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Report of the baseline study

Reducing vulnerability in the Lao People's Democratic Republic:
Advancing Social Protection and Labour Rights and Entitlements in
the Coffee and Tea sectors (SOLAR)



SOLAR: Report of the baseline study

January 2023

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Abbreviations

ARC	Agriculture Research Center of Southern Laos
ASDSP	Association to Support the Development of Peasant Societies
CLEAN	Creating Linkages for Expanded Agricultural Networks
CPC	Bolaven Plateau Coffee Producers Cooperative
CSO	civil society organization
DAFO	District Agriculture and Forestry Office
EU	European Union
FDI	foreign direct investment
FGD	focus group discussion
GDP	gross domestic product
KII	key informant interview
KOICA	Korea International Cooperation Agency
LCA	Lao Coffee Association
LFTU	Lao Federation of Trade Unions
LNCCI	Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry
MHP	Maeying Huamjai Phattana (Women Mobilizing for Development)
MoAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MoHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MoLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
OSH	occupational safety and health
PTPA	Paksong Tea Promotion Association
PTSE	Phan-Thin Social Enterprise
SOLAR	Advancing Social Protection and Labour Rights and Entitlements in the Coffee and Tea sectors of Lao PDR
UXO	unexploded ordnance
VZF	Vision Zero Fund

1. Introduction

1.1. Background¹

“Reducing Vulnerability in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic: Advancing Social Protection and Labour Rights and Entitlements in the Coffee and Tea Sectors (SOLAR)” is a project funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the ILO and Oxfam in partnership with the Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO), a department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW) that deals with social security issues; the Lao Federation of Trade Unions (LFTU); the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI); and several civil society organizations (CSOs).

The project aims to realize the labour rights of workers (particularly informal workers² and women) in the coffee and tea sectors of the Bolaven Plateau region of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, directly reaching at least 400 workers. The Bolaven Plateau consists of three districts – namely, Paksong District, Champasack Province; Laongarm District, Salavan Province; and Thateng District, Sekong Province. This region is known for its production and export of high-quality coffee as well as tea.

Specifically, the project will aim to improve access to the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) and occupational safety and health (OSH) provisions for farmers and workers in this region. The implementation of project activities will also involve third parties – both government and non-government organizations, such as the LSSO; LFTU; Lao Coffee Association (LCA); Agriculture Research Center of Southern Laos (ARC); Paksong Tea Promotion Association (PTPA); Association to Support the Development of Peasant Societies (ASDSP); Maeying Huamjai Phattana (MHP); and Phan-Thin Social Enterprise (PTSE).

The baseline study for the SOLAR project was carried out from July to September 2022 and covered the project’s target districts in the Bolaven Plateau. The study consisted of a literature review and a field survey in the target districts to collect data directly from workers. It provides information to set a baseline for measuring the achievement of project outcomes over time by:

- i. collecting data on the indicators and contributing to the final evaluation;
- ii. tailoring the project implementation to the specific needs and circumstances of the target population;
- iii. identifying changes in gender and power relations between and within target groups;
- iv. identifying people’s perception of service deliver and soliciting recommendations to improve the labour conditions of workers in the coffee and tea sectors; and
- v. informing monitoring, evaluation and risk assessment.

1.2. Study approach

Based on the terms of reference of the baseline study, discussion with the project management team, and review of the project document, a note of study concept and set of survey tools were developed.

The study approach or methodology includes:

- i. a literature review;

¹ This section relies heavily on the terms of reference of the baseline study and the SOLAR project document.

² The term “informal workers” in this report refers to all workers outside formal enterprises officially registered with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

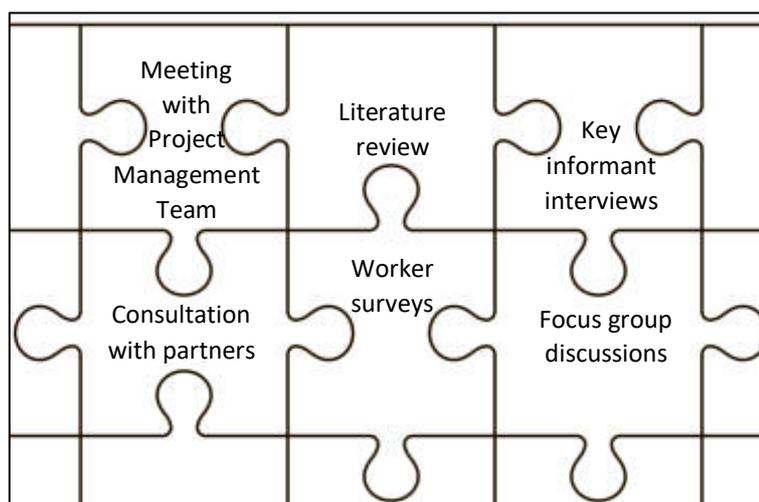
- ii. key informant interviews (KIIs);
- iii. focus group discussions (FGDs); and
- iv. the collection of individual data from farmers who joined the group discussions (worker survey).³

KIIs were conducted with key players in the field of social security, OSH, gender, and organization of coffee and tea farmers. The FGDs were conducted to capture insights from coffee and tea farmers by organizing them into homogeneous groups, with separate groups for men and women to allow the latter to feel more relaxed and comfortable about expressing their opinions.

The data from the KIIs and FGDs were summarized and cross-checked before conducting the analysis. The quantitative data from the worker surveys were inputted into an online database, cleaned in Microsoft Excel and analysed using STATA software.

The preliminary results were presented at a validation workshop on 9 September 2022 in Vientiane. Workshop participants included representatives from government at the central, provincial and district levels and non-governmental organizations – Oxfam, ILO, LSSO, LFTU, LNCCI, LCA, PTPA, ASDSP, PTSE, and MHP. The workshop provided many comments and feedback from stakeholders, which were used to finalize this report.

Figure 1. Study approach



1.3. Field data collection

For collecting baseline data for the SOLAR project, a field mission was carried out during 5–15 July 2022. The mission team consisted of the SOLAR Project Coordinator from Oxfam, representatives from the LFTU (central, provincial and district levels), representatives from two CSOs—ASDSP and PTSE, and the consultant. The mission was organized by Oxfam, while appointments with informants and in villages were arranged by the LFTU.

³ The original plan was to distribute an online form to all tea and coffee farmers in target areas, but this could not be realized due to various factors. According to the local project partners, while internet connectivity exists in the target areas, the majority of farmers do not use any internet-friendly devices such as smartphones. It was assessed that a paper-based survey for all would take more time and require financial resources beyond the allocation for this study. In consultation with the project team, it was decided to do a sampling data collection instead.

1.4. Profiles of the informants

1.4.1. Key informant interviews

The baseline study mission team met the leaders of 23 government and non-governmental organizations in Champasack, Sekong and Salavan provinces at their respective offices (table 2). Interviews typically were for 40–60 minutes. Using an interview guide, several topics relating to social security, OSH, gender equality and supply chains in the coffee and tea sectors in the target areas were discussed. Some informants provided documents, which were analysed and the necessary data extracted.

- In Laongarm, the team met the head of the District Social Security Office (one of the six district offices of the LSSO all across the country) to understand the situation and the actual system in place to promote access to social security.
- In Champasack Province, the team interviewed the President of the LCA in Pakse, leaders of the PTPA in Paksong, and the head of Coffee Production Group of Ban Nongchua.
- In Paksong, the mission team also visited the ARC office and met the OSH trainers who were trained by the Vision Zero Fund (VZF) project. VZF trained them on OSH measures for coffee farmers and workers. The trainers will participate in SOLAR activities too.
- In Thateng, the team visited Cat Que, a commercial coffee enterprise with Vietnamese investment that has 100 hectares of plantation and capacity to hire up to 500 workers. The company director provided crucial information for the study from an employer’s perspective.

Table 2. List of key informant organizations interviewed during 5–15 July 2022

Province	Level	Organization			
		Government	Non government	Private sector	Academia
Champasack	Provincial	LFTU, LSSO	LCA		ARC
	Paksong	LFTU, DLSWO, LWU, DAFO	PTPA		
Sekong	Provincial	LFTU, LSSO			
	Thateng	LFTU, LWU, DAFO, DLSWO		Cat Que company	
Salavan	Provincial	LFTU, LSSO			
	Laongarm	LFTU, DLSWO & LSSO (single office), LWU, DAFO	Coffee producer group of Ban Nongchua		

Note: DLSWO = District Labour and Social Welfare Office; LWU = Lao Women’s Union; DAFO = District Agriculture and Forestry Office.

1.4.2. Worker surveys and FGDs

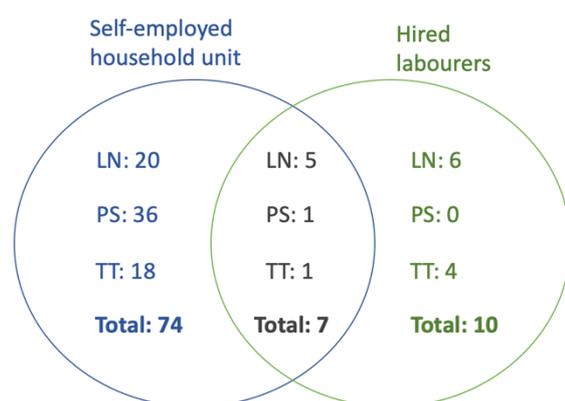
A summary of the FGDs conducted in each district is given below.

- In Paksong, FGDs with coffee and tea farmers were organized at two gathering points – Ban Lak 35 and Ban Bangliang.
- In Thateng, coffee farmers and workers from target villages were invited to participate in an FGD at the district meeting hall. In Thateng, the team also interviewed the director of a coffee plantation in Ban Nongkan.
- In Laongarm, due to heavy rainfall, the mission team was able to work with coffee farmers in only two villages – Ban Nongchua and Ban Dong.

As mentioned earlier, coffee and tea workers who participated in the worker surveys were the same as those who joined the FGDs. Therefore, their profiles have been reported together in this section. Among the 91 workers surveyed, 74 cited their households as being self-employed units (that is, they were independent farmers who cultivated their own coffee or tea crops), 10 were people who only worked for pay in other people’s gardens (hereafter referred to as “hired labourers”), and 7 declared being both self-employed and occasionally working as hired labourers on other people’s farms.

- Among 91 coffee and tea farmers surveyed, 40 (44 per cent) reported hiring workers, especially during peak season. These workers usually get paid a fixed rate per day or a fixed rate per kilogram of picked or processed product. It was reported that most of the hired labourers are migrants from other areas who come to work on the Bolaven Plateau during the harvesting season. The mission was in July when most seasonal migrants had returned to their homes to take care of their rice fields, so it was not possible to meet any of them.
- Self-employed workers who occasionally work on other people’s farms are not always in a situation of time-related underemployed. There are cases of labour exchange too.
- The mission team estimated that there are salaried workers or employees in the areas visited, however it was not possible to meet any of them or their employers mainly as they were busy with seasonal work elsewhere.

Figure 3. Surveyed workers by employment status and district



Note: The sequences of numbers in the figure are (from left to right): self-employed household unit; self-employed and occasional hired work; and full-time hired labourers. LN = Laongarm; PS = Paksong; TT = Thateng. Source: Baseline study mission, 5–15 July 2022.

A notable characteristic of agricultural employment in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic is that both self-employed and hired labourers are far more likely to be working as a part of a household unit rather than as individuals. In a household unit, all able members of the household contribute to that economic activity, especially during peak periods. Coffee and tea farming are labour-intensive, and farming households mainly have their family members working in the field and hire outsiders to reduce the workload during peak season. Upon analysing the household compositions in the target areas, it was found that:

- In general, there are 4–6 people per household. In Paksong, one household will have on average 4 persons. The age structure shows that households in Paksong tend to have fewer working-age people and youth (below 25 years), which implies higher demand for hiring external workers.
- In Laongarm, compared to other districts, households are larger and more likely to have people with disabilities. Unfortunately, the mission team could not collect information about their ages.

- By employment status, households of daily-wage and temporary workers (that is, hired labourers) tend to have higher numbers of younger people. Therefore, they can supply labour to other households.
- By sector, no significant differences in the demographics of coffee and tea households were found.

Table 3. Composition of households with people with disabilities and different age groups

	District			Employment status*		Sector	
	Laongarm	Paksong	Thateng	Self-employed	Hired labourers	Tea (Paksong)	Coffee
Number of observation households	31	37	23	81	17	20	90
a. People with disabilities	16%	5%	4%	9%	6%	10%	9%
b. Age group							
– Children below 14	84%	59%	52%	64%	88%	45%	67%
– Youth (ages 14–25)	65%	57%	65%	59%	71%	45%	61%
– Adults (ages 25–65)	100%	86%	96%	93%	100%	90%	93%
– Elderly (above 65)	19%	16%	26%	21%	6%	25%	20%

Note: * Respondents who stated that they were self-employed but also occasionally work as hired labourers are counted in both columns below.

2. Findings

2.1. Coffee and tea plantations in the target districts

In 2018, the gross domestic products (GDPs) per capita in Champasack, Sekong and Salavan provinces were 26 million kip, 13 million kip and 9 million kip, respectively, indicating that people in Champasack Province tend to be wealthier.⁴ The SOLAR target districts of Paksong, Thateng and Laongarm are among the most developed in these provinces, because they are located on the fertile and volcanic Bolaven Plateau, where various agricultural products can be grown. In addition to coffee and tea, the plateau also produces cardamom, cassava, rubber, vegetables and fruits (LSB 2020a; LSB 2020b; LSB 2020c).

2.1.1. Production areas and land ownership

In the project areas, coffee and tea farms are mostly owned by individual households. According to information provided by the District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO), Paksong is the only tea-cultivating district in the Bolaven Plateau. Of the total area of 300 hectares used for tea cultivation, more than half is owned by individual households. Coffee is cultivated in all three districts. In terms of production area, Paksong is the largest, followed by Laongarm and then Thateng. Similar to tea, coffee farms are mostly owned by individual households.

