

DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Status brief on Lao PDR



Source: Plan International

Author: Nampheung Somanivanh, Senior Project Officer, Gender Development
Association

Table of Contents

Background.....**4**

I. Context of Disaster in Lao PDR**8**

II. Analysis of Disability-inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction in Lao PDR**11**

III. Recommendations.....**14**

Conclusion.....**15**

References.....**16**

Summary

Lao PDR is a country facing frequent natural disasters, and climate change-related events pose significant challenges, impacting lives, property, and livelihood, particularly for persons with disabilities. While the government has recognized the importance of disaster risk reduction and established legislative frameworks such as the Disaster Management Law (2019) and the National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (2021-2030), integrating disability inclusive in DRR efforts remains challenging. Despite the obstacles, recent initiatives investing in hydrometeorological stations and strengthening disaster risk committees demonstrate progress in disaster preparedness and response. On the other hand, increasing the effectiveness of integration disability inclusion into DRR requires the enhancement of data collection and analysis and improved coordination among stakeholders and organizations both nationally and internationally. Promoting people with disabilities' leadership and decision-making is essential to building a resilience framework that protects the rights and safety of all individuals, including persons with disabilities, during disaster and its aftermath.

Abbreviations

[CDMC]	[Central Disaster Management Committee]
[CSOs]	[Civil Society Organizations]
[DiDRR]	[Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction]
[DRR]	[Disaster Risk Reduction]
[Lao PDR]	[Lao People's Democratic Republic]
[NDMC]	[National Disaster Management Committee]
[NGOs]	[Non-Governmental Organizations]
[NSDRR]	[National Strategy Disaster Risk Reduction]
[NSEDPP]	[National Socio-Economic Development Plan]
[UN]	[United Nations]
[UXOs]	[Unexploded Ordinances]

Background

Lao PDR's geographical conditions and location frequently expose the country to natural disasters and climate changes, including floods, droughts, storms, landslides, epidemics, etc.¹ The impact is widespread, causing deaths or injuries, also affecting, or damaging the property, houses, public facilities, and utilities. It leads to loss of income and socio-economic benefits and impacts the livelihood of everyone, particularly persons with disabilities who are vulnerable in disaster situations due to lack of mobility and ability to express themselves. Disaster risk management, prevention, and reduction in Laos are critical elements that the government recognizes and pays attention to by creating operational capacity and resource availability for disaster risk reduction, preparedness, emergency response, and recovery.

Implementation of the national legislations and frameworks, namely the Disaster Management Law (2019), the National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction – NSDRR (2021-2030), the Resilience Framework (2022-2025), the Disaster Management Fund (2020) and the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2025) which is adapted from the regional and global framework, is needed to manage disaster risk, and ensure integration and implementation at all levels. As stated by the Disaster Management law², the Central Disaster Management Committee (CDMC) is responsible for the general implementation of DRR and disaster management and the coordination with disaster management committees at all levels, implementing agencies and international development partners, as well as the coordination for the assessment of the overall DRR in the country.³ Early warning systems in Lao PDR are usually the responsibility of the National Disaster Management Committee (NDMC), whose task is

¹ Lao PDR, National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (2021-2030). Available at: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/lao215507eng.pdf>

² Lao PDR, Law on Disaster Management (2019). Available at: https://disasterlaw.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/media/disaster_law/2021-03/DM%20Law%20Unofficial%20Translation.pdf

³ Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Lao PDR Voluntary National Report for Midterm Review of the Implementation of Sendai Framework for DRR (2015-2030) <https://sendaiframework-mtr.undrr.org/media/87104/download?startDownload=true>

to coordinate early warning systems by reporting to the Central Disaster Management Committee (CDMC)⁴, which issues a notice to local disaster management committees. After that, the concerned local committee relays the information and disaster warnings to communities through village loudspeakers, messages on WhatsApp, and SMS alerts. In addition, disaster warning information is also broadcasted on the news, radio, and social media official pages.

