

# **National Practitioner Forum on (Re)integration of Victims of Trafficking in Lao PDR**

Talad, Vientiane Province, Lao PDR

28<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> October 2010

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.a Forum and Practitioner Context

- **Forum Details:**
  - National Practitioner Forum on (Re)integration of Victims of Trafficking in the Lao PDR
  - 28<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> October 2010
  - Khem Ngeum Guesthouse
  - Talad, Vientiane Province, Lao PDR
  - [1 AGENDA ReintForum Oct10 EN.DOC](#)
- **Coordinator Details:**
  - Organised by: Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
  - Supported by: IOM, WVL, UNICEF, UNIAP, Save the Children and AFESIP
- **Participant Details (see Annex B):**
  - **48 participants**
    - 3 DSW coordinators
    - 5 facilitators: IOM (1), WVL (1), UNIAP (2), SC (1)
    - 40 forum attendees
  - **Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW)**
    - Operate Transit Centre in Vientiane Capital – Women and children VoT
    - Coordinate all Lao government action on trafficking
    - **23 participants:** 5 central, 9 provincial, 9 district
      - 3 Department of Social Welfare (including the Deputy Director)
      - 2 VTE Transit Centre officers
      - 9 provincial Social Welfare officers
      - 9 district Social Welfare officers
  - **Lao Women’s Union (LWU)**
    - LWU’s Counselling and Protection centre for Women and Children, since 2006
    - Provide specific services to VoT, eg psychosocial, medical and education
    - **5 participants:** 3 central, 2 provincial
      - 1 LWU Development Department officer
      - 2 LWU Centre for Counselling (shelter) officers
      - 2 LWU provincial officers
  - **Ministry of Public Security (MPS)**
    - Host the Anti-Trafficking Division (ATD)
    - Largely legal, focus on prevention and prosecution
    - **4 participants:** 1 central, 3 provincial
      - 1 ATD officer
      - 3 provincial Law Enforcement officers
  - **Ministry of Public Health (MPH)**
    - **4 participants:** 2 central, 2 provincial
      - 2 provincial Public Health officers
      - 1 officer each from Mahosot Hospital and Mother and Child Hospital
  - **Partners**
    - **13 participants**
      - World Vision Lao PDR: 2 – Savannakhet:2
      - Village Focus International (VFI), Champasak: 2
      - AFESIP: 3
      - UNIAP: 2
      - IOM: 1
      - Save the Children: 1

## 1.b Lao Context: Reintegration background and network

- The first return and re-integration processes were introduced to Lao PDR in 2001, supported by IOM.
- This forum was the first revision of the processes since 2001.
- MLSW and IOM signed an MoU on return and re-integration in 2007.
- Key government agencies involved in reintegration include: MLSW, LWU, ATD and MPS
- Key NGOs working on reintegration include: AFESIP, WVL, VFI, Friends International, and Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) → Note: NCA mainly refers cases to AFESIP and VFI
- Key UN groups currently working on reintegration include: IOM and UNIAP

## 1.c Reintegration: Current policies, programs and practices

- In theory, reintegration assistance is available to all victims of human trafficking and/or exploitation, whether returned voluntarily or involuntarily; however, in practice, men do not currently have access to long-term shelter and usually have only limited access to services.
- Although an MoU has been signed between MLSW and IOM, still no national-level policy or procedures support reintegration programs, and there are still no formal definitions of reintegration.
- The national-level Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on Return and Reintegration is currently being discussed and will be drafted in the future.
- Government agencies involved usually hand over responsibility of reintegration to shelters.
- There are currently 5 shelters in Lao PDR:
  - 1 LWU shelter (VTE)
  - 1 Transit Centre (MLSW, VTE)
  - 2 AFESIP (VTE and SVN)
  - 1 VFI (CMPSK)
- Each shelter/organisation defines/frames reintegration policies, programs and practices for themselves. Organisations usually provide training and guidelines for their own staff.
- There are no national-level standard **monitoring** guidelines for reintegration activities.

## 1.d Reintegration Data Overview

→ Data below is summarised from Session 1.1 CAD presentation, Mr Vongkham and has been collected from the Vientiane Transit Centre.

