. Children from non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups living in rural and remote areas have the lowest primary education indicators. While 89% of students in the capital who enroll in Grade 1 stay in school long enough to advance to Grade 5, less than half of them do so in most other provinces. Educational disparities widen at the intersection of gender and ethnicity. Literacy rates for young males of Lao-Tai ethnicity are 84% but only 63% for Mon-Khmer. The disparity increases for ethnic females, with 81% of Lao-Tai ethnicity but only 45% of Mon-Khmer ethnicity being literate in Lao language. This study suggested that further attention needs to be focused on issues that address the quality of education in terms of geographic boundaries, ethnicity and gender.

39. In terms of doing business and financial literacy, all informants shared the view that Lao businesswomen/men generally have low levels of financial adequacy, literacy and planning skills, and inadequate administrative systems, and some even lack knowledge of such skills. The monetized economy is a relatively new phenomenon for many, and undertaking economic activities is not always well underpinned with a plan and budget, or well administered. Incoming and outgoing cash flows, debts and assets of the household are hard to distinguish from those of entrepreneurial activities. As a result, MSMEs generally have a hard time distinguishing a need for credit from a need for money; the former supposes a prospective profitable economic activity supported by some numerical analysis and planning, whereas the second just observes that there are inadequate funds, likely because of a lack of financial self-sufficiency between the household and its MSME.

40. Few MSMEs have an adequate administrative system and can produce appropriate financial statements, let alone financial statements audited by a reliable accounting firm. In the past the accountancy profession has been criticised by the Government because some certified accountants issued or certified unreliable financial statements. Even for those who produce an annual report according to Lao Accounting Standards, the information contained therein is often inadequate for market participants to base decisions upon. MSMEs typically also make most financial transactions in cash, dismissing an opportunity for financial service providers to base some assessment on traceable transactions had the MSMEs used a bank account. This assessment suggests that financial literacy and management is one of the core areas that needs attention.

G. Business Management, Trade and Competition

41. Since Lao women-led enterprises are mostly micro and small, female entrepreneurs face challenges competing in foreign markets due to: low productivity; lack of understanding of, information about, and access to markets and distribution channels; and a weak position within value chains. This weak market position is often related to low levels of added value in their activity within such chains and limited technological innovation. Even compared to countries with similar levels of per capita income, Lao PDR scores low on factor productivity and this situation has not changed for some time. The country remains competitive by virtue of its low labor costs,

which result in low incomes. Most key informants said that Lao enterprises have family-based management styles that do not encourage decision-making and competition based on economic merit and market orientation. Most are instead based on family values, and thus business planning and investment in capacity or capital goods are undervalued.

42. Increasingly, Lao businesses face competition at home because of ongoing integration of markets as a result of Lao PDR's participation in the Association of South East Asian Nations and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Competition comes typically from larger and financially stronger legitimate foreign companies, but there is also fierce and large-scale competition from informal workers and MSMEs from populous neighbors, especially Thailand, China and Viet Nam.

43. Besides increasing the costs and the time required to import products, the current import license structure may have negative implications for households (especially the poor), and can also encourage importers to resort to informal channels to bring their products into the market, putting the health and safety of consumers at risk. The World Bank reports that because traders typically pass on part of the extra costs incurred by obtaining a license, the impact of obtaining an import license is reflected in the final prices paid by consumers, resulting in a negative welfare impact and discouraging traders from pursuing official import licenses.

H. Business Registration and Licensing

44. From a policy and legal perspective, business registration and licensing is widely acknowledged to be gender-neutral. Most key informants shared the view that there is no gender gap in business registration and licensing. However, despite the percentage of registered businesses being almost equally shared by men and women, the nature of those businesses varies between the two groups. In addition, when looking beyond policy and registration procedures, there is a lot of evidence suggesting differential impacts on women and men due to their social status and how processes are administered. This contributes to women entrepreneurs choosing to operate informally, with implications for tax collection and business growth. Discussions with female entrepreneurs revealed that many prefer to stay under the radar because of the complications involved in renewing business licenses and the unreliability of the tax system. Some of the literature reviewed also suggests that most female-owned small businesses are less likely to be able to afford the required procedures, lack collateral or funds to contribute toward high start-up capital requirements, and have less time available to complete lengthy procedures.

45. However, a survey conducted by the Business Assistance Facility (BAF) in 2017 and discussions with businesswomen themselves both suggest that many women and men make opposite choices when dealing with the lengthy procedures legally required to register a business. While women prefer to run the official document process themselves, many businessmen prefer to hire a third party to take the burden from them. The discussions highlighted that women are more interested in knowing and understanding what is required from them while men are content with not having to deal with the lengthy and involved registration process.

46. To register and/or obtain a business license is costly and time-consuming because most of the system to grant licenses is centralized in Vientiane Capital, despite trade occurring around the country. This situation makes it harder to regulate products, rural traders and small enterprises. A

World Bank study, *A Comparative Overview of the Incidence of Non-Tariff Measures on Trade in Lao PDR*, pointed out that weak coordination between central authorities in charge of granting licenses and border agencies in charge of enforcing licenses leaves room for provincial authorities to exercise their own discretion, causes unnecessary delays, and encourages informal payments to be made to expedite the process.

47. On the bright side, Lao PDR is in the process of preparing to accede to the WTO and this has brought business registration, licensing and other procedures related to trade and competitiveness closer to regional practices. The challenges to private sector-led growth created by the high regulatory burden, excessive trade costs and firms' limited capacity have been addressed under this LCT Project. To improve the business environment and increase its competitiveness, the Project is helping the Government to: improve regulatory transparency by expanding reforms to the business enabling environment; improve connectivity with neighboring economies; and raise firm-level productivity, particularly with regard to simplifying regulatory requirements, reducing policy restrictions on market entry and exit, and increasing the consistency and predictability of how existing rules and procedures are implemented and applied in practice.

48. Led by MoIC, the Project is helping simplify processes to obtain an Enterprise Registration Certificate, starting from the central capital level where most licenses and certificates are issued. The challenge, however, is that the simplification of processes will take time at provincial level.

