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Project Information Document (PID)

Appraisal Stage | Date Prepared/Updated: 12-Jul-2024 | Report No: PIDIA00345



BASIC INFORMATION

A. Basic Project Data

Project Beneficiary(ies)	Region	Operation ID	Operation Name
Lao People's Democratic Republic	EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC	P179284	Lao PDR Climate Resilient Road Connectivity Improvement Project
Financing Instrument	Estimated Appraisal Date	Estimated Approval Date	Practice Area (Lead)
Investment Project Financing (IPF)	17-Jun-2024	29-Aug-2024	Transport
Borrower(s)	Implementing Agency		
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Ministry of Public Works and Transport		

Proposed Development Objective(s)

To improve climate resilient road access in targeted provinces, enhance capacity to manage the road network, and, in case of an Eligible Crisis or Emergency, respond promptly and effectively to it.

Components

Climate Resilient Road Access
Project Management
Institutional Development
Contingent Emergency Response Component

PROJECT FINANCING DATA (US\$, Millions)

Maximizing Finance for Development

Is this an MFD-Enabling Project (MFD-EP)?	No
Is this project Private Capital Enabling (PCE)?	No

SUMMARY

Total Operation Cost	56.20
Total Financing	56.20
of which IBRD/IDA	56.00
Financing Gap	0.00



DETAILS

World Bank Group Financing

International Development Association (IDA)	56.00
IDA Credit	48.00
IDA Shorter Maturity Loan (SML)	8.00

Non-World Bank Group Financing

Counterpart Funding	0.20
Borrower/Recipient	0.20

Environmental And Social Risk Classification

Moderate

Decision

The review did authorize the team to appraise and negotiate

Other Decision (as needed)

B. Introduction and Context

Country Context

- Lao People's Democratic Republic's (Lao PDR) economic growth averaged about 7 percent over the two decades to 2019 but the economy's growth pattern was capital-intensive, resource-driven, and debt-fueled¹.** Growth was predominantly driven by large foreign investments in hydropower, mining, and construction of transport infrastructure.
- Economic growth was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic but is recovering gradually.** Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth declined sharply from 5.5 percent in 2019 to 0.5 percent in 2020, owing to the wide-ranging economic impacts of COVID-19, including the collapse of international tourism². Growth has gradually recovered to an estimated 3.7 percent in 2023. However, the recovery remained vulnerable, undermined by macroeconomic instability, with high inflation and a sharp currency depreciation.

¹ Country Partnership Framework for the Lao People's Democratic Republic for the Period FY 2023 – FY 2026, The World Bank Group.

² Bank Staff estimates. The Lao authorities estimated GDP growth in 2020 at 3.3 percent.



3. **The World Bank assesses Lao PDR to be in debt distress with an unsustainable outlook under the Low-Income Countries Debt Sustainability Framework (LIC-DSF).**³ High public debt levels have contributed to persistent macroeconomic instability, which is undermining development prospects. Lao PDR is facing both solvency and liquidity challenges owing to significant financing needs, limited financing options, low foreign exchange reserves, and considerable depreciation pressures. Public and publicly guaranteed debt amounted to 108 percent of GDP at the end of 2023, or 110 percent of GDP if domestic expenditure arrears and a swap arrangement are included. There are also substantial contingent liabilities associated with public-private partnerships and non-guaranteed borrowing of state-owned enterprises.
4. **Consumer price inflation accelerated in 2023, driven largely by the weaker Lao kip.** Average annual consumer price inflation reached 31 percent in 2023, compared to 23 percent in 2022. High inflation was largely driven by Lao kip depreciation, particularly in the parallel market. In 2023, the annual average official Lao kip/US dollar exchange rate weakened by 31 percent, while the average parallel rate depreciated by 27 percent. The Bank of the Lao PDR tightened monetary policy and introduced administrative measures to manage the exchange rate in early 2023, but the exchange rate has continued to depreciate.
5. **Decades of remarkable progress in poverty reduction have been undermined by COVID-19 and rising inflation.** Lao PDR made remarkable progress in reducing poverty during the past decades: from 46.0 percent in 1992 to 18.3 percent in 2018. During this period, the Gini coefficient increased from 30.5 to 38.8, reflecting lower gains for the bottom 40 percent.
6. **Poverty incidence varies largely across districts, even those within the same province as per a recent study conducted by the Lao Statistics Bureau**⁴. The other key findings of the study are: (i) poverty is high in districts located in mountainous areas bordering Vietnam and low in districts located on the Mekong River plain and areas bordering China; and ii) districts with the highest number of poor people are mainly located in the provinces of Savannakhet, Khammouan, and Saravan.
7. **Lao PDR is highly vulnerable to climate change risks. From 1970 to 2010, 33 natural hazard events (mostly floods and droughts) were registered, affecting almost the entire population, and causing economic damages of over US\$400 million**⁵. Flooding, storms, landslides, and drought are the top four hazards occurring in the country. Current annual expected losses from flood events in Lao PDR range between 2.8 percent and 3.6 percent of GDP⁶. The northern and north-western parts of Laos are vulnerable to drought. The locations most vulnerable to flooding are the plain areas along the Mekong River in the central and southern parts. The floods in 2018 were severe, and over half of the reported losses and damages were to the transport infrastructure, costing about US\$190 million.
8. **Climate change projections indicate further increases in temperature as well as the intensity and frequency of extreme events, including increased rainfall and flooding risks.** Due to a combination of political, geographic, and social factors, Lao PDR is recognized as vulnerable to climate change impacts, ranked 142 out of 181 countries in the 2020 ND-GAIN Index⁷. Temperature rise in Lao PDR is expected to be broadly in line with the global average.

