

## 2.3 Socio-economic Characteristics

### 2.3.1 Demographic Features

The total population of Lao PDR in 2000 is estimated to be 5,234,000. Savannakhet holds a population of 763,000 (14.6%) and Khammouan 309,000 (5.9%).

The population density is much lower in SKR than the surrounding regions in the neighboring countries. This represents smaller accumulation of human activities. Within SKR, the western districts are more densely inhabited, reflecting the geographical conditions. Of all the districts, Khantabuly (the capital of Savannakhet) is the most densely inhabited (110 persons/km<sup>2</sup>), but still lower than the surrounding regions in Thailand and Vietnam, which cover rural and mountainous areas.

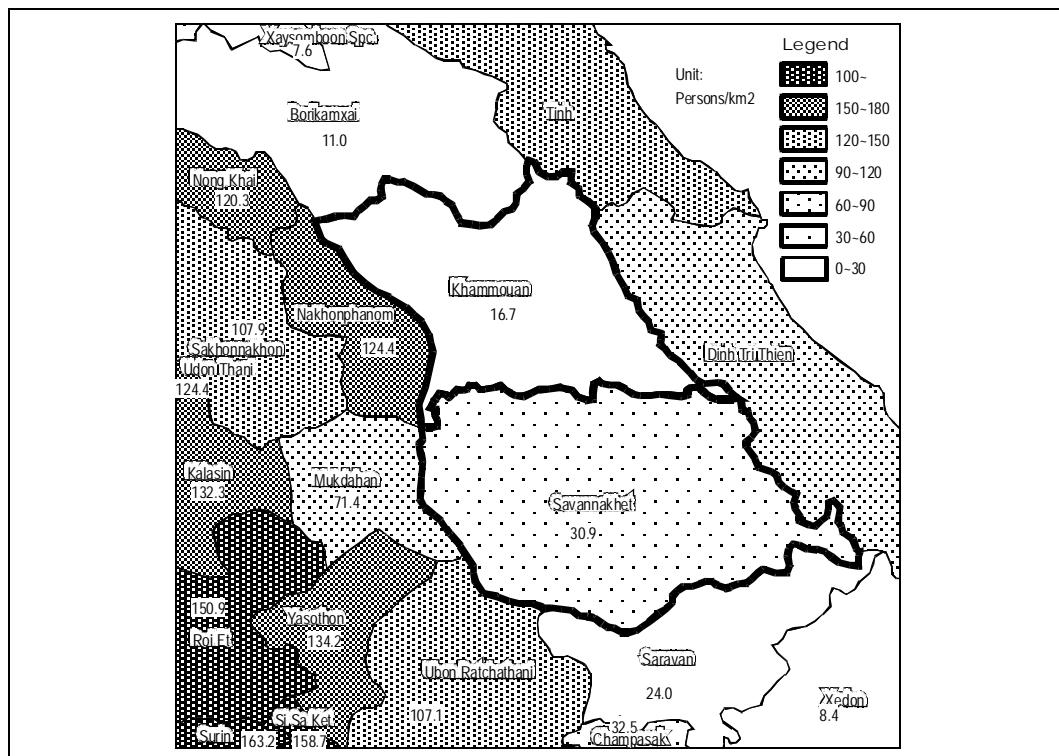


Figure 2-8 Population Density in Neighboring Regions

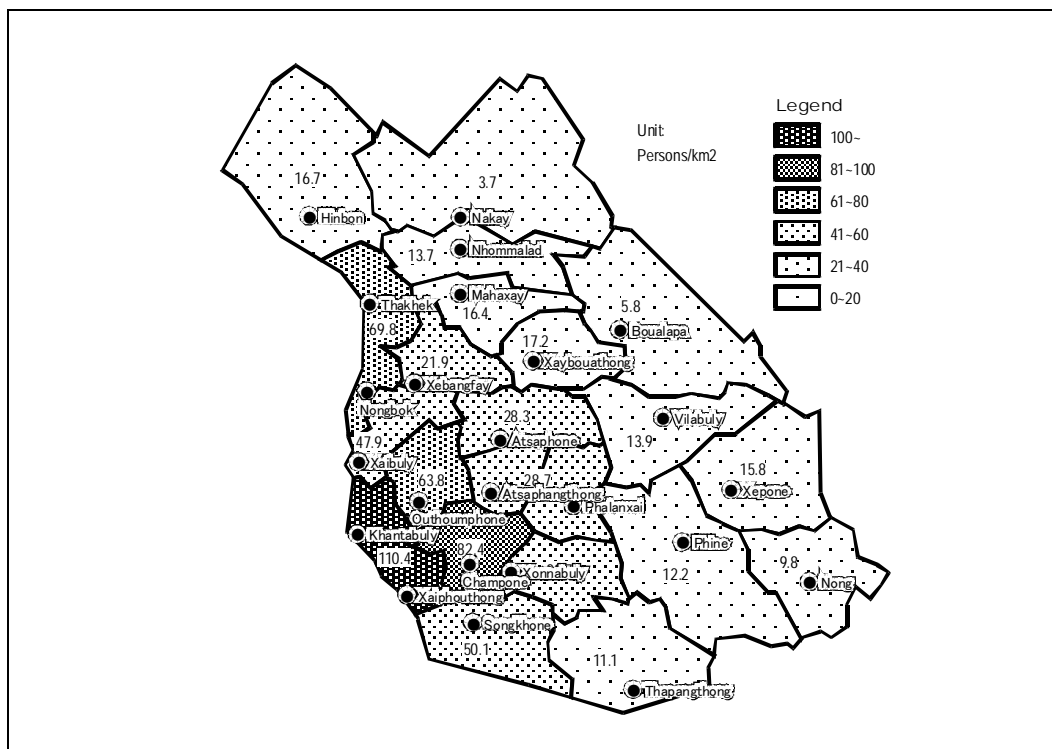


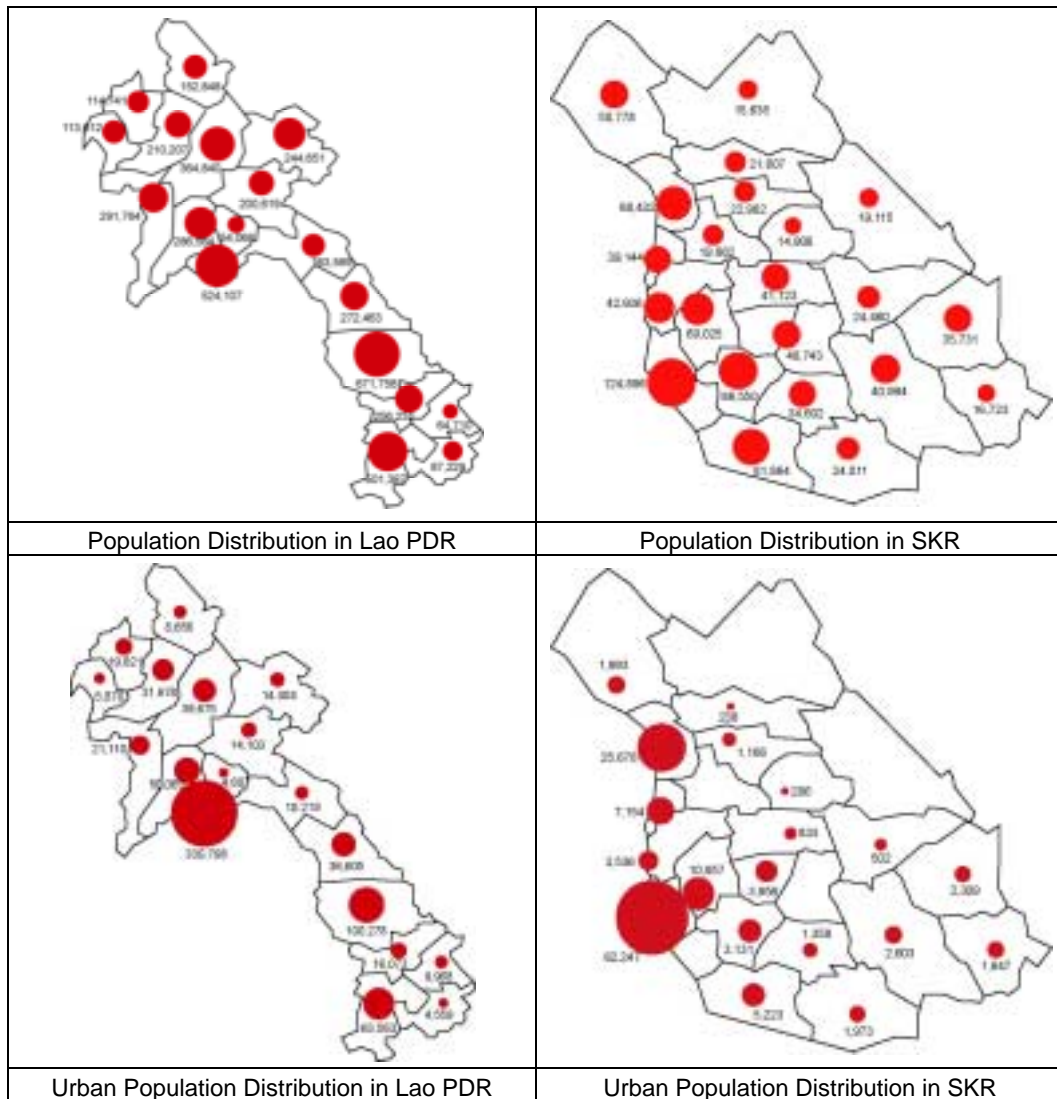
Figure 2-9 Population Density in SKR

SKR is one of the major population centers in Lao PDR. SKR has a population of 1,072,000 or 20.5% of the national population (2000 estimation) on 16.1% of the land. A clear tendency is observed in SKR’s population distribution. The Mekong coastal flat area has more population than the mountainous east. Even so, the latter part accommodates a significant number of the population.

Nearly 86% of the population in SKR live in the rural areas. Urban<sup>2</sup> population is concentrated in the Mekong coastal area. Khantabuly (or Savannakhet City) has the largest urban population. Urban population in Khammouan is mostly concentrated in the capital city (Thakhek). The recent urbanization rate in SKR has been 3.5% per annum, and it is increasing every year.

<sup>2</sup> In Lao PDR, an urban area is defined to satisfy at least three of five conditions; i.e., (i) there is a market, (ii) there is a road for motor vehicles for access, (iii) there is a district or provincial office; (iv) majority of households are electrified, and (v) there is tap water supplied to the majority of households.