I. Financial Services and Accessibility

I.1 Banking Sector

49. The Government has made great efforts and improvements in banking and financial services. According to BoL's *Financial Sector Statistics 2016*, all banks and other financial services are regulated and supervised by the Bank Supervision Department under BoL. There are four State-owned banks, 19 private banks (of which three are in a joint venture with Government) and 19 branches of foreign banks, which together operate 96 branch offices, 494 service units, 37 foreign exchange bureaus and 1,095 ATMs. Next to banks, there are 175 non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs), including: 32 pawn shops; 17 deposit-taking microfinance institutions (MFIs); 59 non-deposit-taking MFIs; 28 savings and credit unions; 31 leasing companies; five money-transfer companies; around 20 insurance companies; and three other NBFIs. Together the NBFIs hold EUR 272 million in assets, some 70% (or EUR 193 million) of which are held by the 31 leasing companies (BoL, 2016). BoL states that the banks held 99.4% (or EUR 6.3 billion) of the total financial services sector's deposits and 99% (or EUR 6.2 billion) of the total financial services sector's commercial loan portfolio at 2016 year end. State-owned banks hold 44% of all banking sector assets. Key informants suggested that in recent years the dominance of State-owned banks has been gradually declining in favor of privately owned banks.

I.2. Financial Services, Loans and Grants

50. Most key informants shared the view that more recently, due to greater opportunity and the priority given to SMEs, more women have access to finance. This perception is confirmed by a study conducted in 2014. The *Investment Climate Assessment* reported that in the group of surveyed formal enterprises, women-owned business had better access to credit than male-owned

companies (30% for female-owned business versus 24% for male-owned businesses). The higher percentage enjoyed by women results from lending policies and decisions on credit and loans being based on prioritizing the subsidy of rural areas and well-connected companies. The two rural policy banks, Nayoby Bank and Agricultural Promotion Bank, jointly have a 71% market share of all credits issued by the banking sector. Some of the newer banks – for instance Banque Franco Lao – have policies targeting businesses, and they offer special loans with slightly lower interest rates to women.

51. However, access to credit remains a major challenge. The *Enterprise Survey* (2018) found that of the surveyed enterprises, 41% had successfully accessed credit from any source, while another 14% had tried but had not been successful. The remaining 45% were not looking for external financing. Accessing credit was more of a challenge for microenterprises, of which 20% tried and failed. Despite the seeming high rate of success, lack of (access to) capital remained the most quoted business constraint; most enterprises are both looking to expand and to borrow (60%) to finance expansion, rather than self-finance. Looking at the spectrum of enterprise sizes, the larger the enterprise, the more likely it was to have accessed credit; 27% of micro-, 42% of small-, 61% of medium-sized and 73% of large enterprises had attracted finance.

52. When looking at different types of providers, banks were by far the most important source of credit, holding about 60% of loans and providing equal levels of access to all enterprises regardless of size. The role of NBFIs as MSME credit providers, including leasing companies and MFIs, was again found to be negligible. Family members, on the other hand, were an important source and provided credit to 17% of MSMEs, and slightly more to micro and small enterprises, at 22% and 19%, respectively. Interestingly, the study found that moneylenders are also an important source of financing for large firms, at about 13%; however, only 2% goes to microenterprises.

53. In addition, a range of rural development projects as well as international financial institutions including the World Bank, the German Bank, Asian Development Bank, Australian Aid, and the United States Agency for International Development have distributed significant numbers of subsidized and targeted loans and grants, especially with the objective of improving livelihoods, women's access to finance and private sector-led growth. The LCT is also providing grants to improve firm-level competitiveness. The grants will be implemented through Component C.1–BAF. They are aimed at matching other funding to bolster investment in business development services by private firms and scale-up to stimulate trade. The grants will be allocated to eligible businesses directly. BAF is responsible for grant distribution and it must ensure that a broad range of businesses can effectively benefit from free advisory services and get access to matching grants to address the challenges faced by businesses and companies that are underrepresented among larger firms. Grant recipient targets have been set and 40% of the total grants will be allocated to women-led enterprises.

I.3. Financial Reliability and Accountability

54. Individual property with legal land certificates can be used as legal collateral. However, Lao PDR has the lowest number of land titles issued by the Government compared with neighboring countries. Although the Property Law specifies that all land acquired by a married couple is to have both the husband's and wife's names on the land-use certificate or title, many

Land Information Working Group studies, as well as the Mekong Region Land Conference in May 2018, suggest that not all women, especially in rural areas, equally share the right to land with their husband. They stated that this is mostly due to limited access to legal information, and the predominant Lao cultural norm that men are considered the head of the family, which includes entitlement to land ownership. This has limited the ability of women, especially in rural areas, to use land as legal collateral to obtain financial assistance.

55. In addition, while land certificates can be used as collateral, the legal means and procedures to effectuate the collateral rights for a bank or other lender are considered ineffective. This issue is not only associated with land ownership but also other assets. Land assets and property rights on land or buildings, and even movable assets, are weakly defined or proven, resulting in a constraint for a bank to accept them as collateral. When and/or if a court order to sell off a pledged property has been given, implementation of such a court order is tedious and consumes considerable amounts of time and money, if it is possible at all. In such a setting, collateral merely functions as a signal of commitment by a borrower, and as extra pressure on him/her to repay.

56. Interviews with bank representatives confirmed that fees to register collateral rights are high - a full 1% of the value of a property in the case of real estate, or 3% in the case of movable assets. As a result, indicative of the problem but in line with legal requirements, moneylenders and even some formal financial institutions require a borrower to sign over ownership of real estate before loan issuance, and will return ownership on full and timely payment of due interest and installments. On the plus side, bank representatives also confirmed that the legal framework for accepting movable assets as collateral and a movable asset registry have been in place since in 2013, resulting in EUR 1 billion worth of loans having been issued soon after. Around 99% of the registered movable collateral belongs to MSMEs.

J. Information, Public Media and Business Dialogues

57. Recently, market information has been made available through media and rural development projects. Online communication – especially Facebook and WhatsApp, together with e-commerce – has started to sprout up to supplement inadequate public infrastructure. These alternate forms of communication can reduce barriers, help lower the costs of trade and export products, and lower prices for consumers. The *Vientiane Times* of 18 August 2017 stated that improvements in logistics and payment infrastructure in the past decade have contributed to the growth of e-commerce, as many young people have started buying products online. It is also true that more and more women have access to market information and public media. Online marketing and doing business have started to become key tools used by women entrepreneurs.