³ See the 2023 Debt Sustainability Analysis, jointly conducted by the IMF and the World Bank.

⁴ Report titled 'Where Are The Poor In Lao PDR?' Lao Statistics Bureau and the World Bank.

⁵ Climate Change Knowledge Portal, The World Bank Group

⁶ Recovery and Resilience in Lao PDR, The World Bank Group, Feature Story, April 9, 2019.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/04/09/recovery-and-resilience-in-lao-pdr>

⁷ University of Notre Dame (2019). Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative. URL: <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/>
The ND-GAIN Index ranks 181 countries using a score which calculates a country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges as well as their readiness to improve resilience. The more vulnerable a country is, the lower its score is, while the more ready a country is to improve its resilience, the higher it will be.



9. **The labor market in LAO PDR exhibits some gender gaps, which vary in nature and size.** Overall, there are gender gaps in the labor market, with 41.9 percent of women aged 15 and above and 52.6 percent of men for the same age category participating in the labor force⁸. However, there is a divide between where women and men work and the type of jobs they do. Women tend to be concentrated in manufacturing, trade, and social services, while men dominate other sectors, such as transport, construction, and energy.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

10. **The transport sector contributes to about 3.6 percent of the country's GDP. It grew at 6.5 percent per year during the last decade⁹. Transport demand has more than doubled between 2004-2018.** Over this period, the numbers of registered passenger cars every year has grown from 59,000 to 433,800 and that of motorcycles has also increased from 293,600 to 1,633,700. Likewise, those of passenger buses have increased from 2,200 to 5,500 and trucks have increased from 13,100 to 60,400. In total, the accumulated number of all the types of registered motor vehicles has increased from 367,900 at year 2004 to 2,133,500 at year 2018 (+480 percent).
11. **Lao PDR has a wide range of modes of transport. Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MPWT) manages the transport sector and consists of several departments including departments of roads, transport, civil aviation, inland waterways, housing and urban planning, railways, inspection, planning and finance, personnel, cabinet office, and public works and transport institute.** Lao PDR has 59,943 km of road network. The country's rail network is about 425 km. There are 14 airports, about 2,000 km of inland waterways, and 29 river ports.
12. **Road transport is the dominant mode of transport carrying about 86 percent of freight traffic and 98 percent of passenger traffic and is central to the policy of 'landlocked' to 'land linked'.** The country's total road network is 59,943 kilometers (km) in 2017¹⁰ with a paved road network of 9,251 km (15.5 percent). It consists of a primary network of 7,515 km of National Roads, a secondary network of 8,597 km of Provincial Roads, a tertiary network of about 33,318 km of District Roads and Rural Roads, 3,537 km of Urban Roads, and 6,975 km of Special Roads¹¹. Only 15 percent of the total road network is paved. 40 percent of paved roads are classified as in poor or bad condition. 40 percent of unpaved roads are inaccessible during the rainy seasons.
13. **MPWT is responsible for administration of the National Road network and setting sector policies, regulations, and standards for the entire road network. The road network other than the National Roads is managed by provincial road authorities.** MPWT has the overall responsibility but has delegated certain project management and maintenance responsibilities to departments of public works and transport (DPWTs) in each province, with subsidiary offices in districts.
14. **Funding constraints and channeling of most of the available funds towards the National Roads network is crowding out the maintenance of the secondary and tertiary networks, which primarily serve the rural population and agricultural areas, and are extremely vulnerable to climate risks.** There are two sources of funding for the road sector - the Road Fund and budgetary support. The yearly allocation to the sector from the Road Fund is capped at LAK 700 billion and 72 percent of this is earmarked for the National Roads and only 18 percent for the rest of the network. Moreover, about 35 percent of the Road Fund allocations are spent towards clearing the existing arrears to the contractors. Due to depreciation of LAK against the US dollar, the yearly

