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**Master's Thesis of International Studies**

**A Study of Self-assessed Contributing  
Factors to Low Female Representation  
in Senior Diplomatic Positions in Lao  
PDR**

라오스 고위 외교직의 여성 대표성이 낮은 자체 평가  
기여 요인에 관한 연구

**August 2023**

**Development Cooperation Policy Program  
Graduate School of International Studies  
Seoul National University  
International Cooperation Major**

**Phennapha BANTHAVONG**

**A Study of Self-assessed Contributing  
Factors to Low Female Representation  
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PDR**

A Thesis Presented  
By

**Phennapha BANTHAVONG**

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of International Studies

**Graduate School of International Studies  
Seoul National University  
Seoul, Korea**

# **A Study of Self-assessed Contributing Factors to Low Female Representation in Senior Diplomatic Positions in Lao PDR**

**Oh, Yoon Ah**

**Submitting a Master's Thesis of International Cooperation**

**August 2023**

**Graduate School of International Studies  
Seoul National University  
International Cooperation Major**

**Phennapha BANTHAVONG**

**Confirming a Master's Thesis Written By  
Phennapha BANTHAVONG  
August 2023**

Chair	<u>Park, Tae Gyun</u>	(Seal)
Vice chair	<u>Han, JeongHun</u>	(Seal)
Examiner	<u>Oh, Yoon Ah</u>	(Seal)

# Abstract

## **A Study of Self-assessed Contributing Factors to Low Female Representation in Senior Diplomatic Positions in Lao PDR**

Phennapha BANTHAVONG  
International Cooperation  
Graduate School of International Studies  
Seoul National University

The objectives of this research examine the factors that lead to fewer women Ambassadors, and Consul Generals, as well as the barriers, difficulties, and challenges of Lao women ambassadors during the posting period as perceived by senior Lao diplomats. Women comprise 25 percent of all Ambassadors and Consul Generals in 40 diplomatic representative missions abroad. The thesis relied heavily on information from the interviewees from both female and male in order to observe any differences in results; three women Ambassadors, seven men Ambassadors, and three Consul Generals were interviewed in-depth. The findings and results of this thesis show that there are factors that may hinder women from becoming ambassadors as suggested by the top diplomats; such as social norms and culture in the past that suppress women's opportunities, and lack of affirmative action. Furthermore, men officials are much more than women and that makes women in the qualified position lower than men. Women and men face similar working obstacles and challenges, which are internal and external unity, non-uniform of the information from relevant sectors, foreign languages proficiency, the lack of capability of the employees, and insufficient budget.

**Keywords:** Women Ambassadors, Lao Diplomacy, Female Representation, Lao PDR

**Student Number:** 2021-20413

## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

<b>ADB</b>	Asia Development Bank
<b>AGDA</b>	Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy
<b>ASEM</b>	Asia-Europe Meeting
<b>ACMECS</b>	Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination
<b>FEALAC</b>	Forum for East-Asia-Latin America Cooperation
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>Lao PDR</b>	Lao People's Democratic Republic
<b>LWU</b>	Lao Women's Union
<b>MoFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<b>NCAWMC</b>	National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers, and Children.
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WIPO</b>	World Intellectual Property Organization

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# Chapter I. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Achieving gender equality and empowering all women is one of the goals that the Lao Government aims to achieve. As stated in SDG goal 5, it targets to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”. Unfortunately, gender inequality in diplomacy still persists and lagged behind many other professions. According to AGDA (2021), Women continue to be underrepresented in ambassadorship positions across the world, out of 4,060 ambassadors, women account for only 20.7 percent in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Since the ambassador is the highest-ranking position and plays a key role in representing a home country in the host country, implementing a gender mainstreaming strategy will promote and empower women in the decision-making position, and will help the government to achieve gender equality, essential for sustainable development and durable security.

The Lao People’s Democratic Republic was established in 1975. The Lao Diplomatic Day was established on Oct 12, 1945. The Constitution of Lao PDR, article 12, 2015, outlines the guidelines for foreign policy as “Peace, Independence, Friendship, and Cooperation. Promote relation and cooperation with all countries on the principles of peaceful coexistence; respect for each other’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; and equality and mutual benefits. The Lao PDR supports the struggle of the

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<sup>1</sup> Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, Women in Diplomacy Index 2021.

world's people for peace, national independence, democracy, and social progress".<sup>2</sup>

As of 2022, Lao PDR has established diplomatic relations with 147 countries, and has 40 diplomatic representative missions abroad; which are 26 Embassies, 3 Permanent Representative Missions, 10 Consulate Generals, and 1 Consulate Office.

According to Law on Diplomacy Class (2020). A Diplomat is an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to carry out foreign affairs activities in the home country and abroad. While an ambassador is a highest-ranking diplomat that is authorized to represent the home country in a host country.<sup>3</sup>

Towns, A., Niklasson, B., (2017). Occupational sex segregation is very important when it comes to what extent it identifies what job is only for women or men. Especially in the diplomatic field, this career claimed to be a male-dominated profession, with fewer women. Women were undervalued in their abilities, they experienced criticism, negative reactions, and disrespect. The similar value of gender equality and the culture of the host country are possible factors that can determine the acceptance and performance limitations of female ambassadors.<sup>4</sup> However, studies showed that female ambassadors believe they may exploit their femininity to gain beneficial information from male colleagues and be able to approach female civil servants which males couldn't do so.

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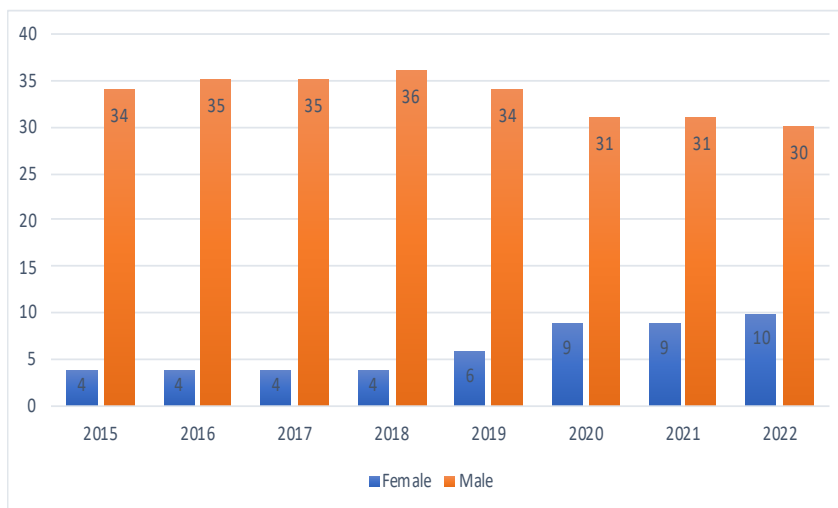
<sup>2</sup> Government of Lao PDR, The Constitution of Lao PDR, Art. 12, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Lao PDR, Law on Diplomacy Class, Art. 2, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Towns, A., Niklasson, B... Gender, International Status, and Ambassador Appointments, *Foreign policy analysis* (13, 521-540), (2017).

According to the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2021 reported that Lao PDR ranked 36 out of 156 countries, which shows the gender gap from four different frameworks, such as, (1) economic participation and opportunity, (2) educational attainment, (3) health and survival, and (4) political empowerment. Unfortunately, among these four areas, the highest gender gaps are education attainment (112<sup>th</sup>) followed by political empowerment (104<sup>th</sup>).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, as the country is developing and moving forward, the Government has put the gender equality perspective along with the country’s socioeconomic development; making women are now receiving more opportunities, especially in the foreign affairs field as we can see more women get the chance to be promoted as ambassadors.

**Figure 1: Ambassadors and Consul Generals of Lao PDR**



*Source: Organization and Personnel Department, MoFA (as of August 15, 2022)*

\*Note: Consulate General of Lao PDR to Stung Treng, China was established in 2016. And Consulate General of Lao PDR to Changsha, China was established in 2018.

<sup>5</sup> World economic forum, Global Gender Gap Index Report 2021.

