Sustainable Tourism in the World Heritage Town Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

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This paper discusses the role of local institutions in promoting sustainable tourism in Luang Prabang, Laos, with a focus on SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. The study uses qualitative research methods to gather from stakeholders and examines the synergies and trade-offs among various SDGs, the strategies for balancing different priorities, the importance of positive stakeholder relationships and consultations, and the future challenges facing the tourism industry in Luang Prabang. The socio-economic development plan for Luang Prabang Province prioritizes political stability, protection of cultural and natural heritage, sustainable agriculture, education and healthcare, hydroelectric power, and commercial and financial development. Despite challenges, Luang Prabang Province has made significant progress in implementing its socio-economic development plan over the past two years. However, several challenges still need to be addressed, including economic growth lacking rationality, income and development disparities between urban and rural regions, inadequate educational and healthcare services, preservation of cultural heritage and effective management of tourism resources, inadequate labor skills development and land management, budgetary constraints, deficiencies in policies and mechanisms for private investment, and the impact of social deprivation on progress and development. The province aims to address these challenges by enhancing political education and training, prioritizing rural development and employee welfare, eliminating poverty and uplifting living standards, seeking input from diverse ethnic backgrounds, addressing political resistance and limitations, and cultivating the province to attain prosperity and resilience.

KEYWORDS: SDGs, Sustainable tourism, World heritage, Luang prabang town, Engagement of local stakeholders

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) comprise a set of ambitious objectives, benchmarks, and metrics that were adopted by the international community at the United Nations for 2030. Balancing the pursuit of crucial social and environmental objectives with the need for economic development is a complex challenge faced by the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as they work towards achieving the SDGs. The successful attainment of these goals by the LDCs is contingent upon effective multi-level governance that coordinates implementation at the local level with the involvement of relevant stakeholders (Koffi and Nkounga, 2019). Several LDCs are home to historic towns and sites that are designated as UNESCO World Heritage sites, due to their ongoing engagement with the UN. Luang Prabang, a significant regional town in northern Laos, situated between the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers, is a prime example of such a place. With its rich cultural and historical significance and substantial influx of foreign visitors, Luang Prabang has become a focus of attention for initiatives aimed at promoting local employment opportunities, advancing social objectives such as gender equality and high-quality education, and protecting the environment (Chutima and Suthikarnnarunai, 2019).

In earlier academic discourse, UNESCO faced criticism for its sole focus on preservation efforts, neglecting the impact of tourism on the broader community. Recently, UNESCO has endeavored to enhance stakeholder involvement in sustainable tourism initiatives (Hinch and Higham, 2011). This essay explores the participation of local institutions in a multi-level governance system aimed at mitigating the effects of tourism on the well-being of local residents. These institutions com-
prise the municipal government of Luang Prabang, the town’s educational institution, Souphanouvong University (SU), and civil society organizations operating at the local level. We are particularly interested in the interaction between international organizations such as UNESCO and UN ESCAP, as well as the regional intergovernmental body ASEAN, with local government, higher education, and civil society organizations in the implementation of specific SDGs.

1. Objectives of study
The aim of this investigation is to advance sustainable tourism in the World Heritage City of Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, with a focus on SDG 11 concerning Sustainable Cities and Communities. This will be achieved by promoting three specific objectives, namely, the economic goal of SDG 8 regarding Decent Work, the social goal of SDG 5 concerning Gender Equality and SDG 4 on Quality Education, and the environmental goals of SDG 6 relating to Clean Water and SDG 14 concerning Life Below Water. These objectives are critical to the survival of the town, as they will help to protect the two rivers, Mekhong and Nam Khan, which are vital to the community’s existence.

2. Research Questions
How does the city of Luang Prabang attempt to balance its objectives in terms of international tourism as a UNESCO World Heritage site and economic development with selected Sustainable Development Goals for its citizens?

3. Scientific and Social Significance of the Research Question
Tourism is often considered a significant contributor to economic growth in developing nations. However, critical perspectives are increasingly being adopted in tourism literature to expand the focus beyond attracting foreign visitors. These perspectives now recognize the impact of tourism on local economies, community perspectives, cultural traditions, heritage, and social welfare. In this context, we draw attention to the Lao PDR, which is struggling with the adverse effects of heavy tourism pressure. To address this issue’s social importance, we aim to advance knowledge on how emphasizing the SDGs for local can better balance decisions related to tourism and historical preservation. The UN Global Goals, regional ASEAN development and integration plans, the Laos government’s national targets and indicators, and the provincial level are all interconnected. While our focus is on one city, these entities impact local planning and implementation at the local level.

Literature Review
1. ASEAN and the SDGs
The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has recently adopted the ‘ASEAN Sustainable Urbanization Strategy’ (ASEAN, 2018). In this paper, we will concentrate on three of the six priority areas outlined in the strategy, namely civic and social, quality environment, and industry and innovation. ASEAN identifies "inclusive and equitable growth" as specific items under the first priority area, civic and social. The second priority area, quality environment, focuses on "water, waste, and sanitation," while the third priority area, industry, and innovation, identifies "education." Our research aligns with these ASEAN priorities, with a focus on planning and governance for sustainable cities (SDG 11), economic growth, and decent work (SDG 8), the social objective of gender equality (SDG 5), quality education (SDG 4), and the environmental goals of clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) and preservation of life below water (SDG 14) (Pham and Lee, 2019).

