



German Red Cross

The German Red Cross in Laos A decade of action



Who we are

Internationally, the **German Red Cross** implements humanitarian and development programmes together with local Red Cross/Red Crescent partners. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic (or Laos), German Red Cross partners with the Lao Red Cross, where our primary focus is with blood donation, processing and transfusion. The German Red Cross is an approved international non-governmental organisation in Laos and we maintain a modest project office at the Lao Red Cross National Headquarters in central Vientiane.

The Lao Red Cross is auxiliary to the Lao Government and provides humanitarian services to support vulnerable communities to improve their health and livelihoods and help them in times of disaster.



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- Is responsible for the national blood service
- Undertakes health and care activities in the community, including an emergency ambulance service and a first aid training programme
- Provides services to communities to prepare for and provide relief during times of disaster
- Has an active youth volunteer programme
- Runs a family links programme which helps to reunite and keep families connected
- Undertakes community resilience projects across the country
- Operates several massage and sauna centres which generate income, and train and employ local staff to help the sustainable development of communities
- Also works with the International Committee of the Red Cross, the French Red Cross and the Swiss Red Cross, all of whom have representative offices in Laos
- Works with other members of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, such as those from Thailand, Japan and Korea



Where we work

Laos is the only landlocked country in Southeast Asia, with a thickly forested, mountainous landscape, and a tropical monsoonal climate. The Mekong River runs along much of the western boundary with Thailand. As with Myanmar and southern China, Laos is ethnically very diverse. There are 49 officially recognised ethnic groups representing four ethno-linguistic families, with over 80 languages. The vibrant traditional culture and indigenous knowledge of this diverse population permeates into all aspects of Lao life.

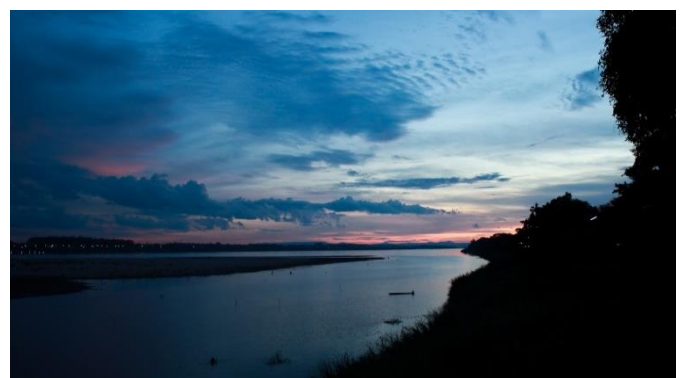


Laos is the most heavily bombed nation, per capita, in the world - during the Second Indochina War between 1964 and 1973, the United States of America dropped two million tons of ordnance on Laos, thirty per cent of which (around 80 million bombs) failed to detonate. There have been untold death and casualties, and the clearance of unexploded ordnance continues.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, with whom it was strongly allied, Laos has upheld its position in a shifting economic and political environment, and continues its transition from a centrally planned to a market-oriented system. The country's abundant natural resources (forestry, agricultural land, hydropower and minerals) have helped it to achieve robust economic growth throughout the last decade. If the country continues growing at this pace, and if human development outcomes improve in parallel, Laos expects to begin the move out of 'Least Developed Country' status by 2020.



However, now with a population of around seven million, Laos remains one of South East Asia's poorest and least developed countries. Over 20% of the population of Laos still lives in poverty, 44% of under-five children are stunted (too short for their age) and 27% are moderately or severely underweight (indicative of extreme poverty and hunger), and Laos still has one of the highest maternal mortality ratios in the region. The government and development partners are working hard to address such issues and there have been many improvements in recent years - halving poverty, reducing hunger, and improving education and health outcomes. There has been much progress in health service delivery and access to health services - investments by the Government of Laos in basic health have helped to improve equitable access to health services in remote and mountainous areas and have improved maternal, infant and child mortality.



What we do

The blood service was first established in Vientiane in 1975, and the Lao Red Cross is now solely responsible for the national blood service, from national to provincial and district levels. Blood is needed during complications at childbirth and during surgery, and by patients with thalassaemia, anaemia, kidney failure, haemorrhage, dengue fever and accident victims.

The full range of laboratory-based blood banking activities includes screening, testing, processing, blood component separation and storage. There are also collection and transport requirements and a stock management system is in place to manage the supply of blood at national through to provincial and district levels.

There have been major achievements in the promotion of voluntary blood donation over the last decade. However, despite the annual increase of blood donations collected by the Lao Red Cross, the supply is insufficient to cover the present demand, particularly in rural areas with limited health services, where those in poor health can die from blood loss when adequate safe blood for transfusion is not available. Similarly, needs are changing in urban areas - there are on average, 25 or more serious life-threatening road traffic accidents weekly in Vientiane alone.

As the socio-economic development of the country progresses, with an annual population growth rate of 1.7%, and health systems continue to improve, the demand for blood is set to increase further.

The ongoing blood safety programme supported by German Red Cross aims to address these issues and is planned until at least 2020.