According to data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Organization and Personnel Department, in 2022, the number of women ambassadors and consul generals has increased by more than 50 percent compared to 2015. Currently, there are six women Ambassadors who are posted in Malaysia, Brunei, China, Japan, Russia, and Cuba, and four Consul Generals who are posted in Viet Nam, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Kunming (China), which comprise 25 percent of all Ambassadors and Consul Generals in 40 diplomatic representative missions abroad.<sup>6</sup> (Figure 1)

This thesis will examine the factor that influence to low women Ambassadors, barriers, difficulties, and challenges of Lao women ambassadors. The questions that are presented in this thesis will be tested using the data from the interview of current Lao women and men Ambassadors and Consular Generals abroad. The thesis is deemed helpful in giving the understanding the role, obstacles, and experiences of women ambassadors while they are working abroad as well as contributing factors to lower women ambassadors.

## **1.2 Overview of Lao Diplomacy and 5-Year Development Plan of MoFA (2021-2025)**

Lao diplomacy is linked to the national liberation struggle to protect national independence. Diplomacy has gone through the process of negotiating the unification of the country under the conditions of direct war with foreign countries. After winning and being the potential on the battlefield, there are diplomatic negotiations, so that the great powers and other allied countries come into contact

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<sup>6</sup> MoFA, Organization and Personnel Department, 2022.

with the assurance of independence, sovereignty, and complete territory as in the Geneva Conventions regarding the Indo-China Agreement and the Lao neutrality agreement. After several periods of political and diplomatic struggle, the Lao delegation has been legally recognized by the international communities, the United Nations, the great powers, and allied countries that have used diplomatic efforts to bring peace and neutrality to the Kingdom of Laos. Diplomatic activity is an important component of the success of the national democratic revolution, which is by combining the military and political forces.

The action plan of the Lao PDR government that was proposed on December 2, 1975, determined the policy guidelines both domestically and abroad to go hand-in-hand, aimed at the mission of protecting and developing the nation according to the guidelines of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, the Lao PDR government announced its foreign policy immediately, which was "Peace, Independence, Friendship and Non-alignment". As a result of the political, foreign, and diplomatic policies of the struggle over the past decades under the leadership of the party, the Lao Patriotic Front, and the opposition government. Since Laos is located in the center of five countries, does not have a border with the sea, and has been continuously invaded by foreign countries. Therefore, defining the policy of peace, independence, friendship, and non-alignment, is to express solidarity with the big movement that includes the advanced countries in the world that have the goal of anti-imperialism, old and new colonialism. Especially during that period, the non-aligned movement considered socialist countries to be its natural development allies.

Hence, according to the definition of "non-aligned" is also a neutral stance that does not take sides. During the struggle for the national rescue of the Lao people,

the non-aligned countries have shown solidarity and support for the fair struggle of the Lao people.<sup>7</sup>

For this reason, the government of the Lao PDR had set out in detail the direction of foreign affairs five points in the action plan, namely:

- 1) Denounce and resolutely fight against the new destructive tactics of the United States in collaboration with the Thai reactionaries, the group pushing the Lao reactionary forces, wishing the United States to heal the wounds of the war in Laos;
- 2) To increase and improve relations of solidarity, friendship, and cooperation between Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia, and unity and cooperation with socialist countries, maintaining and increasing friendly relations with Thai people;
- 3) Improve relations with third-world countries, continue diplomatic relations and expand normal trade with all countries without distinguishing social regimes and different ideological systems according to the five principles of peaceful coexistence;
- 4) Determined to support the struggle of the people of various countries in the world, first of all, Asian countries, for peace, independence, democracy, and neutrality. Request that America in this region actively participate in all activities of the non-aligned anti-imperialist Movement;
- 5) Actively participate in the activities of the UN and other international organizations of which Laos is a member to maintain the position and protect

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<sup>7</sup> 70-Year of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015, 2017.

the interests, contribute to the collective struggle of the people and progressive governments.

According to the resolution of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party which was held in April 1982. H.E. Mr. Kaysone Phomvihane, Secretary General of Lao People's Revolutionary Party issued a political report on foreign policy that “ In the new period, the foreign duty of our party and state is to adhere to the foreign policy of Peace, Independence, Friendship and Socialism, to continuously increase special capabilities, cooperation in fighting with Vietnam, Cambodia and comprehensive cooperation with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, get support from revolutionary movements and people who love peace and justice in the world, work hard to maintain peace in Indo-China and Asia.”<sup>8</sup>

In each aspect of the new changes, to accomplish, must be improved, and pay attention to the new situation properly. For this reason, the 4<sup>th</sup> Party Congress determined the foreign policy in accordance with the reality by transforming the policy into “Peace, Independence, Friendship and Cooperation”, focusing on promoting the development of foreign countries to continue to create the conditions and environment conducive to economic and social development. In this matter, after the Congress, the leadership of the Party did not hesitate to consider various issues in the following meetings such as in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> Party Congress to explore, discuss and agree on new economic changes domestically and new economic relations with foreign countries. And in the 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1989, H.E. Mr. Kaysone Phomvihane, Secretary General of Lao People's Revolutionary Party had a direction in the specific role of foreign affairs that “In this new situation, the

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<sup>8</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress Party of Lao People Revolutionary Party document.



direction of our foreign policy is to take political, diplomacy related to economic relations with foreign countries, make efforts to obtain the foreign capital and technology to serve new economic and social changes as the basis for strong and long-term strategic relations between Laos and related countries”.<sup>9</sup>

The mission of change that has led to openness and cooperation with foreign countries through the introduction of foreign policies of peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation has been confirmed in the following Party Congresses, especially in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> congresses of the party in 2006 and 2016, where both congresses summarized the achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the new mission, in which there was always an evaluation of the actual results and lessons of the movement for peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation.

### **The 5-Year Development Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Based on the 8<sup>th</sup> Five-Year National Economic-Social Development Plan and the recommendation on the creation of the 9<sup>th</sup> Five-Year National Economic-Social Development Plan (2021-2025) dated July 26, 2019, and the 2030 vision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopted at the third meeting of the Party Committee of MoFA. The MoFA had created the development plan for the 5 years (2021-2025), this edition aims to develop the direction of the plan stated in the draft political report to the Fourth Congress of the Party Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in detail to implement it in a focused and effective manner, which is defined as a plan and focused project as well as implementation measures and measures to monitor

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<sup>9</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Party Central Committee, 1989 page 39.

and evaluate from time to time.<sup>10</sup> All of these measures and activities are targeted to increase the diplomacy affairs, the capacity of the diplomats, and diplomatic relations with foreign countries.

### **Foreign Activities**

- Research, create and enhance diplomatic relations with allied countries, namely: enhance diplomatic relations with Russia, South Korea, Thailand, and other potential countries.
- Increase the role in multilateral platforms, especially the UN and ASEAN, in which efforts are made to be able to apply to become a member of the Executive Council of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations for the period 2023-2025, Prepare to be the chairman of ASEAN in 2024.
- Expand the establishment of diplomatic relations to at least 3-5 countries; Examine the possibility of opening embassies or consulates in 1-2 potential countries and Lao PDR honorary consuls abroad in 5 countries.
- Increase economic diplomacy activities, and mobilize development aid to contribute to the Five-Year National Economic Social Development (2021-2025). Collaborate with related sectors to attract foreign direct investment and attract tourism after the outbreak of Covid-19; At the same time, look for more and more potential export markets for Lao products.

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<sup>10</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> Foreign Affairs Conference, 2019.

## **Staff Advancement**

- Increase political-ideological education, create Party members and Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials who have a strong political commitment, have confidence and loyalty to the Party's ideals, and distinguish between friends and enemies clearly. Get the direction of the party, the state, various policy plans as well as economic-social development plans in each phase;
- Organize a 45-day political theory training at least 10 times for the staff to enhance their theoretical knowledge domestically and abroad to a greater extent.