Achieving the SDGs can be facilitated through various city-to-city learning mechanisms within ASEAN. Luang Prabang, along with Vientiane, is one of the two cities in Laos that is a part of the ASEAN Smart Cities Framework. This network aims to achieve strategic outcomes by combining a competitive economy, a sustainable environment, and a high quality of life. The framework focuses on five development areas,
including civic and social, health and well-being, safety and security, built infrastructure, and industry and innovation. Our research primarily aligns with the subheadings listed under the focus area of civic and social, particularly social cohesion, culture and heritage, public and municipal services, and governance. A recent ASCN statement highlights that smart solutions can contribute to achieving goals such as promoting social equity to eliminate all forms of discrimination, preserving and promoting appreciation for cities’ cultural authenticity and heritage, and advancing the tourism sector, while also achieving social cohesion amidst diversity (ASEAN, 2019).

Luang Prabang, along with Vientiane and Xayabourie, is one of three cities in Laos that are part of the ASEAN Initiative on Environmentally Sustainable Cities. Recently, ASEAN has published a report titled "ASEAN Cooperation on Environmentally Sustainable Cities, Regional Vision: The ASEAN Response Beyond 2015". The report outlines specific objectives and actions promoted in the Blueprint for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (2009-2015) under Section D5, which focuses on promoting quality living standards in ASEAN cities and urban areas. The strategic objective is to ensure that cities in the ASEAN region are both environmentally sustainable and able to meet the social and economic needs of the people. Various actions have been proposed to support this objective, which are relevant to our research, including improving water quality within ASEAN, sharing experiences and expertise in urban planning to enhance water management, sanitation and waste management, and reducing water pollution (ASEAN, 2016).

Luang Prabang, a globally renowned world heritage site, is actively participating in the ASEAN Model Cities program, which aims to promote urban sustainability throughout the region. As an esteemed participant in the program, Luang Prabang faces the challenging task of balancing its rich cultural history with the need for improved living standards that are developed in an environmentally sustainable manner. To this end, the city has implemented various wastewater pilot projects as part of its long-term Drainage and Sewerage Master Plan, which was established in 2013. The Ministry of Public Works and Transport serves as the National Focal Point for Environmentally Sustainable Cities (ESC) in Laos (ASEAN, 2019).

The ESC Model Cities Programme has been succeeded by the ASEAN SDGs Frontrunner Cities (FC) Programme, which was launched during a high-level seminar in March 2018 under the framework of the EAS Environment Ministers Meeting. The official announcement of this new program highlights its objective of enabling cities to transition into the more demanding role of spearheading local sustainability efforts guided by the comprehensive framework of the SDGs. This framework accords equal importance to environmental concerns and socio-economic development goals, thus promoting a balanced approach to sustainable development (ASEAN, n.d.).

2. Existing Academic Literature focused on Tourism and Luang Prabang

In a recent article, Labadi (2017) examines whether the conservation and management of World Heritage sites can contribute to sustainable development, using Luang Prabang as one of the case studies. The author begins by analyzing the World Heritage Convention’s text and the evolution of processes under the convention. Despite the original text’s failure to mention development or sustainable development, the operational guidelines have been modified over time to incorporate these concepts into the preservation mandate. The 2005 guidelines for implementation, for instance, declare that the "protection" and conservation of natural and cultural heritage significantly contribute to sustainable development (UNESCO 2005: Para. 6). This version also emphasizes the importance of community participation and recognizes the local community as a key stakeholder (Para. 12). In a further revision in 2011, the guidelines underscore the contribution of World Heritage sites to the "quality of life of communities" (UNESCO 2011, para. 119).

Labadi (2017) observes that in 2012, the World Heritage Committee took significant strides towards integrating sustainable development principles into their processes. The Committee employed the definition of sustainable development outlined in Realizing the Future We Want for All (UNCSD 2012), a document adopted at the Rio+ conference. This definition is centered around four key dimensions: inclusive social development, encompassing gender equality; inclusive economic development; environmental sustainability; and peace and security. In a 2014 meeting to discuss the new policy, there was a debate regarding the potential conflict between pursuing inclusive economic development and environmental
sustainability. Labadi herself was responsible for finalizing the gender equality component of the final version. The General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention adopted this new policy direction in 2015.

Labadi (2017) presents a case study on Luang Prabang, which highlights the challenges of implementing a sustainable development model. The case study demonstrates that the diversity of stakeholders, who lack coordination, have misaligned interests, and prioritize short-term tourism profits, makes it difficult to establish a functional sustainable development model. Following its designation as a World Heritage site, Luang Prabang received initial funding that aimed to preserve buildings of historical significance, as well as to improve public infrastructure and roads, rehabilitate drainage systems, and construct public sanitation facilities (Labadi, 2017). However, implementing sustainable development ideas proved challenging due to the differing visions of key stakeholders, including the French government, the Asian Development Bank, and the Laotian government.

Several articles highlight the challenges of coordinating with local stakeholders. For instance, Suntikul and Jachna (2013) explore the interaction between entrepreneurs and heritage regulators in the city. The authors observe that, at times, the perspectives of experts tasked with safeguarding heritage may conflict with how local communities engage with their heritage in a meaningful manner (Suntikul and Jachna, 2013). They suggest that interpreting heritage through collaborative rather than adversarial processes may foster more socially sustainable conservation practices.