German Red Cross support includes:

Voluntary donor motivation

- Between 2010 and 2017, blood donations nationally rose from around 26,000 to 44,500, together with an increase in the proportion of returning blood donors.
- Communication, publicity and educational materials on voluntary blood donation and campaign strategies have been developed.
- Youth Donor Clubs and lists of emergency donors ('walking blood donors') have been established at provincial and district levels.

Facilities and equipment

- The programme to date has supported the construction and development of provincial level facilities in five provinces and 14 district blood storage units.
- Provision of test kits, reagents and blood bags and equipment.

Development of capacity within the Lao Red Cross National Blood Transfusion Service

- Significant training and knowledge exchange and workshops at district, provincial, national and international levels.
- GRC domestic blood services have been involved in providing technical inputs over quality management.
- The programme has supported policy development and advocacy with Government Ministries.

Additional strategic and operational focus

- Thalassaemia
- Clinical waste management

Thalassaemia

Thalassaemia is the name for a group of inherited conditions of the blood. People with thalassaemia major (the most severe type) produce too little haemoglobin, used by red blood cells to carry oxygen around the body. This can make them very anaemic (tired, short of breath and pale), and can cause retarded growth and bone deformities. In the absence of appropriate medical care, affected children die at a young age.

Thalassaemia mainly affects people of Mediterranean, South Asian, Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern origin. Laos has one of the highest rates of thalassaemia in the world.

People with thalassaemia major will need specialist care throughout their lives. Regular blood transfusions are given to treat and prevent anaemia; in severe cases these are needed around once a month, together with treatment with medications to remove the excess iron from the body that builds up as a result of having regular blood transfusions. In addition to the struggle faced by patients coping with the disease, thalassaemia has great emotional, social and financial repercussions for families as a whole.

Thalassaemia is not an obvious priority in Laos, yet over 60,000 people are thought to be affected, and the National Blood Transfusion Service at the forefront – Lao Red Cross works with the government on strategy and policy, and with local communities and hospitals to improve awareness about thalassaemia and the uptake of treatment.

German Red Cross projects in Laos

Project title	Location	Approx. Euro*	Period
Voluntary Blood Donor Recruitment and Retention	Vientiane	310,000	2007 - 2011
Development of Blood Transfusion Services (BTS) in selected rural areas of Laos	9 Provinces	490,000	2011 - 2014
Integration of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) within selected areas of Lao PDR	9 Provinces	100,000	2013 - 2014
Further development of blood transfusion services (BTS) in selected areas of Northern Laos	5 Provinces	991,000	2015 - 2017
Consolidation of the blood system in selected rural areas of Laos	Nationwide	955,000	2018 – 2020

* Our thanks to the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), who fund the majority of our work in Laos.



Donation at the temple

The village head of Nongsa is already awaiting the Red Cross team in the temple. In fact, this is where the villagers come to donate blood regularly. A four metre high golden Buddha radiates peace while the necessary tables and donor couches are placed in front of him. One by one, the villagers come to the temple. Without haste, each blood donor is examined carefully, questioned and asked to lie on one of the couches, so that a unit of their blood can be collected.

A young man with a Red Cross T-shirt stands out. 'Who is this?' I ask Dr. Souli, the head of the Red Cross Provincial Branch. 'That's Mr. Somchai. He's an active Red Cross helper, who has already donated blood four times. Many villagers donate blood regularly. If the hospital desperately needs blood in an emergency, we can ask these people without ever being turned down.'

Two hours later, enough blood donations have been made and the mobile Red Cross team is ready to depart. As we leave the hospitable villagers of Nongsa, I think of other provinces where blood donation facilities are more limited or where mobile blood donation teams are poorly equipped. Today, however, we can see that donating blood can be just as natural as going to the temple.

Dr. Tim Bray
Country Representative
German Red Cross, Laos

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

- HUMANITY** The Red Cross, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours – in its international and national capacity – to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.
- IMPARTIALITY** It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours only to relieve suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.
- NEUTRALITY** In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Red Cross may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.
- INDEPENDENCE** The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.
- VOLUNTARY SERVICE** It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.
- UNITY** There can be only one Red Cross or one Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.
- UNIVERSALITY** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

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German Red Cross

The German Red Cross is part of this global community, and in its capacity as a National Society and a humanitarian organisation the German Red Cross is tasked with a range of activities at the national level:

- Rescue and first aid
- Health services, including blood services
- Aid for the elderly, including care and a home visiting service
- Aid for children, young people and families
- A tracing service
- The Youth Red Cross

The German Red Cross is also operational worldwide in the field of humanitarian aid - both in acute emergency situations (disaster relief) and in long-term development cooperation projects. The German Red Cross is currently working in about 55 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

German Red Cross Headquarters

International Cooperation
Carstenstr. 58
12205 Berlin
Germany
Tel: +49 30 85 404 0

German Red Cross Laos Country Office

Setthathirath Ave.
Impasse Xieng Nhune
PO Box 2948
Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR
Tel: +856 20 96 19 37 18

Donations account

Bank für Sozialwirtschaft
Account number: 41 41 41
Bank code: 370 205 00
IBAN: DE63370205000005023307
BIC: BFSWDE33XXX