## **Project on Increasing the Staff Management and Advancement Efficiency**

- The party committee at all levels must fully understand the party's view and vision on the work of managing employees in a centralized, democratic and transparent manner. Build, maintain and improve staff according to the plan, knowledge, and skills must be in accordance with the position; Use information technology to assist the staff information management to be able to collect staff information in a complete, clear, and convenient way for staff planning and advancement;
- Advance sufficient staff, both in quantity and quality, especially diplomats. The advancement of staff must be closely combined with the cultivation of political knowledge and professional knowledge, and must advance employees in accordance with their talent and passion;

- Recruiting employees for new jobs must choose those who meet the criteria, have knowledge in specific subjects and a certain foreign language, have a good personality, good interpersonal relations, and the courage to express themselves in a good way;
- Improve political-theory courses for short-term and long-term training, foreign affairs special subjects, and other technical techniques related to foreign affairs activities such as protocol, press, negotiation, consul, and administrative services. Improve the English language course for employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other sectors in the center and local organizations to be proficient and suitable for current and future work;
- Continue to examine the civil servants to upgrade political theory and professional subjects both domestically and abroad, such as organizing a 45-day political theory training, taking master's degrees in governance, international relations, international law, public management, public administration, economic law, and translation course training.

### **Project on Foreign Policy Implementation**

- Create short-term and long-term foreign policy strategies with target countries.
- Establish diplomatic relations and improve relations with important countries.
- issue legislation and create mechanisms for economic diplomacy activities so that all central and local sectors, including representative offices of the

Lao PDR abroad and the private sector, take action to bring benefits to the nation.

### **Project on Improving the Efficiency of Specialized Work and Coordination Work**

- Create a fast coordination mechanism for foreign affairs, which includes both the central and local sectors.
- Make a manual for the implementation of the work of each department.
- Make an annual book report for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### **Project on Strengthening Foreign Sector Staffs**

- Create a human resource development plan for the foreign sector.
- Determine the position of the foreign sector to complete as expected.
- Create various training plans for the staff.
- Build technical strength for foreign sector workers at the local level throughout the country.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms**

- All departments in MoFA and representative offices of the Lao PDR abroad are responsible for monitoring, inspecting, evaluating, evaluating, and reporting the results of the implementation of their plans and projects from time to time. In each review and evaluation, must summarize the results, outstanding issues, and directions for future improvements.
- The secretariat compiles the program plans, objectives, implementation methods, and goals every year to give to the relevant sectors and departments for implementation.

- The committee is responsible for monitoring, auditing, and evaluating the plans and projects implementation for 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, and 5 years to be able to see and check the obstacles and difficulties to improve, encourage and correct to meet the expectations in each period.

All these activities and projects are just a part of the development plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that was presented and reported at the 14<sup>th</sup> Foreign Affairs Conference in 2019.

### **1.3 Purpose of Study**

As aforementioned, diplomatic and foreign affairs are male dominant jobs. As the world moves forward, in the development era of Lao PDR, the Government has been taking the gender issue more seriously. Therefore, it's very interesting to see how females can participate and perform in this field, especially in an important position, such as Ambassador and Consul General, do females and males have different outcomes or not. The purpose of this research is to discover the factors that lead to fewer women Ambassadors, the barriers and challenges while they are working aboard.

### **1.4 Research Questions and Methodology**

This research aims to answer two questions, which are:

[1] What are the factors that lead to fewer women Ambassadors than men Ambassadors?

[2] What are the obstacles and challenges faced by women Ambassadors during the posting?

This research will use the primary data with qualitative questions that will be carried out in the form of in-depth email interviews with 10 women and 10 men

ambassadors and consul generals from different Lao embassies and consulate generals in different regions to make the comparisons to examine the differences, and secondary data to support the study is from articles, documents, book and data from national statistic website, and the Organization and Personnel Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the period of 2015 onward. Thus, this thesis will be analyzed mainly based on the primary sources' points of views and their own assessments.

This thesis is comprised of five chapters in total. Chapter 1 will introduce the background, and purpose of the study, followed by the research questions, methodology, and scope and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 will review on past studies on gender issues in foreign and diplomatic services. Chapter 3 will look at the overview of laws and the institutions promoting gender equality and non-discrimination, an overall picture of the diplomacy class and tiers, the ambassador and consul general appointment, and the standard criteria for becoming an ambassador. Chapter 4 will analyze the findings of the study. And lastly, in Chapter 5 will be the conclusion.

## **1.5 Scope and Limitation**

The content of the thesis will cover the case study of current women ambassadors from different perspectives such as the factors that lead to lower women Ambassadors, the difficulties, and challenges of working during their postings. However, since this topic is very new, the information is very limited, and there is no research about this content in Lao PDR yet, which makes it hard to find regional literature that relates to this. Therefore, the information that will be used in this research will mainly base on the case study of women and men Ambassadors

and Consul Generals through the survey questions. 10 women and 10 men  
Ambassadors and Consul Generals are the expected responses. Unfortunately, due  
to some Ambassadors and Consul Generals' individual circumstances, 7 did not  
respond. As a result, the total of 13 responders that had responded are 3 women  
Ambassadors, 3 women Consul Generals, and 7 men Ambassadors.



## Chapter II. Literature Review

(Alexandra Bro, 2020) argued that promoting gender equality has been found to boost economic growth, increase the possibility of long-term peace, and promote democracy. In an era of increasing global economic instability, high-level commitment and consistent support for women and girls throughout the world is a strategic and critical investment.

(Julia. 2004) Women were not allowed to serve in American diplomatic and consular services until 1933. Women's most significant contribution to diplomacy before the mid-twentieth century was as spouses of diplomatic and consular personnel. Women supported their husbands by maintaining diplomatic households, serving as hostesses, and establishing their own network of contacts within the embassy. In many cases, they set themselves apart by doing local, volunteer, and community work.

Despite the fact that more women are entering professions in foreign service, the study found that the rise is focused on lower levels. Women continue to be underrepresented in administrative and policy-making jobs at the highest levels. Moreover, the division of labor exists in many public organizations, with males conducting stereotypically "male" jobs and women performing stereotypically "feminine" tasks. Female ambassador posts may be clustered due to expectations that women will be ineffective in male-dominated diplomatic environments.

(Towns, A., Niklasson, B., 2017) Women would be overrepresented in lower-status positions and underrepresented in higher-status positions among ambassadorial roles. Masculinity is connected with positions of power and influence, whereas femininity is associated with positions of submission and lower status.

(Malayvieng, 2015) In academic terms, the challenges of female ambassadors and male ambassadors are the same because the ambassador's roles and responsibilities are on the same level. As a woman, to be a head position or ambassador, she needs to be a strong person, has high self-esteem, responsible to her own country and host country to enhance the relationship and cooperation. To be able to successfully perform diplomatic duties, an Ambassador has to have the knowledge and ability, fully understand government policies, especially foreign policies.

It's worth it to see that many researchers have found out that traditionally human trafficking, female legislation, women's healthcare, well-being, family, and perhaps even women's representation are all considered "women's issues" as opposed to "human issues." These concerns affect both men and women equally, but they have nonetheless been stereotyped as being exclusively the purview of women. Framing what is a human issue as a women's issue may encourage women to take the lead but discourage males from supporting legislation. (Wittmer, D. E., Bouche, V. 2013).

Numerous studies contend that social and cultural norms, legal and legislative responses to gender issues, and economic development all contribute to the outcomes of gender equality. For instance, numerous researches on Korea have demonstrated how cultural norms and beliefs about the role of women, particularly those expressed by the Confucian idea of patriarchy, have affected social norms and beliefs, resulting in a long-term impact on women's status. (Jan H and Kwon S 2022) However, there are significant discrepancies in women's engagement and opportunity levels among Confucian states that cannot entirely be attributed to

culture. We should place more emphasis on the dynamic, long-term connection between culture and the development of women's empowerment rather than the role of culture, especially in light of the changing nature of culture.

Regardless of the physical division of men and boys and women and girls in social and other settings emphasizes the sexual division. In Korean Confucianism, a man's ideal life was to be well-educated so that he could play a productive and decision-making role for the family and society. A woman's ideal life was to become a wise mother and a good wife. Many academics contend that such Confucian beliefs and gender roles are strongly ingrained in Korean culture, showing substantial limitations on women's economic roles. (Chung, 1994).