Southisend and Walsh (2010) examine the perspectives of small and medium enterprise owners in selected cities in Laos. Their research reveals that management styles predominantly prioritize short-term, day-to-day goals, with limited consideration for long-term objectives and business sustainability. Furthermore, the authors note that the development of human resources is often viewed as a cost rather than an investment. While the article briefly touches on the role of academic institutions, the authors suggest that academic entrepreneurs with expertise in entrepreneurial research and the integration of technology and science in business administration could enhance entrepreneurial-related teaching materials.

### Methodology

The research commenced with a comprehensive literature review of the correlation between tourism and sustainable development goals, with a particular emphasis on UNESCO World Heritage sites. Subsequently, we conducted a new analysis by means of a series of interviews that were carried out over a three-week period in April 2023 in Luang Prabang and Vientiane, Laos. In addition, we were granted access to internal planning documents of the city of Luang Prabang, which we scrutinized together with national documents of Laos related to sustainable development goals, as well as ASEAN documents outlining strategies for achieving the SDGs in Southeast Asia.

Qualitative research methods will be utilized to gather in-depth information. The following study methods will be employed:

- Our latest analysis drew on interviews conducted in Luang Prabang with a range of stakeholders, including local government officials, members of civil society organizations, the director of SU’s tourism department, and a represen-

| Table 1. The primary target organization and number of participants in the interview. |
|------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| The primary target organization of the interview | No. of participants | Remark |
| Souphanouvong University | 5 | Discussion |
| Department of Tourism, Faculty of Economics and Tourism, Souphanouvong University | 4 | Discussion |
| Department of Planning and Investment, Luang Prabang province | 5 | Interview and discussion |
| Luang Prabang World Heritage Office, Luang Prabang province | 1 | Interview |
| Mainsson Souvannapoum Hotel, HR/Learning/CSR Manager, Ms. Alichith Phengsavanh | 1 | Interview & discussion |
| Department of Information, Culture and Tourism, Luang Prabang province | 3 | discussion |
| Department of Industry and Trade, Luang Prabang province | 2 | discussion |
| Department of Resource and Environment, Luang Prabang province | 3 | discussion |
| Total | 24 | |

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tative from UNESCO in Luang Prabang. To supplement these interviews, we also obtained internal planning materials for the city, which we cross-referenced with national Laos documents relating to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The primary target organization for the interview is expected to have around 24 participants. More details about the participants can be found in Table 1.

During the interview and subsequent discussion, we focused on several key themes. Firstly, we explored the synergies and trade-offs among the various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Secondly, we examined the processes and strategies involved in achieving a balance between different priorities. Thirdly, we discussed the importance of fostering positive relationships and engaging in consultations with stakeholders. Finally, we considered the future challenges facing the tourism industry in Luang Prabang, including regulatory frameworks, policy development, urban planning, public and private sector investment, business management, and environmental sustainability (The interview questions for the research are included as Table 2).

As part of our documentary research, we began by analyzing the Voluntary National Review of Laos’s report on sustainable development. We then conducted a comprehensive review of the existing literature on sustainable development objectives and tourism, paying particular attention to studies that focused on UNESCO World Heritage sites.

1. Scope of Research
This study primarily focuses on SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities in Luang Prabang. It aims to investigate this objective with a specific emphasis while also supporting three critical goals: SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 5 - Gender Equality, and SDG 4 - Quality Education. Additionally, this research examines the environmental objectives of SDG 6 - Clean Water and SDG 14 - Life Below Water, particularly in relation to the town’s two vital rivers, Mekhong and Nam Khan, which are integral to its survival.

2. Conceptual Framework of Research
In order for cities and communities to be sustainable, it is imperative to strive towards three overarching goals - social, economic, and environmental. The achievement of these goals is crucial for the well-being of communities and the planet as a whole.

This study emphasizes the significance of social goals, which require support from two distinct areas - SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Similarly, economic goals necessitate the backing of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), while environmental goals must be reinforced by SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water).

By addressing all three of these fundamental goals, cities

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| **II. Processes and Balancing** |
| 3. Can you explain your local planning processes for the SDGs? |
| 4. Are there specific local TARGETS (and indicators) for some of the SDG goals? |
| 5. How do you try to balance and meet the need of your citizens for the SDGs, with the needs and desires of the visitors and tourists to Luang Prabang? |

| **III. Relationships and Consultation** |
| 6. How do you work between the local, the provincial and the national government for progress on the SDGs? |
| 7. How do you consult with citizens, civil society organizations, and NGOs in planning for the SDGs? |
| 8. How do you consult with the UNESCO office in Luang Prabang on planning for the SDGs? |

| **IV. Future Challenges** |
| 9. What do you think is your biggest challenge with regards to the sustainable development goals? |
and communities can truly achieve sustainable growth and development. The successful accomplishment of these goals is essential for the realization of SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities. SDG 11 aims to promote inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and communities, and the attainment of the three goals is a crucial step towards achieving this objective.