Table 4. Coffee and tea production by district and ownership

Sector	Contents	Paksong	Laongarm	Thateng
Tea	Total production area (hectare)	300	–	–
	<i>Area by ownership:</i>			
	a. Large plantations	Less than 50%		
	b. Individual households	More than 50%		
Coffee	Total production area (hectare)	48 000	13 000	6 000

⁴ For the same year, the national average GDP per capita was 21.7 million kip (LSB 2019).

	<i>Area by ownership:</i>			
	a. Large plantations	10 500	Less	180
	b. Individual households	37 500	More	5 820

– = nil. Source: Reported by DAFO of each district during baseline study mission, July 2022.

In terms of productivity, FGDs indicated that tea farmers in Paksong harvest and process their products based on pre-order volumes and sales in previous years. It is estimated that annual production of self-employed households equals 100–500 kilograms of dried tea per hectare. Unlike coffee, tea leaves collected from the plants are fully harvested because demand is higher.

Coffee farmers in the Bolaven Plateau produce both Arabica and Robusta beans. However, table 5 below presents data only for Arabica, due to limited data availability. Coffee productivity in the Bolaven Plateau varies based on the location/geography and membership status of coffee farmers. At the same time, the mission team collected data on the use of pesticides, chemical fertilizers and weed killers on coffee farms and found that independent workers are more likely to be injured through the use of such chemicals. The data also indicates higher incidence of chemical use in Paksong and Thateng compared to Laongarm.

Table 5. Productivity of Arabica and rate of workplace injury due to use of chemicals

District	Type of villages	Productivity of Arabica (tons of red cherries/hectare/year)		Rate of workplace injury due to use of chemicals	
		Minimum	Maximum	Organized workers	Independent workers
Laongarm	More CPC members	8	25	–	–
	Less CPC members	8	15		
Paksong	PTPA	10	15	4%	20%
	Non-PTPA	15	25		
Thateng	All samples	7	20	20%	22%

– = nil. Source: FGDs and worker surveys during the baseline study mission, July 2022.

2.1.2. Organization of tea and coffee producers on the Bolaven Plateau

Due to the fact that tea and coffee producers in target districts are mostly individual households, formation into groups of producers provides them better access to various forms of support (financial and technical), product markets and negotiation power.

In addition to the fact that tea and coffee farmers can contact and work directly with individual collectors/traders/companies, the study found that there are four possible ways that individual households or smallholder families can form themselves into a solidarity group:

- i. **Agriculture producer groups or cooperatives**⁵: These are certified and supervised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MoAF) and its vertical organizations.
- ii. **Informal worker groups**: These have recently been promoted by the LFTU for organizing informal workers, which are the majority in the Lao labour market.
- iii. **Civil society organizations** (often in the form of associations): These kinds of institutions must be registered and supervised by the Ministry of Home Affairs and its vertical organizations.

⁵ According to Laongarm DAFO, production groups and cooperatives are different in terms of their sizes. A group of 5–7 farming households can form a producer group and more than 7 households can develop a cooperative.

- iv. **Production groups under agriculture development projects:** Instead of forming themselves, there are forms of producer groups that are initiated by a project. These groups may or may not continue after the project ends.

The study also explored a number of organizations that play important roles in organizing tea and coffee producers on the plateau. Figure 4 below showcases the geographic area covered by these organizations, three of which are SOLAR's target partners, namely, LCA and PTPA members and the LFTU. The organizations explored by the study include the following:

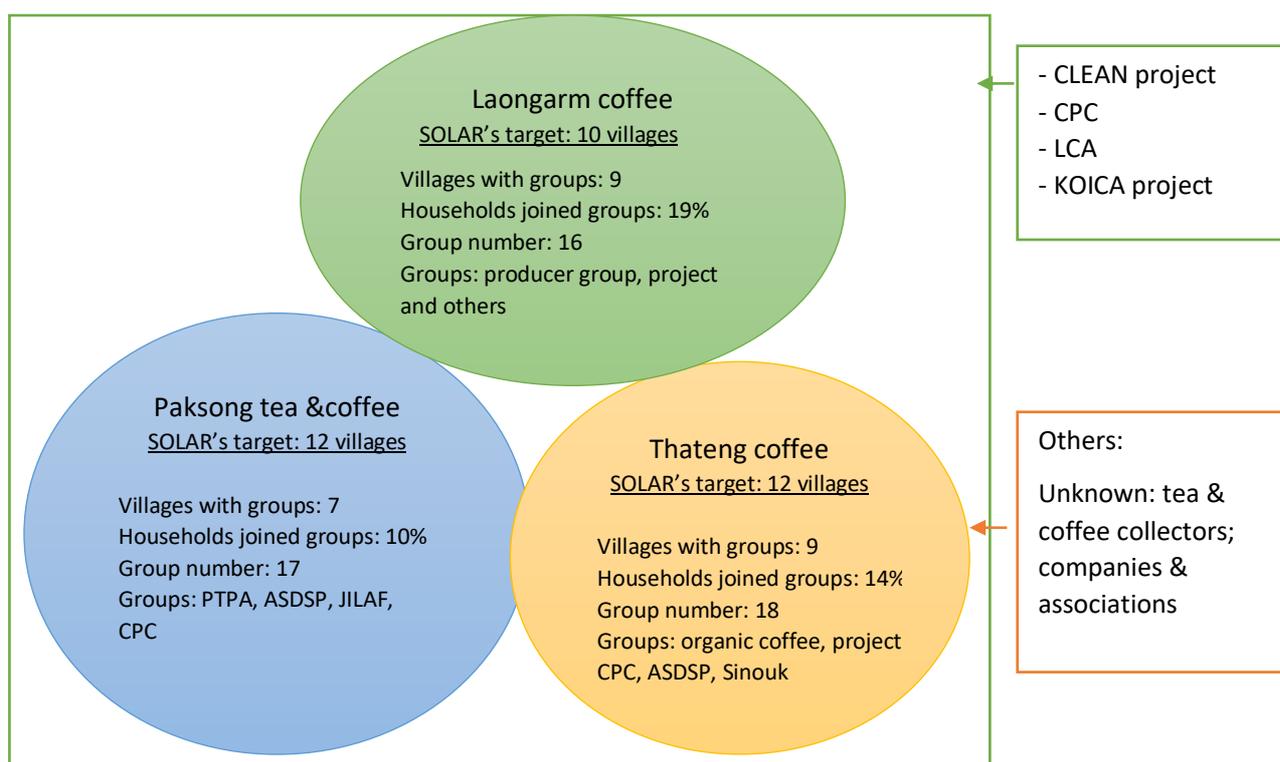
1. **Lao Coffee Association (LCA)** is a non-profit organization established in the year 2000 as a service provider for promoting the uniqueness of Lao coffee and for encouraging sustainable development and standardized production by engaging all stakeholders, compiling and disseminating information and knowledge, as well as providing laboratory services and coffee quality management. The LCA reported in July 2022 to the mission team that their current membership includes 62 export-oriented enterprises, 3 groups of roasters, and 10 producer groups and cooperatives. According to the LCA's president, detailed information on people working under these association members is not recorded at the office, but it is possible to collect such information from each member if time and budget allow. The exporters and roasters are from several provinces, while the coffee producer groups and cooperatives are mainly from Paksong, Thateng and Laongarm. Export-oriented LCA members include some large companies, for example: Daoheaung, Outspan Bolovens, Paksong Highland, Champa Karnkaset, Cat Que and Somxay Karnkaset.
2. **Bolaven Plateau Coffee Producers Cooperative (CPC)** was originally developed from a cooperation project between the Lao Government and the French Development Agency in 2007. According to a [CPC Facebook post dated 21 July 2022](#), the cooperative is currently a 100 per cent farmers only organization that consists of about 925 members and 44 groups spread across the whole of the plateau (Paksong, Thateng and Laongarm). The CPC is one of the largest coffee exporters to Europe, and according to their website, the CPC provides a variety of support to their members, mainly: technical and organizational support, financial support, coffee promotion and marketing support, and processing and storage facilities. The CPC does not only promote members' income and the standardization of coffee production, but also pays attention to welfare by regularly organizing training courses on occupational safety and health, social protection, and gender equality. The field mission could not arrange to interview CPC officials due to time constraints, instead the above information was collected from their [Facebook page](#), from farmers and from people interviewed as part of the study.
3. **Coffee Agriculture Creating Linkages for Expanded Agricultural Networks (CLEAN) project**, a cooperation between the MoAF and Winrock International during 2019–23, funded by the United States Department of Agriculture. CLEAN is working with Lao farmers and local authorities in Vientiane capital, as well as on the Bolaven Plateau in Champasack, Salavan, and Sekong provinces. According to DAFOs, CLEAN works to improve market linkages and increase demand for coffee products in different markets by improving quality compliance and certification systems. The project provides supports to farmers in target villages on production techniques, equipment, market linkages, and various trainings on clean agriculture. CLEAN is currently supporting the LCA to organize the [Taste of Laos event](#) – a 2022 coffee competition and auction. The study team heard about CLEAN through interviews with DAFOs and local farmers, and then searched for more information on the internet.

4. [KOICA-funded Integrated Rural Development Project](#) is an initiative between the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and the MoAF during 2021–25 in the southern provinces – Champasack, Sekong and Salavan – to develop participatory rural communities for the successful implementation of the Sam Sang (“Three Builds”) directive of the Lao Government in line with the fundamentals of the Saemaul Undong (“New Village Movement”) model. The project aims to create rural income generation, improve infrastructure, strengthen the capacity of communities and officials, and increase agricultural knowledge to guarantee food security. Similarly, the study team got to know of KOICA’s project through the field mission and sought further information from online sources.
5. **Paksong Tea Promotion Association (PTPA)** was founded in 2006 as an organic tea producer group and registered as an association in 2020. The PTPA currently has 116 members, 38 of whom are women. These 116 members represent 2 enterprises and 114 individual households from eight villages in Paksong District, Champasack Province. The two enterprise members are the Champa Karnkaset company and the Three Six Manor company; while PTPA household members mostly reside in Ban Lak 33, Lak 35, Lak 40, Lak 43, and Lak 45. During the field mission, the study team only managed to meet with 18 members of the association, all of whom were individual households. As for details about workers in each household and enterprise members, this can be collected from primary sources. In addition to growing tea, 13 association members (including the two enterprises) process and trade tea products. At the early stage of their development a majority of association members sell their products individually.
6. **Informal worker groups supported by the LFTU**, which include organizations of workers who are employed outside the formal sector and self-employed people. This is an approach that the LFTU undertakes for administering and protecting informal workers in responding to the Law on the LFTU (Amended), 2017. The approach includes support on group formulation processes, such as drafting group regulations, building the capacity of group leaders, and offering necessary training courses. Within SOLAR’s target area, the LFTU has supported a number of informal worker groups, including those in tea and coffee sector – mainly the PTPA in Paksong and a coffee farmer group in Ban Lakkhao in Thateng District. Under the SOLAR project, the LFTU plans to provide similar support to informal workers in 5 out of 12 villages in Paksong, 10 out of 12 in Thateng and 4 out of 10 in Laongarm (see details of the target villages in [Annex 1](#)).
7. **Local producer groups and cooperatives registered with the DAFO**: In Paksong there are currently 34 producer groups and 11 cooperatives for tea and coffee (including the PTPA), with some these groups working with the LCA, CPC and CLEAN. In Laongarm and Thateng, information on the number of local producer groups and cooperatives were not available. After the validation workshop, the provincial LFTU, PTPA and ASDSP kindly supported the research team in collecting additional information from target villages that could not be covered during the field mission. The details will be discussed in section 2.1.3 below.

2.1.3. Organization of tea and coffee farmers in target villages

The SOLAR project planned to implement intervention activities in 34 villages in three districts: 12 villages in Paksong, 12 villages in Thateng and 10 villages in Laongarm (see list of villages in [Annex 1](#) and map in figure 2). According to data collected by the LFTU (September 2022), these 34 villages are home to 8,570 households. Nearly 100 per cent of the households in these villages engage in the tea and coffee sector; only 13 per cent of them are organized in some form, such as an association, a pilot group under a development project, or a producer group or cooperative (10 per cent in Paksong, 14 per cent in Thateng, and 19 per cent in Laongarm). In other words, tea and coffee farmers in 9 out of 34 villages are working independently without any group support.

Figure 4. Organizations of tea and coffee workers in SOLAR’s target area and some key players



Source: Provincial LFTU, ASDSP and PTPA, September 2022.

The above information implies that, **in addition to the project partners (LCA, PTPA and ASDSP), there are a number of key organizations working with tea and coffee households in the same geographic area.**

To have a clearer picture, the study team managed to collect insight data in Ban Dong – a coffee village in Laongarm District, which is one of the project targets. According to FGD participants, about 78 per cent of households are independent coffee farmers who are neither beneficiaries of development projects nor members of the CPC.

- The male participants in the FGD in Ban Dong (Laongarm) raised some reasons why farmers do not join organizations, especially producer groups or cooperatives. These include: difficulties related to cooperative work, as it requires time and labour contribution; no willingness to be regulated; liquidity issues; and registration fees.
- For coffee producer groups or cooperatives where members gather their products into a bulk amount and sell it all, the payment to farming households is not made immediately. In many cases, farmers have to wait for several months until their group or cooperative is able to sell

the lots (containers). This issue of liquidity was identified by the Paksong DAFO as a key factor discouraging coffee farmers from enjoying the long-term benefits of being part of a producer group/cooperative.