The disability monograph, which provides data on disability prevalence in Lao PDR,⁵ showed a total number of 160,881⁶ people living with a disability among the population aged 5 and over, and an overall ratio of disabilities of 2.77%⁷ (Figure 1). The percentage of persons with disabilities with moderate difficulty represented 23.08% among persons with a disability and those with severe difficulty 9.77% (Figure 2). The most common types of difficulties were related to seeing (1.35%), walking, or climbing stairs (1.3%), hearing (1.23%), remembering and concentrating (1.2%), self-care (1.1%) and communicating (0.95%).⁸ 56.6% of persons with disabilities reported having multiple difficulties which were interrelated. For instance, some persons with hearing difficulties experienced difficulties communicating.⁹

⁴ CFE-DM (2021), Lao PDR Disaster Management Reference Handbook. Available at: <https://www.cfe-dmha.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=BsMS42nJdE%3D&portalid=0>

⁵ Lao Statistic Bureau, Disability Monograph of Lao PDR from the 2015 Population and Housing Census (re-publishing 2020). Available at: https://lao.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/1.disability_monograph_laos_en_final_29_nov_2020_print.pdf

⁶ Ibid, 7

⁷ Ibid, 7

⁸ Ibid, 16

⁹ Ibid, 17

Figure 1: Disability prevalence in Lao PDR (population aged 5+)

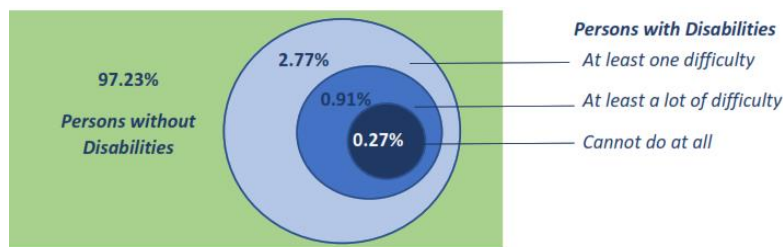
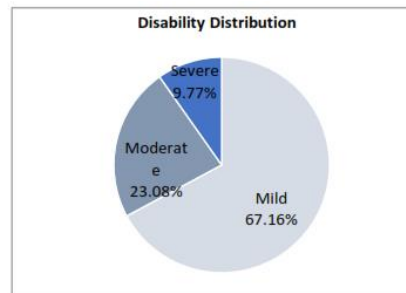


Figure 2: Distribution of Persons with Disabilities, by level of difficulty



Source: Lao Statistic Bureau, Disability Monograph of Lao PDR from the 2015 Population and Housing Census (re-publishing 2020).

The gender-disaggregated data between males (80;776)¹⁰ and females (80;115)¹¹ shared quite similar figures. However, the ethnicity with the greatest number of persons with disabilities was the Mon-Khmer, with 3.51% of persons found to have a disability.¹²

The government has been paying attention to creating a more inclusive environment for persons with disabilities by adopting laws and decrees regarding persons with disabilities to ensure their accessibility and livelihood, such as the Decree of the Persons with Disabilities (2014); The Law on Persons with Disabilities (2019); the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) (2021-2025) and the Resilience Framework (2022-2025). For example, the Decree of the Persons with Disabilities determines principles, rules and measures to ensure the protection of persons with disabilities' rights and interests. It formulates policies on treatment, health rehabilitation, vocational training, employment promotion and other policies aiming to promote the self-development and self-reliance of persons with disabilities and create conditions necessary for persons with disabilities to participate fully and on an equal basis in all social activities.¹³ Moreover, the 9th NSEDP's key implementation measure No. 3, "Promoting well-being and Prosperous and Just Society", paragraph 6, mandated

¹⁰ Ibid, 7

¹¹ Ibid, 7

¹² Ibid, 21

¹³ Lao PDR, The Decree of the Persons with Disabilities (2014), Article 1 Purpose. Available at: <https://dredf.org/legal-advocacy/international-disability-rights/international-laws/laos-decree-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/>

relevant ministries to “Provide welfare policy to care for the elderly and people with disabilities and encourage them to participate more in society, build infrastructure to accommodate people with disabilities; and provide social assistance and physical therapy for people with disabilities.”¹⁴