### [2 D1S1d MLSW Statistics \(no pics\) LA.PPT](#)

→ It is important to note that absence or low numbers of trafficking in some provinces may indicate a lack of research/data in that province more than an actual lack of VoTs/reintegration programs.

→ Statistics of VoTs who have returned voluntarily and have not been included in or accessed reintegration services are not captured.

- Between 2001 and 2010, the per province number of VoTs reintegrated into communities:
  - Ranged from 2 in Udomxai to 643 in Savannakhet;
  - Totalled 1,582;
  - Other provinces with high numbers included Champasak (249), Salavan (222) and Vientiane Province (203).

- There was a peak of reintegration during 2005 (246 cases), 2006 (259 cases), and 2007 (264 cases). There have been 135 cases to date in 2010 alone.
  - 1,518 of 1,582 total cases have been female; 64 male.
  - 1,355 of total cases have been for VoTs below the age of 18; 227 above age 18.
  - Most common forms of labour exploitation noted include:
    - Restaurants: 199 cases
    - Commercial sex trade: 152 cases
    - House cleaners: 96 cases
    - Factories: 65 cases
- 

## 2. The Practitioner Forum

### 2.a Session 1.1: Setting the Scene

#### → Mr Khamkheng, Deputy Director of Social Welfare Department, MLSW, key points:

- The definition of human trafficking essentially includes exploitation at all levels and is of great importance in this country.
- Human trafficking is not just bad luck. It is preventable.
- Trafficking and exploitation issues and solutions are inextricably linked with development issues and solutions, and that in seeking to combat trafficking we have to look at what creates victim vulnerability to it.
- One objective of this forum is to examine strengths and weaknesses of the status quo and work on a plan to improve the safety and security of our citizens.

#### → Mr Vongkham, Head of Child Assistance Department, MLSW, noted that, given that it has been 10 years since we reviewed our national trafficking-victim reintegration processes, this forum is a significant opportunity to strengthen our regional (6 country) response to trafficking.

#### → Dr Xoukiet, Project Coordinator of UNIAP, key points:

- Having this important opportunity to share the real stories from the shelters and victims, we can improve future counter-trafficking activities by more effectively updating our national processes, for maximum impact.
- Overview of COMMIT and SPA II and how they fit together with MoU and reintegration plans
- Encourage participants, as practitioners, to contribute to this assessment and effort to improve reintegration regionally.

#### → Ms Thanaporn, IOM, key points:

- [3 D1S1a IOM Intro \(no pics\) TH.ppt](#)
- Overview of IOM's response to and support of reintegration processes
- Highlights that every country has its own understanding of and approaches to reintegration
- One particular issue to deal with in the Lao context is pushback migrants.
- Slides 9 – 14 list fundamental principles of reintegration, for example that reintegration:
  - Includes educational/vocational/income-generating opportunities;
  - Places the victim at the centre of decision-making in reintegration plan;
  - Protects the victim at all stages;

- Includes follow-up and monitoring;
- Is all inclusive and respects difference, eg gender, ethnicity, etc.

## 2.b Session 1.2: Panel Discussion on Practitioner Perspectives

### → A: Group 1: Family/Community Assessment – Ms Souksavanh, Deputy Head CAD, MLSW

- [4 D1S2a MLSW Case Study LA.doc](#)
- MLSW CASE STUDY:
  - 17 year old female labour exploitation victim in a Bangkok jewellery factory; 13 hour work days, 6 days a week - Escaped after 1 year, was arrested and sent back to Lao PDR, early 2010
  - While in Lao shelter, victim wanted to continue primary school study – She had previously completed only 3 years of school – Government tried to support this but she was considered too old to continue primary school study – She was unable to find suitable work because she did not have appropriate education level – She did not want to return to shelter

### → B: Group 4: Education/Vocation Support – Mr Khamsoulith, World Vision, Savannakhet

- [5 D1S2b WV Procedures \(no pics\) LA.ppt](#)
- Presents WV SVK education/vocational training procedures – Slide 6 in particular outlines 6-step reintegration procedure, including:
  1. Social workers to build relationship with victims through listening and understanding
  2. Collect lots of information from victims to help build best reintegration plan
  3. Identify and analyse challenges with victim
  4. Make individualised plan for each victim based on challenges and solutions
  5. Implement the plan with the victim and adjust to suit the context and timing
  6. Follow-up and review the progress of the case → Close the case when appropriate