⁸ Labor Force Survey 2022, Lao Statistics Bureau (2023).

⁹ Lao Statistics Bureau

¹⁰ 5-Year Development Plan 2021-25, Ministry of Public Works and Transport

¹¹ 'Special Road', as per the Road Design Manual of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, means a road used specifically for the production and service of a sector of activities for the national defense and security and the forest preservation zone



allocations for the road sector over the last couple of years have also been decreasing in real terms – US\$66 million in 2020, US\$33.9 million in 2021, and US\$44.4 million in 2022. The Road Fund resources can cover less than 30 percent of the maintenance need of entire road network. The World Bank is currently undertaking a study on ‘Lao Road Sector Financing Review’ to provide analysis of road sector financing and funding options in Lao PDR.

15. **Only about 5.6 percent of the tertiary network of District Roads and Rural roads is paved, and rest of the network is either gravel surfaced or earthen. 40 percent of these roads are inaccessible for over six months in a year, and many have no redundancies for access during extreme climate events. More than 40 percent of villages are 6 km or more from the main road and nearly half are not accessible during the rainy seasons¹².** The network of District Roads and Rural Roads has (i) most of its cross-drainage structures in dilapidated condition, (ii) very few culverts, (iii) no longitudinal drainage facilities, and (iv) no adequate embankments. Climate events have led to a deterioration in road conditions and maintenance funding has not kept pace with the demands for road maintenance, rehabilitation, and repair leading to loss of these assets.
16. **Lao PDR’s District Roads and Rural Roads are much prone to climate risks.** About 80 percent of the country is mountainous and forms the catchment of the Mekong River and its several tributaries and the road network in these areas are highly prone to landslides and slope failures. In the plains, the network is prone to flooding, inundation, and asset loss. In 2019, heavy rains caused floods in the southern provinces (Saravan Province worst affected) and impacted 580,000 people and caused damages of about US\$50 million including many roads and bridges. 52 villages of the southern province of Savannakhet were flooded in October 2020 and affected over 10,000 people, several roads, and bridges.
17. **Three other key areas which are affecting the management of District Roads and Rural Roads are (i) lack of adequate and updated road asset data for climate resilient network planning and prioritization of capital investments and maintenance, (ii) same institutional structure/staff in MPWT working on the entire road sector, and (iii) overloading.** There is no proper and updated inventory of District Roads and Rural Roads or a prioritization framework for selecting roads for rehabilitation/maintenance. The institutional and technical capacities of the managing agencies are weak especially at the provincial and district levels. At the MPWT, dedicated staff are not assigned to work on District Roads and Rural Roads.
18. **A major gender gap in the transport sector is related to employment. The female share of workers in the transport and logistics sector in the country is only 9.1 percent¹³.** Within the MWPT, women constitute 24 percent of the total workforce nationwide with most of them employed in administrative functions. The share of women within the Roads and Bridges sector of the ministry is only 13 percent¹⁴. It is notable that 16 percent (197) of the 1258 employees of the seven road construction companies are women, most of whom are accountants, environment and social specialists, human resource specialists, and 11 percent and 9 percent of the engineers and construction equipment operators of these companies are women, respectively.
19. **Lao PDR recorded 6440 accidents in the year of 2022¹⁵, resulting in 10,132 injuries and 947 fatalities.** The impact of road crashes on the national economy is estimated at five percent of GDP. In December 2022, Lao PDR approved a new National Road Safety Strategy. The country has an ambitious goal of reducing road traffic deaths by 50 percent by 2030, in line with the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-30. The District and Rural Roads have no road safety infrastructure including road signs and road markings. Another challenge linked to road safety is vehicle overloading.

