

# Mapping Child Vulnerability Dimensions in the Lao PDR

A spatial-statistical analysis  
2019

## Abstract

This report provides an overview of child vulnerability by ranking all districts and villages in Lao PDR. The study is intended to inform program strategies by directing resources and efforts toward the most vulnerable children in the country.

This exercise is part of the World Vision International Lao PDR's drive to reduce and alleviate childhood vulnerability globally. We hope this document will make a humble contribution to a discourse where all the needs of children are viewed comprehensively and reached out with greater agility. We also hope this document will contribute to the efforts of the Government of Lao PDR in the implementation of the Concluding Observation on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2019).

## Introduction

In recent years Lao PDR has taken a number of positive steps to improve children rights, and made significant progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and targets. However sustainable progress in ensuring that children can escape the cycle of poverty still lags behind. Adequate investment in health, education, and child protection, particularly for ethnic minority children who live in remote and rural disadvantaged communities are still lacking. Without adequate access to education and social support, many children are leaving schools, marry very young, or work to support their families. According to the recent report done by UNICEF (SDG and Children Measuring progress on child well being in Lao PDR 2018) 70 percent of children in Lao PDR experience at least two forms of deprivation, with consequences for lifelong productive and social participation; 50 percent of children are suffering from three or more deprivations at the same time; and only 12 percent of children experience no deprivation at all.

Children in Lao PDR (age group up to 18 years old) account for 42.9 percent of the population (Census 2015), and the population

age structures differ significantly across regions and ethno-linguistic groups. With the demographic pyramid wider at the base, there is a necessity for the country to understand and protect children and their rights, given that their development will influence directly the social and economic development growth of the country.

The aim of this study is to develop evidence-based measures of child vulnerability at a high level of spatial disaggregation, aiding geographic and thematic intervention targeting.

Through the understanding of the villages and districts where the most vulnerable children reside, development programs can strategize to target these children. Specific interventions can be designed to alleviate the problem of child vulnerability in these areas. Additionally, this study can inform both public and private sector organizations to carry out work in these areas, in alignment with the implementation plan of the Concluding Observation on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2019), carried out by the Government of Lao PDR, through the leadership of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children

## Methods and Data

### Dimensions and markers:

The general definition provided by World Vision International was the basis to align the understanding and special focus on the most vulnerable:

'Most vulnerable children are children whose quality of life and ability to fulfill their potential is most affected by extreme deprivation and violations of their rights. These children often live in catastrophic situations and relationships characterized by violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, exclusion, and discrimination' (WVI, The Handbook for Integrated Programming, 2010, p.9).

The four vulnerability factors within this definition, provided the overarching framework that has been used to define the Child Vulnerability Priority Risk Matrix.

### Abusive or exploitative relationship:

Relationships which are characterized by violence; the use of a child to benefit others sexually or commercially; or relationships which consistently harm the child through intentional acts or negligence.

### Extreme deprivation:

Extreme material poverty or deprivation of caregivers.

### Vulnerability to catastrophe or natural disaster:

A 'catastrophe' or 'disaster' is a natural or human-made event which seriously threatens the survival or development of a child.

### Serious discrimination:





Severe social stigma which prevents children from accessing services or opportunities essential to their protection or development.

Each dimension is measured via a set of locally adapted markers, 17 markers all together, capturing various vulnerability aspects in each dimension.

### Marker-, dimension-, and data quality weights:

Each dimension was given an importance weight, based on the perceived importance of the dimension, and the usefulness of the indicators and quality of the data used to measure the markers in each dimension. Within each dimension, the individual markers were weighted according to their importance in terms of expected impact on a child's life. Each marker had a weight between 0 and 1, implying low respectively high relevance regarding child vulnerability. Within each dimension, one key marker was identified, based on the importance of the marker and the corresponding indicator's quality.