**Result, Discussion and Analysis**

To promote sustainable growth in Luang Prabang, the provincial government has implemented five-year development plans. The latest plan, spanning from 2021-2025, aims to achieve significant progress over the first three years of implementation (2021-2023). While some objectives may be accomplished during this period, it is worth noting that the plan’s implementation began halfway through its timeline, resulting in a few incomplete components.

According from the interview with the Deputy Director of the Provincial Department of Industry and Trade, and the Director of the World Heritage Office (UNESCO), the government of Luang Prabang is committed to advancing SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, as well as SDG 5 on Gender Equality, recognizing that economic transformation has resulted in a shift in the distribution of labor and job creation. To ensure a balanced workforce, the provincial government has taken measures to create jobs, including policies that encourage foreign investment in various sectors, such as tourism, factory production, and dam construction. Companies and industries can rely on a steady supply of skilled workers from institutions like Souphanouvong University, which provides higher education across eight provinces in northern Laos, and supports the establishment of private colleges, institutes, and technical and vocational schools. Short training courses are also provided to those who may not have access to higher education, enabling them to acquire the necessary skills for employment or entrepreneurship. Despite the progress made towards gender equality in terms of education and employment opportunities, women's participation in the labor force still lags behind that of men.

The tourism industry stands at the forefront of promoting economic growth in Luang Prabang, as the provincial administration implements strategies for development. Luang Prabang is renowned for its picturesque mountainous terrain, which boasts a natural and cultural atmosphere. However, the growth of the economy is inevitably accompanied by an increase in tourism-related pollution, particularly in the form of excessive waste and a lack of effective drainage and sewage control systems. Although measures have been taken in the past to address these issues, the sustainability of these projects has been questionable, as the management or systems put in place were not maintained. For instance, the garbage collection business in the town does not mandate the segregation of cans, paper, and food waste. Furthermore, during the rainy season, inadequate drainage and sewage systems result in flooding inside homes.

The responsibility of preserving the UNESCO World Heritage site lies with the heritage office, which is tasked with creating regulations to oversee building development, rebuilding, and repair. Additionally, the conservation heritage office must work in conjunction with allied organizations such as the tourism office to educate the public about customs and culture, such as morning arms giving, offering food to monks, and participating in traditional festivals, including budget and activities. This educational effort aims to cultivate compliance with government policies. To this end, the government convenes meetings with the community to discuss plans and activities, which are then announced to the public through the head of district or village. The head of the village is responsible for disseminating these announcements to the inhabitants of the village and implementing the provincial plan, which may involve selecting individuals to participate in the event or col-
lecting funds according to the announcement.

The province aims to attract a higher number of foreign visitors to Luang Prabang and encourage them to extend their stay. This, in turn, will bolster the local economy by providing more opportunities for businesses to offer lodging, dining, and other services. To achieve this objective, the provincial administration has implemented various measures, such as permitting domestic and foreign investors to establish standardized guesthouses and hotels and enhancing infrastructure, including road construction and airport expansion. The province also focuses on human resource development, providing education and training, and facilitating private healthcare services for tourists. Currently, there is only one private clinic that has signed a contract. Additionally, the province is exploring new tourist destinations and assessing their potential to increase the number of visitors to Luang Prabang.

1. Analysis based on Sustainable Development Goals

1.1 SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth

1) Economic Growth

According to the Summary and evaluation of the mid-term implementation of the 05-year socio-economic development plan IX (2021-2025), Luang Prabang Province, Provincial Department of Planning and Investment (2023: p2-10), the province's economy has demonstrated steady growth over the past half-term, with an annual rate of 4.2% (3.6% in 2021 and 4.8% in 2022). Despite this upward trend, the growth rate has yet to reach the target average of 5.2% per year. The agriculture-forestry sector has exceeded the average plan by 2.07%, growing at an average rate of 4.02% per year. Similarly, the industry-crafts sector has surpassed the average plan by 6.7%, growing at an average rate of 5.71% per year. However, the service sector's average growth rate of 2.63% per year falls short of the plan by 6.07%. The primary factors driving economic growth are improved agricultural output, industry growth, and the recovery of some services. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected each sector's growth, resulting in the economy falling short of the plan.

Over the past two years, the gross domestic product (GDP) has totaled 22,792,085.66 million kip, representing 49.85% of the five-year plan's target of 45,720,810.00 million kip. The average annual GDP over this period was 11,396,042.84 million kip. Looking ahead to 2022, the average income per person is projected to be 30.81 million kip, equivalent to 1,925 US dollars, based on a population of 474,366 persons and an average exchange rate of 1 dollar to 16,000 kip. The projected GDP for 2022 is 14,615,518.70 million kip.

The global and national economic downturns are anticipated to have an impact on the economic framework of Luang Prabang province in the upcoming two years (2021 and 2022). In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the province's economy has undergone significant changes to adapt to the current conditions. The specific details of the operating structure are as follows:

The agriculture-forestry sector constitutes an average of 44.47% of the total economic activity, with the 2025 plan targeting a reduction to 24.5%. This sector's share is predicted to rise from 28.5% in 2020 to 48.84% in 2022.

The industry-craft sector currently accounts for an average of 22.43% of GDP, up from 20.34% in 2022 and 24.96% in 2020. The 2025 plan aims to increase this sector's share to 27%.

