

***INTERGOVERNMENTAL TENTH REGIONAL
ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE
TRANSPORT FORUM IN LAOS***

Mr. Viengsavath Siphandone

Vice Minister of MPWT

THE ROLE OF RURAL TRANSPORT IN ACHIEVING THE SDGs

- Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere,
- Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture,
- Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages,
- Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,
- Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,

THE ROLE OF RURAL TRANSPORT IN ACHIEVING THE SDGs

- Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all,
- Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all,
- Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all,
- Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

GOAL 1: END POVERTY IN ALL ITS FORMS EVERYWHERE

- In Laos, poverty is more widespread in rural areas, especially in the mountainous districts along the border with Vietnam, where access is often only possible in the dry season, and sometimes not at all. In those areas, where we were already able to build all-weather access roads to the villages, we have observed that the poverty rates decrease much faster than in areas where access remains difficult.
- There are many reasons for this, including better access to markets to buy inputs for agriculture, or to sell surplus production, better access for government staff, better supplies for health stations and dispensaries, and better access for other agencies like electricity companies, mobile phone providers, or organizations working on water supply, sanitation, or education.



GOAL 2: END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

- Rural transport is a precondition for higher agricultural production and it can help to promote better agricultural technologies. But in times of disaster, the transport routes are also important to provide emergency help for a limited period, until the people can be self-sufficient again.



GOAL 3: ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

- It is extremely difficult for the Government to provide good health services in very remote areas. As soon as year-round road access is ensured, on the other hand, it is possible to run health stations and dispensaries, and to attract doctors to work and stay in such areas. Also, we notice that with improved roads more and more pregnant women go to the health station or hospital for delivery, thus reducing the mortality rates for mothers and babies.



GOAL 4: ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

- We have noticed that in villages with year-round access the share of students attending secondary school increases substantially. While primary schools are now available in nearly all villages, the same is not the case for secondary schools. These are mostly found in central villages which we call “Kumban”, or in the district centres. If transport is ensured, more children can attend secondary school, stay there in dormitories, and return to their village on the weekend to see the family and to take back their food supply for the next week.
- Also, with improved road access, mobile phone companies move in and with the possibilities offered by the internet nowadays this means that access to information and lifelong learning are possible, even in remote places.



GOAL 5: ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

- When we organize village meetings in remote villages before deciding to improve roads, we often hear complaints from women that they have hardly any possibility to leave their village, because it means crossing rivers and mountains, and neglecting the care for children or animals. Men are much more flexible and get more contact with the outside world, even in remote villages. But with an improved road and transport services being offered, women can also travel to the nearest big village, market, or district centre, or visit relatives in other villages. In combination with higher attendance of girls in secondary schools, improved rural transport thus contributes to achieving gender equality.



Photo: United Nations Lao
PDR

GOAL 6: ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

- Improved rural transport makes an indirect but important contribution to this goal, by allowing organisations and projects which are active in the field of water supply and sanitation to reach the remote villages whenever required. We find that often drinking water systems in villages are broken down, only because a small and inexpensive spare part is missing. With good road access, it is easy to get this spare part from the district or provincial centre



Photo: World Bank

GOAL 7: ENSURE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND MODERN ENERGY FOR ALL

- A high share of the electricity produced in Laos comes from hydropower, and a smaller part from solar panels. But generally, a high percentage is from renewable sources. We notice that usually already during road improvement the power supply companies use the new access to establish their power line poles along the road corridor. Projects promoting small family-based solar systems will find it much easier to do this in villages which they can reach with their pickups or small trucks. Again, rural transport routes contribute to other, seemingly not related goals.



Photo: Sunlabob

GOAL 8: PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

Isolated villages are usually restricted to subsistence agriculture, using outdated techniques and inefficient seeds. With ensured all-weather access, in combination with advisory services, farmers are getting interested to grow higher value crops, improve their production methods, and diversify into different crops. Just to give you one example: In many villages of Dakcheung district of Xekong Province, families have started to grow coffee on half a hectare after road improvement, with the help of a coffee processing company which provides seedlings, fertilizer, advise, and which sends trucks during the harvesting season picking up the coffee from the farm. Although the changing coffee prices are a problem, this new crop enables a higher income for the farmers who previously fully depended on slash-and-burn agriculture. However, in future the objective of our government would be to not just export the raw product, but to establish processing plants at the place of production, promoting rural industrialisation. Then the benefits for the producers will be even higher.



Photo: donga1965

GOAL 9: BUILD RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE, PROMOTE INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALIZATION AND FOSTER INNOVATION

- Building of resilient infrastructure, especially climate-resilient, is a real challenge in Laos, in view of the natural disasters and changing rainfall patterns which we experience. Here it is also very important to find the right balance between building more climate resilient, but also more expensive roads, and connecting as many villages as possible. In these cases, flexible road design is required and in one of our development projects we have developed a number of Climate Change Adaptation modules, covering planning, survey, design, construction and maintenance of roads, and we want to disseminate this knowledge with the help of the Public Works and Transport Training Centre of our Ministry to all provinces in the coming years.
- At the same time, we aim to increase the funds available for maintenance especially of rural roads, so that rural transport is not something the local people can only enjoy for a short while, but remains a sustainable feature contributing to an improved life in the long run.



**THANK YOU
FOR YOUR ATTENTION**