List of child vulnerability dimensions, markers, indicators, data source and weights

Vulnerability dimensions	Weights			Markers of vulnerability	Indicator description	Data source
	Overall	Within dimension	Key markers			
<b>Abusive or exploitative relationship</b> 	0.30	0.50	0.35	<b>Experiencing physical &amp; emotional abuse</b>	Mother's reaction to her child's wrong behavior	LSIS II
		0.25		Children involved in labor and child care role	Children working >21 hours/week	LSIS II
		0.25		Young mothers	Mothers 14-17	PHC 2015
<b>Extreme deprivation</b> 	0.30	0.35	0.35	<b>Severely malnourished children &lt;5</b>	Weight for height, Z score < -3 SD	LSIS II
		0.20		Moderately malnourished children <5	Weight for height, Z score < -2 SD	LSIS II
		0.25		Children whose household are designated poor	Household poverty estimates	PHC 2015 & LECS IV
		0.08		Children whose household have poor access to clean water and sanitation	Household's type of toilet, water source and distance	PHC 2015
		0.08		Limited access to healthcare	Village has a hospital	PHC 2015
		0.05		Road accessibility in rural areas	Village has road access	PHC 2015
<b>Vulnerability to catastrophe or disaster</b> 	0.20	0.50	0.20	<b>Areas contaminated with unexploded ordinance</b>	Village has uncleared UXO	AgCI I
		0.20		Children living with a disabled caregiver	Household with <3 adults/disabled adult	PHC 2015
		0.10		Children living with old caregivers	No adults aged 19-59 in household	PHC 2015
		0.20		Areas that are highly prone to natural disasters	Village had a flood or drought in past 12 month	AgCI I
<b>Serious discrimination</b> 	0.20	0.40	0.25	<b>Children who do not attend school</b>	Children 6-12 not attending school	PHC 2015
		0.10		Children with disabilities and learning difficulties	Household has a disabled child	PHC 2015
		0.20		Children disadvantaged due to ethnicity and/or gender	sex ratio of % out of school	PHC 2015
		0.30		Children without birth certificate	Household has a child <5 without birth certificate	LSIS II



A child is considered to be 'vulnerable' if she or he is having a positive score in any of the markers listed in the adjacent table and was considered as 'most vulnerable' if living with two or more active markers. Markers in bold, however, denoted 'most vulnerable' status on their own. Small-area estimation techniques as commonly applied to estimation of poverty levels for small areas (for an example applied to Lao PDR see e.g. Epprecht et al, 2008) were used to extrapolate the household indicators of the LSIS II Survey onto the households of the Census 2015 to achieve national full coverage.

## Results

Lao PDR is one of world's least developed countries, however, there are significant disparities among the different regions within the country. Children in the Southeast experience strongest vulnerabilities in most of the dimensions, reflected by the red colour ranges in the map below. Xiengkhuang province is another region with high levels of vulnerability.

The first map shows the overall vulnerability at village level, using all markers. This is followed by four maps where village-level vulnerability scores are presented, organized individually by the four dimensions. Below is a summary of key findings.

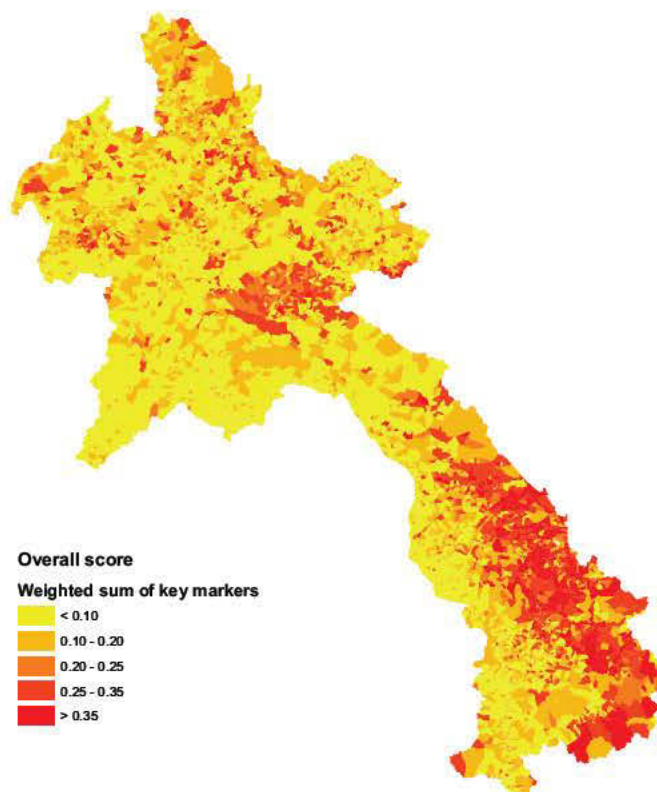
Map D1: Saysomboun appears to be the region with the most abusive or exploitative relationships. The percentage of children working appears to be much higher in Xaysomboun, Xiengkhouang and Huapan provinces than in the rest of Laos. In south-eastern Laos, it appears much less common for children to work even though it is one of the poorest regions.