¹² 5-year Development Plan 2021-25, Ministry of Public Works and Transport

¹³ Lao PDR Population Census 2015

¹⁴ 2023 statistics provided by the MPWT.

¹⁵ 1053 in 2017, 995 in 2018, 1134 in 2019, 1031 in 2020, 831 in 2021



C. Proposed Development Objective(s)

Development Objective(s) (From PAD)

To improve climate resilient road access in targeted provinces, enhance capacity to manage the road network, and, in case of an Eligible Crisis or Emergency, respond promptly and effectively to it.

Key Results

- (i) Millions of people that benefit from improved access to sustainable transport infrastructure and services,
- (ii) access disruption along the project roads due to climate hazards (number of days multiplied by section length per year), and
- (iii) percentage of new road projects designed/prepared by the MPWT that include climate resilient designs.

D. Project Description

20. **Component 1: Climate Resilient Road Access (Total: US\$50.9 million; IDA: US\$50.9 million):** The project will support (i) improvement of about 300 km of District Roads and Rural Roads in the provinces of Khammouan, Savannakhet, and Saravan to the standards of Class V/VI roads as per MPWT's Road Design Manual and addressing climate and disaster resilience aspects, (ii) construction supervision of the project road improvement works, and (iii) maintenance of the project roads post improvement during the project period.
21. **Component 2: Project Management (Total: US\$3.3 million; IDA: US\$3.1 million, Government of Lao PDR: US\$0.2 million):** This component will support (i) financial audit, (ii) technical audit of the project road improvement works during construction, (iii) environmental and social monitoring, (iv) road safety audit of the project road designs at three stages (design, during construction, at completion of construction), and awareness campaigns, (v) road user satisfaction surveys carried out at the start of implementation of works, at mid-term, and at the close of the project, (vi) incremental operating costs, (vii) technical and operational assistance for the day-to-day management, monitoring and evaluation of the Project, and (viii) land acquisition, resettlement, and rehabilitation.
22. **Component 3: Institutional Development (Total: US\$2 million; IDA: US\$2 million):** This component will support MPWT in (i) capacity building of local contractors in the areas of Output and Performance-based Road Contracts (OPBRC), climate resilience, road safety, and environmental and social risk management, (ii) a study on climate resilient road network planning and prioritization and capacity building of MPWT and DPWTs, (iii) preparation of a road sector financing strategy, (iv) capacity building of MPWT and DPWT staff on cross-cutting issues including road maintenance, OPBRC contract management, road safety, gender, citizen engagement, and climate disaster risk, (v) a female internship program, and (vi) preparation of environmental, social, technical, and economic documents for any future road projects in Lao PDR.
23. **Component 4: Contingent Emergency Response Component (Total: US\$0 million; IDA: US\$0 million):** This component will support MPWT in case of an Eligible Crisis or Emergency in responding promptly and effectively to it as per the Contingent Emergency Response Manual. The Contingent Emergency Response Manual will consider climate risks on both mitigation and adaptation.



Legal Operational Policies	Triggered?
Projects on International Waterways OP 7.50	No
Projects in Disputed Area OP 7.60	No

