



Legal Aid and Access to Justice



BACKGROUND

The Asia Foundation is one of the longest-standing supporters of law dissemination and legal education, village mediation, and legal aid in Lao PDR. Beginning in 2006, the Foundation supported the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and Lao Bar Association (LBA) to pilot the first legal aid offices in Lao PDR. The Foundation also supported MOJ to develop the policy and legal framework for access to justice and legal aid, including the Mediation Decision and Legal Aid Decree (approved by the Prime Minister in 2018).

However, challenges persist for Lao citizens to access justice, especially vulnerable groups and those living in remote areas. Legal knowledge and confidence to resolve disputes or protect their rights remains extremely low. Navigating complex and varied dispute resolution mechanisms, spanning mediation, formal litigation before the courts, and petitions, adds to the daunting challenge of seeking justice. Moreover, in 2021 with only 317 lawyers (72 women), there is a dearth of legal professionals to provide services.



ACTIVITIES

Under the Legal Aid Support Program, the Foundation has assisted the MOJ to expand its legal aid services to nine provinces and Vientiane Capital. The Foundation supports 94 of 166 MOJ Legal Aid Offices (LAOs), as well as 17 LBA Legal Aid Centers. The LAOs and clinics make justice more affordable for the poor and vulnerable, especially women, children, and minority populations, and provide legal information and legal advice to these people. The Foundation will support the MOJ's future budget advocacy to ensure that such services are expanded. The Foundation also works to increase the number of lawyers providing legal aid, and the number of female lawyers in the country, by providing scholarships for professional legal training and funding internships.

The Foundation also supports non-profit associations such as the Association for the Development of Women and Legal Education (ADWLE) and university legal aid clinics (National University of Laos and the Champasak University to provide legal aid, and Bridges Across Borders South East Asia Clinical Legal Education (BABSEACLE) to provide community legal education.

KEY OUTCOMES

The Foundation has supported the MOJ LAOs in Oudomxay, and Champassak provinces, since 2009, Xayabouly province (two districts), since 2018, Vientiane Capital, Salavan, Phongsali, Luang Prabang since 2020, and Luang Namtha, Vientiane Province, and Savannakhet since 2021 to provide legal aid (legal information or advice, help with legal documents, or referral for legal representation) every workday and conduct mobile clinics and law dissemination in villages.

The Foundation supports ADWLE to operate two legal aid clinics for women and children.

With Foundation support, BABSEACLE strengthened and expanded Clinical Legal Education (CLE) at the National University of Laos and established CLE at Champasak University. As part of the program CLE students worked in villages and at the Vientiane Capital Drug Treatment Centre to build awareness at the local level.

The Foundation also works with BABSEACLE and the Faculty of Law and Political Science at the National University of Laos to hold mock trial competitions to teach students about the right to a fair trial and access to justice.



The Foundation supported:



The MOJ to develop and distribute

20,000

posters on legal aid and village mediation across

9 target provinces and Vientiane Capital.



The MOJ to develop and distribute

10,000

brochures on legal aid and notary services across nine target provinces and Vientiane Capital.



The MOJ and ADWLE to develop and distribute

10,000

brochures explaining the laws on violence against women and human trafficking.



Since August 2018, the MOJ LAOs provided legal aid services to

1,522

individuals.

2

ADWLE Legal Aid Clinics supported

158

women and children.



CLE students from 2 universities increased awareness in

15

villages and at the Vientiane Capital Drug Treatment Center on:

- Gender-based violence
- Laws on human trafficking and drugs
- Seeking legal assistance.



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mock trial competitions were conducted with over 100 student participants.



The Asia Foundation

23 Singha Road, Phonxay Village
Saysettha District
Vientiane, Lao PDR
Phone: +856 21 454300-4
Email: country.laos.general@asiafoundation.org
Website: <https://asiafoundation.org/>