- At the CPC, newly registered members need to wait for three years before getting approved to sell their products through the cooperative. **It seems that in reality, conditions to become members of a production group or cooperative are such that they serve households that can strictly follow production standards and cooperative rules and that are financially better off (that is, they have enough financial reserves).**

Table 6. Composition of households in Ban Dong, Laongarm District, Salavan Province

No.	Ban Dong, Laongarm District	Number of households	% of total*
I	All households		
1.1	Households of self-employed coffee farmers only	228	50%
1.2	Households of self-employed coffee farmers who also do occasional work as hired labourers	214	47%
1.3	Households of hired labourers only	15	3%
	Total	457	100%
II	Coffee farmer households		
2.1	CPC members	40	9%
2.2	CLEAN project beneficiaries	17	4%
2.3	KOICA project beneficiaries	40	9%
2.4	Independent coffee farmers	345	78%
	Total	442	100%

Source: Estimated by group of male coffee farmers of Ban Dong, FGD in baseline study mission as of July 2022.

2.1.4. Labour supply chain

2.1.4.1. Sources of labour and brokers

Tea and coffee production is labour-intensive work, nearly 50 per cent of self-employed households in the survey reported that they occasionally employ people outside their family. Among the three target districts, Paksong tended to demonstrate the highest demand for outside workers, mainly because of larger cropping area and there being a greater number of commercial plantations.

Self-employed households recruit workers using a few channels: re-hiring workers employed in previous years, individual agents/brokers, and walk-in workers. When it comes to using an agent, a small fee is paid as a commission by the employer, for example 100,000 kip to source 10–20 workers. Before sourcing, the owner agrees with the agent a particular wage or amount of return that will be paid to the workers. The agent will interact directly with the workers, including handling the disbursement of money after work is completed.

- The daily rate for working on tea and coffee farms is approximately 50,000–70,000 kip. For harvesting, the payment is output-based – for example, 1,000–1,500 kip for picking a kilogram of coffee and 3,000 kip for picking a kilogram of tea.
- Some of the observed self-employed households (part-time employers) are not really happy with the workers they have hired due to the quality of work performed, but they dare not take any remedial action because, as one employer noted, “Finding workers during the middle of harvesting season is very difficult.”
- However, the study team did meet some workers who had previously experienced penalties due to their work being deemed unacceptable. For example, employers deduct 200 kip per kilogram of coffee in cases of mixing unripe green beans with ripe red cherries, or for breaking

coffee trees and stems, or when red cherries that have fallen under the tree are not picked. However, the hired labourers interviewed felt that this was acceptable.

Beyond being destinations for seasonal migrant workers, some target villages also occasionally see their own people migrate out to work elsewhere when the opportunity presents itself, for example, travel from Thateng and Laongarm to work in Paksong.

During the FGDs there were many mentions of arguments/conflicts between workers and agents/brokers. Some workers stated that agents had cheated them by not paying any money at all, and some agents had deducted a large portion from their payment. For example, one employer paid 1,500 kip per kilogram of coffee, but the agent took 800 kip per kilogram without informing the workers; when the workers found out they could not do anything, they just stopped working with that agent.

Labour brokers or agents on the plateau are not well organized. They can be a village head, an individual with a transport vehicle (*Song-thaew*), relatives of the plantation's human resources staff, former workers at self-employed households, farm owners themselves, and workers' kin networks (friends, family). The mission team was not able to meet with any labour agents during the field mission because they appear only in the peak season for migrant workers. The best timing to identify labour agents is when the harvesting season starts.

Table 7. Sources of labour for tea and coffee sector in target area

District	Existence of plantation in		Sources of labour for self-employed farmers in target villages			People in target villages migrate out to work		
	Target district	Target village	Local people	People from outside	Mode	Destination	Mode	
Paksong	Yes	Yes	20%	70%	Attapeu, Muang khong	Agent, farm owner	None	Agent
Thateng	Yes	No	Less	More	Muang Kalum	Agent, farm owner	Paksong	Agent
Laongarm	No	No	50%	50%	Other part of Salavan	Agent, farm owner	Paksong	Kin network

Source: KII and worker survey, baseline study mission in July 2022

Workers in the tea and coffee sectors are found to be recruited via different means by commercial plantations, including for informal employment. The study team also learned about the job search methods and preferences of workers.

- In a target village of Paksong where a large plantation is located (Ban Bangliang), villagers reported that the company hires 70 per cent of workers in the village as full-time workers in positions in the planting unit, as well as drivers, technicians and admin. Workers hired by the plantation appear to receive good pay as well as being protected by social security.
- In Thateng, the study team interviewed workers and the director of a plantation currently recruiting about 100 workers (Ban Nongkan). This recruitment effort consisted of hired labourers getting paid on a daily basis, sub-contracted workers and full-time workers. Workers mostly found their job by themselves, and did not rely on an agent. Most of the workers came from nearby villages, though some had migrated from Kalum District because they had relatives or friends currently working on the plantation. The study team met with workers

who have been on duty for different periods of time (from 2 days to 3 years); none of them had written contracts nor were they being covered by social security. Most of workers are paid daily, for example, 60,000 kip for fertilizing and 70,000 kip for shaping coffee trees. The director of the plantation stated that her workers do not like to work full time and receive a salary, as they prefer to get paid daily. She reported trying to convince them to accept such arrangements by providing more incentives for salary-based positions, such as free meals, but the workers were not interested. The turnover rate on the plantation is very high, as workers who come today may not come tomorrow, she added.

2.1.4.2. Scarcity of workers

“Before we can easily find workers from nearby locations; currently we have to seek workers from longer distances,” a self-employed coffee farmer said. According to the DAFO, people in the surrounding region (both upland and lowland) used to be available after harvesting their rice and came to the plateau to earn money by harvesting coffee. At present, however, people who have cultivation land are mostly busy the whole year because they have started planting cassava. High demand for tapioca (starch) from the regional market has led to cultivation land being converted into cassava plantations.

- For preserving coffee plantation areas, authorities of Champasack as well as Paksong have prepared zoning of cultivation areas for each commercial crop. Only in areas unsuitable for coffee will farmers be allowed to plant cassava, Paksong DAFO said. Despite its small impact on the planting area for tea and coffee, cassava cultivation absorbs the supply of labour in the region.
- Farmers in Thateng estimated the cost of hiring labour accounts for about 50–60 per cent of operation costs. If the labour shortage continues, the cost of hiring workers will increase. The mission team asked the DAFO if replacing labour with machines can help farmers reduce their labour cost; the answer was that it is “less likely to be possible” because coffee plantation terrain is typically rocky, making it ill-suited to the use of machinery.

2.2. Access to social security

2.2.1. Coverage of social security in the target area

In the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, social security is contributory and divided into three schemes for different types of workers: (i) government scheme; (ii) enterprise scheme; and (iii) voluntary scheme. From discussion with the LSSO, all government officers are registered with the LSSO. The current concern is that the enterprise and voluntary social security schemes only cover very small numbers of people.

- According to social security law, all formal enterprises should register themselves with the LSSO and co-contribute into the social security fund (the equivalent of 6 per cent of the worker’s wage from the employer and 5.5 per cent from the worker).
- The voluntary scheme is for self-employed people, informal workers and employers. In this scheme, a worker pays 100 per cent of the contribution. There are 17 levels of monthly contribution and insurable amounts, the lowest is 108,000 kip per month, calculated at 9 per cent of the monthly minimum wage of 1,200,000 kip (MoLSW 2022).

For all LSSO members, there are basically eight benefits, including: (i) workplace injury benefits; (ii) health insurance benefits; (iii) maternity benefits; (iv) sickness benefits; (v) loss of working capacity benefits; (vi) pension benefits; and (vii) death, and (viii) survivor benefits. In addition, the enterprise scheme provides additional benefits for unemployment, and in the voluntary scheme, injury benefits cover all injuries, and not only workplace accidents.

As a result, beneficiaries of the LSSO are not only those people who registered with the organization but also their families. In the LSSO's annual reports, the numbers of beneficiaries are reported in three groups: insured persons, their spouses and their children. **According to these reports, in 2021 there were a total of 20,013 people benefiting from the enterprise and voluntary schemes in Champasack, Sekong and Salavan provinces, which is equivalent to 2 per cent, 1.5 per cent and 0.8 per cent of the population in each province.**

Table 8. Beneficiaries of enterprise and voluntary social security schemes in three provinces

	Items	Unit	Province		
			Champasack	Sekong	Salavan
1	Level of development				
	Province with poor district	PRF exists in 2021?*	No	Yes	Yes
	Population**	Persons	730 281	126 011	434 441
2	Capacity of LSSO staff				
	Number of LSSO staff	Persons	17	7	13
	Total beneficiaries to LSSO staff ratio	Persons per staff	857	265	275
3	Coverage of enterprise and voluntary scheme				
	Total beneficiaries (excl. government scheme)	Persons	14 577	1 856	3 580
		% of population	2.0%	1.5%	0.8%
4	Groups of beneficiaries for two schemes				
	Insured persons	Persons	6 343	n/a	1 499
	Spouses	Persons	3 638	n/a	858
	Children below 18 (up to 23 if studying)	Persons	4 596	n/a	1 223

n/a = data not available. Source: * [2021 Annual meeting](#) of the Poverty Reduction Fund. ** 2021 village data from Lao Statistic Bureau. The rest are taken from 2021 Annual Reports of the LSSO in Champasack Province, Sekong Province and Salavan Province (LSSO 2021a; LSSO 2021b; LSSO 2021c).

Based on LSSO's data, social security coverage in the target districts is also very low. There were approximately 1,464 people in total benefiting from the enterprise and voluntary schemes in Paksong, Thateng and Laongarm, which is equivalent to 0.7 per cent, 1.1 per cent and 0.6 per cent of the population in each district.

- None of the enterprises in the tea and coffee sectors in Laongarm and Thateng had registered themselves with the LSSO, while only two coffee companies in Paksong had done so.
- As for the voluntary scheme, the registration includes just 10 people in Laongarm, 19 in Paksong and zero in Thateng. It is interesting to note that people registered in the voluntary scheme were mostly residing at the district capital (Laongarm) and were not really voluntary enrolees, as they had transferred over from the enterprise scheme due to losing their jobs in Paksong.

Table 9. Beneficiaries of enterprise and voluntary social security schemes in three districts

	Social security scheme	Unit	Paksong	Thateng	Laongarm
1	LSSO service network				
	Existence of district office		No	No	Yes

2 Workload of LSSO staff				
Population*		85 317	43 598	76 866
Number of LSSO staff		–	–	2
Population to LSSO staff ratio				
3 Coverage of enterprise and voluntary scheme				
Enterprise	Economic units	13	13	3
	Insured persons	228	199	170
Voluntary	Insured persons	19	–	10
4 Estimated beneficiaries for two schemes				
Insured persons	Persons	247	199	180
Spouse**	Persons	142	114	103
Children**	Persons	179	153	147
Total beneficiaries (excl. government scheme)	Persons	568	466	430
	% of population	0.7%	1.1%	0.6%

Source: * 2021 village data from Lao Statistic Bureau. ** Estimated using provincial level data. The rest of data was reported by provincial and district LSSOs during KIIs for baseline study mission in July 2022.

2.2.2. Promotional activities on and awareness of social security

Promotion of social security is organized via various means, such as social media (mainly Facebook), radio, village speaker, television and signboard. Face-to-face information dissemination activities (via meetings or workshops) in target areas were found to be arranged by various stakeholders. In 2021, when the country was in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis and undertaking preventive measures, such events were less likely to take place. Only 63 meetings were organized by the LSSO in the three provinces to disseminate information on the law on social security and to promote social security schemes (enterprise and voluntary). Even so, these meetings reached about 2,707 people, 30–40 per cent of whom were female. In the target districts, the LSSO reported organizing four information dissemination meetings in 2021 (two in Paksong and one each for Thateng and Laongarm).

Table 10. LSSO's meetings in 2021 to promote social security in the three provinces

	Unit	Province*			District**		
		Champasack	Sekong	Salavan	Paksong	Thateng	Laongarm
Total number of meetings	Meetings	32	2	28	2	1	1
Total number of people joined	Persons	409	45	2 253	n/a	n/a	50
– Percent female	% of total	n/a	42%	31%	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a = data not available. Source: * LSSO 2021a; LSSO 2021b; LSSO 2021c. * Recorded from the interview, baseline study mission in July 2022.

Beside data from service providers, the study team also examined the awareness of tea and coffee farmers in the target areas concerning social security and who had provided them with such information. As shown in table 11, **20 per cent of surveyed workers in the target districts attended promotional activities on social security** organized by a particular company/cooperative, a development project or a government organization. Details are as follows:

- In Paksong, Oxfam- and ILO-supported projects during 2017–21 also implemented such activities for coffee workers in Ban Lak 35 and for PTPA members in Paksong and Ban Lakkhao in Thateng.
- In Laongarm, promotion of social security had been implemented privately for members of the CPC, and in April 2022 the LSSO organized a public information dissemination meeting at Ban Dong.

- Since 2021 the LSSO at the central and provincial levels have followed their own direction to conduct awareness-raising activities throughout the country by disseminating information to officers at government agencies and large enterprises as well as to informal workers in the agriculture sector.

Table 11. Surveyed workers who have attended activities on social security

District	Observation	Promotional activities attended by surveyed workers		
		%	Earliest year	Organizers
Paksong	37	30%	2013	CPC+LSSO, LFTU, LFTU+LSSO, ILO's OSH training, LSSO
Thateng	23	17%	2021	Various agriculture development projects
Laongarm	31	10%	2000	Company, Provincial organization

Source: Worker survey, baseline study mission in July 2022.

In addition, the study team assessed the level of awareness on social security among tea and coffee farmers in the target areas. **Nearly 70 per cent of all farmers surveyed were found to have heard about social security. However only 10 per cent had an understanding of the benefits to be received due to their registration.** The rates of unawareness were higher among people who are not members of any worker organization, among hired labourers, and among those who reside in Laongarm and Thateng. The relatively high level of awareness in Paksong is consistent with the higher number of promotional activities organized by various stakeholders in the district.