Confucius typically believed that the state, like the household, should be governed by men, women have historically been sidelined in the realm of foreign policy-making. The qualities most associated with being a man have historically been those most valued in the conduct of international politics, particularly in matters of state. The successful management of the state is said to need traits like toughness, courage, power, strength, and even the use of force. (Bloch, J. C. 2004)

In order to flourish in the patriarchal system, women are expected to be humble, obedient, and receptive. Women are also urged to embrace a masculine-defined feminine identity. This is thus because in patriarchal discourse, man is treated as the lone universal subject, whereas women are seen as his equal. In addition, Women are less likely to be appointed as ambassadors for a variety of reasons, including the unequal distribution of family responsibilities that may prevent some female diplomats from being promoted to a high-ranking position and

the perception that men are more likely to possess innately masculine traits than women, such as assertiveness and the capacity for reasoning.

## **Theoretical Framework**

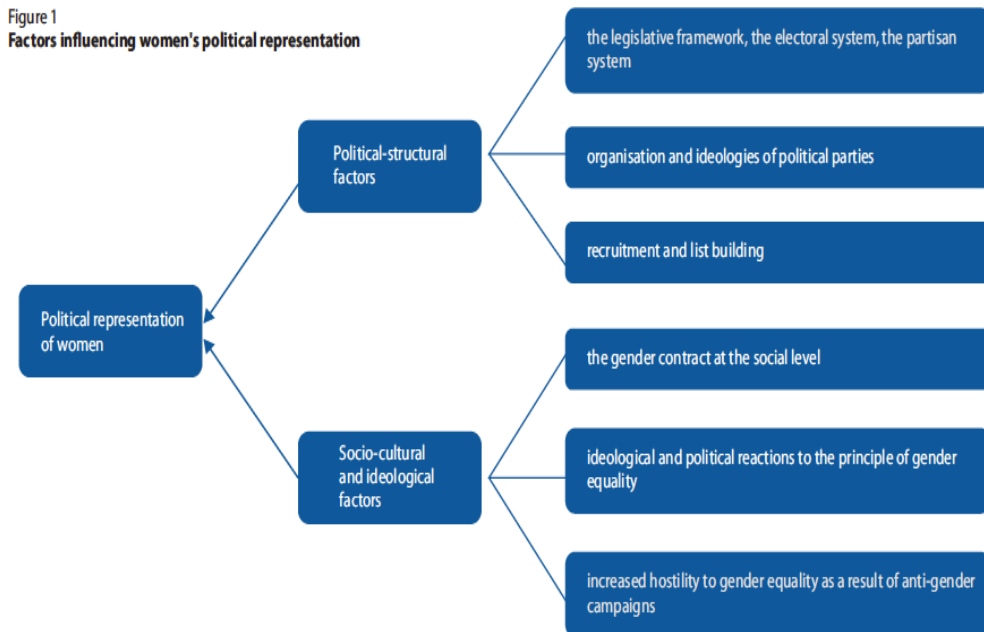
The ontological basis of the farming theory is a social constructivist viewpoint. “Constructivism is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meaning are continually being accomplished in social actors” (Bryman 2008). Reality is a social construct, according to constructivism's central theory. Due to this viewpoint, human behavior and practice are shaped and informed by ideas, beliefs, conventions, and identities.

By including a recently developed measure of national gender ideology into a cross-national model of women in the legislature, it was shown that gender ideology had a significant impact on the number of women in national legislatures. Understanding cross-cultural parallels and differences in how people regard men, women, and other gender identities is the goal of the study of gender ideas.

According to social role theory, the gendered division of labor is the source of widespread gender stereotypes. Stereotypes linking agency with men and communion with women have been formed due to men's higher participation in paid high-ranking jobs, and the disproportionate allocation of nurturing roles to women. The gender gap in the work market also offers men and women differing skill sets. Through the expectations that individuals have for one another's behavior, gender stereotypes directly influence behavior, gender stereotypes do not govern group members' conduct when they play social roles that are more closely related to the situation than their gender (Eagly 1987). Based on the theory, women will typically

respond in situations more communally and less instrumentally than males, and these differences will be largest when gender is very salient. Gender differences, on the other hand, will be minimal or nonexistent when people play formal, institutional roles.

## Conceptual Framework



Source: Baluta, L. and Tufis, C. (2021). *Political Representation of Women in Romania*.

This thesis will take the literature and it combine with the conceptual framework to explain and demonstrate the contributing factors to lower female's representation in high diplomatic positions.

# **Chapter III. Law on Gender Equality and the Role of Ambassador**

## **3.1 Gender Equality and Nondiscrimination**

The role of gender is very important, being a female diplomat of the government of the Lao PDR is not easy but yet possible. Since the nation was liberated, the Party and Government have always maintained gender equality and it has been enshrined in the Constitution of the Lao PDR. Under article 35 and 37 stated that “Lao citizens are all equal before the law irrespective of their gender, social status, education, beliefs and, ethnic groups. Citizens of both women and men enjoy equal rights in the political, economic, cultural, and social fields and in family affairs.

Meanwhile, since the establishment of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party on March 22, 1995, the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party has been directly responsible for the historical mission of the Lao revolution. Under the leadership of the Party and as a result of the women’s revolutionary struggle in the world that has accelerated the implementation of freedom, and equality between men and women in politics, economy, and social-culture, the Party, Government, and foreign policy of the government have given importance to the equality between women and men of Lao citizens until today. In addition, the national economic development plan is considered women are equally equipped as men to be ambassadors and consul generals, as well as diplomats who will bring, and promote the policies of the Party, Government to the world.

So far, there are 10 female ambassadors and consul generals. Raising awareness and promoting gender equality is not only an international obligation of our country, but also a priority policy of our Party-State based on the national Constitution. Being an ambassador or consul general does not discriminate between genders. Everyone must have the ability to lead and have a broad vision, understand the policy of the party, be a person who has the courage to decide on issues based on the guidance of the Party-Government, and has the ability to negotiate to gain benefits for the country.

An effective national system for promoting gender equality and preventing discrimination against women should include laws that protect women's fundamental rights. Policies should strengthen legal measures and put legislative safeguards in place. These essential rights should ideally be enshrined in the Constitution.

Despite the fact that the gender composition of Parliament is one of the elements that might influence the gender responsiveness of the legislative process and the substance of legislation, Lao PDR does not have gender quotas in the National Assembly. However, women will make up 21.95 percent of the Parliament in 2021, making it one of the highest in Southeast Asia.<sup>11</sup>

LWU and NCAWMC are critical institutions for promoting gender equality and combatting discrimination against women. The LWU is a mass organization founded on July 20, 1955, with over one million members. It runs a training center where women can be trained in various fields to help them run their

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<sup>11</sup> ADB, *Women's Resilience in the Lao People's Democratic Republic*. How law and policies promote gender equality in climate change and disaster risk management. 2022

own businesses and earn money, as well as a center for counseling and protection of women and children where they provide consultations, psychological counseling, and a temporary safe shelter for victims of violence. It is mandated by the Constitution to develop women's rights and by the Law of the Lao Women's Union 2013 to represent and advocate for the rights of women and children. This responsibility is reinforced by the Women's Development and Protection Law of 2004 and the Violence Against Women and Children Law of 2014.

The NCAWMC was formed in 2013 by the merging of the NCAWMC and has since been included in the LWU. It is responsible for advancing gender equality and defending the rights of children. The NCAWMC is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, with the President of LWU serving as vice chair. The NCAWMC is the main organization responsible for overseeing and carrying out laws about children's rights, gender equality, and treaties like the CEDAW Convention.

Law on Gender Equality in 2019 was established to protect and inspect the equality, to ensure that women have the same opportunities and benefit as men do, and end the discrimination between women and men. Women and men irrespective of age, ethnic groups, ethnicity, social-economic status, educational level, occupation, religion, and domicile are all have the same equality in the fields of politics, governance, economics, culture, education-sport, health, labor, social welfare, science, technology, information, environment, national defense-security, foreign affairs, family tie, and lodge complaints.<sup>12</sup>

Law on Development and Protection of Women was established in 2004, with the aim of promoting women's knowledge, capability, and revolutionary ethic,

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<sup>12</sup> Government of Lao PDR, Law on Gender Equality, 2019.



gender equality, eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, preventing and combating trafficking in women and children, and domestic violence, this movement aims to guarantee and promote the role of women, define the fundamental contents of, and measures for developing and protecting, the rights and interests of women. Additionally, Article 13 of this legislation makes it very apparent that equal rights for women and men entail equality in self-development, as well as the same value and possibilities in politics, the economy, culture, society, and family as outlined in the Constitution and laws.<sup>13</sup>

Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Children was established in 2014, it aims to set out the principles, fundamental rights, and obligations to prevent and combat violence against women and children by protecting and providing assistance to the victims, and solving the violence issue to protect women's rights and interests.<sup>14</sup>

### **3.2 The Role of Ambassador / Consul General**

Being an Ambassador, it's important to understand the policies of the State and Party, foreign policy, and the national socio-economic development plan of each period, as these are considered as a road map for planning the implementation of various tasks correctly and coherently.