The service sector represents an average of 33.10% of the total economic activity, with the 2025 plan targeting an increase to 48%. This sector's share is expected to decrease from 46.54% in 2020 to 30.82% in 2022.

2) Decent Work

According to the Summary and evaluation of the mid-term implementation of the 05-year socio-economic development plan IX (2021-2025), Luang Prabang Province, Provincial Department of Planning and Investment (2023: p14-15), the labor force in Luang Prabang Province is undergoing a transformation that is closely tied to the province's evolving economic structure. The government and private sectors have taken a keen interest in enhancing the skills of the labor force, particularly among youth and women who require additional training to improve their employability prospects. This focus on skills training has gained momentum in recent times, reflecting the growing demand for a skilled labor force that can adapt to the province's changing economic landscape.

To elevate job competencies and foster increased employment opportunities, we have partnered with business enterprises and vocational schools, with a keen focus on cultivating a skilled labor force that serves as the main driver of socio-economic advancement.

The overall headcount amounted to 6,717 individuals, with 2,977 of them being women, resulting in an average of 3,359 people per year. This figure surpassed the target by 2.35 bil-
lion (equivalent to 1,000 individuals per annum). Additionally, out of the total count, 6,133 individuals secured employment, with 2,919 of them being women, averaging 3,067 individuals per year. This achievement exceeded the set goal by 86.44% (equivalent to 1,645 individuals per annum).

The labor force comprises 8,131 individuals, serving across 159 units, of which 2,044 are female. The female workforce includes 1,979 foreign workers and 176 domestic employees. The internal regulations have been established for 83% of the targeted units, which translates to 71 out of 86 units. To address the concerns raised by employees, nine out of the 16 issues received were resolved, meeting 56.25% of the 80% target.

As the policy implementer for meritorious individuals, in compliance with Decree 272/Gov, issued on 9/16/2015, 97 individuals were awarded, receiving a total of 1,666.59 million kip. Furthermore, training was successfully conducted on database comparison and policy requisites for labor and welfare officers in the city, ultimately enabling the closing of accounts for 51 villages across nine districts. Additionally, land-use certificates have been granted to 34 retired employees, while 45 villages have been designated as labor development and social welfare villages. Notably, 6,044 families in eight districts and one city, equivalent to an average of 22.5 villages per year, exceeded the target by 25% (six districts, three villages per year).

1.2 SDG 4 on Quality of Education

According to the Summary and evaluation of the mid-term implementation of the 05-year socio-economic development plan IX (2021-2025), Luang Prabang Province, Provincial Department of Planning and Investment (2023: p12-13), encouraging the Education Sector to Develop Human Capital: Presently, Luang Prabang boasts 71 primary schools catering to young learners, 157 kindergartens, and 393 pre-schools providing education to 16,910 pupils. The percentage of 0-2 year old children enrolled in schools stands at 4.06%, falling short of the targeted 47.76% set by the five-year plan (which aimed for 8.5%). Meanwhile, the percentage of 3-5 year old children in school is at 59.33%, compared to the five-year plan's goal of 99% (with 64% as the benchmark). The percentage of 5 year olds enrolled in schools is at 84%, slightly lower than the targeted 92% set by the five-year plan (which aimed for 91%).

Enhancing Primary Education in the Province: The entire province boasts 717 primary schools, 624 of which are fully functional and cover 88% of the total primary school population. This falls slightly short of the five-year plan's target of 98%. These schools have a total of 2,619 classrooms catering to 58,681 students, resulting in a student-to-classroom ratio of 22:1. The student-to-teacher ratio at 21:1, with 2,847 primary teachers currently employed. The net enrollment ratio for primary school students is 100.2%, which is slightly above the five-year plan's target of 101.15% (with 101% being the benchmark). The primary school dropout rate is 3.5%, while the repetition rate stands at 2.3%. Finally, the rate of students continuing on to 5th grade is 84.31%.

Improving Middle School Education: There are currently 57 middle schools in the region, equipped with 846 classrooms and catering to 36,792 students. The total number of staff and teachers is 2,080 people. The rate of students entering middle school stands at 90.7%, which falls short of the five-year plan's target of 94% (with 96.96% being the benchmark). The rate of middle school dropouts is at 10.97%, while the repetition rate is merely 0.7%. Finally, only 68.63% of students were able to continue on to the fourth grade of middle school.

There are a total of 47 fully operational high schools in this region, equipped with 352 classrooms that cater to the educational needs of approximately 15,546 students. The current admission rate stands at 50.21%, which is a slight decrease from the 67% achieved during the implementation of the five-year plan (previous five-year plan had a 71.4% admission rate). However, the dropout rate remains relatively low at 9.28%, while the repetition rate is at a commendable 0.39%. Approximately 80.43% of students who enroll in high school continue to remain in the system up until grade 7.

The region is home to a single prestigious university and 10 colleges, three of which are privately-owned. These institutions collectively employ a faculty and teaching staff of 980, including 353 female educators. The student population is currently at 16,526, with females accounting for 7,151 of the total number. The region has also seen a significant number of students participating in overseas study programs, with 815 students studying abroad, 330 of whom were in Vietnam (including 137 females) and 485 in China (including 197 females). In addition, 2,656 students were sent to pursue further studies at both domestic and foreign universities and colleges.
The implementation of non-formal education has resulted in a literacy rate of 99.48% among individuals aged 15-24, compared to the 5-year plan which achieved a rate of 99%. Similarly, the literacy rate for individuals aged 15-40 has reached 99.42% through non-formal education, just shy of the 5-year plan's 100% target (which had achieved a rate of 99%).