Table 12. Awareness on social security by worker organization, employment status and district

	Worker's org		Employment status		District			Paksong	
	Group member	Non-member	Self-employed	Hired labourers	Paksong	Thateng	Laongarm	Group member	Non-member
Observations	48	43	81	10	37	23	31	27	10
Heard only name of social security	67%	56%	68%	10%	73%	57%	52%	74%	70%
Know something, e.g., benefits	17%	2%	11%	–	14%	4%	10%	19%	–
Know nothing	17%	42%	21%	90%	14%	39%	39%	7%	30%

– = nil. Source: Worker survey, baseline study mission in July 2022.

2.2.3. Social security beneficiaries

In the LSSO's reports, it was found that the number of indirect beneficiaries (spouses and children) was reported together with number of insured persons, see table 9 in the previous section. For a better understanding on social security coverage in the target districts, the study team asked the targeted workers about their household members who were registered with the LSSO. In the event that anyone in a household registers with the LSSO (either through the government, enterprise or voluntary scheme), all household members will directly or indirectly benefit from social security. **It appears that 5 out of every 100 of the observed households are entitled to benefits from the LSSO. However, only 1 out of 100 is an insured person who has access to all the benefits of voluntary social security.**

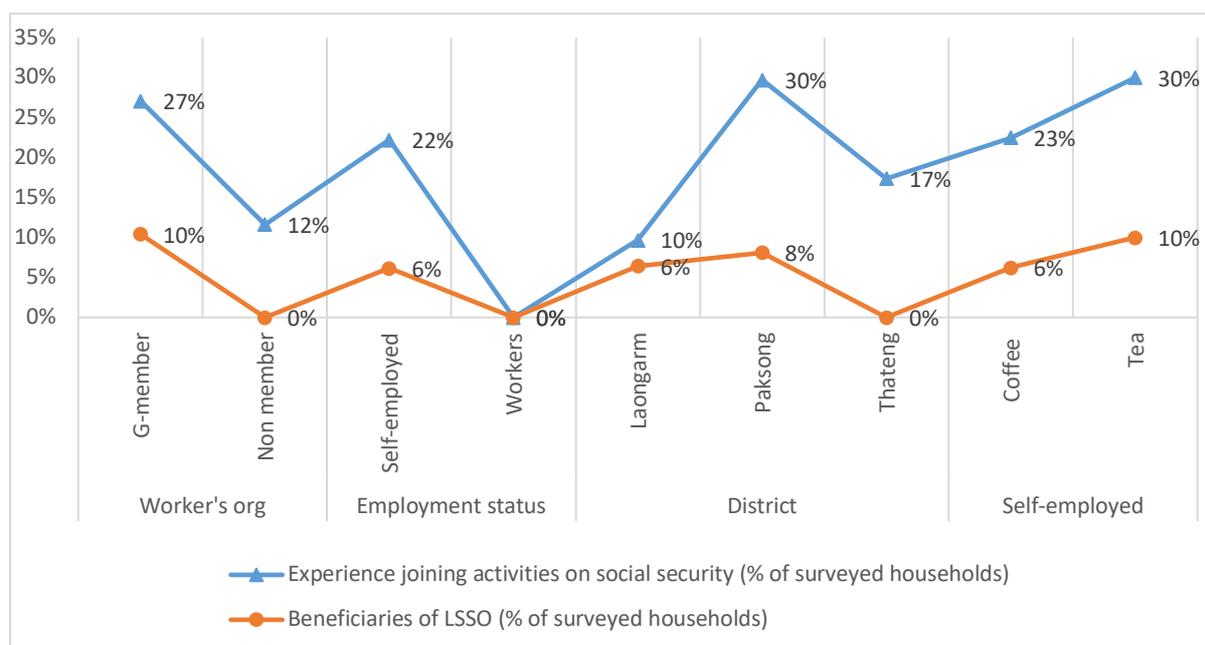
Table 13. Observed households that registered with the LSSO

	Households	% of total	Note
a. Anyone in your household registered at LSSO?			
- Yes	5	5%	Laongarm (2), Paksong (3)
- No	86	95%	
Total	91	100%	
b. Who in your household registered at LSSO?			
- Children	3		Laongarm (1), Paksong (2)
- Spouse	2		Paksong (2)
- Parent	1		Laongarm (1)
- Myself	1		Paksong (1)
Total	5		

Source: Worker survey, baseline study mission in July 2022

Gaining awareness of the LSSO and its insurance packages by attending promotional activities may or may not lead to deciding to register, as there are also other factors determining the decision. **Among workers surveyed, 30 per cent in Paksong and 17 per cent in Thateng reported attending such awareness-raising activities, but only 8 per cent and 0 per cent, respectively, registered.**

Figure 5. Rates of attending activities about social security and percentage of the beneficiaries



Source: Worker survey, baseline study mission in July 2022.

The study team interviewed officials from the LSSO and government agencies who work on expanding the coverage of social security in the target areas. According to them, there are number of issues related to social security, grouped into the following themes.

- i. **Healthcare services:** This is a key factor to be solved for improving the attractiveness of social security in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. There are at least two possible ways: either improving quality of the healthcare services or shifting the management of the health insurance fund from National Health Insurance Office to the LSSO. However, this seems to be a complicated issue and needs to be resolved at the policy level.

- ii. **Promotional activities:** Gathering farmers during production seasons (planting and harvesting) is not easy because most of working age people are in the field. Gathering many villages into one meeting also does not seem to work because such meetings do not invite in-depth discussion among participants and the gatherings in each place should not just be one time events without followup. Inviting community leaders and CSOs to be part of promotional activities is considered to be a key. In terms of media, an informant cited that current spot advertisements are 10–20 minutes in duration, which is too long and may make people bored. In many cases, word of mouth tends to be a faster and more effective way to promote social security.
- iii. **LSSO offices:** There are currently six districts throughout the country that have district-level LSSO offices. To register for social security via the enterprise and voluntary schemes, the enterprises and informal workers typically have to present themselves at a provincial LSSO located in the provincial capital of each province (roughly 49 km away for Paksong, 54 km for Thateng and 44 km for Laongarm). It is believed that expanding the LSSO office network will make it easier for people to access offices and thereby ease the registration process. In addition to expanding the LSSO network, there is a need to improve staff capacity, both quantitatively and qualitatively.
- iv. **Self-employed informal workers:** This is particularly an issue for expanding the voluntary scheme. However, there are some initiatives on transforming informal workers into semi-formal workers who are self-employed by organizing them into groups and prompting them to register with the LSSO. The study team learned from the Laongarm DAFO and a producer cooperative in Ban Nongchua about an alternative means of accessing social protection: production groups under the CPC were instructed to set up development funds, and as a result, they are now able to provide social welfare or social protection to their members.
- v. **Hired labour:** Workers who are occasionally employed as hired labourers for a fixed amount of pay per day or a fixed amount of pay per kilogram of picked or processed product in the tea and coffee sectors are another concern. Some informants have considered the idea of registering seasonal workers into the co-contributory enterprise scheme and transforming them into full-time workers; however, this can be something for SOLAR to explore during the course of the project. Conducting promotional activities on social security in areas where these seasonal workers predominantly reside was also suggested.
- vi. **Small-scale enterprises:** Similar to other sectors, tea- and coffee-related enterprises are mostly micro-, small- and medium-sized and many are family businesses. Therefore, co-contribution into the LSSO's enterprise scheme is seen to be costly for them. The LSSO primarily targets social security promotion towards large enterprises.
- vii. **Enforcing social security law in foreign direct investment (FDI) projects:** The provincial LSSO reported that they tread carefully when it comes to implementing the law on social security among FDI companies. They reason that strict enforcement may discourage FDI. However, the study team found a very good example in Laongarm where a Japanese invested farm registered all of their full-time workers with the LSSO. According to the LCA, most of the commercial plantations rely on seasonal workers who do not work for them permanently. Therefore, to provide social welfare benefits, many farms set their own internal policies. For example, workers on a plantation in Thateng will be taken to the hospital in case of workplace injury or sickness and be paid 200,000 kip per incidence.

In addition to key informants from organizations, the FGDs with workers also provided useful information and suggestions. These are more or less similar to what key informants already mentioned above, but also include the following:

- i. **Many workers had attended an information dissemination meeting on social security but had not registered because they already have other options.** They shared their worries about poor services in public hospitals and fear of loss of money in case they quit the LSSO (unlike a bank deposit that can be withdrawn at any time as needed). Some workers in Paksong had already joined various funds (elderly fund, village development fund, and the fund of Lao Women’s Union), so they felt they did not need anything more.
- ii. **However, all agreed that there is a need to understand more about the LSSO and the benefits it provides.** Information dissemination meetings were suggested to be organized. However, these meetings should not be a one-time thing, but rather be held two or three times using a sit-and-talk format to allow for deeper understanding. It would be best if there are “model households” that try to use social security first, so that other households can observe and see the benefits.
- iii. **Most of the workers’ comments focused on contribution fees and payment methods.** Affordable contribution amounts, convenient contribution payment methods, and the availability of a notification system for when the next payment is due were all raised. Income from tea and coffee is seasonal; therefore, it was preferred that contributions be collected on an annual basis.

2.2.4. Access to other forms of social protection

Apart from social security from the LSSO, households in the target area tend to receive benefits from other formal and informal forms of social protection, mainly the National Health Insurance and social welfare from semi-formal organizations:

- National Health Insurance (NHI) is applicable to Lao people residing in 17 provinces (except for Vientiane Capital). NHI beneficiaries follow the same policies as LSSO members in terms of health benefits at public hospitals. However, NHI users cannot select the hospital; they have to go to the nearest health centre first before transferring to a district hospital if the health issue is beyond the capacity of the centre to treat. The NHI is a government-subsidized insurance, where the user brings their family book with them to activate their right to benefit and pay a very low amount per instance of treatment (5,000–30,000 kip).
- Social welfare is provided by a village/cooperative/producer group when their development fund becomes mature enough. At the village level, the development fund is mostly promoted by mass organizations like the Lao Women Union and Lao Front for National Construction. The Agriculture and Forestry Office and the LFTU also advise their supported producer groups, cooperatives and groups of informal workers to establish development funds within their organization.

According to the FGD in Ban Dong of Laongarm, social welfare is available for coffee farmers who are members of CPC producer groups. The level of welfare depends on amount of funds in each producer group. Welfare includes life, accident and fire insurance. For example, life insurance is 3,000,000 kip for CPC members in Ban Dong-noi and 5,000,000 kip for the group in Ban Nongchua.

2.3. Occupational safety and health

2.3.1. Division of labour throughout the tea and coffee production processes

As noted in the previous section, producers of tea and coffee in the target areas are found to be mainly self-employed. The study team further asked about tasks that independent farmers have done by themselves to produce tea and coffee. Understanding the division of labour in each production process could help the SOLAR project to target correctly those groups that need to be protected during the various stages of the production process.

Table 14. Tasks in tea and coffee production process by district, worker organization and employment status

Task	Tea	Coffee					
	Self-employed	Self-employed					Worker
		Paksong	Thateng	Laongarm	G-member	Non-member	
1. Seeding	80%	69%	47%	80%	86%	46%	60%
2. Planting	90%	89%	100%	84%	86%	95%	70%
3. Caring	85%	92%	100%	84%	88%	95%	90%
4. Harvesting	85%	81%	100%	72%	84%	81%	100%
5. Processing	35%	42%	84%	64%	58%	59%	40%
6. Roasting	35%	19%	0%	24%	28%	3%	0%
7. Packing	35%	22%	0%	8%	21%	3%	0%
8. Trading/collecting	30%	22%	5%	20%	19%	16%	0%
Observation	20	36	19	25	43	37	10

Source: Worker survey, baseline study mission in July 2022.

For the tea sector, most of the farmers handled the early stages of production (seeding, planting, caring and harvesting) by themselves around 80–90 per cent of the time and were less likely to take part in later activities such as processing, roasting, packing and trading. From the survey data, only 30–35 per cent of tea farmers continue to work in the production process after harvesting. This implies that a majority of tea farmers only work up to the picking of tea leaves, and then sell the fresh leaves to tea processors. The PTPA added that their tea products are not yet in high demand, and therefore production is frequently done upon receipt of an order and sold to that buyer.

For the coffee sector, the study team found a number of interesting points regarding the division of work:

- Concerning coffee seeding, there is higher likelihood that the self-employed who are in a producer group/cooperative/association will handle coffee seeding by themselves and be more active in roasting and trading – especially in Paksong and Laongarm. **This could imply more advanced knowledge and skills among coffee farmers in these two districts.**
- **In Thateng, the self-employed tend to do the work by themselves (that is, they do not hire workers)**, which is probably because their plantation areas are smaller in size.
- Not all processes related to coffee production are labour intensive. Demand for hired labour tends to be high for the parts of the process up to and including harvesting (such as caring for the coffee trees), but it was found that none of workers in the survey reported being hired for roasting, packing and trading activities, and it is assumed that those farmers who do this themselves use machines.

2.3.2. Steps of production that can possibly cause workplace injury

Based on discussions with target farmers, the study explored some potential risks in the tea and coffee production processes. There are a greater number of risky points in the coffee production process compared to that of tea.