58. The Government recognizes the importance of e-commerce; however, it is a new development in the country and the Government still has not fully discussed how to regulate it and ensure that owners are registered for e-commerce operations and to pay taxes. The World Bank shares the same view: that while e-commerce can provide great benefits, there are several

associated constraints to the e-commerce environment currently holding Lao PDR back from greater participation.¹³ The constraints include but are not limited to:

- Limited internet connectivity, high cost of payments, incomplete regulatory infrastructure, and high trade facilitation and logistics costs
- Weak legal and regulatory framework to support greater participation and protection of consumers participating in e-commerce
- Taxation of e-commerce and trade facilitation are still a priority policy area to address
- Further reform is also needed to avoid imposing undue costs on small firms and entrepreneurs
- Small firms and entrepreneurs are least equipped to manage costs related to shipment delays, lack of transparency and unpredictable regulations
- Clarification on regulations for low-value goods imports and a formal framework to streamline the process are needed

59. Market information and official invitations to attend business dialogues are also delivered via an online system such as WhatsApp, and several WhatsApp Business Groups that can be used as an outreach tool to communicate with other business owners have been established by various women-owned/led businesses. Traditionally, women entrepreneurs in Lao PDR receive inadequate infrastructure support and lack a strong network of institutions that can support their growth and development. Under LCT, the Lao Business Women's Association works closely with LNCCI and has become more involved in the LBF process. Its membership generally consists of well-connected, successful businesswomen.

60. A report from LBF in 2018¹⁴ suggests that the number of small, formal, and women-led and women-owned businesses participating in business forums is increasing, not only in the capital but also in other provinces. This is indicated by the number of women who participated in provincial public-private dialogues in Champasak and Luang Prabang Provinces. At the working group level, women represented 23% and 25% of total participants in Champasak and Luang Prabang, respectively; at public-private consultative meetings, these figures increased to 33% and 36%. This shows that women business owners are becoming more active in formal public dialogues and are more comfortable about raising their concerns.

IV. LCT STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

61. The main Project objectives are to simplify business regulations, facilitate trade and improve firm-level competitiveness. The Project has four main pillars and each pillar consists of different components. Detailed information on each pillar and its component's objectives, approaches and implementation arrangements are documented in Project documents and therefore will not be repeated here. Only the Project's gender dimensions are provided.

62. As mentioned, Lao PDR has a strong legal framework for promoting gender equality and three solid women's institutions that complement each other. The Lao Women's Union and

¹³ World Bank (2019). *Taking Advantage of E-Commerce: Legal, Regulatory, and Trade Facilitation Priorities for Lao PDR*.

¹⁴ LNCCI Annual Report submitted to NIU.

NCAWMC complement each other's work, taking a comprehensive approach to gender issues at policy, institutional and practical levels. Under the direct supervision of the National Assembly Standing Committee, the Women's Caucus is a committee for women parliamentarians which advocates on women's issues, leadership and decision-making.

63. This assessment suggests that the legal and regulatory framework in Lao PDR – including laws, Government instruction orders and administrative procedures related to business and trade – are gender-neutral. However, because policies often do not consider gender or use sex-disaggregated data, the impacts of policies can at times differ from their intention: men and women do not enjoy the same equality in reality. Gender differences in social, political and economic opportunities have been identified in all documents consulted. The share of women in wage employment is low in all sectors, but they account for 70% of unpaid workers, which suggests that women are less likely to be engaged in paid work with income they control.

64. Women entrepreneurs in Lao PDR play an important role in agriculture, small-scale businesses and services. They account for more than 45% of registered businesses and domestic investment; however, their areas of business are not sufficient to enter the formal workforce. Part of the reason is that the gender insensitivity and neutrality of the legal framework and official administration undermine women's roles and involvement, while a significant factor is that social norms and expectations mean women bear the majority of domestic work in households, limiting the amount of time they can spend on their businesses. This involvement in household labor, and elder and child care not only affects women's ability to grow their businesses but also influences their decisions on firm size and sectors of operation.

65. This assessment reveals that despite good recommendations and initiatives to address identified gender challenges under the LCT, there is a need to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by women. This includes the need to address gender blindness as well as social and cultural gaps that affect women entrepreneurs and their business development. Together with the already identified gender interventions, this assessment suggests that the Project includes three additional key areas, not only to gain better understanding of gender issues but also to promote gender awareness, equality and women's empowerment: (i) a gender diagnostic study with the aim of understanding the practical experiences of women-led SMEs and providing gender-sensitive solutions; (ii) improve women's competency and ability to access regulatory frameworks by providing gender-sensitive procedures; and (iii) incorporate gender sensitively in all IAs and partners and their implementation activities. These three key areas will complement the already proposed initiatives under the project implementation components, which are to provide inclusive, productivity-led growth and increased market opportunities and competitiveness for women-led firms/women entrepreneurs.

A. Pillar A: Improving the Business Environment

66. This pillar consists of three components, and aims to improve the transparency and efficiency of the general business environment to reduce the costs it currently imposes on all enterprises, and in particular SMEs that find it more difficult to deal with complex and opaque procedures that are applied based on deals rather than rules. Under this pillar, the Project has set an ambitious target to reduce the 'time to start a business' from the current 67 days to 30 days to align with the direction provided in the Prime Minister's Order No. 2.

67. The Project will support streamlining business operating licenses in key non-resource sectors and sectors of particular interest to women. Throughout this pillar, emphasis will be placed on ensuring that reforms and initiatives benefit SMEs in particular and proportionally benefit women-led enterprises. Through this pillar, gender sensitivity will be mainstreamed into outreach activities and related dissemination materials developed by DERM to raise awareness of simplified business registration procedures; and streamlined operating licenses will incorporate a gender dimension. More specifically, gender sensitivity will be incorporated in the implementation of the new enterprise registration process at central, provincial and district levels. Gender sensitivity will also be mainstreamed through DERM's regular follow-up with its provincial and district enterprise registry offices and its hand-on trainings on enterprise registration.

B. Pillar B: Facilitating Trade and Connecting to Markets

68. This pillar is designed to support the Government in implementing the provisions of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).¹⁵ Full and effective implementation of TFA commitments is expected to: reduce the high trade costs and delays resulting from administrative procedures to obtain trade documents and clearance for imports and exports; increase the certainty and reliability of imports and exports; and increase trade transparency. Under this pillar, the Project has set an ambitious target to reduce the 'time to prepare documentary requirements for imports and exports' from 216 hours (in 2017) to 108 hours (in 2022) to align with the direction provided in the Prime Minister's Order No. 2.