1.3 SDG 5 on Gender Equality

According to information from interviews in April 2023, it is imperative to promote equal access to development for women and children, ensuring that they receive full protection of their rights and benefits within the framework of socio-economic development. This includes advocating for gender equality and creating opportunities for marginalized communities to thrive.

The General Assembly's resolution was published, and the family name was recited on several significant occasions, totaling 677 times. Additionally, training sessions were conducted 14 times to educate provincial and district-level employees on collecting news. Furthermore, the Provincial Women's Association advertised 305 times through media channels, and 120 radio programs were organized.

This initiative aims to raise awareness about violence against women and children, targeting specific groups to provide support and technical assistance, rescue children, and assist victims of human trafficking in returning to their families. The initiative has collected information jointly with authorities 51 times, including six women, and has cooperated with organizations addressing marriage problems, such as premature and forced marriage. The initiative covers a total of 20 villages and four target districts, namely Nam Bak, Ngoi, Viengkham, and Phonthong, with a total of 54 individuals, including 54 women, and 37 reported cases of rape.

The total number of members increased to 86,232, including 5,497 new female members. The women's union at all levels has prioritized the dissemination of relevant documents and recommended the implementation of the "03 Good Gifts" and competition terms. They have also taken responsibility for evaluating the performance of village and grassroots units across 11 districts and cities, accounting for 90% of the total units. Additionally, the union has managed to announce the "03 Good Women's Union District" in all areas, with grassroots units in the province accounting for 90% or more.

Empowering rural women to establish financial support networks among themselves is a crucial step towards enhancing their collective economic agency. To this end, a remarkable 260 groups have been established, with a membership count of 13,524 and a total fund of 15,345.53 million kip. These groups have also facilitated loans amounting to 12,281.23 million kip. Furthermore, comprehensive follow-ups and encouragement have been provided to foster resilience in seven districts (Provincial Department of Planning and Investment, 2023).

1.4 SDG 6 on Clean Water (Water supply)

According to the Summary and evaluation of the mid-term implementation of the 05-year socio-economic development plan IX (2021-2025), Luang Prabang Province, Provincial Department of Planning and Investment (2023: p16), the water supply infrastructure in Luang Prabang province has the capacity to produce an impressive daily average of 58,000 cubic meters, yielding a total of 23.03 million cubic meters produced, 18.43 million cubic meters distributed, with a value of 73,066.83 million kip, and a loss of 6.60 million cubic meters of water. The province boasts 10 water plants - 08 state-owned and 02 private - with 05 located in the capital, Phabang, and one each in the districts of Chiang Ngan, Nan, Nambak, Ngoi, and Phonxay. Presently, 24,289 households, constituting 28.35% of the province's total population of 85,662 families, reside in 111 settlements with access to water. Furthermore, 20 factories in Luang Prabang serve the needs of over 687 villages, which equates to 88.87% of all villages in the province.

1.5 SDG 14 on Life below the Rivers

The Lao PDR, including Luang Prabang, currently lacks a comprehensive recycling system. Moreover, several regions lack proper waste collection, resulting in indiscriminate dumping of waste in fields and rivers. This practice poses a severe threat to the environment, particularly the safety of fish from the Mekong and Khan rivers that locals consume. The absence of a townwide rubbish division system in Luang Prabang necessitates the promotion of trash separation, the use of environmentally friendly materials, and the development of the city as a clean and green town. Unfortunately, there are no drainage or sewage control systems in place to support this initiative, and previous attempts to address this issue have failed due to inadequate management and support. To remedy
this, locals and businesses in hotels, guesthouses, and restaurants must be encouraged to participate in environmentally sustainable practices.

The provincial administration, however, has plans to address climate change and promote green growth. These plans include the completion of training programs, the publication of guidelines for implementing environmental quality promotion work, and the establishment of a control mechanism to reduce waste through the 3Rs across the province. Additionally, a green agency office has been established. The administration has also successfully established 52 green schools, which accounts for 57.78% of the planned 90 schools, 29 green villages (29% of the planned 100 villages), and 16 green service facilities. Furthermore, 57 locations have been cleaned, exceeding the plan by 2.85 times ( Provincial Department of Planning and Investment (2023: p19-20). However, there are still four plans for waste fields that cannot be constructed, with one in each city.

2. Discussion

2.1 Economic development and international tourism satisfaction, and Sustainable Development for Local citizens

Based on interviews with staff from the Department of Information, Culture and Tourism and the Head of the Department of Heritage in Luang Prabang, it is clear that economic development has led to a significant increase in international tourism in the region. Recognizing the potential for tourism as a strategy for economic development, Luang Prabang has focused on promoting the production of agricultural products and developing tourism-based industries as a means of achieving sustainable development for local citizens. For example, the sale of handicrafts and other locally-made products has presented new income-generating opportunities for residents. Despite these positive developments, however, it is difficult to determine the full economic benefits of tourism for the community due to the lack of an accounting system in Laos. Additionally, a significant proportion of the money spent by tourists may leave the country in the form of economic leakage from foreign-owned businesses and outside tour operators. While official job creation figures in the tourism sector appear strong, it is important to consider the types of jobs created and who benefits from them. Many of these jobs are low-paying and unskilled or semi-skilled in nature, and limited educational opportunities locally make it difficult for residents to gain higher-paying jobs. Furthermore, outside business people represent a significant proportion of those profiting from high-return tourism investment projects. Therefore, while tourism has brought economic benefits to Luang Prabang, there is a need for more comprehensive accounting systems and greater efforts to ensure that local residents are not left behind in the development process. This could include increasing access to education and skills training, as well as promoting local ownership and control of tourism-related businesses.