However, the integration of disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction efforts in Lao PDR will take more effort and attention to achieve or reach the desired outcome of international frameworks. Indeed, the technical capacities, mechanisms, budget, and resources remain insufficient or not yet systematized. To be able to integrate disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction in Laos successfully, it is critical for the CDMC to engage and coordinate with stakeholders such as line ministries, international development partners, CSOs, including organizations of persons with disabilities, and relevant sectors. This engagement and coordination with various stakeholders would allow for policies and strategies to be more specific and more inclusive for persons with disabilities, as well as for the development of concrete action plans for a disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction national framework. This work could then be consolidated into a structural guidance for the preparation and prevention of disasters among persons with disabilities to ensure that vulnerable individuals are protected, supported, and can recover when there is an event of disaster and its aftermath.

¹⁴ Lao PRD, 9th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2025), Part III Implementation Measure and Mechanisms. Available at: https://rtm.org.la/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Advanced_draft_FS_clean_with_exec_summary_DOP-24_01.pdf

I. Context of Disaster in Lao PDR

Laos is in a tropical setting and exposed to a range of hazards, in particular floods, droughts, storms, earthquakes, unexploded ordinances (UXOs), as well as epidemics. In 2018, Lao PDR was affected by three consecutive disasters: the storm Son-Tinh saddled a dam, causing flash flooding in July¹⁵, and then the storm Bebinca in August.¹⁶ The effect of those two storms caused damages and losses to 600,000 people in 90 districts, estimated at around 371.7 million USD.¹⁷ Then, a breach in a dam in the Attapeu province caused damage and losses estimated at US\$35 million or almost 10% of the total economic impact in Lao PDR.¹⁸ The agriculture sector, which includes crops, fisheries, livestock, forestry, and irrigation, suffered the most, with 57% of the losses.¹⁹ 65.5% of transportation was damaged, and 40% of all losses included roads, bridges, transportation services and government buildings.²⁰ Consequently, the social impacts from flooding were evident among the rural population, as 14.2% were estimated to have suffered from disaster-related food insecurity and negative impacts on their livelihood.²¹ The droughts are significantly worse in the southern parts of the country, causing the spread of diseases to livestock and people, as was seen in the aftermath of the previously mentioned flooding event. Several outbreaks of diseases were recorded during these events, such as acute diarrhea, respiratory infections, dengue fever, hepatitis, malaria, and other relevant diseases.²²

¹⁵ UNDRR, Disaster Risk Reduction in Lao PDR Status Report (2019). Available at: <http://www.undrr.org/publication/disaster-risk-reduction-lao-pdr>

¹⁶ Government of Lao PDR (2018), Post Disaster Need Assessment 2018 Flood, Lao PDR, Vientiane. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/laopdr/publications/post-disaster-needs-assessment-2018-floods-lao-pdr#>

¹⁷ UNDRR, Disaster Risk Reduction in Lao PDR Status Report (2019). Available at: <http://www.undrr.org/publication/disaster-risk-reduction-lao-pdr>

¹⁸ Government of Lao PDR (2018), Post Disaster Need Assessment 2018 Flood, Lao PDR, Vientiane. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/laopdr/publications/post-disaster-needs-assessment-2018-floods-lao-pdr#>

¹⁹ Ibid 2

²⁰ Ibid 2

²¹ UNDRR, Disaster Risk Reduction in Lao PDR Status Report (2019). Available at: <http://www.undrr.org/publication/disaster-risk-reduction-lao-pdr>

²² Ibid 8

The impact is most severe on the poorest demographic areas and populations. For instance, the flooding affected livelihoods regarding food security, damaging properties, and agricultural land. 70% of households were estimated to already be in debt due to an increase in loans because of loss of property and assets.²³ Not only that, but the impact of disasters also often manifests itself in various ways, such as forced migration, dropping out of school, loss of employment opportunities, etc.²⁴ Vulnerable groups like women, girls, and persons with disabilities are often disproportionately affected, especially among the poorer demographic areas, due to practices and systems²⁵ which prevent them from accessing better facilities and opportunities. For instance, women's lack of land ownership, due to these practices and systems, reduces their chance to financially support themselves and their families, education, and health.²⁶