- In both the tea and coffee sectors, farmers in the Paksong and Thateng FGDs reported the risk of encountering **unexploded ordnance (UXO)** when they dig holes for planting. For coffee trees, for example, farmers have to dig 30–50 centimetres deep to plant a seedling.
- It was also learned that coffee farmers use **chemical pesticides** during early stages, such as the seeding process. Farmers in Paksong cited there are chances for them to come into contact with chemical pesticides when they clear weeds or arrange coffee seeding within their farm. Some farmers keep using chemical pesticide during the caring and harvesting processes. In the caring process, chemical inputs in various forms seem to be used heavily, including chemical fertilizers and weed killers. Pesticide is applied during the seeding and caring processes mostly to get rid of aphids; however, it is to deal with ants during the harvesting season. As shown in section 2.1.1, the rate of applying chemical inputs are reported to be relatively high in Thateng and Paksong compared to Laongarm. Coffee farming tends to be chemical free in areas that produce organic coffee, especially for producers that export to high-end markets like Europe or the Americas (among producer groups under the CPC, for example).
- **Working tools** like knives, hoes and weed clearing machines can also be dangerous if used improperly. Injuries caused by these tools include, for example: cutting one's hand with a knife, cutting toes with a hoe or the blade of a weed clearing machine. While clearing weeds using a machine, it might hurl little stones into the eyes and other parts of the body. In addition, coffee farmers/workers frequently deal with **animals (including snakes) and insects (ants, bees and mosquitoes, as well as centipedes)**.
- **Lifting heavy sacks of coffee** tends to be the main cause of back pain for workers during harvesting season as well as during processing. Carrying 15–20 kilograms of red cherries and walking with them from the farm to milling place or collecting area can be a heavy burden for every worker, especially on plantations with steep terrain. Similarly, lifting sacks of red cherries and pouring them into the milling machine can also be burdensome. Improper use of a milling machine can also cause injury, with FGD participants stating that there have been cases of hand injuries due to milling machines.
- **Coffee trees** that are typically tall (such as Robusta) can also be a problem. Shaping coffee trees and harvesting red cherries from tall coffee trees require bending the branches, climbing the tree or using ladders. Workers cited frequently getting injured due to tree branches and falling from trees or ladders. Pain from accidentally kicking the stumps of old trees is another type of injury they experienced.
- Despite of receiving a certificate of conformity for geographical indication (GI) during 2020–21, Paksong tea still needs more development. They currently use traditional tools for processing tea. Women FGD participants noted that they need to contend with **heat and dust when processing/drying the tea**, so even improper hand gloves can cause an injury.

Table 15. Causes of getting injured along tea and coffee production process

				
Production process	Causes for getting injured	Tea	Coffee	Note
1. Nursery	Chemical pesticide		○	Paksong
2. Planting	UXO	○	○	Paksong, Thateng
3. Caring	Tools (knife, hoe, Weed clearing machine)	○	○	
	Chemical pesticide	○	○	
	Chemical fertilizer		○	
	Chemical weed killer		○	
	Animals (snake, centipede)		○	
	Insects (ants, bee, mosquito)		○	
	Tall coffee tree		○	
4. Harvesting	Lifting/carrying heavy sacks		○	
	Chemical pesticide		○	
	Tall coffee tree		○	
	Steep terrain in the garden		○	
5. Processing	Heat in roasting/drying room	○		
	Dust in roasting/drying room	○		
	Lifting/carrying heavy sacks		○	
	Coffee milling machine		○	

Source: FGD, baseline study mission in July 2022.

Figure 6. Tea processing



Source: Facebook, [ຖິ້ງ ນັກ າວ ື ດ ຊາປາກຊ ອງ Paksong tea GI.](#)

2.3.2. Rates of workplace injuries

In the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, overall information on the safety and health of workers at the national and provincial levels is limited and rarely reported. Records on the situation at the provincial and district levels, in particular for an economic sector like tea and coffee, are very scarce. For LSSO members, their OSH conditions and injuries can somewhat be observed by examining the

rate at which they avail of sickness and loss of working capacity benefits as well as healthcare services. Unfortunately, these indicators are not officially reported.

The worker survey included questions related to OSH. **About 70 per cent of surveyed workers reported having been injured at their tea or coffee workplace last year, with female workers being more likely to get injured (82 in every 100) compared to male workers (62 in every 100). In addition, workers generally reported experiencing multiple work-related injuries during the course of the preceding year, with four being the average number sustained.** Groups of workers who are more likely to sustain an injury include those who are not members of a workers' group (production group/cooperative/association) and seasonally hired labourers on coffee farms/plantations.

- By location, it was found that workers in Paksong are less likely to get injured at work compared to workers in Laongarm and Thateng.
- In considering worker organizations, group members tend to be safer in almost all dimensions of work except for getting injured by machinery. However, this incidence does not necessarily imply that members are less careful in using machinery; it could mean they are more likely to use machinery as part of production because they have a better income.
- By working status, the self-employed tend to work safely in many dimensions, but all workers encounter injuries from chemical inputs and using tools to much the same degree.
- By district, Paksong workers are less likely to experience workplace injuries; a higher proportion of workers in Thateng had problems related to animals, insects and carrying heavy sacks; while only workers in Laongarm reported injuries from coffee trees (see [Annex 2](#) for more details).

Table 16. Rate of workplace injury and number of times injured in the last year

		Observations	Ever been injured at work in the last year?	
			% of total observation	Average no. of times injured/ person/year
	All	91	70%	4
	Female	39	82%	4
	Male	52	62%	3
Workers' org.	G-member	48	60%	4
	Non-member	43	81%	4
Employment status	Self-employed	81	67%	4
	Workers	10	100%	4
District	Paksong	37	57%	3
	Thateng	23	83%	5
	Laongarm	31	77%	4
Self-employed	Coffee farm owners	90	70%	4
	Members of PTPA (19 of them also have coffee farms)	20	50%	2

Source: Worker survey, baseline study mission in July 2022.

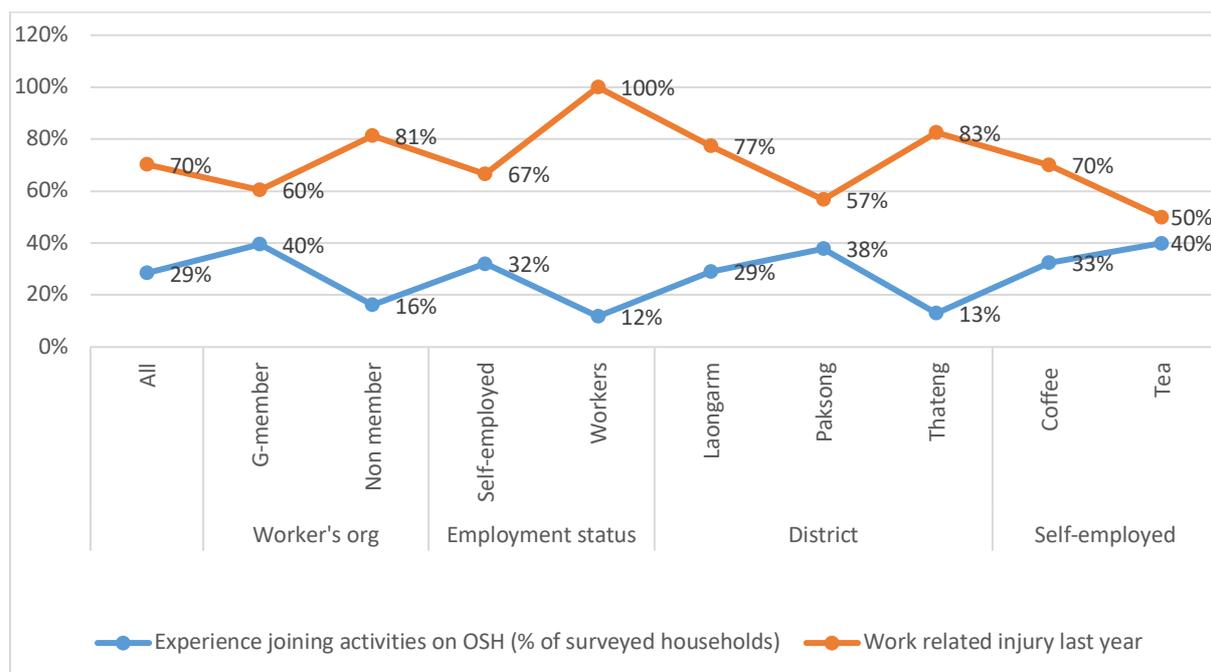
2.3.3. OSH training: Workers' experiences and training organizers

About 29 per cent of the workers surveyed had ever participated in OSH training, with male workers more likely to have participated in such activity (35 in every 100) compared to female workers (21 in every 100).

Figure 7 shows that survey respondents who had participated in OSH training were less likely to be injured at work (the two lines move in opposite directions). The groups most likely to have engaged in OSH activities include: workers who are members of worker group (producer group/cooperative/association), self-employed households, farmers in Laongarm and Paksong, and workers in the tea sector.

- In Laongarm, people reported participating in OSH training since 2019. Training organizers included agriculture development projects, CPC, ARC, a coffee promotion project, a health promotion project, a private sector firm (Phonexay company), and village authorities.
- In Paksong, systematic learning about OSH started in 2020 by the ILO and an upland development project.
- Coffee farmers in Thateng do not seem to have been reached by any development projects related to OSH. However, some of them received information and OSH training from enterprises. Some workers in Thateng reported attending safety training provided by an electricity agent; it is assumed that the content of the training was on electricity-related matters only.

Figure 7. Rate of participation in OSH training activities compared to work-related injury rate



Source: Worker survey, baseline study mission in July 2022.

2.3.4. OSH-related topics

2.3.4.1. Responsible agencies

During the field mission, a number of government and non-government organizations were found to be involved in the safety and health of the target workers.

Agriculture and Forestry Office (MoAF, PAFO, DAFO) aims to promote safe and clean agriculture by working through mandatory work plans and specific project activities. In SOLAR’s project area, the agriculture promotion projects under the supervision of the DAFO provide training on good agriculture practice, which includes proper use of chemical inputs.

Healthcare sector recently also began prioritizing OSH training as a preventive approach; however, this training is not yet widely available.

Labour Protection Department/Division/Unit is located in both government (MoLSW) and the LFTU. The mandate of these bodies is to protect workers from improper treatment by employers and to promote safety at work. These organizations often work with tripartite constituents and development partners. Salavan LFTU reported that labour inspection missions are carried out occasionally on plantations; if unfavourable working conditions are found, they immediately notify the enterprises for improvement and correction.

Under the VZF initiative in Champasack Province (2019–22) a number of OSH trainers were trained. Those include officers from ARC, LFTU, DAFO and human resource personnel of selected coffee enterprises. The ARC then became an institution that specializes in OSH training, with the ARC's two professional trainers continuing to provide OSH training to enterprises and cooperatives upon their request. According to coffee farmers in Ban Lak 35 of Paksong, the OSH situation in their area has improved after receiving OSH training, but they noted that a one-time training does not seem to be sufficient. The VZF OSH training they attended was conducted over four days in 2021, with participants from 208 households from multiple villages. Participants were divided into four groups, and training activities included demonstrations, practical exercises and after training follow up. At the Paksong DAFO office, the study team saw VZF's OSH posters on their office walls and DAFO staff noted that these posters were useful for their OSH training.

For plantations that export coffee products to high-end markets, the LCA reported that OSH is frequently a condition from buyers. Therefore, worker safety and health issues are now increasingly capturing their attention. The ARC also mentioned being invited by the CPC to provide their human resources staff with OSH training, and OSH training certificates were granted after the training.

2.3.4.2. OSH of seasonal workers

The ARC added there is still high demand for OSH training among seasonally hired labourers who are employed by farming households and plantations, especially those labourers who are not members of any worker organizations.

The LCA's president also expressed similar concerns for the safety of seasonal workers. He cited that most of the large plantations provide preventive and safety equipment to workers, but workers frequently do not use this equipment or do not feel comfortable to get used to it (for example, wearing masks, rain boots and coats, safety glasses and gloves). A director of a coffee plantation said that she had invested a lot on safety equipment for her workers, but it was not worth doing so because of high turnover rate (workers only work for a short time). There were cases of stealing of equipment and workers did not wear the equipment they provided. Right now, the plantation has stopped providing such equipment and asks workers to buy their own equipment and bring their own tools.

2.4. Gender equality

Gender equality is a cross-cutting point explored in the mission. Men and women were organized into separate discussion groups to better allow women workers to feel comfortable expressing themselves. The content of the FGDs also included a number of topics related to gender, such as roles and responsibilities and the decision-making power of men and women within farming households. The study team also interviewed the district Lao Women's Union (LWU) to understand the general situation on gender promotion and women's empowerment in the target area.

2.4.1. Gender issues related to accessing social security

Having a better understanding about social security can possibly make a person decide to register with the LSSO, but based on the workers surveyed, female workers are less likely to have that information. Among the 91 workers interviewed, only 20 per cent reported having attended activities or meetings about social security. The rate of participation in such activities is lower for females (13 per cent) compared to their male counterparts (25 per cent). This suggests unequal participation of women in social security-related activities. As a result, awareness among female workers regarding social security is also lower; indeed, 8 per cent of female workers interviewed knew something about social security, while this was true of 12 per cent of male workers.

Based on the FGD discussions, there are a number of reasons for this inequality. A major reason must be the fact that men are playing leadership roles within the family: head of household in the registration book, representative of the household at public events, and main decision-maker within the household. In addition, being burdened with household chores and other domestic work, women reported having less time for relaxation, not to mention having time for going out or attending events.

The FGDs with male and female workers also found that for a female household member to join the LSSO, the decision is less likely to be made by herself but rather made jointly between them and the male head of household or by only the male head of household. As a male FGD participant said: “I am the person who makes all decisions for my wife and daughters because they are not mature enough in my opinion.”

Table 17. Awareness on social activities and participation in social security promotional activities of surveyed workers

		All	Female	Male
1	Observations	91	39	52
2	Social security			
	Ever attended social security promotional activities	20%	13%	25%
	Awareness about SS:			
	– Heard only name	62%	51%	69%
	– Know something about	10%	8%	12%
	– Know nothing about	29%	41%	19%

Source: Worker survey, baseline study mission in July 2022.