2.2 Answering the research question that “How does the city of Luang Prabang attempt to balance its objectives in terms of international tourism as a UNESCO World Heritage site and economic development, with selected Sustainable Development Goals for its citizens?”

I would like to present some information based on the Comprehensive Environmental Management Plan for Luang Prabang Province, as well as reports from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and the Department of Planning and Investment. The implementation of the Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2023) of the Seventh has been underway for three years, with the Resolution IX of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party Center and the Resolution of the Sixth Congress of the Luang Prabang Provincial Party Committee guiding the strategic direction of the people’s Democratic Republic. This includes a focus on environmental protection, peacekeeping, social order, and international cooperation. To ensure that Luang Prabang continues to prosper and develop continuously, the province has set forth its socio-economic development plan for 2021-2025. This plan is designed to guide all people across the province in implementing the Party's new approach to economic prosperity and development.

The development strategies for Luang Prabang province are detailed below: 1) Foster political stability, order, peace, security, and justice in Luang Prabang. 2) Develop Luang Prabang as a green, clean, and sustainable World Heritage City with a strong focus on environmental protection. 3) Establish Luang Prabang as a center for cultural, natural, and historical tourism. 4) Develop clean and sustainable agriculture in Luang Prabang province, along with processing industries for export. 5) Establish Luang Prabang province as a hub for education and healthcare institutions in the northern region. 6) Utilize the hydroelectric power potential of Luang Prabang province.
7) Establish Luang Prabang province as a commercial, investment, transit, and financial center for the northern region.

2.3 Opportunities and Strengths of Sustainable Cities and Communities in Luang Prabang

Despite facing multiple challenges and uncertainties in the global and regional contexts, such as the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of the socio-economic development plan of Luang Prabang Province in the past two years has made significant progress. The Party Committee and the governing bodies at all levels have provided effective guidance and leadership, while the People's Council has closely monitored the situation and the cooperation of all ethnic groups has been instrumental in achieving political stability and social harmony. Moreover, the support and assistance from friendly countries have also contributed to the province's economic growth. Although the price of fuel and consumer goods has increased, the service sector and tourism industry within the province have recovered and are showing a positive trend, which bodes well for the overall development of the province.

The socio-economic infrastructure in both urban and rural areas has undergone significant development. Educational initiatives have been extended to remote rural areas, with a focus on enhancing the quality of teaching and curriculum. Likewise, the health network has undergone a steady expansion and improvement over time.

2.4 Weakness of Sustainable Cities and Communities in Luang Prabang

Along with the aforementioned achievements, there are still some lingering issues that require attention. In comparison to the benchmark of potential, economic growth appears to be lacking in rationality. Despite an increase in average income per capita, actual income levels among the populace, particularly farmers, remain low. Inequalities in society persist, particularly with regards to income and development disparities between urban and rural regions.

The provision of educational services does not yet ensure quality, with many expectations remaining unfulfilled and some even showing signs of regression. Certain districts have yet to prioritize the expansion of nursery schools, kindergartens, and primary preparation schools to remote rural areas. Efforts to construct schools that adhere to the quality standards of primary education are not yet widespread. Additionally, there exists a notable disparity in teaching and learning between urban and rural areas, particularly in remote regions.

While there has been progress in implementing public health indicators, there still remains room for improvement. While many indicators have been met, there are still voices within society expressing concerns regarding the quality of healthcare services.

Effective management and preservation of the customs, refined culture of the people of Luang Prabang, and conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of the nation's cultural heritage, including ancient sites, monuments, and historical landmarks, have not been accomplished to their full potential.

1) The jurisdiction for overseeing tourism resources and visitors remains inadequate, with a lack of control over tourists themselves. The necessary infrastructure to adequately support the tourism industry has yet to be fully developed, and the cost of general services remains prohibitively high.

2) The development of labor skills has not kept pace with the demands of society, and the regulation of labor management inspections remains lax.

3) The management and allocation of land continue to be inadequate, revealing rampant improper land acquisition, transactions, and other societal phenomena.

4) Addressing the issue of state investment remains a daunting task due to budgetary constraints. The prolonged existence of numerous debts coupled with the unavailability of social development funds in alignment with predetermined targets further exacerbates the situation.

5) Despite the investment situation posing challenges, both domestic and foreign private sector investments have made concerted efforts to address bottlenecks, barriers, and transparency issues in this realm. However, even after evaluating investment proposals, a lack of harmonious coordination proves to be a significant impediment to their implementation.