Summary of Screening of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts

24. Overall Environmental and Social (E&S) risks is considered Moderate. Nine out of ten Environmental and Social Standards (ESSs) of the World Bank are relevant under the project. These are ESS1: Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts, ESS2: Labor and Working Conditions, ESS3: Resource Efficiency and Pollution Prevention and Management, ESS4: Community Health and Safety, ESS5: Land Acquisition, Restrictions on Land Use and Involuntary Resettlement, ESS6: Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources, ESS7: Indigenous People, ESS8: Cultural Heritage, and ESS10: Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure.
25. Potential direct environmental impacts associated with the road improvement may include sourcing of material for earthworks, noise, dust, sedimentation, erosion, wastes generated from civil works, management of storm water, community safety related to traffic during construction and operation, occupational health and safety of the workers, worker camps, forests/land clearing beyond road corridors, encounter of unexploded ordnance (UXO), and intentional or accidental introduction of non-native flora species for stabilization of embankment. Based the scale and nature of proposed project activities, potential environmental risks and impacts associated with road improvement activities are considered insignificant, site specific, temporary, and manageable if relevant mitigation measures are properly conducted. Potential indirect impacts may be associated with improved road condition that may encourage additional encroachment of agricultural farms and infrastructure to the road-side forests which are already in degraded condition and cause further degradation of such forests or changes to other land use types. Road upgrade and the increased connectivity of road network may amplify illegal trades of timber and wildlife products from nearby Conservation Forests/Protected Areas and Protection Forests.
26. The project will not finance road sections within Protected Areas (PAs) with international or nationally significant biodiversity value that may cover Conservation Forests and Protection Forests so as to ensure avoidance of adverse impacts on key biodiversity, critical and natural habitats, and ecological functions as well as local population. Consultations with Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and its respective Provincial and District Offices, and other key stakeholders were undertaken to ensure that the proposed road sections for project financing do not fall within Protected Areas with internally and nationally significant biodiversity value. It was also confirmed by the PMU that there will be no possibilities of associated road sections in the nearby protected areas to be financed by the government or other donors. During the project implementation, site specific Biodiversity Management Plan (SS-BMPs) will be prepared for some road sections which are close to PAs (within 1 – 3 km) following the guidance provided in the project ESMF.
27. Social risk is also considered Moderate. Social risks and impacts identified through the initial E&S screening are expected to be site specific and manageable since the project aims to finance improvement works for existing District Roads and Rural Roads within the pre-identified road alignments except those segments where some small adjustments may be needed to improve road safety and climate resilience. Moreover, the density of population



in the three target provinces is relatively low ranging from 27 to 50 persons per square kilometer and the traffic volume, as well as number of road commuters, along the rural roads is small. Land acquisition and resettlement are expected to be minor as all main house structures and assets are located outside the road alignments and Corridor of Impact (COIs). To effectively manage land acquisition and resettlement risks, one of the agreed criteria to be included in the negative list of project investment is that sub-projects that may cause resettlement of more than 200 people (or 40 households), and/or cause more than 40 households to be severely affected - with 10 percent or more of productive assets including land owned by individual household lost – will not be considered for financing under the Project in all three target provinces. Land acquisition impacts will be managed under the RPF.

28. Risks of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and Community Health and Safety (CHS) including risks of communicable diseases transmission, and SEA/SH, GBV and VAC are moderate and manageable due to limited influx of workers anticipated from outside local community, and from neighboring countries if foreign contractors are selected. To help minimize risks associated with external labor influx, the MPWT has prepared an LMP as part of the ESMF and will encourage local contractors to undertake the road works using national competitive bidding method to and to hire local labors and workers from local communities to the extent possible. Risks associated workers camps that may be installed along rural road sections with necessary facilities to be provided will be managed through a worker camp management plan to be prepared and applied as part of the SS-ESMP.
29. There are some ethnic groups that are defined as Indigenous Peoples (IPs) among the potential project affected people along the proposed road sections in the three provinces. These groups are observed to possess the four characteristics of IPs defined under the scope of application of the World Bank's ESS7. Initial screening identifies potential risks of CHS particularly traffic safety issue and risks of the exclusion and discrimination of ethnic minorities, women and vulnerable groups from project planning, consultation, implementation and benefit, e.g., income earning or employment opportunities and these risks are managed via the ESMF and SEP.
30. The project's risk management instruments have been prepared to be applied under the project. These include an Environmental and Social Commitment Plan (ESCP); Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) including screening procedures, Labor Management Procedures, a template for Biodiversity Management Plan and for an ESMP; Resettlement Policy Framework (RPF) and a Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) which integrates elements of an Ethnic Group Development Framework (EGDF). These ESF instruments were consulted with key stakeholders during October 3 and 27, 2023, and submitted to the Bank for review and clearance before appraisal. The cleared documents were disclosed onto the MPWT's website on May 21, 2024. During project implementation, and after scope and detailed design of road sections to be financed by the project is confirmed, site-specific assessments will be carried out and required site-specific management plans (SS-ESMPs, ARAPs) will be developed following the screening procedures outlined in the project's ESMF and RPF.
31. Road alignment may go through some Protection Forests and Production Forests and noise and frequent movement of traffic during construction. The site-specific ESMP will include mitigation measures to limit direct impacts on those forests along roadside and their biodiversity during construction phase. However improved access and better road condition during operation stage and after project completion may bring additional pressure on the remaining forests along the roadsides including further encroachment of agricultural activities, and new settlements. To monitor potential impacts to the forests, remote sensing monitoring will be conducted by the Contractor, pre-construction, mid-construction and post-construction (years 1, 2 & 5 of O&M phase) to monitor any indirect impacts including agricultural encroachment, further degradation of forests due to illegal trade of timber and wildlife from the forests and nearby PAs.