The priority areas of support under this pillar will be those relating to (a) transparency, (b) simplification, and (c) coordination. The discussion and development of guidelines and procedures to improve transparency, simplification and coordination will incorporate gender dimensions. The Project will progressively mainstream trade and gender issues into discussions on trade facilitation by including gender as a non-binding criterion used to evaluate proposals seeking support from the TFA Challenge Facility. In doing so, the NIU Gender Advisor will be invited to join the TFA Challenge Facility Evaluation Committee and to assist in reviewing proposals.

C. Pillar C: Improving Firm-Level Competitiveness

69. This pillar is implemented through BAF. It will complement improvements in the overall business and trade environment, and will support individual private enterprises in accessing business development services through a matching grant facility. The intervention aims to reduce costs internal to firms by improving company management and innovation in terms of products, markets and distribution channels, including e-commerce. To improve firm-level competitiveness, the Project, through BAF, will provide advisory services free of charge to address business operation and market access challenges. This will support enterprises to develop a robust business growth plan to stimulate enterprise growth and transformation. Grants will be provided to support a total of 300 enterprises, of which 40% will be provided to women-led enterprises. The Gender Advisor will support the BAF team in outreach and potential

¹⁵ Lao PDR was the 18th WTO member to formally accept the WTO TFA (in September 2016).

engagements, and gender sensitivity will be incorporated in BAF communication and engagement activities.

D. Pillar D: Supporting Better and More Inclusive Policies

70. This pillar will support effective Project implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and improved economic analysis policymaking under MoIC leadership. It will continue to support the transparency agenda for trade and private sector-related regulations, and strengthen public–private dialogue in Lao PDR through LNCCI. LBF has been created to assist Lao enterprises and stimulate public–private dialogue so that any concerns raised by enterprises can be properly addressed. LNCCI has made good progress on dialogue with relevant Government agencies to address issues raised at the LBF, and it actively reaches out to small, regional, start-up and women-led enterprises by including in working groups the Business Women’s Association, the Young Entrepreneurs Association, and the SME group. It successfully raised the proportion of women-led enterprises participating in working group discussions from an average of 25% in 2018 to 39% in 2019. Despite the fact that there are fewer female entrepreneurs and the rate of women’s participation has increased, LBF found that issues faced by women-led enterprises are similar to those faced by male-owned enterprises. It is suggested that the NIU works closely with the LNCCI inclusion consultant to incorporate gender sensitivity into LBF’s public–private dialogue/communication mechanism and facilitation methodology, with the aims of increasing the share of retained issues raised by women, and supporting LNCCI in ensuring that expanded geographic participation in the LBF will be inclusive vis-à-vis women-led businesses operating at provincial level.

E. Risk and Mitigation Measures

71. The assessment suggests there are two major risks that need regular attention, time and patience if they are to be overcome. Firstly, Lao PDR has a male-dominated institutional culture and social norms; and most of its policies and regulations – including official gender approaches and procedures – are based on the concept of equality and neutrality, where gender gaps are often overlooked. Secondly, it has low capacity on gender in business and trade within institutions, and there is limited interest in gender-related activities, especially with the assumption that equality and neutrality provides equal opportunity and access to all, regardless of gender. Although the overall idea of supporting gender activities under LCT was received in a generally positive way, these two major challenges will undoubtedly have an impact on the implementation of the LCT Gender Strategic Action Plan. Table 2 describes how these risks may be mitigated to ensure that gender sensitivity will be adequately incorporated into project components.

72. To deal with the challenges, LCT may provide adequate information through gender data analysis and provide gender support through its NIU. Potential types of support are listed under the Gender Strategic Action Plan in Table 4. One of the intervention strategies is to generate evidence on gender issues with the aim of promoting equality and empowering women in business and trade, which can potentially help provide better gender information to better understand the reasons for, patterns and perpetuation of biases against women. The proposed mitigation measures under this particular strategy include conducting a gender assessment, impact studies from its matching grants, and compiling and analyzing data from the ongoing LBF. These actions can

contribute to enlarging the available pool of data and evidence on trade and gender at the project and national level, which could be used in support of policy dialogue activities.

73. Other project intervention strategies include: strengthening women's ability to access and influence legal, regulatory and policy frameworks; providing support to improve gender competency within the Project and its implementing partners; and ensuring inclusive, productivity-led growth and increased market opportunities for women-led firms/women entrepreneurs. These strategies may assist the Project to address the second main risk of low gender capacity. The Project could also raise gender awareness, especially addressing unconscious bias, discrimination and gender sensitivity to counter gender bias against both men and women and address gender blindness. There may be some degree of reluctance and limited interest in actively participating in the implementation of gender activities. This could be attributed to a variety of factors, including but not limited to partners' weak technical expertise on gender, lack of previous experience on gender-responsive projects and programs, and inability to see how gender could fit into the overall mandate of their daily work and institution as a whole. This challenge can be mitigated by incorporating gender sensitivity into all Project components and providing regular capacity-building to strengthen gender technical capacity, starting with Project implementation technical staff within NIU and possibly expanding to other key Project partners, including by relying on existing networks of Gender Focal Points (GFPs) within implementing partners and line agencies.

Table 2: Risks and Mitigation Measures

Potential Risks	Estimated Risk Likelihood (High, Medium, Low)	Estimated Risk Magnitude (High, Medium, Low)	Mitigation Measures
<p>Male-dominated institutional culture and social norms</p> <p>Undermined/overlooked gender challenges as most policies, regulations, and gender approaches and procedures are based on the concept of equality and mutuality</p>	H	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide evidence-based solutions through gender assessment, impact case studies, best practices ✓ Target awareness-raising (on unconscious bias and gender sensitivity) to counter gender bias against both men and women
<p>Low capacity on gender and business and trade within institutions</p> <p>Limited interest in gender-related activities</p>	M	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Regular communication and policy dialogue on gender ✓ Strengthen staff and institutional capacity on gender ✓ Identify and collaborate with GFPs from each implementing partner ✓ Disseminate and share best practices on how gender streamlining promotes business and trade

V. GENDER ACTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

74. Gender is expected to be integrated into all dimensions of the Project and to contribute to the achievement of all its objectives. The overall long-term goal of the project is to increase trade opportunities, to reduce the time and cost of doing business and trade for women, and eventually contribute to increased investment and create more jobs for women. The achievement will likely result from the Project outcomes through its four pillars, where the Project works to: stimulate more trade to increase the volume and value of product transactions conducted by women; make it easier to trade by simplifying the rules, regulations, and procedures of trade, including those that particularly affect women; and reduce cost and increase competitiveness in business and trade. These project outcomes are described in the Gender Theory of Change (see Table 3) and they link directly to the overall LCT Theory of Change described in Annex 4. Table 3 illustrates that the gender dimension outcomes depend largely on the Project’s ability to deliver several gender-related outputs, which can be incorporated into its main pillars: gender-sensitive facilities; gender-responsive policies and procedures; women’s competency; and women’s economic empowerment. To achieve these gender outcomes, specific activities such as gender-sensitive

guidance and training sessions will be designed and supported under the project components to ensure that, to the extent possible, each contributes to the program's gender outputs, outcomes, and goal.