The Southeast of Laos is by far the region with the highest deprivation along with Huaphanh province in the northeast (map D2). Both areas are also the poorest regions, although the southeast is additionally also affected by malnourishment and poor sanitation. The Southeast's higher rate of malnourishment could indicate more severe poverty in this region.

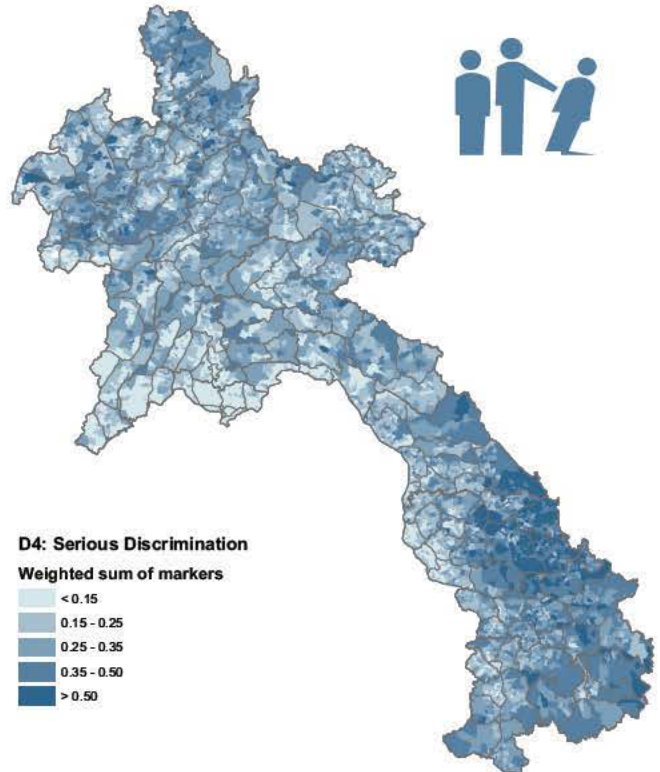
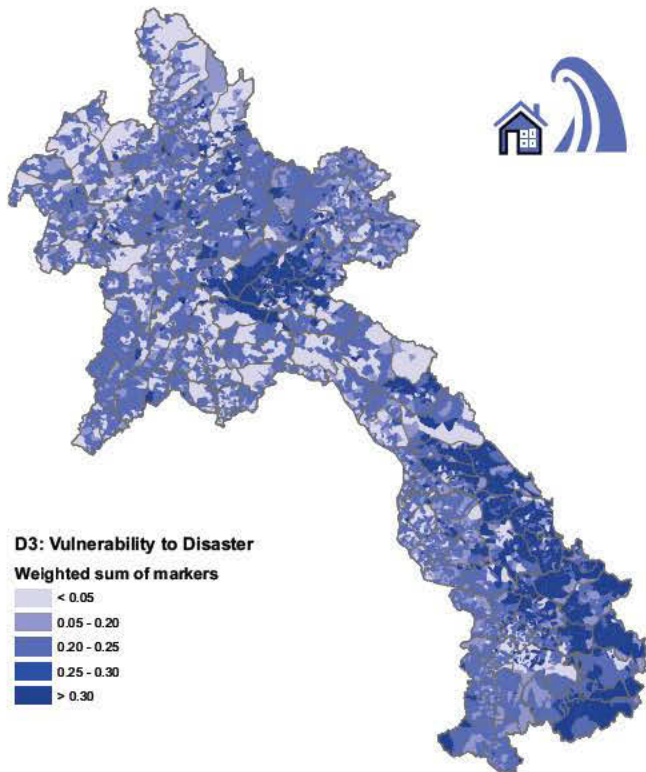
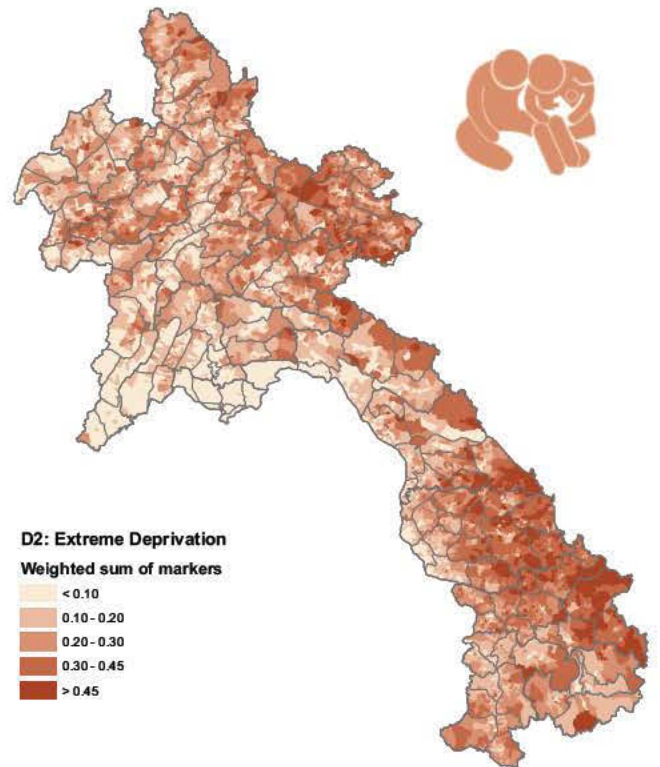
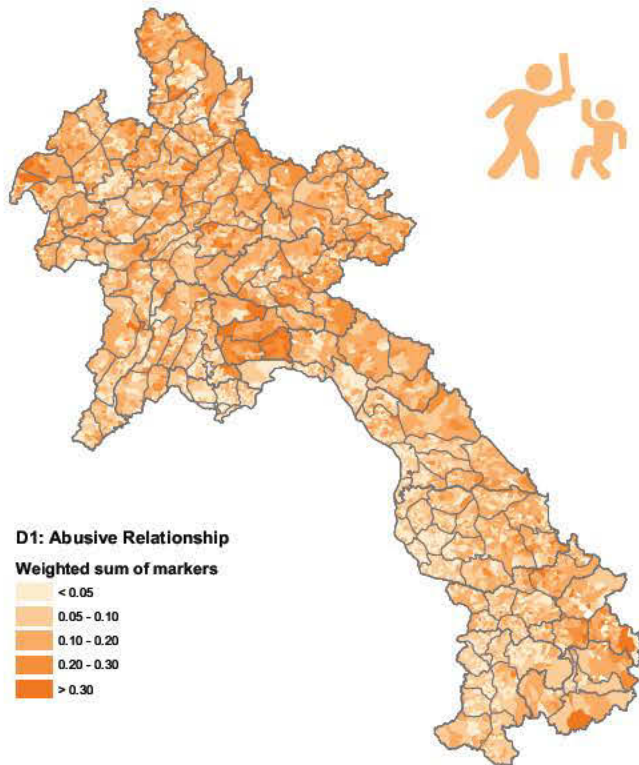
Map D3 indicates vulnerability to disaster. In Lao PDR, the most frequent hazards are unexploded ordinance (UXO), floods and draughts. Households with disabled persons and without people in the productive ages between 19 and 59 are considered particularly vulnerable to disasters. UXO contaminated villages are particularly concentrated in the Southeast and in Xiengkhuang province and they are mostly poor, partly due to the difficulties posed by the UXO. Large parts of the country are affected by floods and draughts each year, and seemingly more so in most recent years. Such events have an impact on children's families' health, wealth and wellbeing.

Serious discrimination (map D4) includes factors which give a child a disadvantage without any wrongdoings. Once more, the southeast is particularly affected, as children there rarely possess a birth certificate and often do not attend school. While the poor regions of the Southeast have a low school attendance rate, the poor regions further north have a school attendance as high as the wealthy regions. This is even more striking considering that the poor regions up north have higher numbers of children engaging in labour, whereas according to the census data, there is almost none in the southeast.

## Overall child vulnerability







**Data sources:**

- Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) II 2017
- Population and Housing Census 2015
- Census of Agriculture 2011
- Lao Expenditure and consumption Survey (LECS IV)

Realized in collaboration between World Vision International-Lao PDR and the Centre for Development and Environment CDE, University of Bern, Switzerland.