2.4.2. Gender issues related to OSH

It was found that male workers are less likely to get injured at work compared to their female counterparts (62 per cent versus 82 per cent) and number of incidences per year is also smaller (3 versus 4 times in 2021). There are a number of reasons to explain why female workers are more likely to get injured at work. As noted above, workers who have engaged in OSH training were found to be less likely to experience injuries, and female workers are less likely to participate in OSH-related activities, especially OSH training, with just 21 per cent of female workers having received such training, compared to 34 per cent of male workers. The reasons why female workers are less likely to participate in OSH training could be similar to barriers faced by women in attending social security promotional activities.

Table 18. Rate of injury and participation in OSH related training of surveyed workers

		All	Female	Male
1	Observations	91	39	52
2	OSH			
	Ever attended OSH training activities	29%	21%	34%
	Got injured at workplace in 2021			
	– % of total	70%	82%	62%
	– Average number of incidences	4	4	3

Source: Worker survey, baseline study mission in July 2022.

As noted above, the tea and coffee production processes have different potential risks or causes for getting injured. In addition, tea production is more likely to involve women workers, and these workers face different risks than their male counterparts, especially in process of tea processing (specifically from heat and dust in curing rooms).

In the coffee sector, lifting and carrying heavy sacks of coffee cherries was found to be a potential risk for workers to get back pain. These risks are found during both the harvesting and processing periods. A female informant stated: “It’s very difficult to carry a sack of 15–20 kg and walk from the coffee farm with steep terrain to the collection point.” In performing this laborious work, women are more vulnerable to injury due to their physical condition.

2.4.3. Gender issues related to worker organization

As per section 2.1.3 above, only 13 per cent of total households in the 34 target villages are members of worker organizations, showing that the vast majority of tea and coffee farmers remain unorganized.

According to the FGDs, factors determining group membership go beyond the gender of individual farmers, and are more dependent on the condition and willingness of the household in terms of the time and labour the household could contribute to group activities, paying registration fees, being regulated and controlled for product quality and market, and being comfortable with delayed payment. **In other words, the study did not find any strong evidence to differentiate the difficulties of men and women in becoming members of tea- and coffee-related worker organizations.**

The president of the PTPA confirmed that tea is a female-dominated sector in terms of employment; however, an examination of the list of PTPA members showed that 67 per cent of members are male. This suggests that: **(i) despite a high level of female involvement in economic activities, men still appear to dominate decision-making and serve as the representatives within the sector; and (ii) the degree of participation by female workers in tea household economic activities cannot be easily analysed by examining membership in worker organizations.**

Female leaders in tea- and coffee-related groups/associations is found to be small in number (13 persons in 34 villages). According to data from the provincial LFTU, PTPA and ASDSP collected in September 2022, 25 out of 34 target villages have at least one worker group/organization. Of those 25 villages, only 11 have female leaders working in the worker group/organization.

Table 19. Villages with worker organization and female leaders in tea and coffee related group/organization

District	Target group (unit: villages)		Number of female leaders in tea and coffee related worker group/association (unit: persons)	
	Total	At least one worker group		At least one female leader
Paksong	12	7	2	3
Thateng	12	9	1	1
Laongarm	10	9	8	9
Total	34	25	11	13

Source: LFTU, PTPA and ASDSP, September 2022.

2.4.4. Promotion of gender equality in target areas

In the target area, promotion of gender equality tends to be included in many development projects, including projects for agriculture and rural development, nutrition promotion, land titling, and women’s empowerment.

The LWUs of Paksong, Thateng, and Laongarm actively work on women’s development and mentioned to the study team that the status of women has been improving and is much better than before. This is indicated by a better division of labour (men do hard work and women do light work), more women being promoted to leadership positions (in village authorities and producer groups/cooperatives), more empowered women are now engaged in business, and a reduction in cases of domestic violence. According to the LWU, activities or projects targeting women’s development and gender promotion are still active in some particular areas:

- In Paksong, the LWU is organizing gender-related activities in 15 out of 87 villages. These are particularly for resettled villages (moved from a dam construction area). With support from HELVETAS, a counselling centre for women was opened in July 2022 in Houaikong. The key informant there added that there are some unhappy families in the district due to gender-based domestic violence as well as domestic arguments due to problems stemming from COVID-19 and the resulting economic crisis.
- In Thateng, LWU activities to promote gender equality have been implemented in 12 out of 46 villages. Here, the outstanding issues related to gender equality are drug addiction among teenagers, spending too much on unnecessary goods, and gambling. Similar to what was stated in the FGDs with workers, the LWU cited that women have less time for relaxation compared to men. In addition, in worker/producer organizations, some women dare not take responsibility even within the positions/roles that they have been promoted to do.
- In Laongarm, the LWU jointly works with various organizations in promoting gender equality. Therefore, the number of female leaders is quite high. For example, a nutrition project with World Vision that covers many villages has also provided training on gender equality. The LWU also reported being invited to organize gender training for coffee farmers that work with CPC. Currently there are five people in Laongarm LWU who can provide training on gender. Challenges for gender development in the district are quite similar to those in Paksong and Thateng. There should be more training in SOLAR’s target villages, the LWU added. According to their experience in promoting behavioural changes, activities should be carried out at least two times per month for the first three months, then reduced to once per month for the later phase.

3. Conclusion and recommendations

3.1. Conclusion

The baseline study on the social protection needs of workers and levels of access to social protection was conducted using data from various sources: secondary data from existing documents and primary data gathered from 23 organizations and 91 workers in three districts on the Bolaven Plateau. Before finalization, this study report was reviewed by the project team and validated by stakeholders.

Our findings show a number of decent work deficits in the tea and coffee sectors on the Bolaven Plateau, this significantly confirms the relevance of the SOLAR project concerning the needs of workers in target area. The findings are presented below along the following themes:

1. In terms of production, it was found that more than half of tea and coffee production land on the plateau is owned by individual households. Among the three districts, commercial plantations are found to be more active in Paksong and Thateng. SOLAR aims to work with approximately 8,570 tea and coffee households in 34 villages. Only 13 per cent of these households were found to be organized in some form, such as being part of a tea- or coffee-related production group, cooperative or association, or as part of development project.
2. In terms of labour supply, the Bolaven Plateau is found to be a labour deficit area. The majority of workers are seasonal and temporary migrants from other districts and provinces, who were sourced by informal agents or directly by farm owners. Payment for these workers is about 50,000–70,000 kip per day. During the harvest, their income is defined by production output: 1,000–1,500 kip per kilogram of coffee cherries and 3,000 kip per kilogram of tea leaves.
3. This study focuses on two social security schemes of the LSSO that tea and coffee workers would be eligible to register with – namely, the enterprise and voluntary schemes. According to secondary data from the LSSO, the number of reported beneficiaries includes insured persons, spouses and children. In 2021, these two schemes provided social security benefits to 20,013 people, which is equivalent to 1.6 per cent of total population of Champasack, Sekong and Salavan. At the district level, the number of beneficiaries was approximately 1,464 people, or 0.7 per cent of the total population of Paksong, Thateng, and Laongarm. The low level of social security coverage in the target area is due to several factors, including lack of awareness about social security. The survey of tea and coffee workers shows only 10 per cent being aware of social security benefits, while 20 per cent reported attending social security promotional activities or information dissemination meetings. It was observed that workers who are members of a workers group/cooperative/association tend to have more awareness of and access to information about social security.
4. Analysing information from informal workers, a majority still lack understanding or awareness of social security benefits due to limited access to sources of information. For those who are already aware of social security, they have problems with traveling to the LSSO office to register or claim for benefits, as the offices are mostly located in provincial capitals. In addition, workers expressed dissatisfaction with public health services, and being unable to meet the payment schedule and contribution amount for social security contributions. Some other reasons are related to workers' preferences, with workers dismissing the importance of social security and/or already having alternative forms of social protection, such as health insurance or social welfare from a group/association to which they belong. These findings are consistent with Oxfam's study in 2021 (Oxfam 2021).

5. In regard to the low level of enrolment in the enterprise social security scheme, difficulties appear to be more on the side of the enterprises, especially related to the scale of business and their willingness to comply with social security law. Among tea and coffee enterprises, employers are more likely to register full-time workers with the LSSO compared to the part-time and seasonal workers they employ occasionally but in large numbers. In the field, the LFTU in Thateng reported progress on a collective negotiation between seasonal workers and rubber plantations concerning co-contributions into the social security fund; the study team considers this an interesting model that may be adapted to protect the rights of informal workers in the tea and coffee sector.
6. On the supply side of social security, the provincial LSSO reported having limited human resources in terms of both quantity and quality. While the population is dispersed all over the province, the LSSO's working station is in the provincial or district capital. Either workers travel to the LSSO office or staff travel to reach them, and both involve transportation costs. Laongarm is the only district on the plateau that has a district office for social security services. The office was established in 2018, and as of mid-2022 they have served 170 insured persons in the enterprise scheme and only 10 insured persons in the voluntary scheme. This small outreach implies that having a district office is only one of the interventions needed to expand the reach of social security membership.
7. The occupational safety and health (OSH) situation of workers in tea and coffee sector was also examined in this research. The tea sector was found to have fewer risky points in its production process. In the coffee sector, all aspects of the production process can cause injury to workers (nursery, planting, caring, harvesting and processing). About 70 per cent of surveyed workers reported having been injured at their workplace at least once, and just 29 per cent of workers reported attending OSH training. Similar to social security, workers who are producer group/association members tend to have better access to OSH training and are less likely to be injured at the workplace. In term of OSH training services, a number of projects that include an OSH training component were identified, but only one organization acts as an OSH training provider on the plateau – the Agriculture Research Center of Southern Laos (ARC).
8. Among informal workers in the tea and coffee sectors on the plateau, hired labourers who work for a fixed amount of pay on other people's gardens were found to be the most vulnerable – having lower awareness of and access to social security and OSH. From the employers' point of view, co-contributing into social security and providing safety equipment to these workers is not really cost-effective compared to provisions for permanent and full-time employees. Furthermore, most employers in the target sectors are individual households who have little incentive to do so. Hired labourers frequently reported having conflicts with informal agents. In some cases, the agents betrayed workers by not paying them after the work was done, and there are cases where the agents have simply run off. Sometimes, agents charge more than half of what the employer was paying to workers without having an agreement with the workers before they started the work.
9. Looking at the baseline situation through a gender lens, it is clear that gender gaps still persist. Female workers are found to have fewer opportunities to join activities or develop awareness about social security and OSH. In the survey, 12 in 100 male workers understood the benefits of social security, while the rate was only 8 per 100 among female workers. In terms of

workplace injuries, 82 in 100 female workers reported getting injured in the past year, while the rate is lower for males (62 in 100). It was also found that female participation in worker organizations is not well presented and recorded. For example, female workers are heavily involved in tea production in the target area, but 67 per cent in the tea association's member list appear to be male. Furthermore, the number of female leaders in worker groups is still low. There are in total 13 female leaders in worker groups in the target area. Among the 25 villages that have at least one worker group, 14 do not have any group leaders who are female.

Despite the comprehensive results presented above, it was not possible to provide all baseline indicators for the Action. Due to time and budget constraints, the field mission could not examine economic sectors outside agriculture (that is, tea and coffee workers in the service and industry sectors). The field survey was arranged in the rainy season, resulting in difficulties in accessing target villages and gathering workers, which reduced the total observation number in the survey (only 91 persons). The study team managed to receive the 2021 annual reports from provincial LSSO and saw that many worker-related data were not disaggregated by sex and economic sector and sub-sector. Despite knowing that raw data was available in the LSSO's records and that it was possible to be granted access to this raw data, it was beyond the time and scope of this study. Also, the country-level annual report of the LSSO is not possible to access, and the LSSO's Planning Department reported that national data are currently not disaggregated by economic sector, sub-sector and form of employment.

3.2. Recommendations

Based on the study results and contributions from stakeholders at the validation workshop, the recommendations below were developed considering project impact, effectiveness and sustainability. This section includes suggestions on intervention design and targeting, baseline indicators, and the monitoring system.

3.2.1. Overall

1. According to the project document, the implementation of project activities involves multiple stakeholders – including the DoLSW, LSSO, LFTU, LCA, ASDSP, and PTPA – who play very important roles in promoting decent work in the tea and coffee sectors on the plateau, and professional CSOs such as PTSE and MHP are also involved. In addition, **this study suggests the project to get some further key stakeholders involved, including the Provincial Agriculture and Forest Office (PAFO), the Lao Women's Union (LWU), the Department of Health (DoH) and the CPC.** The PAFO are working on the safety of farmers, while the DoH is mandated with addressing workers' healthcare; these two organizations can support OSH interventions and there is the possibility to include OSH activities in their mandatory work in the future. Working with the LWU and their network may help increase the number of female workers accessing social security and OSH. The CPC is considered to be a model for providing social welfare, OSH and worker organization. In addition to providing a number of helpful lessons, CPC workers could also become potential members of the LSSO in the future.
2. Hired labourers are found to play important roles in a labour-deficit area like the Bolaven Plateau. Compared to self-employed tea and coffee household units and employees of enterprises, they are also the more vulnerable. **To make this project more inclusive, it is recommended to work with hired labourers.** The study team believes there are a number of people in labour-surplus villages in Paksong, Thateng and Laongarm that come to work in tea

and coffee farms within target villages, and seasonal hired labourers can also be found on plantations during the harvesting period.