75. The key strategic actions aim to address identified challenges and strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment both in the provision of services and delivery of business and trade assistance facilities within the project scope.

Table 3: Theory of Change for Gender Mainstreaming

Gender Challenges	LCT Components	Gender Activities	Intermediate Gender Outcomes	Overall LCT Outcomes	Project Impacts	
<p>1. The unfriendliness of business registration and operating licensing procedures for women.</p> <p>2. Gender-neutral trade facilitation reforms are insensitive to addressing gender and/or women’s needs.</p> <p>3. Fewer women entrepreneurs, limited knowledge of and low capacity in business and financial management.</p> <p>4. Limited understanding of gender challenges and reliable evidence</p>	<p>A. Improving the Business Environment A.1 Making it Easier to Start a Business A.2 Streamlining and Publishing Operating Licenses A.3 Support to Producer Organizations</p>	<p>Institutional capacity-building on gender for LCT stakeholders</p>	<p>Gender awareness-raising among women on business registration procedures; Stakeholder dialogue towards gender-sensitive procedures and licensing; Streamlining in sectors that</p>	<p>Reduced time to obtain ERC and increased registration of women-led enterprises; Increased participation in</p>	<p>Improved Gender Awareness, Gender Competency, Increased Women’s Economic Empowerment</p>	
	<p>B. Facilitating Trade and Connecting to Markets B.1 Supporting the Trade Facilitation Secretariat B.2 Trade Facilitation Agreement Challenge</p>		<p>Streamlining trade and gender issues into discussions on trade facilitation, and incorporate gender in the transparency, simplification development</p>	<p>Gender-sensitive trade facilitation reforms Increased transparency and</p>		<p>Less time needed to import and export</p>
	<p>C. Improving Firm-Level Competitiveness C.1 Business Assistance Facility</p>		<p>Grants to women-led enterprises Direct business advisory to women-led enterprises</p>	<p>Women’s access to BAF grants increased Improved knowledge and skills among women</p>		<p>Increased firm competitiveness</p>
	<p>D. Supporting Better and More Inclusive Policies D.1 Project Management and Coordination D.2 Improved Policy Making and Transparency D.3 Supporting Public-Private Partnerships</p>		<p>Gender issues that have been raised by women-led enterprises captured and actioned through LBF Greater focus on women and small enterprises</p>	<p>Improved coordination, partnership and small enterprises Increased voice and agency for women-</p>		<p>Improved transparency and more coherent policies and regulations</p>

Table 4: Gender Strategic Action Plan

Gender Strategic Action Plan					
Identified Key Constraints	Intervention Strategy	Actions and Their Objectives	Expected Outcomes	Component, Lead Agency and Budget	Timeframe & Indicators
<p>1. While women entrepreneurs and traders in Lao PDR are broadly understood, both understanding of specific challenges and reliable evidence remain limited.</p> <p>Although data on gender and business and trade is limited, there is evidence of persistent gender differences in social, political and economic opportunities due to the quality of education, geographic boundaries, ethnicity and cultural gender norms.</p>	<p>Generate evidence on gender issues with the aim of promoting equality and empowering women in business and trade</p>	<p>1. Conduct a gender assessment to identify specific constraints in the key areas of the business environment at national, local, and sector level. It is expected that the study will be carried out at national level and one regional economic center of the country, and cover the sectors in which women are more or less likely to invest and operate and those with greater women’s participation in the labor force, including: 1) general manufacturing activities, particularly manufacture of food and beverage products, wearing apparel and furniture; 2) wholesale and retail trade; and 3) accommodation and food service activities.</p>	<p>Better understanding of the pros and cons of formalizing a business and the concerns and issues faced by women-led enterprises.</p> <p>Able to provide concrete recommendations to: (i) address gender neutrality by understanding gaps between men and women; (ii) reduce administrative constraints through accurate information with gender friendliness; and (iii) promote legal registration.</p>	<p>Components: A1, A2, A3, D2, D3</p> <p>Agency: NIU</p> <p>Budget: \$20,000–\$30,000</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1st quarter 2020</p> <p>Actions/Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Terms of Reference drafted ✓ Consultant recruited ✓ One study completed
		<p>2. As part of the case studies they produce, BAF could conduct three case studies of women-owned/led enterprises that were supported by LCT matching grants. The selected case studies will cover at least three levels of business operation – micro-, small-, medium or large-scale</p>	<p>Collect lessons learned for future projects and amplify good practice.</p>	<p>Component: C1</p> <p>Agency: BAF Gender Team in coordination with NIU Gender Advisor</p>	<p>Timeframe: Three case studies conducted by July 2020 and follow-up on progress semiannually</p> <p>Actions/Indicators:</p>

		<p>businesses that highlight issues identified in this assessment (e.g., business management and financial literacy). The aim is to monitor the correlation between and impact of the released grants on how the project has addressed business and trade issues, and whether the quality and quantity of production/businesses have improved.</p> <p>The studies will be published on the project website.</p>		<p>Budget: BAF & NIU in-house budget</p>	<p>✓ Baseline: Three impact case studies on women entrepreneurs for baseline completed in Jan 2020</p> <p>✓ Impact: The same three impact studies are updated in July 2020, Jan 2021 and July 2021</p>
		<p>3. NIU and LNCCI to collect and analyze data to make sense of practical experience from the LBF, with the aim of checking on the shifting trends of Lao businesswomen and their special interests in terms of size and investment sectors. Keeping track records over time will allow the project to check the sectors/areas women most and least participated in and which issues and concerns they raised most and least often during the project period.</p>	<p>Availability of data on women entrepreneurs and their interests in terms of size and investment sector.</p>	<p>Components: A3, D1, D.2, D3.</p> <p>Agency: LNCCI in coordination with NIU Gender Advisor</p> <p>Budget: In-house budget</p>	<p>Timeframe: LNCCI and NIU complete data semiannually</p> <p>Indicators: Ensure that a set of sex-disaggregated data is collected, analyzed and reported semiannually.</p> <p>✓ # participants by gender in each sector</p> <p>✓ # issues raised</p> <p>✓ # issues resolved</p>