An ambassador is a representative of the state, an important person in leading the development of the nation, a leader in the embassy, a monitor and valuator the regional and international situation, and reports to the government. A

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<sup>13</sup> Government of Lao PDR, Law on Development and Protection of Women, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Government of Lao PDR, Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Children, 2014.

representative of the government to maintain and enhance bilateral relations between the representing country and the host country, as well as promote and develop the foreign policy through various activities, whether it is promoting the economy, trade, investment, social-culture, tourism of Lao PDR to foreign countries.

In addition, an Ambassador is a representative of the government to takes care of, helps and protects the rights and interests of the Lao people living in the host country.

Moreover, apart from the bilateral relations that had mentioned earlier, ambassadors in some countries also have the responsibility of multilateral relations, such as relations with various international organizations such as the UN, international organizations in the United Nations network such as WHO, WIPO, ILO, IOM, Human Rights Council, ASEM, FEALAC, ACMECS, OECD, etc.

The international treaty such as The Vienna Convention on Diplomacy Relations (1961) explains an outline for diplomacy relations between independent countries Art.3. the functions of a diplomatic mission consist, in<sup>15</sup>:

- a) Representing the sending State in the receiving State;
- b) Protecting in the receiving State the interests of the sending State, and its nationals, within the limits permitted by international law;
- c) Negotiating with the Government of the receiving State;
- d) Asserting by all lawful means conditions and development in the receiving State, and the reporting thereon the Government of the sending States;

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<sup>15</sup> UN, Vienna Convention on Diplomacy Relations, 1961.

- e) Promoting friendly relations between the sending State and the receiving State, and developing their economic, cultural, and scientific relations.

As mentioned earlier, the Lao government has supported the equality between women and men in many fields, one of them is foreign affairs; according to the Law on Gender Equality (2019), article 17 is clearly stated that women and men have the same equality in participation and participate in foreign affairs activities domestically and internationally, receive the same opportunities to be active in foreign work according to the foreign policy of Lao PDR.

Therefore, there is no difference in terms of the role of ambassador, both women and men have the same role. In Law on Diplomacy Class (2020), article 35 stated about the obligations and duties of diplomats as follows:

1. Loyalty to the nation, to the multi-ethnic Lao people; to protect the sovereignty, stability, honor, national interests, rights, and legitimate interests of the multi-ethnic Lao people.
2. Concentrate wisdom and strength in the performance of our own duties with honesty, patience, and diligence to complete the assigned tasks.
3. Respect and strictly abide by the Constitution, laws, and regulations of the Lao PDR, as well as the regulations of the foreign affairs sector.
4. Implement the domestic and foreign policy guidelines of the Party and the state correctly, actively contribute to the development of the foreign affairs sector, and complete the assigned tasks.
5. Strengthen friendly relations between Lao PDR and foreign countries and international organizations.

6. Maintained national secrets and secrecy of work assigned.
7. Preserve the political virtues and honor of diplomats.
8. Train and study to improve in political theory, diplomacy, and foreign language regularly.
9. Implement other obligations and duties as specified in the law.

All respondents argue that there is no difference in the role of ambassador or consul general between women and men unless as long as he or she can meet the criteria, and requirement and have adequate ability to be so. Overall, the ambassador is the representative of the country, has the duty to observe, report and analyze the regional and global issues, and situation to MoFA, promote the economic, trade, cultural, and tourism cooperation between Lao PDR and the host country, promote Lao foreign policy, attract more investment from foreign countries to come to invest in Laos, provide assistance to Lao citizens in the host country such as the consular work. And the most important thing is the ambassador has to truly understand the Lao Foreign Policy to implement all the works and tasks, participate in the activities of high-level delegations of Lao PDR that visit and work in the host country. Moreover, Ambassadors who were posted in the Lao neighboring countries that have borders with Laos, have to be responsible for the boundaries tasks to protect the Lao independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the nation.

In addition, the Ambassador and Consul General have to manage, and take care of other staff members of the Embassy and Consulate General, inspect and evaluate the implementation of the work of the staff members.

Furthermore, to be a good ambassador, one must have strong ideals, be trusted by the Party and State, be ready to serve in all assigned tasks with highly

responsible, and understand the political system, economic conditions, cultural-social. Know about politics, world economy, international law, and political systems of various countries. Be the main person in charge of implementing the policies of the Party, and the national development plan in foreign affairs in a dynamic manner to attract the support and investment from the host country or foreign countries. Encourage and promote relations-cooperation with the countries to obtain high results. Able to research, summarize, analyze and predict the important problems and situations in today's world. Have the ability to propose directions, methods, and duties to be resolved peacefully and reasonably. Must have the ability to direct and lead, gather unity, mobilize employees and be a good role model, be able to read, write and communicate at least two languages, have a leadership plan and working method democratically; minority voice depends on the majority voice, pay attention to the difficulties and happiness of the employees, living with purity and honesty, no greedy, corruption, or nepotism.

### **3.3 Diplomacy Class, Ambassador Position, Standard, and Appointment**

Law on Oversea Representative Missions of the Lao PDR (2018). The President of Lao PDR appoints Ambassador with full power to call them back to the country according to the proposal of the Prime Minister. The Minister of MoFA appoints diplomatic positions and consular positions. The term of service of a member of a representative mission abroad is thirty-six months, such period of service may be shortened or extended bases on job demand. After the end of the

service term, the member must be reinstated and re-entered into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs within two months.

Law on Diplomacy Class (2020). There are eight levels of the diplomat class, which consists of three levels and seven sub-level as follow as defined in Article 8:

- 1) The basic level:
  - Attaché
  - Third secretary
- 2) The intermediate level:
  - Second secretary
  - First secretary
- 3) The advanced level:
  - Counselor
  - Minister
  - Ambassador

For the Ambassador level, there are first and second tiers. The senior diplomats at the advanced level must have the following common standard as defined in Article 17:

1. Have strong political qualities, be loyal to the party, to the nation, and to the People democracy regime; protect the sovereignty, stability, national interest, and multi-ethnic people; respect and strictly abide by the Constitution and laws;

2. Be qualified, virtuous, high responsibility for work and a great attitude, gain the trust of the masses, have good vision, ideas and work scientifically;
3. Have the ability to organize, manage and gather internal unity;
4. Have the ability to coordinate well with individuals, legal entities, and organizations related to the implementation of assigned tasks;
5. Have the ability to research, compile, evaluate and anticipate the situation, important, and outstanding international issues or issues related to the development of foreign affairs, including the ability to provide guidance, responsibilities, and appropriate and effective solutions;
6. Have strong, and competent as an aide in leading, directing, and implementing laws and foreign policies, be innovative, and effective;
7. Defending the political system, economic situation, and socio-cultural situation of the Lao PDR; aware and understand the history, politics, world economy, international relations, and international law; have the knowledge and ability to train and improve lower-level diplomats;
8. Have the ability to lead or participate in research on basic scientific topics or higher, or make significant contributions to scientific research projects in the field of foreign affairs or the development of accredited foreign affairs. Have to ability to lead or join the creation of policy guidance documents, foreign affairs strategy and tactics, or the development of the foreign sector;

9. Have experience in managing foreign affairs, well contributed to foreign affairs activities, and have been posted at the Office of the Representative before;
10. Have a bachelor's degree or higher, have a high level of political theory, and completed training to improve diplomatic technical knowledge;
11. Able to use any foreign language fluently. For English, if it's not a primary language, must be able to use in general relations as stated in the regulation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
12. Be a member of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party;
13. Be healthy.