32. The PMU is also recommended to comply with the relevant national regulations. These include the Labor Law (2013), EIA Decree, updated in October 2022 which requires a separate Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) to be carried out and IEE reports prepared and submitted to the Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment (PONRE) for review and approval for projects to improve existing roads regardless sources of funds.

E. Implementation

Institutional and Implementation Arrangements

33. MPWT is the Project Implementing Agency. The Project will be implemented through Government structures. The project will receive overall policy and strategic guidance from a Project Coordination Committee chaired by a Vice Minister of MPWT and comprising MPWT's Department Directors directly involved in project implementation and Director of Provincial DPWT involved in the implementation of the project. The Committee will be supported by a secretariat led by the Deputy Director General of MPWT's Department of Planning and Finance (DPF) and comprising representatives of related departments.
34. **Project Oversight and Coordination.** DPF will coordinate with other MPWT departments providing supporting management functions including: (i) the Department of Inspection (DoI) which will apply internal controls to project activities, (ii) Public Works and Transport (PTI) which will be responsible for all aspects of safeguards preparation, supervision, monitoring environmental and social compliance and oversee and report on the implementation of the project grievance redress mechanism; (iii) Department of Transport (DoT) will be responsible for road safety audits and awareness campaigns; (iv) Department of personnel (DOP) will be responsible for training, and (v) ICT Division of the Permanent Office will provide IT support to all departments involved in the project implementation including disclosure of project documents on the MPWT's website.
35. **Project Implementation.** MPWT's Department of Roads (DoR) will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of climate resilient road access including procurement and management of road contracts and implementation support and work supervision (ISWS) contract, monitoring road work progress, reviewing work plans, and allocating funds to routine and periodic maintenance activities. The design and supervision consultants managed by DoR will provide implementation support to DPWT for data collection, planning, day-to-day contract management, quality control, monitoring, and reporting, as well as building the technical capacities of DPWTs and district Offices of Public Works and Transport (OPWT) on a continuous basis. DoI will recruit consultants to conduct technical audit, financial audit, and internal control.
36. **Memorandum of Understanding.** To ensure clear assignment of roles and responsibilities, and accountability for project results, the Minister of MPWT and the Governor of each one of the six participating provinces will sign a Memorandum of Understanding prior to the commencement of project implementation.
37. **Project Operational Manual.** The project will be implemented using a Project Operational Manual (POM).

CONTACT POINT

World Bank



Pratap Tvgssshkr
Senior Transport Specialist

Sombath Southivong
Senior Infrastructure Specialist

Borrower/Client/Recipient

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Implementing Agencies

Ministry of Public Works and Transport
Visara Khamvongsa
Deputy Director, International Cooperation Division
visara.khamvongsa@gmail.com
Litta Khattiya
Vice Minister
k_litta@yahoo.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

The World Bank
1818 H Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20433
Telephone: (202) 473-1000
Web: <http://www.worldbank.org/projects>

APPROVAL

Task Team Leader(s):	Pratap Tvgssshrk, Sombath Southivong	
Approved By		
Practice Manager/Manager:	Benedictus Eijbergen	24-May-2024
Country Director:	Alexander Kremer	12-Jul-2024