The intervention mechanisms for disaster risk reduction in Lao PDR during the 2010s faced many challenges, many of which remain to this day, such as the lack of baseline and data collection on disasters and hazards and the lack of impact analysis on vulnerability (including women, girls, elder and disability). The initial assessment is not yet systematic, unified, or centralized. The structural protection measure cannot be implemented to the extent that is needed by the community due to limited access to information and early warning transmission systems in some areas.²⁷ Disaster risk zoning identification and mapping in high-risk provinces, districts and villages are still unavailable, and local disaster risk management committees have limited knowledge of disaster management and mitigation,²⁸ leading to a lack of initiatives in planning for prevention and responsive action plans. Emergency response teams also have limited capacity to provide necessary assistance in some areas, as they lack suitable and

²³ Government of Lao PDR (2018), Post Disaster Need Assessment 2018 Flood, Lao PDR, Vientiane. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/laopdr/publications/post-disaster-needs-assessment-2018-floods-lao-pdr#>

²⁴ UNDRR, Disaster Risk Reduction in Lao PDR Status Report (2019). Available at: <http://www.undrr.org/publication/disaster-risk-reduction-lao-pdr>

²⁵ *ibid.* 12

²⁶ *ibid.* 12

²⁷ Lao PDR, National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (2021-2030). Available at: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/lao215507eng.pdf>

²⁸ *ibid.* 14

appropriate tools, vehicles, and equipment to address the situation and conditions. Furthermore, the number of warehouses storing relief material and equipment is limited, and zoning evacuation centers temporary or emergency shelters have not yet been identified.²⁹

Nonetheless, in early 2023, Lao PDR had a mid-term review of the implementation of the Sendai Framework regarding disaster risk reduction progress, challenges, and achievements. The review highlighted that the government has a data collection system and the capacities for collection and analysis at the national and sub-national levels³⁰, that it invested in hydrometeorological stations, thus improving the early warning and preparedness for floods, and conducted a National Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment in 2019³¹ for disaster preparedness and people response plan. This national assessment result aims to build knowledge on the climate vulnerability status in Lao PDR and provides meaningful input for the 9th NSEDP.³² Moreover, the capacities of disaster risk management committees have been strengthened, and disaster response work is now regularly implemented, emphasizing the integration of anticipatory actions into disaster risk reduction plans at the sub-national level.³³

²⁹ *ibid.* 14

³⁰ Mid-Term Review of the Sendai Framework in Lao PDR: Progress and the Road Ahead <https://laopdr.un.org/en/249407-mid-term-review-sendai-framework-lao-pdr-progress-and-road-ahead>

³¹ More Information of Lao PDR, National Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment in 2019. Available at: https://fukuoka.unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/3_Lao_PDR_National_Climate_Change_Vulnerability_Assessment.pdf

³² *Ibid*

³³ Mid-Term Review of the Sendai Framework in Lao PDR: Progress and the Road Ahead <https://laopdr.un.org/en/249407-mid-term-review-sendai-framework-lao-pdr-progress-and-road-ahead>

II. Analysis of Disability-inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction in Lao PDR

Lao PDR DRR framework is also informed by the Sendai Framework, Incheon Strategy, and relevant international frameworks, which promote the inclusion of disability into Disaster Risk Reduction, ensuring that persons with disabilities can access information and adequate resources, thus enhancing their involvement and benefit from the DRR framework. Therefore, it is essential for Lao PDR to apply this disability-inclusive approach to the prevention and resilience framework that will help improve suitable assistance, meet the needs, and protect everyone's rights, safety, and benefits.