<p>2. The legal framework, including policy and official administration for business and trade, has been found to be gender-neutral but insensitive and unresponsive to specific gender/women's needs.</p>	<p>Strengthen women's ability to access and influence legal, regulatory and policy frameworks</p>	<p>4. To incorporate gender sensitivity into LCT-funded activities, including policy dialogue on business registration procedures to ensure they are women-friendly; Gender-sensitive awareness-raising on removal of name registration certificate at provincial level; Awareness-raising on Licenses Portal for women-led enterprises; Policy dialogue with DERM on streamlining operating licenses in sectors of particular importance to women.</p> <p>The activities include, but are not limited to, reviewing TFA Challenge Facility proposals, communication and outreach tools with a gender lens.</p> <p>Action for A1: To prepare a special Brochure targeting women's enterprises and propose specific dissemination channels. The reason is that the new regulation and instructions enacted under PM02 are a series of technical documents that comprise substantial changes to the starting a business process. The complete updated procedure has not been effectively disseminated to relevant stakeholders and the general public, especially women-led enterprises.</p>	<p>Promote gender-proofing/friendliness in regulatory frameworks.</p>	<p>Components: A.1, A.2, A.3, B.1. B.2, C1, D.1, D.2</p> <p>Agency: NIU and IAs</p> <p>Budget: In-house budget for some Components. Need budget for Component A1- Brochure targeting women's enterprises</p>	<p>Timeframe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon request <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ # of proposals selected under TFA Challenge Facility which target economic sectors of particular importance to women ✓ # of regulatory reforms/brochures developed under LCT with a gender lens or targeting gender/women

3.	Institutional gender expertise in IAs is low.	Support and improve gender competency within the project and IAs	<p>5. Provide a series of gender sensitization trainings to NIU project staff. Although not compulsory, key staff from the various IAs, including those that are part of the National Trade Facilitation Committee, can participate in training sessions.</p>	<p>Improved institutional gender capacity.</p> <p>Improved gender competency.</p>	<p>Components: Cross-cutting intervention, but addresses D.1, D.2, D.3</p> <p>Agency: NIU</p> <p>Budget: See Annex 1</p>	<p>Timeframe: Sept 2019 onward</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ # of trainings provided ✓ Indicative level of gender knowledge increase based on pre/post training surveys ✓ # of staff use gender knowledge at work, based on a staff survey result
			<p>6. Provide support to IA GFPs on gender-related matters under LCT, with the aim of improving gender coordination and connections with GFPs based at each IA office.</p> <p>The IA GFPs will be invited to gender sensitivity training.</p>	<p>Improved gender coordination within Project partners and other Government institutions (improve collaboration and gender-competent counterparts within MoIC and between NIU and IAs).</p>	<p>Components: All. A.1, A.2, A.3, B.1, B.2, C1, D.1, D.2, D.3</p> <p>Agency: NIU</p> <p>Budget: In-house budget</p>	<p>Timeframe: Project period</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ # and/or list of GFPs in each IA recorded ✓ # of IA GFPs attended gender training
4.	Lao enterprises, including, women-led entrepreneurs, have limited knowledge of and low capacity in business and financial management.	Inclusive, productivity-led growth and increased market opportunities for women-led firms/women entrepreneurs	<p>7. Provide support and work closely with the BAF and DERM teams to ensure the set targets and objectives are met with a gender-sensitive and inclusive approach.</p>	<p>Increased access to finance for women-led businesses through BAF matching grants (target is 40% of total grants).</p>	<p>Components: A.1, A.2, A.3, C1, D1.</p> <p>Agency: NIU coordination with DERM and BAF</p> <p>Budget: In-house budget</p>	<p>Timeframe: Project period</p> <p>Indicators: to work with BAF on these indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ # of women enterprises inside and outside

						Vientiane Capital that received grants
5.	Women-led enterprises have weak market positions and strong competition from within and outside the country.		8. Provide support to LNCCI and assist in monitoring evidence-based discussions and solutions to businesswomen's concerns and challenges, and ensure that gender sensitivity has been incorporated into LBF public-private dialogue/ communication mechanism and facilitation methodology.	Improved market networking and public-private partnerships.	<p>Components: D.1, D.2, D.3</p> <p>Agency: NIU in coordination with LNCCI</p> <p>Budget: In-house budget</p>	<p>Timeframe: Project period</p> <p>Indicators: Work with LNCCI to monitor its gender indicators, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ # of women enterprises that participated in public dialogs ✓ # of issues raised by women-led enterprises ✓ #of raised issues resolved with an indicative timeframe

VI. RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

76. The LCT Project is overseen by the Project Executive Committee, chaired by the Minister of Industry and Commerce. The IAs are Government Departments or other agencies directly responsible for the technical implementation of project components as outlined in the Project Document. Lead by the DPC, MoIC, the Gender Strategic Action Plan and its actions will also be implemented by Government Departments. Within MoIC, there are three core IAs: DPC, DERM and DIMEX, together with other line ministries' departments. These include but are not limited to: the Department of Investment and Promotion of the Ministry of Planning and Investment; the Department of Food and Drugs of the Ministry of Health; and the Department of Agriculture. The NIU of DPC has been effective in overall project implementation, overseeing analytical work and policy guidance in the past, and is assessed to be in a strong position to continue this role effectively. Supervised by DPC, the NIU will provide adequate support and implement the Gender Strategic Action Plan in an inclusive manner.