Furthermore, there are specific standards for the Ambassador position. In addition to the general standards of the senior diplomats as defined in Article 17, the ambassador position must have the following specific standards as defined in Article 20:

1. Have the ability to lead or be a key member of the negotiating team, attend important international conferences and seminars;
2. Have the ability to create important diplomatic documents and legislation on foreign affairs at the ministerial and state level;
3. Be an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for fifteen years or more, including a high level of experience in foreign affairs activities;
4. Hold the Minister or Deputy Minister level for the first tier;
5. For the second tier, must hold one of these standards:
  - Have the position of Director General, Deputy Director General, or other equivalent position.;



- Have been the head of Office of the representative before, and must pass his or her term for twenty-four months or more;
- Must have an expert level or above for an official position.

## Chapter IV. Findings of Study

### 4.1 Self-assessed Factors Contribute to Fewer Female Ambassadors

#### 4.1.1 Social Norms and Culture

Diplomatic service is seen as a male dominant occupation. In Lao society, in the past, women were not admitted to diplomatic and consular services, and they didn't receive as many opportunities compared to men. But nowadays, although women have the same equality as men, in Lao culture, married women are still the ones who are taking care of the children, and do housework, which means that women spend more time doing house chores than men; these work and responsibilities are still women's main focus apart from their works; making them have less opportunity to improve their academy, women have less self-confidence, lack of courage to speak out nor give opinions.

Pascale H. P and Souvanxay. P. (2022). Before 1975, Lao culture was reportedly dominated by male dominance and female subjugation. The father was called "pho na" (ພໍ່ນາ- the father of the rice fields) and the mother was called "mae huean" (ແມ່ເຮືອນ – the mother of the house). Until recently the dominant family model was described by anthropologists as the husband/man heads the family and his role is to seek food and work most often outside the family space. While the wife/woman has to stay home most of the time to look after the children and cook.

The idea of "Three Goods" was established during the first LWU congress in 1984 to construct an ideal or image of "good women." This model has been widely publicized and promoted as the perfect woman's characteristics throughout the

country. The tagline "Three Goods" was developed as a framework and set of "rules" for women to follow to actively engage in the development process, achieve gender equality, and improve women's standing in society.

The three goods refer to being a good citizen, a good wife, and a good mother. To be a decent citizen, a woman must study, obey, and implement the party's policies, strengthen unity with all ethnic groups in Laos, and love the nation. A decent wife should help to create a new socialist family, she must be faithful to her husband and assist him in overcoming any obstacles. She should provide her husband the opportunity to study and work, and celebrate him when he succeeds. The wife has to learn to weave, embroider, and keep the house tidy. And to be a good mother, she should be a good caretaker for her children and encourage them to study in order for them to become good citizens in the future.

Clearly, the slogan's implications did not advance women's position, their involvement in decision-making, or their capacity as effective leaders. Instead of encouraging Lao women to actively engage in political, economic, and decision-making processes, it trained them to be excellent housewives and supporters. The slogan appeared to follow a traditional gender ideology that portrays women as inferior to men, and it reflected a few tactics for advancing gender equality, and formulates women's status as being more closely related to the private sphere than the public one.

In 1993, the slogan was changed in the Third Congress of Lao Women Union to a good citizen, good development, and good family.

1. Good citizen, to be a good citizen means that a woman must loyal to the country, have discipline, practice the law of Government and Party, the

actions that represent the preservation of the dignity of Lao women, activities and actions to strengthen unity.

2. Good development; being good in development means self-development, developing the women's organization, Party, and Mass Organization and developing the country.
3. Good family; having a good cultural family, which comprises the ideal family, educating the family, and being a role model to the family.

The new slogan seems to promote more gender equality, unlike the previous one, which didn't promote strategies to position women in decision-making processes, nor to upgrade the status of women in society. The old slogan tends to encourage women to stick to their reproductive work more, rather than to be engaged in productive activities.<sup>16</sup>

The role of women is stated in the Law on Development and Protection of Women (Art. 2) as “women have fought and made sacrifices shoulder to shoulder with men for national independence. Women play a role in all aspects of politics, society and economy, environment protection, national defense-security, foreign affairs, and in the conservation and development of the fine traditions of the national culture and the identity of Lao women. Women work together with their families in the development and care of and in bringing up and educating, family members to become good citizens of the nation”. And the Law on Gender Equality of Lao PDR just came into force in 2019, it was very recent, even though it was a great step for the government to realize the importance of women. However, one of the

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<sup>16</sup> Khouangvichit. Socio-Economic Transformation and Gender Relations in Lao PDR. 2010: (51-52).

respondents stated that “The implementation of the policy to promote the rights and equality between men and women has not yet been fully effective as it should be” (said respondent #4).

When women have received the opportunity to study, train, and develop themselves may be the same period as the time when they are obligated to take care of their family, to be pregnant or to give birth and to raise their children. Most women have to bear this burden along with their work responsibilities. Therefore, the hard work (the family burden) may be reduced which bring women to have a lower proportion of high-ranking position or to certain position that is required to be an Ambassador or Consul General, for instance, the position of Director General or Deputy Director General.

Several respondents have argued that Lao women lack the courage of expressing their views or another word, they don't have self-confidence. Moreover, trying to be and act within the set role model limits the ability of women to express themselves fully as they also have to balance and maintain the good work of family work as well as professional work at the same time. The actual phenomenon shows that many females who are still single will contribute to their duties fully, but many of them after having a family is unable to contribute to their duties due to the increased burden of the family, so they cannot continue to improve themselves academically according to the set goals.

**Respondent #1:** Due to the special point of Lao women is that they don't have courage to express their knowledge and ability, they don't have self-confidence, and their opportunities to extend their knowledge and political theory are still limited. Moreover, the

initiative for the development of Lao women is still not continuous because, in addition to carrying out specialized work, women also have the important burden of taking care of their families and children, and teaching them to be good people. Therefore, the decision to overcome the difficulties of women is still restricted.

**Respondent #2:** When having a family, some women will focus on taking care of the family or they will follow their husbands abroad (in case the husbands are assigned to work aboard), sometimes opportunities are given to women but they are not trying to develop themselves.

**Respondent #5:** The opportunity for women to reach a high level of diplomacy may be less than men because the opportunity for women to develop their education, training, and self-improvement may be at the same time as the time when they are obligated to take care of their family, be pregnant or give birth, and raise their young children. Most women have to bear this burden along with the responsibilities of work. Therefore, the hard work (both family burden and work duties to excel at the same time) may be less than men. Women must work hard to be able to work side by side with males or reach a higher level.

**Respondent #6:** several diplomats who will be able to move up to a higher level have obstacles because if they are married, they have more obligations, and have children to be responsible for, which affects their work to get promoted to a higher position or in some

cases, female diplomats do not have the courage to express their perspective or opinion so they are not promoted.

**Respondent # 7:** There are more male Ambassadors because, in the past, the roles and duties of women have not been equal to men, but now there are more women compared to the past because women show their roles more.

**Respondent #8:** The culture of Lao PDR still considers the family factor as the foundation, which means that women continue to maintain their role in taking care of the family and children, women still have many limitations, such as when they are pregnant and have children, they still have to take care of the children more than men.

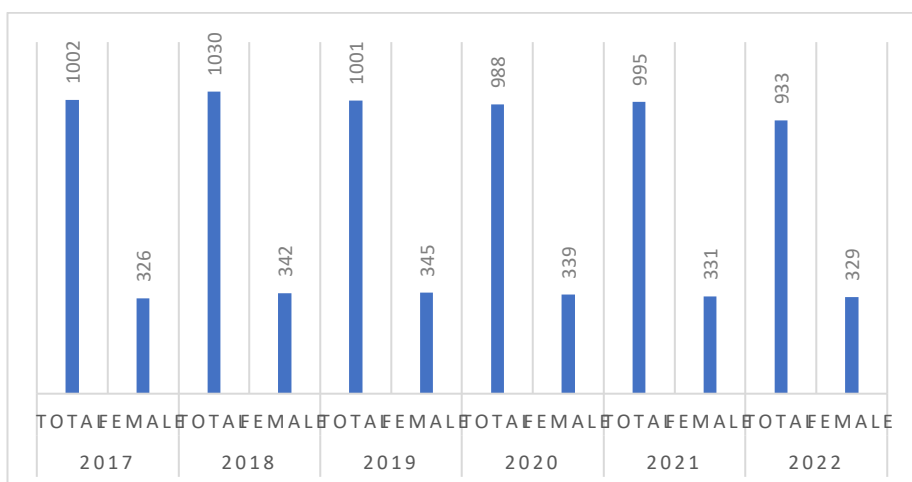
**Respondent #9:** Because women still have different burdens than men, such as being mothers who have to take care of their children, there is the burden of carrying out the duties of the women's union given to them, such as the three goods model (good citizens, good development, good family) in the competition clause of the women's union, which shows that women have more responsibility than men.