Lao PDR's national legislation and framework mentioned above do include persons with disabilities in terms of benefit, protection, and participation. For instance, Objective 5 of NSDRR involves two main actors, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities, alongside stakeholder groups, to explore the needs, response, and recovery from local disasters.³⁴ This aims at enhancing the resilience of building and maintaining the infrastructure that is more resilient to disasters, understanding the source of vulnerability in disaster by focusing on reducing the risk, protecting and supporting families and organizations of persons with disabilities by collecting and analyzing the data on vulnerable groups, and designing and implementing ways to provide information on warning, evacuation and other aspects of disaster response.³⁵ Although, the existing national legislative framework on DRR aims to ensure that everyone is equally included and protected, in practice, it needs to put more effort into disability inclusion in DRR in order to achieve standardized disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction action for Lao PDR.

³⁴ Lao PDR, National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (2021-2030). Available at: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/lao215507eng.pdf>

³⁵ *ibid.* 33

Indeed, more time and expertise are required to achieve effective disability inclusion in DRR. The insufficient disaggregation of data on persons with disabilities who experienced the disaster events, and the lack of technical capacities, expertise, and budget are preventing the government from developing the right platform to build the resilience of both people and infrastructure to cope with disasters. Moreover, there is a lack of coordination between stakeholders, involving a variety of actors from the government to NGOs, CSOs and the local level, which increases the barriers to achieving the implementation of this work. Not to mention that community engagement in disaster risk reduction is too few, and their approaches are not consistently considered in the local development planning.³⁶ Thus, it can only be assumed that an awareness of DRR plans is also low among persons with disabilities³⁷ and that these DRR plans are unable to address their specific needs.³⁸

The intersectionality of disability, language, communication channels, and the knowledge of hazard protection is still low, and access to information and resources is also deficient,³⁹ which prevents persons with disabilities from participating in DRR action. A report from UN Women⁴⁰ can be a reference to explain the situation in Lao PDR, as it mentioned “the lack of understanding of the root causes of persons with disabilities’ vulnerability.” Indeed, framing and understanding of disability are limited, and the commitment to promote the leadership potential of persons with disabilities is relatively low, reflecting mindsets that consider persons with disabilities as passive recipients of aid rather than capable agents.

Although integrating disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction may be challenging, the need for response to disaster prevention for all is crucial for the government and DRR

³⁶ GNDR, View from the Frontline 2019 <<https://global-report.vfl.world/project/information-gap/>>

³⁷ UNDRR, Global Survey Report on Persons with Disabilities and Disaster (2023). Available at: <https://www.undrr.org/report/2023-global-survey-report-on-persons-with-disabilities-and-disasters>

³⁸ *ibid.* 15

³⁹ GNDR, View from the Frontline 2019, Lao PDR Available at: <https://www.gndr.org/impact/views-from-the-frontline/impact-in-each-country/laos/>>

⁴⁰ UN Women (2020) Review of Gender-Responsiveness and Disability-Inclusion in DRR in the Asia and the Pacific. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/10/ap-review-of-gender-responsiveness-and-disability-inclusion-in-drr>

stakeholders to comply with the international legislative frameworks along with national ones on addressing the needs and involvement of persons with disabilities in DRR planning. This includes access to disaster risk information,⁴¹ better-addressing intersectionality and diversity in all respects of DRR policy and practices,⁴² and prioritizing disability inclusion as a key factor to pave the way for disability inclusion in DRR action plans.

⁴¹ UNDRR (2023) Global Survey Report on Persons with Disabilities and Disaster (Recommendation). Available at: <https://www.undrr.org/report/2023-gobal-survey-report-on-persons-with-disabilities-and-disasters>

⁴² Ibid, 33 (UNDRR/2023)

III. Recommendations

- The relevant stakeholders in DRR to collaborate and harmonize their efforts in jointly building the capacities of government at all levels⁴³
- To allocate budget towards early warning, preparedness, and risk reduction measures to mitigate the impact of disasters⁴⁴
- To improve the dissemination of information on DRR in the community using a right-based approach and diverse IEC tools such as infographics and visual audio/video and providing the information in ethnic languages considering the people with low education level and persons with disabilities
- To improve access to information, resources, and communication channels to facilitate participation of persons with disabilities in disaster prevention and preparedness activities.
- The government conducts research or studies to address analysis gaps in specific vulnerabilities experienced by different social groups, focusing on persons with disabilities.
- To ensure the meaningful participation of individuals, particularly women, girls, and persons with disabilities, in information dissemination on DRR and in community-based planning for DRR action within their communities
- To strengthen awareness and understanding of disability issues among stakeholders, particularly focusing on challenging cultural beliefs and social practices that hinder inclusion.
- To implement a rights-based approach in disaster management frameworks to ensure coverage for individuals, families, vulnerable and marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities and communities.