77. NIU will work closely with the Women's Advancement Unit of MoIC in taking the leading role to oversee and ensure that all specified gender actions are properly mainstreamed into each component's responsible department and/or agency workplans. The NIU will coordinate with key IA GFPs to enhance understanding of the reasons for gender challenges through analytical work and from a gender perspective. Gender outcomes that see improvement in businesses led by women are expected. The NIU will also coordinate and provide support to BAF and LBF, not only in meeting their gender target indicators but also in strengthening their business capacity and dialogues. Overall, NIU support will contribute to increased accountability for reforms that address the key challenges companies face – particularly those faced by companies currently underrepresented in dialogue – with the aim of increasing the participation of women-led enterprises in Lao PDR as a whole. The Gender Strategic Action Plan will therefore be governed and monitored by the NIU of DPC; however, gender action will be implemented by each assigned IA, as shown in Table 4.

78. The GFP from each IA is not only responsible for mainstreaming gender into their implementation plans but will also act as a key coordination and communication point for the NIU and project partners. The IAs will also be key support channels for the NIU to assess and monitor key actions and measures for gender inclusion in the project's activities; assist in ensuring adequate women's representation and participation in policy reform and public-private dialogues; and be in charge of sex-disaggregated data collection to inform gender-specific measures as specified in Table 4.

VII. MONITORING AND EVALUTION, AND REPORTING

79. Implemented by various Government Departments (AIs from each Department), the NIU of DPC will be responsible for the overall development, monitoring and evaluation of gender action outputs and impact. The NIU will collaborate with all IAs and their GFPs in collecting all relevant information from line departments and agencies, and will formally report progress on all gender indicators semi-annually. The semi-annual progress reports will include an update on implementation activities and record any additional proposed actions for gender, and will inform

each Mission Review. A Gender Actions Completion Report will be prepared by the NIU at the end of the project period and will contribute to the LCT Implementation Completion and Results Report, which will be prepared by the Government.

80. For gender M&E indicators, and gender and women disaggregated data and reporting purposes, the project has developed some specific indicators targeting women's participation and women-owned and women-led enterprises, according to the project Results Framework. To encourage mutual understanding for all stakeholders, especially amongst various implementing departments, the following definitions will be used under LCT:

- **Women-owned enterprise refers** to a business where a woman's name appears in the business registration and/or operation licensing database.
- **Women-shareholder(s)** refers to a woman whose name appears as a shareholder within a company. Regardless of the percentage of shares the woman holds, she will be counted as a woman shareholder.
- **Women-led enterprise** refers to a business where a woman's name appears in the registration database mentioned in point 1 and 2 and/or that woman is actually running the company, as CEO or MD or GD, and can make decisions on the company's behalf, even when there is more than one person at the highest level of management. Regardless of the gender of the most senior person, the business will still be counted as women-led. The credit rests on the fact that a woman is not only managing the company, but can also make decisions for the company.

Annex 1: Gender Sensitization and Awareness Training

1. Gender awareness and sensitization training is very important for the LCT Project because it deals with people doing business, and women play an important role in small-scale businesses, trade and services. Female Lao entrepreneurs represent 45.82% of the total number of enterprises registered in Lao PDR. Female entrepreneurs share 44% of total domestic investment; however, they only share 0.66% of foreign investment and 0.62% of foreign investment in Lao PDR. Many studies also suggest that as businesses get larger, the number of female-run enterprises decreases rapidly.

What is gender sensitization training?

2. Gender sensitization training gives trainees an understanding of existing gender relations and the obstacles in women's daily life, including their working environment and running businesses, as well as their access to opportunities, choices and decision-making. Gender sensitization training attempts to address gender obstacles by proposing content that addresses both women's and men's interests and needs, and enhances women's active participation in public and formal arenas. More precisely, gender sensitization training takes into account self-awareness, as well as the needs, priorities and expectations of both women and men, in order to ensure that women and men receive equitable benefits from the learning process.

Why gender sensitization training?

3. The legal and regulatory framework in Lao PDR – including laws, Government instruction orders and administrative procedures related to business and trade – appears to be gender-neutral. However, men and women do not enjoy the same equality in reality as policy often undermines or overlooks gender challenges. Gender differences in social, political and economic opportunities have been identified in all documents consulted. For instance, the Human Development Index 2018 states that in Lao PDR, the share of women in wage employment is low in all sectors, at an average of 35%. In contrast, women account for 70% of unpaid workers (2015) but only 32% are identified as 'own account workers', which suggests that women are less likely to be engaged in productive work with income they control.

4. Meanwhile, female Lao entrepreneurs account for more than 45% of registered businesses and domestic investment. However, their areas of business are not sufficient to enter the formal workforce. One reason is that the insensitivity of the legal framework and official administration undermines women's roles and involvement, and another is that social norms and expectations mean women bear the majority of domestic work in households, limiting the amount of time they can spend on their businesses. This involvement in domestic chores affects not only their ability to grow their businesses, but also decisions on firm size and sector of operation.

5. In addition, women and men have different roles, responsibilities, and decision-making power. As a result, they also have different needs and priorities that need to be taken into account when working together to deliver expected Project outcomes. Gender disparities exist in all cultures and contexts no matter the level targeted, including among project managers, Government representatives and technical project staff. The belief remains strong that women are not competent enough or not interested in technical topics (especially in IT and engineering), forgetting that women play a key role in daily office operations and economic activities, not to

mention their role in livelihood systems and natural resources management, and in the overall maintenance of their households and communities.

6. In the Lao context, traditional beliefs, patriarchal systems, time constraints due to multiple roles, social and cultural restrictions, and limited involvement in decision-making processes often exclude not only business and office staff but all women from the public sphere, limiting their access to both information and capacity-building and business activities.

7. According the World Bank (2001), gender is an issue of development effectiveness, and not just a matter of ‘doing something special for women’. Evidence demonstrates that when women and men are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster, the poor move more quickly out of poverty, and the wellbeing of men, women and children is enhanced. Gender-sensitive capacity-building initiatives can contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development that improves the wellbeing not only of the participants, but also of their communities.

