LAO PDR VULNERABILITY EXPOSED BY COVID-19

COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the country's economy, health system, and social fabric:

- **Overwhelmed health system:** field response and laboratory capacity, doctors and nurses availability, limited hospital beds and essential medicines, and shortage of medical supplies and PPE complicated the effectiveness in responding to the pandemic
- **Remote and rural areas:** difficult to access healthcare and other essential services, particularly during the pandemic, resulting in limited access to treatment and vaccination.
- **Socio-economic impact:** many businesses forced to close and migrant workers had to return home, leading to job losses and income declines, and disruptions to food production and distribution.
- **Increased poverty:** estimated poverty rate increased from 18.3% in 2020 to 20.4% in 2021* attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic: unable to afford basic necessities, such as food, shelter, and healthcare.
- **Human capital drawback:** disrupted education and social services, which has had a negative impact on children and vulnerable group

*COVID-19 and the Impact on Children and Vulnerable Groups in Lao PDR" by UNICEF (2020)
**Lao PDR Economic Monitor August 2021" by the World Bank

Lessons learnt from the pandemic

The importance of having a strong health system:

- **Strong Advocacy from high levels and concern**
- **Strong public health infrastructure:** prevent disease and promote health such as clean water, sanitation, and hygiene; as well as strengthening the overall healthcare system.
- **Effective health policies:** ensure that everyone has access to quality healthcare through universal health coverage, essential medicines policies, and regulation of the healthcare sector.
- **Strong partnerships and whole-of-society response:** Governments, the private sector, civil society, and communities are essential for building a strong and resilient health system: pool resources, share expertise, and reach more people.

Lessons learnt from the pandemic

The need to strengthen the country's preparedness for future pandemics.

- **Improve disease surveillance and early warning systems:** identify new outbreaks early and take action to contain them.
- **Strengthen the healthcare workforce:** train more healthcare workers and ensure that they have the skills and resources they need to respond to a pandemic.
- **Promote public health measures:** This includes things like handwashing, vaccination, and social distancing.
- **Build public trust:** ensure that people have trust in the health system and the government's response so that they are willing to seek health care, get vaccinated, and comply with public health measures.
- **Be prepared to adapt:** The world is constantly changing, and so are the threats posed by pandemics: be prepared to adapt to new challenges and to make changes to preparedness plans as needed.