⁴³ Mid-Term Review of the Sendai Framework in Lao PDR: Progress and the Road Ahead. Available at: <https://laopdr.un.org/en/249407-mid-term-review-sendai-framework-lao-pdr-progress-and-road-ahead>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Conclusion

Integrating disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction is crucial for Lao PDR as the country faces various disasters and hazards, mainly floods and storms, to manage and reduce the risk of disaster impact for all. The inclusion of people with disabilities is necessary in planning and responsive efforts. Persons with disabilities must be able to access information and resources equally by addressing their specific accessibility needs and intersectionality and by improving data collection and analysis, which increases the chance of understanding their needs in all aspects of DRR. Furthermore, coordination between DRR stakeholders needs to be enhanced and prioritize the meaningful participation of people with disabilities in putting effort into disaster prevention. Finally, disability-inclusive leadership needs to be promoted in risk management by increasing their role in decision-making, driving the national legislation and framework of DRR forward and strengthening the resilience, safety, and benefit, mitigating the impact of disasters for all.

References

Center For Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance (2021), Lao PDR Disaster Management Reference Handbook. Available at: <https://www.cfe-dmha.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=BsMS42nJjdE%3D&portalid=0>

Government of Lao PDR (2018), Post Disaster Need Assessment 2018 Flood, Lao PDR, Vientiane. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/laopdr/publications/post-disaster-needs-assessment-2018-floods-lao-pdr#>

Global Network of Civil Society Organization for Disaster Reduction, View from the Frontline 2019. Available At: <<https://global-report.vfl.world/project/information-gap/>>

Global Network of Civil Society Organization for Disaster Reduction, View from the Frontline 2019, Lao PDR Available at: <<https://www.gndr.org/impact/views-from-the-frontline/impact-in-each-country/laos/>>

Lao PDR, Law on Disaster Management (2019). Available at: https://disasterlaw.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/media/disaster_law/2021-03/DM%20Law%20Unofficial%20Translation.pdf

Lao PDR, National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (2021-2030). Available at: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/lao215507eng.pdf>

Lao Statistic Bureau, Disability Monograph of Lao PDR from the 2015 Population and Housing Census (re-publishing 2020). Available at: https://lao.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/1.disability_monograph_laos_en_final_29_nov_2020_print.pdf

Mid-Term Review of the Sendai Framework in Lao PDR: Progress and the Road Ahead. Available at: <https://laopdr.un.org/en/249407-mid-term-review-sendai-framework-lao-pdr-progress-and-road-ahead>

Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare – Lao PDR Voluntary National Report Mid-term Review of the implementation of Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030). Available at: <https://sendaiframework-mtr.undrr.org/media/87104/download?startDownload=true>

National Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment in 2019. Available at: https://fukuoka.unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/3_Lao_PDR_National_Climate_Change_Vulnerability_Assessment.pdf

UN office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Disaster Risk Reduction in Lao PDR Status Report (2019). Available at: <http://www.undrr.org/publication/disaster-risk-reduction-lao-pdr>

UN office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Global Survey Report on Persons with Disabilities and Disaster (2023). Available at: <https://www.undrr.org/report/2023-gobal-survey-report-on-persons-with-disabilities-and-disasters>

UN Women, Review of Gender-Responsiveness and Disability-Inclusion in DRR in the Asia and the Pacific (2020). Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/10/ap-review-of-gender-responsiveness-and-disability-inclusion-in-drr>

More Information: of Lao PDR, National Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment in 2019. Available at: https://fukuoka.unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/3_Lao_PDR_National_Climate_Change_Vulnerability_Assessment.pdf