6) The oscillations in the currency exchange rate, inflationary pressures, and escalating costs of commodities have exerted a profound impact on the daily existence of individuals, the workforce, and law enforcement officials, giving rise to a host of societal maladies, notably including theft, burglary, and drug smuggling.
2.5 The Cause of Weakness of Sustainable Cities and Communities in Luang Prabang

1) As a result of the dissemination and integration of economic and social development plans for party workers and members, the level of detail and depth in departmental, district, and city plans has not yet reached the necessary level.

2) Due to the extensive scope of its content, the sub-plan for socio-economic development lacks systematic and continuous plans and projects. Many departments are without plans, and even in those where plans exist, they have yet to be translated into work plans, financial plans, or personnel plans. Monitoring and reporting on plan implementation is significantly delayed, and inconsistencies in the plan's content remain. Additionally, insufficient attention has been given to extracting lessons from the plan.

3) The outbreak of COVID-19 and natural disasters have had a severe impact on the economy of the province, resulting in significant damage to infrastructure, production, and property of the local populace.

4) The implementation of effective strategies to incentivize and galvanize entrepreneurs to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities and uphold meticulous accounting practices remains inadequate. Additionally, the adoption of cutting-edge revenue collection technologies remains limited in scope.

5) Numerous state investment projects have remained unresolved for years, resulting in a dearth of available funds that cannot be readily allocated towards new developmental projects.

6) The policies and mechanisms aimed at bolstering both domestic and foreign private investment possess certain deficiencies, primarily in the realm of promotion, management, and monitoring, where rigorous systems have yet to be established.

7) The condition of social deprivation undoubtedly has a significant impact on the economic and social progress of each community. Therefore, it is imperative to address this issue in order to foster growth and development.

2.6 Recommendations for Sustainable Cities and Communities in Luang Prabang

1) To enhance the education and training of political ideology in a comprehensive and profound manner, with the aim of ensuring that all party members - including personnel, soldiers, police officers, and individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds - possess a thorough comprehension and integration of the party's policies, laws, resolutions, orders, and development plans. This will enable them to effectively organize and actualize these objectives.

2) The active pursuit of building a strong political foundation and promoting comprehensive rural development constitutes a vital aspect of the three constructions initiative. To achieve this objective, priority should be given to prioritizing the welfare of employees, allocating adequate funding to boost production at the grassroots level, providing permanent employment opportunities, and promoting model families in various domains. These efforts aim to eliminate poverty and uplift the living standards of the populace.

3) Enhance the trajectory of the socio-economic development plan by crafting intricate and comprehensive blueprints and initiatives, providing guidance towards successful implementation.

4) Elevate the willingness to seek input from individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds in order to promote stability. Address political resistance and investigate the occurrence of all types of limitations, while augmenting responsibility in the management of state and society to serve as a driving force in fulfilling the duty of safeguarding and cultivating the province to attain prosperity and resilience.

Conclusion

The socio-economic development plan for Luang Prabang province aims to promote sustainable development while preserving the province's unique cultural and natural heritage. The plan focuses on political stability, environmental protection, cultural tourism, sustainable agriculture, education and healthcare, hydroelectric power, and commercial and financial development. It is designed to guide the implementation of the Party's new approach to economic prosperity and development.

Despite challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and the global economic crisis conflict, Luang Prabang Province has
made significant progress in implementing its socio-economic development plan over the past two years. This progress is attributed to effective leadership, monitoring by the People's Council, cooperation among ethnic groups, and support from friendly countries. While fuel and consumer goods prices have risen, the service and tourism industries have recovered, and infrastructure in both urban and rural areas has improved, with a focus on education and healthcare.

While there have been notable achievements in various areas in Laos, there are still several challenges that need to be addressed. Economic growth lacks rationality, and income and development disparities persist between urban and rural regions. Educational services need improvement, particularly in remote areas, and quality healthcare services remain a concern. The preservation of cultural heritage and effective management of tourism resources also require attention. The lack of harmonious coordination hinders private sector investment, and inflation and escalating costs of commodities contribute to societal maladies.

The province faces several challenges, including the need for more detailed and systematic socio-economic development plans, the impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters on the local economy, inadequate strategies to incentivize entrepreneurs and improve revenue collection, unresolved state investment projects, deficiencies in policies and mechanisms for private investment, and the impact of social deprivation on progress and development.

The province aims to enhance political education and training for party members of diverse backgrounds, prioritize rural development and welfare of employees, eliminate poverty and uplift living standards, craft comprehensive socio-economic development plans, seek input from diverse ethnic backgrounds, address political resistance and limitations, and cultivate the province to attain prosperity and resilience.

Limitation of Studies

Scope of Studies: The study only focuses on the role of local institutions in promoting sustainable tourism in Luang Prabang, Laos, and does not provide a broader understanding of sustainable tourism practices in other regions.

Qualitative research limitations: The study uses qualitative research methods, which may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues and challenges facing sustainable tourism in the region.

Lack of quantitative data: The study does not provide quantitative data to support the findings, which may limit the credibility of the results.

Limited stakeholder representation: The study may not represent the views and perspectives of all stakeholders involved in sustainable tourism in Luang Prabang.

Limited generalizability: The findings of the study may not be generalizable to other regions or contexts, as the study is specific to Luang Prabang, Laos.

Lack of consideration of external factors: The study does not consider external factors such as political instability or natural disasters that may affect sustainable tourism in the region.

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