**Respondent #13:** For the Lao PDR, because in the past women have not been promoted as much as they should in diplomatic work, but now the Government and MoFA have given equal opportunities to both women and men to contribute to diplomatic work, foreign affairs, and as diplomats and as ambassadors. One of the most significant things to be an ambassador is to have sufficient knowledge and other qualifications.

### 4.1.2 Number of Civil Servants

A Number of all civil servants of MoFA are about one thousand people, women occupy only about 34 percent (Figure 2), this number has steadied from 2017 to 2022, 33 percent, 33 percent, 34 percent, 34 percent, 33 percent, and 35percent respectively, this is because there is no quota policy to favor and support women in the Lao PDR. Everyone has been treaty equally regardless the gender, only those who meet the requirements will be accepted. Therefore, it's clearly shown that the probability of being the ambassador or consul general is less than male.

**Figure 2: Civil Servants of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**



Source: Laos Statistical Information Service (As of Aug 22, 2022)

### 4.1.3 Required Position

A Number of female Ambassadors are lower than male Ambassadors. As previously mentioned, in order to become an Ambassador or Consul general, he or she must have met a certain position; the lowest position that can be accepted is Deputy Director General, followed by the Director General, and some Ambassadors even reach the Deputy Minister. As a consequence of lower female civil servants,

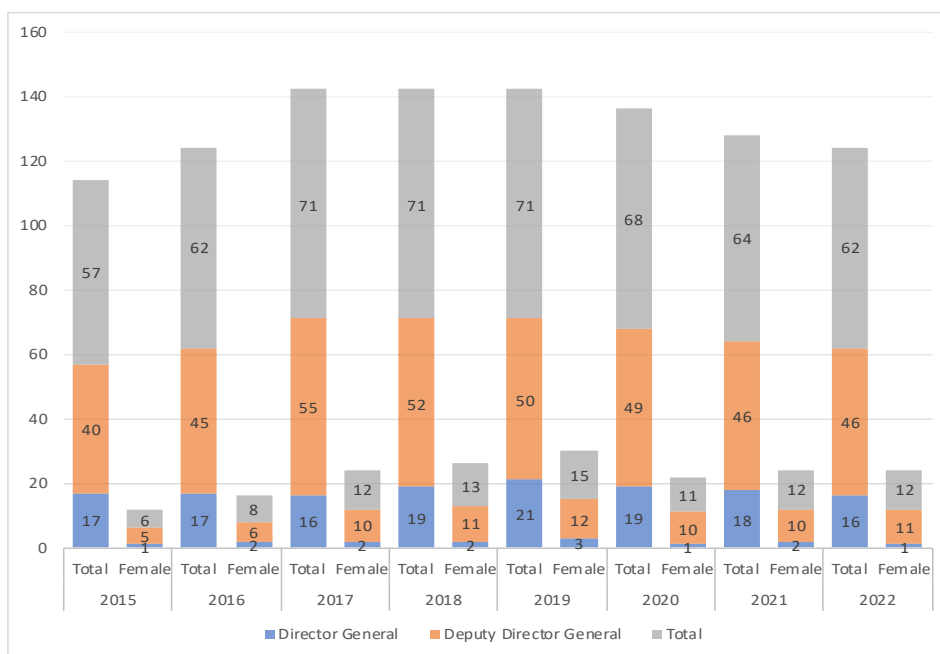


the number of females in the required position from 2015 to 2022 is 11 percent, 13 percent, 17 percent, 18 percent, 21 percent, 16 percent, 18 percent, and 19 percent, respectively. (Figure 3)

***Respondent #5:*** The opportunity for women to reach a high level of diplomacy may be less than men because the opportunity for women to develop their education, training, and self-improvement may be at the same time as the time when they are obligated to take care of their family, be pregnant or give birth, and raise their young children. Most women have to bear this burden along with the responsibilities of work. Therefore, the hard work (both family burden and work duties to excel at the same time) may be less than men. Women must work hard to be able to work side by side with males or reach a higher level.

Moreover, in order to be elected and achieve these particular positions, they must complete the political theory courses and training, and many years of working experience.

**Figure 3: Director Generals and Deputy Director Generals**



Source: Organization and Personnel Department, MoFA (as of July 14, 2022)

#### 4.1.4 Lack of Affirmative Action

Affirmative action refers to a policy or program aimed to increase workplace or educational opportunities for underrepresented groups, such as women, minority groups, and older people. (Dharsani. M & Ericsson. A. 2013) Affirmative action can be utilized to advance women into nontraditional jobs, which are often held by males, since international affairs, as described in the literature study, has been perceived as a male-dominated field. It's crucial to pay more attention to a variety of issues in order to increase the participation of women in political leadership, including customs, laws, corruption, the gender gap in political empowerment, public spending on education, the country's economic viability, access to electricity and the internet, political freedom, and cultural factors like performance orientation, collectivism, and power distance. (Zeng 2014).

Although the Government establishes and introduces many laws that try to promote the role of women and combat discrimination against marginalized groups or women. For instance, in Law on Development and Protection of Women (2004), article 13, “equal rights for women and men means equality in self-development, women and men have the same value and opportunities in political, economy, society and culture, foreign affairs...”. Law on Gender Equality (2019), article 2, “gender equality is the equality of rights, benefits, responsibilities, decision-making, and development opportunities in all areas of social and family life”, article 17 stated that “women and men have the same equality in participation and participate in foreign affairs activities domestically and internationally, receive the same opportunities to be active in foreign work according to the foreign policy of Lao PDR”. Nevertheless, the MoFA has not taken any specific actions which will increase the representation of women or the opportunity for women to enhance their knowledge and ability.

## **4.2 Self-assessed Obstacles and Challenges**

In order to accomplish the role and assigned work, a leader has to be able to observe and analyze the work’s obstacles and challenges to solve the problems to achieve better work results. In this section, we will see if women Ambassadors have experienced any difficulties or discriminations that differ from men during their posting periods.

### ***4.2.1 Unity Among the Staff Members***

The biggest challenge for the Ambassador is to maintain a good relationship and unity among all the staff members, which is the core of the success

of every work, if there is discrimination, people cannot get along well with each other, then will be very hard to accomplish the certain work successfully.

**Respondent #1:** The work of notion-political thinking in guiding the staff under the command, if you can't guide the work of political thinking to your employees, it will make the internal situation at the workplace not peaceful, and there will be no unity. Internal and external unity is very essential for all success in the performance of work.

**Respondent #3:** the challenge is to maintain internal unity, which is the center of the work. As the head of the office, it's necessary to pay attention and be the leader in maintain the unity within the workplace.

#### ***4.2.2 Understanding of Policy, and National Plans***

Another challenge would be understanding our policies, strategy and plan, such as, foreign policy, and national socio-economic development plan, as these are the guild line and map for Ambassadors as well as all civil servants to understand in order to make any decision and to know the priorities and the main focus of our own country. Also, the monitoring the situation of the world as well as the host country that changes rapidly, whether it is about foreign affairs, politics, economy, trade and investment and so on. It's very important for the Ambassador to follow the news, and be able to analyze and report to the home country on time.

**Respondent #12:** First of all, you must understand that the ambassador is a representative of the country, so the challenge is to thoroughly understand the party-state's policy guidelines for all

sectors, to thoroughly understand the foreign policies and the national socio-economic development plan at each stage, know the history, customs, geography, politics, and culture.

**Respondent # 13:** The international situation is changing rapidly, monitoring the news, and prominent events regularly as well as summarizing the work and evaluating it, and sending the report to the ministry in a timely manner.