### → C: Group 2: Medical and Psychosocial Care – Ms Taikham, AFESIP

- [6 D1S2c AFESIP Med&PsychSoc \(no pics\) LA.ppt](#)
- Explains that, on a macro level, all AFESIP reintegration plans follow national/regional guidelines but that each plan is carefully tailored to the specific (medical and psychosocial) needs and experiences of each victim
- “Victims are the experts – We must always listen to them.”
- Mental and psychosocial reintegration activities are programmed based on the Expected Outcomes of each for the victim, and are organised into groups of activities:
  - In Shelter: Confidence and communication through painting, peer sharing, etc
  - Vocational Training (3 months in shelter): Skills taught can include letter writing, etc
  - Training Processes: Psychological preparation of victims to return to their village and to implement their vocational activities in the community
  - Reintegration Support:
- AFESIP CASE STUDY: One young female victim used pottery to share her wish for her abuser to be hated and be shamed in his community (see Slide 10 for photos) – Of great psychological benefit for victims.

→ D: Group 3: Assisting Social/Cultural Reintegration – Ms Vannidah, VFI

- [7 D1S2d VFI Case Study LA.doc](#)
- VFI CASE STUDY: In 2007, 17 year old girl was trafficked to Thailand by a trafficker and forced to work in many jobs for little income, including house-keeper, hard construction labour, and beer-server at karaoke bar where she was almost raped by her employer – She met and moved in with a Thai man to whom she became pregnant, before being arrested and sent back to Lao PDR, where she entered VFI Shelter – She had child, returned to Thailand, became pregnant again, was arrested and again sent back to VFI Shelter in Lao PDR.
  - Particular Challenges of this Case:
    - No parents (both died)
    - Relatives do not accept her/are disgraced by her/do not support her
    - She displayed a lazy attitude
    - She has a two year child and is currently 7 months pregnant
    - Victim still believes that Thai father of child will come to claim responsibility for her and their children
- There was some discussion about legally forcing Thai men who father children to Lao migrant women to take responsibility for the children, but it was generally agreed that this is a challenging issue.

→ E: Group 5: Legal Assistance – Ms Vonemaly, AFESIP

- [8 D1S2e AFESIP Legal LA.ppt](#)
- (TBC)

## 2.c Session 1.3: Q&A with Panel Summary

- All practitioners agree we want to strengthen and have clearer national guidelines for reintegration practices in Lao PDR
- Major challenges of reintegration in current context are:
  - Maintaining achievements of victims in shelter (eg physical, mental, skills) when VoTs return to community.
    - *'In the shelter, you are the nurse, the educator, the counsellor, everything for the victims. When they return home, they have to take the responsibility. But practitioners are the ones who have to: 1. Ensure the community context is suitable for return; and 2. Follow-up and support the victim in village. (AFESIP staff)*
  - Ensuring good health for VoTs when they return to villages without access to good health and sanitation
  - Sharing good practices amongst all reintegration practitioners → One SVN PLSW congratulates WV on the work they do in SVN and asks how we can better ensure transfer of information/methods/systems/successes/ failures across provinces (eg to Salavan) to improve everyone's practices.
- Considerable discussion as to whether VoTs returning to Thailand after reintegration should be considered a failure;
  - Some see it as a failure of reintegration processes, as VoTs obviously don't have sustainable income-generating activities to do in village, so question why we are

sending them back to village without, either enough skills or enough opportunity to function well in community?

- Others see the issue of epidemic migration as so endemic in Lao society that VoTs returning to Thailand for work should not be considered a failure but a necessary consideration when designing reintegration procedures and plans.
  - *'We ensure that VoTs study a **variety** of vocational courses so if one fails in village, another can be employed.'* (VFI staff)
  - *'Vocational skills provided in shelters must suit **both** the victim and the community context.'* (AFESIP staff)
  - *'We must collect good quality information from VoTs in our shelters/care to ensure that we can help improve the issues for any future victims.'* (WV SVK)

## 2.d Thematic Groups Plenary Discussion

- Group facilitators were appointed for each group then participants joined the group they considered most relevant to their experience.
- Groups were given the following framework to work with:

Current Situation and Reintegration Processes	Strengths of these Processes	Challenges of these Processes	Possibilities for Improvement	Case Studies and/or Areas of Special Attention

### → Group 1: Family/Community Assessment Summary

- [9a D2S2G1 Fam&Comm LA.JPG](#)  
[9b D2S2G1 Fam&Comm LA.JPG](#)  
[9c D2S2G1 Fam&Comm LA.JPG](#)  
[9d D2S2G1 Fam&Comm LA.JPG](#)
- The major challenge of family tracing discussed was that no matter how carefully family/community assessment is, '50%'<sup>1</sup> of victims migrate (usually illegally/unsafely) again, even after lengthy reintegration procedures. The following points were discussed:
  - Poverty and lack of gainful income-generating activities in-village are regarded as major factors driving villagers to migrate. If poverty still exists in village, should we send victims back to these villages?
  - Some people believe that returning to the family is the most effective form of reintegration into the community. Others, on the other hand, believe that sending victims to a location which can financially support victims effectively is most important.
  - It was agreed that reintegration must include both work with victims and with communities.
  - *'The issue is how we can build better, more supportive, gainful environments to stop them going in the first place.'* (Forum participant)

<sup>1</sup> 50% is figure given during discussion – Not confirmed

- *'Maybe if we had better labour programs in-village, unsafe migration would not be such an issue... Families must be involved in solving this problem.'* (UNIAP coordinator).
- When victims are young, collecting accurate information from them can be difficult because:
  - They are often known by nicknames;
  - They often do not know their parents' names;
  - They often forget important details.
- Difficulties for family/community tracing/assessment are also caused by:
  - Ethnic language and cultural issues;
  - Village locations changing or smaller villages being combined into larger ones;
  - Some take new spouses in the absence of their migrant spouse gone out of the village to seek work.
- All agree that quality data must be collected from victims, to support the immediate victim as well future victims.
- MLSW encourage social workers to coordinate closely with Village Social Security officers.
- Tracing 'missing persons' is also of great concern.

## → Group 2: Medical and Psychosocial Care Summary

- [10 D2S2G2 Med&PsychSoc LA.pptx](#)
- Some major challenges related to medical/psychosocial reintegration discussed included:
  - It is dangerous, for victim and/or community, for some victims with some particular, communicable diseases to return to villages.
  - Doing all medical and psychosocial tests is very time consuming.
  - Once victims are back in village, following-up health concerns is difficult over phone, and returning to hospitals/shelters can also be difficult/expensive for victims in remote communities.
  - Medical and psychosocial care is expensive for both shelter and victim once they return to village, for example medical needs, staff training, medical books, etc.
  - Strengthening general health of all villagers, not just victims, is also of concern.
- All agree that certificates of health should be issued to victims reintegrating into community.
- Workshops for village members to be able to do in-village check-ups themselves was recommended.
  - Opposition to this was raised in that quality of medical check can not be guaranteed.
- Workshops to update skills of medical staff dealing specifically with VoTs was recommended.
- Some believe that the MoH does not have strong enough policy to support the medical and psychosocial needs of reintegrating victims.
  - Having a secretariat-type framework in MoH to specifically support VoT was suggested.

## → Group 3: Assisting Social/Cultural Reintegration Summary

- [11a D2S2G3 Soc&Cult LA.JPG](#)
- [11b D2S2G3 Soc&Cult LA.JPG](#)
- [11c D2S2G3 Soc&Cult LA.JPG](#)
- Stigma for female VoTs reintegrating into community is mostly attached to loss of dignity and face, individually or on behalf of the family. In this case, victims are usually either cast

out of the family home or, if accepted back, are forced to work as maibaan or 'meh liang' (carer of children) for the family or other 'family members'<sup>2</sup>. *'Social stigmatisation of victims is often noted as them not being cared for [emotionally] upon their return to the community.'* (AFESIP representative)

- It was noted and agreed that reintegrating VoTs are more open to social stigma if they do not have parents.
  - VFI CASE STUDY: One young, parentless female victim was returned to her community to live in her aunt's house – Aunt already has many children – Victim is forced to work in slave-like conditions for the aunt and children.
- Many victims fear the ostracism of the naibaan upon their return.
- It was suggested that an MoU be signed between Lao PDR and Thailand on the issue of babies being born to Lao migrant women of Thai men; that the Thai fathers be legally bound to (financially) support the child.
  - Cases were shared of some hospitals refusing assistance to women with fatherless babies.
- *'The issues of reintegration are a cycle that will never be broken if we don't solve the original problems in the victims' lives.'* (AFESIP representative).