Table 5: Training Topics and Implementation Plan

No	TRAINING TOPICS	OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY	TIME AND DATE	TARGET AUDIENCE AND BUDGET	RESOURCE PERSONS/ FACILITATION
Module 1: BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER, ITS CONCEPTS AND ITS IMPORTANCE					
1	1-1	Discussion Session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To introduce the concept of gender and its role in everyday life. To highlight the importance of self-awareness in understanding gender and avoiding unconscious bias. 	1.5h 24Sept	All NIU staff and AIs NIU meeting room \$150–\$250 coffee and lunch boxes	NIU Gender Advisor
	1-2	Gender and Development/ Gender in Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To highlight and understand the impact of messages received in childhood on a person’s current personality and beliefs about gender. To make participants aware of social institutions and gender roles in society. 	1.5h 30 Oct	All NIU staff and AIs NIU meeting room \$150–\$250 coffee and lunch boxes	NIU Gender Advisor
2	1-2 Gender, Sex and Gender Equality	Discussion Session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To better understand the difference between sex and gender. To better understand what our society expects of women and men and how these expectations influence our thinking/attitudes toward ourselves and the opposite gender. To understand how the process of socialization affects what work men and women do and how this affects their status in society. To develop an understanding of basic gender concepts related to female entrepreneurs. 	Total 3 hours h Nov 2019	All NIU staff and AIs NIU meeting room \$150–\$250 coffee and lunch boxes	NIU Gender Advisor

3	1-3	<p>Women Entrepreneurs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women-Led and Women-Owned Businesses • Women's Empowerment –Lao Business Context 	<p>Exchange and Sharing Session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To exchange with guest speakers: businesswomen on what women's empowerment means in the business and trade sector. • To define women-led and women-owned businesses. • To better understand women's roles in a market economy. 	<p>1h</p> <p>TBC</p>	<p>All NIU staff and AIs</p> <p>NIU meeting room</p> <p>\$250 coffee and lunch boxes</p>	<p>Guest Speakers: TBC</p>
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Module 2: WOMEN'S INSTITUTIONS – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

4	2-1	<p>NCAWMC, The National Assembly – the Commission Secretariat, the Women's Caucus, the Lao Women's Union</p>	<p>Exchange and Sharing Session: Guest Speakers from NCAWMC and Lao Business Women's Association:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand women's institutions' roles and responsibilities. • To understand the National Action for Women's Equality and National Gender Strategies. • To touch on the concept of women inspiring women. 	<p>30 minutes for each speaker</p> <p>Date: TBC</p>	<p>All NIU staff and AIs</p> <p>NIU meeting room</p> <p>\$150–\$250 coffee and lunch boxes</p>	<p>Potential guests:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mme. Chansoda, NCAWMC 2. Mme. Phommavongsa, Lao Business Women's Association 3. Mme. Sommai, MoIC
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Module 3: LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, KEY GENDER POLICIES AND BEST PRACTICES

5	3-1	<p>Legal Requirements: International Conventions and National Gender Action Plan: Define Violence Against Women and Children, Gender Discrimination, Harassment</p>	<p>Discussion focusing on the National Gender Action Plan (2016–2020):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and social inclusion (Souky). • Define discrimination and harassment in the Customs and trade context (input from Carmine). 	<p>1h</p>	<p>All NIU staff and AIs</p> <p>NIU meeting room</p> <p>\$250 coffee and lunch boxes</p>	<p>NIU Gender Advisor</p> <p>Input from World Bank Gender Advisor</p>
6	3-2	<p>Best Practice in Implementing Gender Mainstreaming Strategy in Trade Projects</p>	<p>1: Lessons learned from other projects funded by World Bank and Australian Aid.</p> <p>And/or</p> <p>2: Invite Gender Expert, Ms. Khin-Sandi Lwin, Myanmar (to discuss further with the management team).</p>	<p>1h</p> <p>TBC</p>	<p>1. NIU Meeting Room/\$250 coffee and lunch boxes</p> <p>2. TBC (March 2020) About \$3,500-\$5,000</p>	<p>NIU Gender Advisor and Guest Speaker</p>

Module 4: WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS – IMPROVING THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

7	4-1	<p>Enabling Business Opportunities – Registering a Company</p>	<p>Discussion Session (Component A.1):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding registration and licensing processes: requirements and procedures. Identifying to what extent those requirements and procedures, albeit gender-neutral in principle, can impact 	<p>Nov 45 minutes</p>	<p>All NIU staff, AIs</p> <p>NIU meeting room</p>	<p>Guest Speakers-DERM</p> <p>NIU Gender Advisor</p>
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			women and men differently in practice.		\$250 coffee and lunch boxes	
8	4.2	Enabling Business Opportunities – Streamlining Business Licensing, Women’s Decisions on Firm Size and Sector	Discussion Session (Component A.2): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To review and identify priority sectors that are women-dominated and/or in which there is a significant presence of women and/or continue to attract women entrepreneurs (Component A.2.1). To assist LCT to streamline its support that benefits men and women equally (Component A.2.2). 	Nov 45 minutes	All NIU staff, AIs NIU meeting room \$250 coffee and lunch boxes	Guest Speakers-DERM, NIU Gender Advisor
9	4-3	Effective Business Operation: Marketing, Networking and Communication	Information Sharing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIU Gender Sensitivity Checklist. BAF outreach strategy and activities. Lao Business Women’s Association outreach activities. LNCCI Facilitation Mechanism and Inclusion Strategy. 	TBC 1 h	All NIU staff, AIs BAF Gender Team LNCCI Inclusion Consultant NIU meeting room \$250 coffee and lunch boxes	BAF Gender Team, Lao Business Women’s Association
10	4-4	Effective Business Operation: Procedures for crossing borders – import and export (tax, visa and customs checks)	Women and Customs and Trade (Component B): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand how import/export procedures can impact women and men differently, despite that fact that they are gender-neutral on paper. To better understand the role of traders and intermediaries (trade dealers). 	30 minutes	All NIU staff, AIs, BAF NIU meeting room \$150–\$250 coffee and lunch boxes	Department of Import and Export NIU Gender Advisor
11	4.5	Business Competitiveness – Firm-level Competition	Discussion and Information Sharing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To review and identify strengths and challenges in allocating matching grants to women entrepreneurs with the aim of promoting quality products, innovation and competitiveness. 	1h TBC	All NIU staff, AIs, BAF NIU or BAF meeting room \$150–\$250 coffee and lunch boxes	BAF Gender Team NIU Gender Advisor
Module 5: M&E – GENDER INDICATORS/GENDER MEASURES						
12	5-1	LCT Gender Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To discuss Project gender indicators, gender targets, gender markers and gender measurements. To discuss how LCT gender indicators will meet the Government’s gender target requirements. 	1h TBC	All NIU staff, AIs BAF, LNCCI NIU or BAF meeting room \$150–\$250 coffee and lunch boxes	NIU M&E and Gender Advisor

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