### ***4.2.3 Capability and Language Proficiency***

Lack of capability of the stuffs as well as the poor foreign language proficiency has contributed to the burden of work as this will take more time to complete the task and burden to other colleagues. Surprisingly, a few female and male Ambassadors and Consul General acknowledge that language is limited and become one of the obstacles for them to communicate and work. Most of the time, they have to get an interpreter to assist them.

### ***4.2.4 Poor Coordination and Non-Uniform Information***

Respondent #9 and #11 stated that Many embassies and consulate generals have encountered difficulties in coordinating between the embassies, ministries, and sectors in getting the data and information. There is no effective coordination mechanism between the relevant ministries. The statistical information, report and summaries of each relevant ministry are not yet unified and different, making it difficult to inform, promote and publicized abroad. The coordination of information with other related ministries is still delayed.

#### ***4.2.5 Insufficient Budget and Lack of Staff***

Campaigning to attract funds from abroad for development has not been done as well as it should be. Many Ambassadors admitted that there is also a lack of policies and budgets to support campaigning and other activities. In addition, since Lao PDR is a small country and some embassies have to be responsible for many countries, so the bilateral relationship with the responsible countries is not deep as it should be, the scope of responsibility is wide but the staffs are still limited and not sufficient for the actual work.

#### ***4.2.6 Lack of In-depth Research and Strategy***

The activities of foreign affairs are still based on a comprehensive strategy, there is a lack of strategic research, and long-term planning. The research of various issues is not yet a deep study. Besides, the differences in the political system, customs, and culture are different from Lao PDR are still obstacles to the implementation of the work. And the level of English proficiency and the language of the host country is also an obstacle for some of the Ambassadors.

Each country has different policies, therefore, there should be a deep study and analysis of the policy to proceed and be able to complete the task according to the plan. The situation in the region and the world is changing rapidly, it is necessary to follow and monitor each situation closely with to the plan and report it back to the Ministry.

In addition to the obstacles mentioned above, from the responses of the female Ambassador and, Consul Generals, it can be seen that they have faced different problems from the male ambassador, such as, women find it more difficult

and limited to be able to engage in some events than men, women are more sensitive and more considerate than men. Sometimes, they are inhibited to a certain degree in welcoming guests or participating in some activities, such as, eating, drinking, and some sports, etc. The work of female diplomats is multiplied since there are more active activities from groups of women posted in the host country. There are also women's group activities or women's activities in diplomatic organizations and other social organizations, which are challenging enough to have to choose and manage the time appropriately to participate in these activities along with regular work or to work together with male ambassadors.

Respondent # 7 acknowledged that Lao women still don't have the courage to express their own expression and opinion, Lao women still practice the old tradition of the ideal woman. Lao women are weaker than men and don't have enough experience in the foreign affairs field, and somehow their views are being ignored. This could explain that women Ambassadors will feel limited to speak up and they can't receive inclusivity from their counterparts.

One of the female respondents mentioned that "many countries or societies have seen the importance of gender equality, however, in practice, if there is no acceptance and good cooperation from men, it will be difficult. Female Ambassadors or diplomats should be appointed in regions or countries that know gender roles or gender equality, otherwise, it will be difficult." (said respondent # 5) This means that there is a barrier if a female Ambassador and Consul General were posted in a country where there is gender discrimination and no gender equality or non-women-friendly states.

According to research, women have benefits and disadvantages as leaders, with the disadvantages most pronounced in roles that are dominated by men or otherwise defined in masculine ways. The conflict between the conventional female role and numerous leadership roles is the root of many of the issues and obstacles that women encounter (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Indeed, by analyzing the obstacles above from their self-assessments, regardless of the gender of the Ambassador or Consul General, it can be concluded that men in their male-dominated job may not always perform better than women as this also depends on each individual capability to handle and solve the problem and their own experiences that would help them to be better than their counterparts.



## **Chapter V. Conclusion**

It should be noted that woman's participation is not just holding the position at each level, but it also reflects how Government realizes the importance of gender equality, power, and the rights of both genders.

In summary, women and men are all eligible to be Ambassador or Consul Generals as long as they can meet certain criteria and have capability to be a representative of the country. However, women still find it more difficult to participate and access in diplomacy affairs, the greatest factor that suppresses fewer women Ambassadors would be the social norms and culture that has been practiced from the old time that construct the current situation that we can see that women employees comprise lower percentage than men, and represent lower in the making-decision position that is the standard requirement to be the Ambassador. Furthermore, family obligations and household chores have undoubtedly been important considerations.

Generally, women and men Ambassadors have faced similar obstacles and challenges during their posting periods, such as internal unity among the embassy staffs, ununiform information between relevant entities, foreign language proficiency, the capability of the staff, and insufficient budget. Nonetheless, women are still the one who experience more, for instance, the engaging in some activities and women Ambassadors have to work more in attending the activities organized by the women association in the host country.

According to the interviews, social norms, and culture are still the core factor that suppresses women in diplomacy affairs, by creating a gender-friendly environment for women to have access to learning opportunity to enhance their

capability and knowledge to gain more experiences to be able to become the ambassador or consul general in the future and ensure that women have the chance to learn the political theory course, which is the main criteria requirement in becoming a Director General or Deputy Director General so that they could be Ambassadors in the future

To increase women's participation, and remove the obstacles to equal participation and implement campaigns to support them. In addition, men and society should participate in raising awareness of gender equality and the importance of women.

As mentioned by many respondents about the lacking of the capability of the employees in performing the duties. In this matter, it can be suggested that the MoFA should establish a personnel development plan to enhance the knowledge and ability of the employees, and help them to prepare themselves before posting by arranging courses that include language skills, diplomatic classes, inviting the retired senior employees, former Ambassadors to come to teach and share the experiences. To make it more effective, there should be an evaluation or examination after the training courses to ensure and test readiness and ability.

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## **Appendix: List of Respondents**

### **Female: 6 respondents**

Respondent # 1: Consulate General, replied on Aug 11, 2022.

Respondent # 2: Consulate General, replied on Aug 15, 2022.

Respondent # 3: Ambassador, replied on Aug 17, 2022.

Respondent # 4: Consulate General, replied on Aug 19, 2022.

Respondent # 5: Ambassador, replied on Aug 22, 2022.

Respondent # 11: Ambassador, replied on Aug 22, 2022.

### **Male: 7 respondents**

Respondent #6: Ambassador, replied on Aug 01, 2022.

Respondent #7: Ambassador, replied on Aug 07, 2022.

Respondent #8: Ambassador, replied on Aug 09, 2022.

Respondent #9: Ambassador, replied on Aug 10, 2022.

Respondent #10: Ambassador, replied on Aug 19, 2022.

Respondent #12: Ambassador, replied on Aug 28, 2022.

Respondent #13: Ambassador, replied on Aug 30, 2022.

### **Total of 13 respondents**

## Abstract in Korean

### 라오스 고위 외교직의 여성 대표성이 낮은 자체 평가 기여 요인에 관한 연구

펜나파  
국제협력  
국제대학원  
서울대학교

이 연구의 목적은 고위 라오스 외교관이 인식하는 배치 기간 동안 라오스 여성 대사의 장벽, 어려움 및 도전뿐만 아니라 더 적은 수의 여성 대사 및 총영사로 이어지는 요인을 조사합니다. 40 개 재외공관의 대사와 총영사 중 25%가 여성이다. 논문은 결과의 차이를 관찰하기 위해 여성과 남성 모두의 인터뷰 대상자 정보에 크게 의존했습니다. 여성 대사 3 명, 남성 대사 7 명, 총영사 3 명을 심층 인터뷰했다. 본 논문의 조사 결과는 고위 외교관들이 제시한 여성의 대사 진출을 저해할 수 있는 요인이 있음을 보여준다. 여성의 기회를 억압하는 과거의 사회적 규범과 문화, 차별 철폐 조치의 부재 등. 더욱이 남성 공무원은 여성보다 훨씬 많기 때문에 자격을 갖춘 여성은 남성보다 낮습니다. 여성과 남성은 대내외 통합, 관련 분야 정보의 불균일, 외국어 능력, 직원의 능력 부족, 예산 부족 등 유사한 업무 장애 및 과제에 직면해 있습니다.

**키워드:** 여성 대사, 라오스 외교, 여성 대표, 라오스