#### → Group 4: Education/Vocation Support Summary

- [12 D2S2G4 Ed&VT LA.pptx](#)
- One challenge discussed surrounding education and vocational training for victims included that Lao PDR is built on agriculture, hence more TVT in agriculture is needed.
  - Others disagreed because agricultural activities do not generate significant income in Lao PDR; this is one of the reasons migrants go in the first place.
  - Others suggested that TVT include business skills in agriculture.
- WV SVK suggested that TVT could include ways to avoid future victims, eg train victims in labour networking.
  - All agree that TVT must be based on the needs of the community into which the victim will reintegrate.
- Many agree that TVT activities should be coordinated and standardised across shelters.
- AFESIP shelter staff suggest that one challenge of TVT is when victims study what their parents want them to study rather than what is appropriate/needed in the village and/or what the victim has some skill in and can generate income doing.
- All agree that, when planning TVT for victims, social workers must do some research into what is appropriate in the specified village.
  - Some concern from shelter staff was raised about victims who do not want to study what social workers recommend that they study.
- WV Lao raised the issue of TVT for youth victims including parents as well as victims themselves, so that livelihood for the whole family can be financially stabilised, and youth victims have the opportunity to return to school.
  - Both AFESIP and VFI staff say that they offer this type of TVT, especially in farming.
  - VFI CASE STUDY: (TBC)

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<sup>2</sup> Family member including non-blood ties.

- IOM suggests offer TVT to reintegrate victims into communities other than the ones the victims originally come from and where the TVT skills might be more needed, eg in Vientiane.
- VFI staff note that they have set up some ‘apprenticeship’ type TVT for victims, eg in tourism, where victims can gain TVT skills through an ‘internship’ with a local business.
- All agree that victims are key in the consultation process in designing appropriate TVT plans for reintegration that fits with the individual circumstances of each victim.
  - VFI CASE STUDY: Some victims have been offered training on preparing food in their family homes, while they can care for their children, to be sold at market later in the day/by someone else, enhancing convenience for the victim.

## → Group 5: Legal Assistance Summary

- [13a D2S2G5 Legal LA.JPG](#)
- [13b D2S2G5 Legal LA.JPG](#)
- [13c D2S2G5 Legal LA.JPG](#)
- Some major challenges discussed regarding legal issues included the need for clear definitions of human trafficking and exploitation.
- Lack of funds/technology to be able to pursue legal issues for victims was raised as a concern for some.
- MLSW staff raised the issue of victims’ lack of legal knowledge about illegal migration and the fact that they have broken the law by migrating illegally.
- Legal officers were vocal during this discussion and noted that even they are not fully aware/clear about legal matters surrounding human trafficking and exploitation.
  - A very long discussion resulted about legal issues surrounding trafficking during which many participants agreed that they are not clear about legal matters on this subject.
  - One legal officer noted that the law sometimes forgets who the target of legal retribution should be; the *traffickers* rather than migrants/the victims.
- On the issue of rights: ‘99%<sup>3</sup> of victims do not know their rights.’ (AFESIP)
  - ‘Most victims know about human trafficking but do not know about their labour and migration rights.’ (LWU SVN)
  - ‘Most victims think that legal matters start and finish once human trafficking happens – They forget their labour rights.’ (Khammouan police officer)
  - ‘It seems that we have to ensure that knowledge of human rights permeates through the whole population; migrants, parents, children and all. So that, by the time they reach Bangkok, they are full of human rights knowledge.’ (UNIAP)
  - IOM notes that human rights documents are available to all, in six languages.

## 2.e Forum Recommendations

- At the conclusion of all discussion, recommendations from each group were collated and presented to the forum as a whole (link below).
  - Recommendations were presented under the five thematic group headings and discussed for collegial agreement.