3. Concerning issues of gender, the project areas are the most developed in the region by a considerable margin. According to the provincial LWU, the promotion of gender equality in the target area is already at the level beyond solving domestic violence. However, gender gaps still persist and prevent women from accessing social and economic opportunities. This research found that female workers still have lower participation in social security- and OSH-related events, are less like to contribute to or access social security, have a higher rate of workplace injuries, and are under-represented in workers' groups. Female informants in the FGDs noted that due to the large amount of domestic work they must perform in addition to tea or coffee production work, their idle time every day is very limited. The information provided is qualitative in nature, however, and insufficient to make any definite conclusions. **It is therefore suggested that a gender study be conducted to examine time use of female workers in the tea and coffee sectors, and whether this prevents them from accessing social security and OSH and from joining workers' organizations.** Results of this study can be used to develop recommendations for mainstreaming gender into national policy papers such as the National Social Protection Strategy as well as strategies on OSH and the transition from informal to formal employment.

3.2.2. Indicators for overall and specific objectives

4. **Following on from the original statement on overall and specific objectives, the alternative indicators and possible baseline values below are suggested:**
 - a. In relation to the overall objective, the scope of indicators is suggested to be more specific to workers in economic units and informal workers eligible for enrolment in the social security enterprise and voluntary schemes. This is because informal employment still remains in the formal economic sector, and all government officers are already 100 per cent reached by the LSSO. Five alternative indicators are proposed for measuring project impact; please see Annex 3 for more details.
 - b. In relation to specific objectives (SOs), seven alternative indicators are suggested: three for SO1 and four for SO2. To keep SO1's statement, further work is needed to identify districts throughout the country that are home to tea and coffee production and to check with the LSSO for the list of district offices. For SO2, it is suggested to change the unit of measurement from individual workers to households and to assume that the 34 villages selected by the SOLAR project are potential areas for tea and coffee growing on the plateau. Please see Annex 3 for more details.

3.2.3. Output indicators and intervention activities

Based on findings of this study, this section provides two sets of recommendations: (i) comments on output indicators while keeping the current intervention design; and (ii) suggestions for alternative intervention activities.

5. **Following the intervention design in the project document, the study team reviewed 13 indicators for measuring four project outputs.** As a result, baseline values for six indicators were updated, four indicators were commented upon and the other three indicators remain unchanged. For defining target values, it is suggested that the project team and partners

continue discussions on available resources and capacity for implementation. Please see Annex 4 for more detail.

6. The study team basically supports the list of activities designed for each output. The following recommendations are suggested as alternative activities for the project:

6.1 Demonstrate two network expansion methods: Having an LSSO office in Laongarm and a mobile clinic for Paksong and Thateng, and conduct an internal study with the LSSO by comparing these two methods using a cost-benefit analysis. This will support the LSSO's decision on how to expand their network to the level below the provincial offices.

6.2 Promoting voluntary social security and OSH through more specific targets:

1. Members of existing workers' organizations (such as the CPC) who are more ready in terms of institutional and financial resources. *Approaching this group can be a quick win and provide outreach to a large number of workers.*
2. Villages where greater numbers of seasonal workers reside. *Approaching this group can make project more inclusive.*
3. The LWU and their members. *Approaching this group can mean reaching women faster, and the LWU will have knowledge on social security and OSH over the long run.*

6.3 Developing role model households for social security and OSH by supporting them during the project phase. An Oxfam study in 2021 documented a positive outcome of the Informal Worker Advancement Association: they supported female leaders in worker groups to register with the LSSO by paying contribution fees on their behalf for one year and found that the group leaders still continued to make contributions in the second year and shared their positive experiences with other group members (Oxfam 2021).

6.4 Setting up a special unit for administering labour migration and providing employment services for the tea and coffee sectors on the plateau. This unit may have a role in adjusting labour demand and supply and maintaining decent work conditions, as well as facilitating safe migration.

6.5 Conduct studies that can be used to develop recommendations for mainstreaming gender into national policy papers such as the National Social Protection Strategy and strategies concerning OSH and the transition from informal to formal employment:

- i. A gender study to examine the time use of female workers in tea and coffee producing households, and whether time poverty prevents them from accessing social security and OSH and from joining workers' organizations.
- ii. A study focusing on the working conditions of seasonal and female workers on tea and coffee commercial plantations. This area was not covered during the field mission.

3.2.4. Project monitoring

7. The availability of data is very important for monitoring the progress of every development project, and SOLAR is no exception. This study found several difficulties in compiling baseline data, mainly because the existing organizations do not record detailed information on workers.

Some organizations do have raw data in their records but do not generate reports or make this information publicly available. **It is recommended that the project improve the data formats of project partners.**

- a. All levels of the LSSO report the number of insured persons and the number of beneficiaries. However, sex-disaggregated data are not always presented. Some offices do not separate data on the enterprise and voluntary schemes in their reports. It is recommended that the project work with the LSSO on their reporting format by including data disaggregated by sex (male/female), formality of enterprise (formal/informal), economic sector (agriculture/service/industry) and subsector (tea/coffee). If the descriptive text is too long, the data can be summarized into tables and attached as annexes. This can start with the provincial LSSOs of Champasack, Sekong and Salavan and district office of Laongarm.
 - b. The LFTU have supported a number of informal worker organizations, but worker information does not seem to be recorded systematically. It is suggested that the project work with the provincial LFTU to start recording information about the tea and coffee worker groups they are supporting. This record may include (at least): name and location of the group, name of the contact person, number of workers and leaders disaggregated by sex (male/female).
 - c. The LCA and PTPA have two types of members: economic units and households. By examining their current records, it was not possible to determine the number of workers within these economic units and households. Apart from the names of contact persons and enterprises, it is suggested that they should include additional information, such as the number of workers disaggregated by sex (male/female), formality of the enterprise (formal/informal), economic sector (agriculture/service/industry) and subsector (tea/coffee).
 - d. Over the long run (if this project is extended), SOLAR may consider developing a database for workers in tea and coffee sectors for the whole country.
8. Based on the experience of conducting this research, the study team received only a small number of comments and feedback from the project partners who are going to implement project activities and create impact. **It is therefore suggested that the project raise awareness and build the capacity of the implementing agencies on how their implementation will be measured and reported.** Revision of intervention design, logframes and all indicators should be involved for each responsible agency.
9. **To make the project indicators SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound), it was found that there is a need for clear concepts, scope and definitions for some important technical terms, mainly:**
- a. Social protection versus social security – These terms can occasionally be used interchangeably, but not always, especially when referring to organisations promoting social protection because this covers a broad range of support. Increasing the number of social protection promoters may not directly lead to improving access to social security. Also, the National Social Protection Strategy defines social protection as comprising the social security scheme, a number of social welfare programmes, and the national health insurance.
 - b. Informal versus formal workers – In the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, especially at the law and policymaking level, workers in formal economic units are treated as formal workers. In reality, the ILO supported Labour Force Survey in 2017 found there

is widespread informality (estimated at 57 per cent) within the country's formal sector, which means many workers in formal enterprises are informally employed (that is, no social security, no employment benefits and sometimes no labour contract). The project can contribute to bettering the understanding of this among partners and policymakers.

- c. Workers in the tea and coffee sectors – This term is quite broad. The Lao name of this project indicates “SOLAR is for tea and coffee farmers and workers in tea and coffee gardens”. At the validation workshop, it was confirmed that SOLAR will work with tea and coffee workers in all economic sectors, including agriculture, service and industry. This would mean workers in tea/coffee shops, coffee roasting/tea drying houses, and tea/coffee processing factories would also be counted. This definition is important for quantifying the monitoring indicators and defining the target group.

10. **In order to correctly monitor the impact of the project, it is recommended that the project select beneficiaries who are not benefiting from other development projects in respect to social security, OSH, work organization and gender development.** If this is not possible, the implementing agencies may record information on these project beneficiaries (that is, which other related projects or organizations are they and their families benefiting from).

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Annexes

Annex 1. List of villages, worker organizations and female leadership in SOLAR's target area

		Total households	Households with tea and coffee		Farmer households with group		Organization of worker groups		Female leaders in the groups	
			No.	%	No.	%	No.	Type	No.	Remark
	Paksong									
1	B. Lak 5 Thongkatai	506	n/a	n/a	–	–	–		–	
2	B. Bangliang	532	n/a	n/a	–	–	–		–	
3	B. Sepien	238	n/a	n/a	–	–	–		–	
4	B. Houyset	355	n/a	n/a	–	–	–		–	
5	B. Phakkoutnoi	216	n/a	n/a	–	–	–		–	
6	B. Lak 33	124	124	100%	32	26%	2	Tea association (23), ASDSP (9)	–	
7	B. Lak 35	209	209	100%	65	31%	3	Tea association (21), ASDSP (13), JILAF (31)	–	
8	B. Lak 36	134	134	100%	12	9%	2	Tea association (3), ASDSP (9)	2	Ms Bouakhon, Ms Phet Maly
9	B. Lak 38	137	137	100%	1	1%	1	ASDSP (1)	–	
10	B. Lak 40	271	271	100%	43	16%	3	Tea association (21), ASDSP (3), CPC (19)	1	Ms Banluthai
11	B. Lak 43	454	454	100%	38	8%	3	Tea association (18), ASDSP (4), CPC (16)	–	
12	B. Lak 45	181	181	100%	46	25%	3	Tea association (23), ASDSP (6), CPC (17)	–	
	12 villages	3 357		100%	237	10%	17		3	
	Thateng									
1	B. Kokphoung-tai	156	156	100%	–	–	–		–	
2	B. Takiew	121	111	92%	51	46%	2	Organic coffee group, project	–	
3	B. Kokphoung-neau	87	80	92%	31	39%	1	Organic coffee group	–	
4	B. Donxa	162	162	100%	66	41%	2	Organic coffee group, project	–	
5	B. Chounla	389	389	100%	11	3%	2	Organic coffee group, project	–	
6	B. Nongkan	246	246	100%	62	25%	2	Organic coffee group, project	–	
7	B. Huaxe	480	480	100%	10	2%	2	Organic coffee group, project	–	
8	B. Thongwai	346	346	100%	–	–	–		–	
9	B. Nongnok	74	74	100%	–	–	–		–	
10	B. Houidam	247	247	100%	49	20%	2	Organic coffee group, project	–	

		Total households	Households with tea and coffee		Farmer households with group		Organization of worker groups		Female leaders in the groups	
			No.	%	No.	%	No.	Type	No.	Remark
11	B. Lakkhao	169	169	100%	72	43%	3	CPC, ASDSP, Sinouk	1	Ms Si
12	B. Kongtayoun	429	429	100%	63	15%	2	CPC, ASDSP	–	
	12 villages	2 906	2 889	99%	415	14%	18		1	
	Laongarm									
1	B. Nongtom	137	137	100%	20	15%	1	Producer group	1	
2	B. Phorkhem	400	400	100%	57	14%	1	Producer group	–	
3	B. Phuakmai	200	50	25%	–	–	–		–	
4	B. Onh-noi	156	150	96%	26	17%	1	Other type	1	
5	B. Vangyao	106	106	100%	16	15%	2	Producer group and other type	1	
6	B. Lao-ya	227	227	100%	56	25%	2	Producer group and other type	1	
7	B. Dong	431	431	100%	40	9%	1	Producer group	1	
8	B. Nongchua	275	275	100%	45	16%	2	Producer group and other type	1	
9	B. Phakkoutyai	240	240	100%	120	50%	5	Producer group (1), project (1), and other type (3)	2	
10	B. Nambeng	135	135	100%	30	22%	1	Producer group	1	
	10 villages	2 307	2 151	93%	410	19%	16		9	

– = nil; n/a = not available.

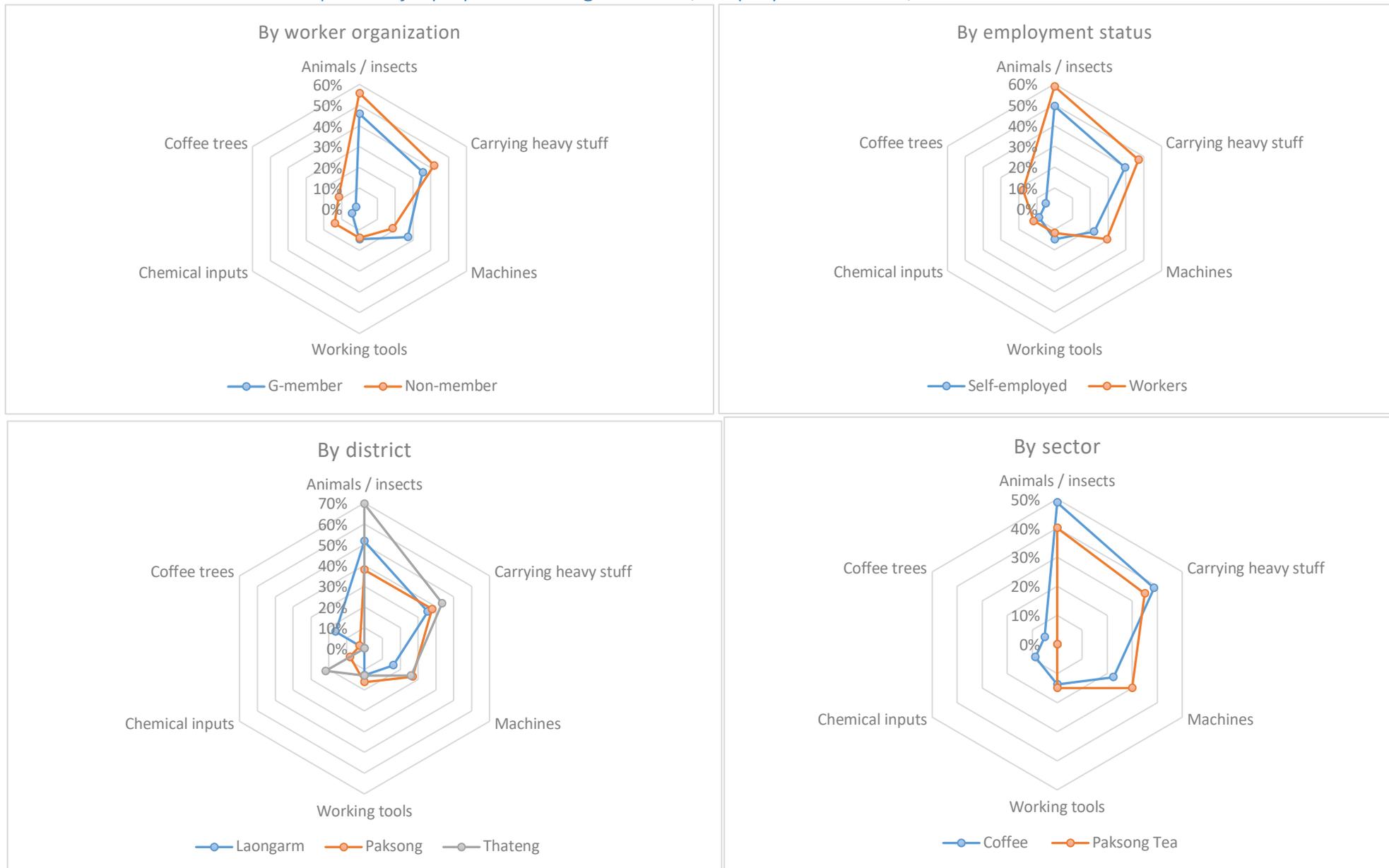
Source:

Paksong: Number of households from LSB (2021), the rest are from Tea Association and ASDSP as of October 2022.