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<sup>3</sup> 99% is figure given during discussion – Not confirmed

- Participants had the opportunity to discuss and refine recommendations.
- Recommendations that could not be agreed upon were highlighted for later discussion and refinement by MLSW and forum coordinators.
- [14 DRAFT Recommendations LA.DOC](#)
  - Recommendations in English to be included after consultation with Forum Coordinators.
- Recommendations for 'Areas of Special Need' were collected from all forum participants.
  - Results currently being collated and summarised by Dr Xoukiet → Will be included upon completion.

### 3. Summary and Conclusion

All forum participants agree that we want to strengthen national guidelines for reintegration practices in Lao PDR. In general, practitioners are proud of existing reintegration programs but are keen to update them and upgrade the skill level of all social workers to be able to better implement reintegration activities and support victims. Participants agree that this can come from capacity building workshops for practitioners and effective sharing of good reintegration practices amongst all practitioners. Most forum participants admit that their knowledge of human trafficking and exploitation across all arenas – reintegration practices, legal matters, shelter practices, protection methods, etc – could be strengthened; and it was agreed that it could be effective to nationally standardised reintegration practices, and that available (human) resources must be used effectively.

All participants agree that reintegration must place the victim at the centre whereby the victim is consulted and informed during all stages of reintegration and has say in plans and programs, and in which victim rights and protection are of utmost importance. Also essential to effective reintegration is flexible planning, adaptable to suit the individual needs of each victim, as well as regular, well-skilled monitoring and support of victims back in their communities. All also agree that collecting accurate and thorough data from victims is fundamental in designing effective reintegration plans for current and future victims.

One recurring issue raised at the forum is the cyclical nature of migration, of which reintegration is a part, and ways to break the cycle so that migrants never become victims of exploitation or trafficking in the first place. Discussion focused on concern about how to strengthen village life – including creating income-generating activities, improving health and sanitation, etc – thereby decreasing dependence on unsafe migration; and on whether we should be sending victims back to villages that may not provide opportunity for successful reintegration. Some thoughtful recommendations were given on ways to improve village livelihood by equipping victims and their communities with skills, training and activities for development. See all Recommendations in section '2.e'.

Interestingly, the issue of gender was barely discussed during the forum, nor was the issue of men's access to reintegration services and/or facilities raised.

### **Event Feedback – Observations of the Forum**

- The 'Setting the Scene' and 'Panel Discussion' sections at the beginning of the forum prepared participants well to be able to contribute knowledgeably and effectively to the thematic group issue analysis and recommendation formation.
- A good cross section of practitioners were invited as participants and it was very valuable for participants to have opportunity to hear each others' reintegration methods and stories, especially for Ministry level to hear directly from shelter staff. In general, participants gained real insight into concerns and challenges related to shelter/reintegration issues, and had opportunity to hear real case studies of both successes and failures in reintegration. This forum proved to be a valuable opportunity for organisations to be able to consult with each other on shelter practice and victim support.
- The forum proved an effective opportunity to remind practitioners of the *coordinated* effort of reintegration activities, ie across ministries, civil society groups (eg medical, legal, etc), and across the region, in coordination with SPA III.
- The final recommendations were generated by all sections of the forum, including panel presentation of case studies, thematic group analysis, and plenary discussion.

## **4. Follow-up Actions**

The Reintegration Recommendations which resulted from the forum are currently being revised and refined by government and partners. Once they are finalised they will be shared with all partners.

## **5. Annexes**

### **Annex A: Participant List, with institutions and contact details**

[15 Forum Participants LA.PDF](#)

### **Annex B: Phase 1: Desk Review of current Lao reintegration context and practices**

[16 Phase 1 Desk Review EN.DOC](#)

### **Annex C: Trafficking Statistics Maps**

Courtesy of IOM, the two maps indicate:

→ Map 1: The per province percentage of internal trafficking victims in Lao PDR (116 cases)

[17 Map Internal Trafficking EN.JPG](#)

→ Map 2: The per province percentage of Lao VoTs returned from Thailand (1,582 cases)

[18 Map Returned Victims EN.JPG](#)

Both maps clearly highlight the trafficking hotspots in Lao PDR being in and around the capital as well as in the south, with Savannakhet being noted as having a severe number of VoTs returned.