Thateng: Data from Thateng LFTU and ASDSP as of October 2022.

Laongarm: All data from Laongarm LFTU as of September 2022.

Annex 2. Causes of workplace injury by worker organization, employment status, district and sector



Source: Worker survey, baseline study mission in July 2022.

Annex 3. Indicators for overall and specific objectives

Original			Recommendation/comment				
Results chain	Indicator	Baseline (value & reference year)	Alternative indicator		Baseline (value & reference year)	Source and means of verification	Note/suggestion
Overall objective							
Workers (particularly informal workers and women) in the Lao PDR coffee and tea sectors have improved access to social protection coverage and occupational safety and health, realizing their respective labour rights	No. of additional workers in Lao PDR registered with LSSO, (informal/formal, female/male, coffee/tea)	xx workers in Lao PDR registered with LSSO in Aug 2022 (informal: xx formal: xx female: xx male: xx coffee: xx tea: xx)	Scope of indicator is suggested to be more specific to workers in economic units and informal workers eligible for social security enterprise and voluntary scheme.	(revised) No. of additional workers in Lao PDR registered with the LSSO's enterprise and voluntary schemes (enterprise/voluntary, female/male)	116,302 workers in Lao PDR registered with the LSSO's enterprise and voluntary schemes in 2018. Female: 56,541 Male: 59,761 Enterprise: 108,295 Voluntary: 8,007	LSSO's annual report	Project please coordinate with the LSSO for updated and disaggregated data (male/female, informal/formal, tea/coffee) For time being, the LSSO cannot provide their 2021 annual report because it is confidential. Project can request for disaggregated data by sending official letter. The terms "registered worker" or "insured person" are different
			That is because all government officers are 100% reached by the LSSO and their employment is already formalized. In addition, informal employment still remains in formal economic sectors.	(new) Share of LSSO's enterprise and voluntary scheme as % of total number registered (enterprise/voluntary)	300,409 registered with LSSO in 2018 where: Government: 61% Enterprise: 36% Voluntary: 3%		

Original			Recommendation/comment				
Results chain	Indicator	Baseline (value & reference year)	Alternative indicator	Baseline (value & reference year)	Source and means of verification	Note/suggestion	
				(new) No. of additional people benefiting from enterprise and voluntary schemes (enterprise/voluntary, female/male)	238,621 people in Lao PDR benefited from LSSO's enterprise and voluntary scheme in 2018 where: Female: 123,681 Male: 114,940 Enterprise: Not reported Voluntary: Not reported		from beneficiaries. Beneficiaries include insured persons, spouses and children. All beneficiaries have access to the LSSO's health benefits.
	No. of workers in Lao PDR coffee and tea sectors have increased awareness of social protection and OSH (informal/formal, female/male, coffee/tea)	xx workers in Lao PDR have awareness of social protection and OSH in Aug 2022 (informal: xx formal: xx female: xx male: xx coffee: xx tea: xx)		(new) % of workers in Lao PDR coffee and tea sectors that have increased awareness of social security and OSH. (female/male, coffee/tea)	% of workers in tea and coffee sectors in 2022 reported participation in the promotional activities on social security and OSH. Social security Both sexes: 20% Female: 13% Male: 25% Tea: 30% (only Paksong) Coffee: 23% OSH Both sexes: 29% Female: 21% Male: 34% Tea: 40% (only Paksong) Coffee: 33%	SOLAR's baseline study in southern provinces, July 2022	More accurate percentages can be obtained by conducting a sample survey of formal and informal workers in target sectors in the northern and southern parts of the country, since tea is produced more in the north and coffee is produced more in the south. Tea workers in the south do not well represent all tea workers of Lao PDR. For number of workers who aware of social security and OSH, we need to know total number of tea and

Original			Recommendation/comment				
Results chain	Indicator	Baseline (value & reference year)	Alternative indicator	Baseline (value & reference year)	Source and means of verification	Note/suggestion	
				(new) % reduction in workers in Lao PDR coffee and tea sectors experiencing workplace injuries. (female/male, coffee/tea)	% of workers in tea and coffee sectors who reported injuries at the workplace in 2022. Both sexes: 70% Female: 82% Male: 62% Tea: 50% (only Paksong) Coffee: 70%		coffee workers in the country – data which is not yet available.
Specific objectives							
SO1: Extended and improved social protection and OSH delivery system and services at district level for women and men workers in the coffee and tea sectors	No. of women and men workers who are reached by district level social security services	xx workers in Lao PDR are reached by district level social security services in Aug 2022 (informal: xx formal: xx female: xx male: xx coffee: xx tea: xx)		(new) No. of LSSO service units/offices available for workers in districts where tea and coffee are produced	LSSO office exists in 1 out of 3 districts on the Bolaven Plateau in 2022 Paksong: 0 Thateng: 0 Laongarm: 1	SOLAR's baseline study in southern provinces, July 2022	At national level, districts with production of tea and coffee throughout the country need to be identified.
				(new) No. of LSSO-insured persons in districts where tea and coffee are produced (enterprise/voluntary)	Insured persons in 2022: <u>Paksong</u> Enterprise: 228 Voluntary: 19 <u>Thateng</u> Enterprise: 199 Voluntary: 0 Laongarm Enterprise: 170 Voluntary: 10	SOLAR's baseline study in southern provinces, July 2022	At national level, districts with production of tea and coffee throughout the country need to be identified.

Original			Recommendation/comment				
Results chain	Indicator	Baseline (value & reference year)	Alternative indicator		Baseline (value & reference year)	Source and means of verification	Note/suggestion
				(new) No. of local organizations that are able to provide OSH training services and official OSH certification in provinces where tea and coffee are produced	1 organization that can officially provide OSH training and certification on the Bolaven Plateau as of 2022	SOLAR's baseline study in southern provinces, July 2022	ARC has OSH trainers and a manual, but is not financially self-sufficient. OSH training is provided upon request of an enterprise or project. SOLAR can strengthen ARC to become more financially sustainable.
SO2: Women and men workers in the coffee and tea sectors in three contiguous districts of the Bolaven Plateau of Lao PDR are organized and empowered to promote and protect their labour rights	No. of women and men farmers who are members of an organized workers' group (formal/informal)	xx farmers are members of an organized workers' groups in Aug 2022 (informal: xx formal: xx female: xx male: xx coffee: xx tea: xx)	What was found from this research is that most of the tea and coffee production land is owned by individual households who mainly use their own labour. When a household representative joins any form of tea and coffee worker organization, the whole of the household also practically joins. Therefore, using the household as unit of analysis is more appropriate.	(new) No. of tea and coffee farming households in potential areas of 3 districts on the plateau are organized into groups	As of 2022 Paksong: 237 Thateng: 415 Laongarm: 410	SOLAR's baseline study in southern provinces, July 2022	Assume that 34 villages selected by SOLAR project are potential areas for tea and coffee growing on the plateau
				(new) No. of tea and coffee worker organizations established in potential areas of 3 districts on the plateau	As of 2022 Paksong: 17 Thateng: 18 Laongarm: 16		
				(revised) No. of tea and coffee worker organizations established in potential areas of 3 districts on the plateau that are organized and empowered by the LFTU to promote and protect their labour rights	As of 2022 Paksong: 1 Thateng: 0 Laongarm: 0		

Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Annex 4. Output indicators

Results chain	Original		Updated baseline indicator		
	Indicator	Target (value & reference year)	Baseline (value & year)	Source and mean of verification	Note
Output 1.1: Measures piloted and promoted to improve the implementation of Social Security and Labour Laws at local level by provincial and district MoLSW/DoLSW and LSSO offices.	No. of improvements to service delivery approaches recommended at district operational level as result of the Action	4 improvements to service delivery approaches at district operational level recommended by Aug 2024	2 improvements as of 2022: a. LSSO's direction to increase awareness-raising activities throughout the country since 2021 b. After ending VZF project in 2021, ARC started providing OSH training to projects and economic units on the plateau on their own	SOLAR's baseline study in southern provinces, July 2022	
	No. of local social protection promoters trained under the Action at the village level in the target districts (female/male)	30 local social protection promoters trained at village level by Aug 2024 (female: xx Male: xx)	0		Need to define "social protection promoters". If promoters for NHI and social security are counted, the baseline should not be zero.
	No. of trainers available in provincial core groups to support OSH promotion in each of the focus provinces of the Action (female/male)	xx trainers available to support OSH promotion in Aug 2024 (female: xx Male: xx)	2 trainers available to support OSH promotion in Aug 2022 (female: 1 Male: 1)		
Output 1.2: Recommendations developed for longer-term strengthening of enabling policy and institutional frameworks at national and subnational levels with respect to social protection and labour rights and	No. of collective platforms, processes and events supported by the Action to strengthen collaboration and develop recommendations	xx collective platforms, processes and events supported to strengthen collaboration and develop recommendations by Aug 2024	0		No change from original

Original			Updated baseline indicator		
Results chain	Indicator	Target (value & reference year)	Baseline (value & year)	Source and mean of verification	Note
entitlements (including OSH) for women and men workers, particularly informal workers	No. of gender-responsive recommendations produced for longer-term policy and institutional change in social protection system at all levels to meet needs of women and men informal workers	xx gender-responsive recommendations produced for longer-term policy and institutional change in social protection system at all levels to meet needs of women and men informal workers by Aug 2024	0		No change from original
Output 2.1: Increased awareness of the benefits of registration with the LSSO among women and men coffee and tea workers in the targeted districts	No. of workers and employers in the targeted districts who are reached by awareness-raising activities (informal/formal, female /male)	xx workers and employers in the target districts are reached by awareness-raising activities by Aug 2024 (informal: xx Formal: xx Female: xx Male: xx)	20% of tea and coffee workers reported having experiences joining awareness-raising activities about social security as of 2022. Female: 13% Male: 25%	SOLAR's baseline study in southern provinces, July 2022	Indicator updated
	No. of initiatives completed to strengthen the basis for ongoing efforts beyond the Action period to improve workers access to social security and OSH	4? initiatives completed by Aug 2024 to strengthen the basis for ongoing efforts beyond the Action to improve access to social security and OSH	2 on-going activities: a. LSSO mandatory activities b. ARC's OSH training services	SOLAR's baseline study in southern provinces, July 2022	
Output 2.2: Increased capacities of mass organizations, informal workers' organizations, farmers' organizations, CSOs, the Lao	No. of initiatives to strengthen advocacy capacities of stakeholders	3? initiatives to strengthen advocacy capacities of stakeholders by Aug 2024	0		No change from original

Original			Updated baseline indicator		
Results chain	Indicator	Target (value & reference year)	Baseline (value & year)	Source and mean of verification	Note
Coffee Association and small and medium producers to effectively advocate for the rights and needs of women and men coffee and tea sector workers, particularly informal workers, with a focus on social protection access and labour rights (including OSH)	No. of organizations of informal workers and/or smallholder farmers strengthened as result of activity under the Action	15? organizations of informal workers and/or smallholder farmers strengthened by Aug 2024	2 organizations as of 2022 a. Paksong Tea Promotion Association b. ARC	SOLAR's baseline study in southern provinces, July 2022	
Output 2.3: Informal women workers are better organized and prepared for stronger leadership, management and governance in the coffee and tea sectors	No. of informal women workers groups created as result of activity under the Action	3 informal women worker groups created under the Action by Aug 2024	13 female leaders in tea- and coffee-related work groups/associations Paksong: 3 Thateng:1 Laongarm: 9	SOLAR's baseline study in southern provinces, July 2022	Indicator updated
	No. of informal women workers engaged in leadership training under the Action	100 informal women workers engaged in leadership training under the Action by Aug 2024	Data is not available		Cannot say "0" yet. Have to check with concerned organizations, such as LWU and CPC

Original			Updated baseline indicator		
Results chain	Indicator	Target (value & reference year)	Baseline (value & year)	Source and mean of verification	Note
	No. of trained women leaders who have transitioned into leadership roles in mass organizations, CSOs, farmers' and workers' organizations, communities, cooperatives, SMEs and other relevant areas within the coffee and tea sectors	30 trained women leaders have transitioned into leadership roles by Aug 2024 (coffee: xx Tea: xx)	Data is not available		Cannot say "0" yet. Have to check with concern organization such as LWU and CPC
	% of surveyed women workers reporting improvements in how they are treated in their communities and workplaces	50% of surveyed women workers report improvements in how they are treated in their communities and workplace	Data is not available		The current indicator needs to be time bound (improvement from when to when).



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