**The Study Area**

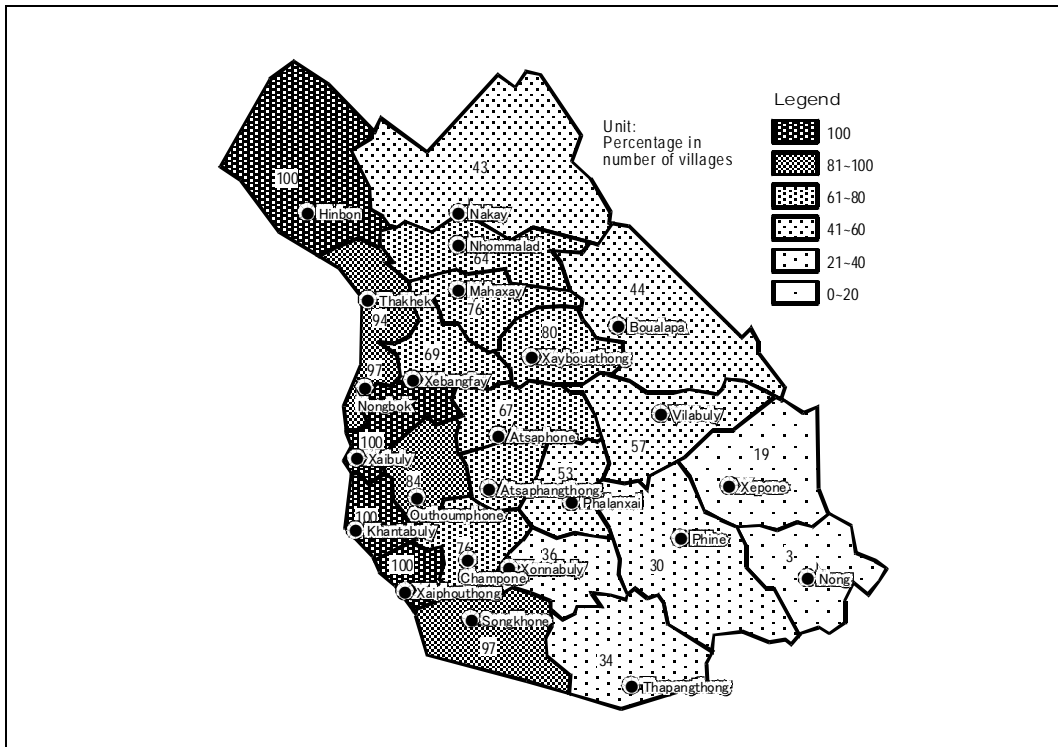


Source: Basic Statistics of Lao PDR, 2000

**Figure 2-10 Population Distribution**

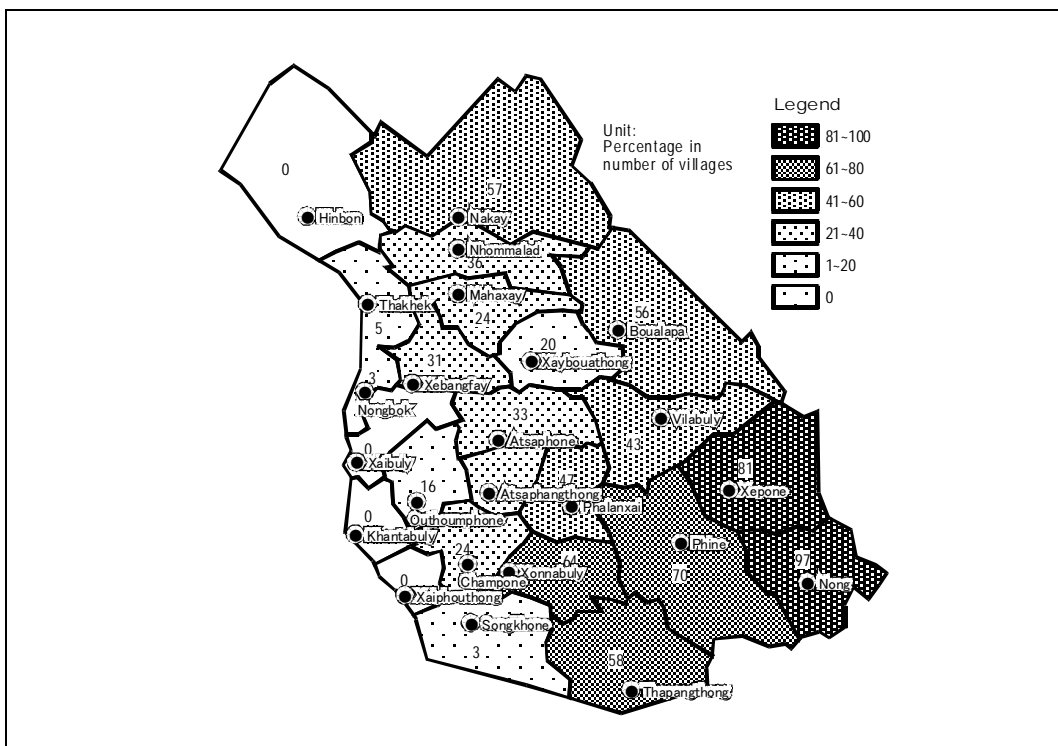
Of the ethnic group classification adopted in Lao PDR, Lao Loum (Lowland Lao) is the majority group followed by Lao Theung (Midland Lao). Khammouan has a larger proportion (78.9%) of Lao Loum compared to Savannakhet (61.7%), while there is a greater number of Lao Theung dominant districts in Savannakhet. The population of Lao Soung (Highland Lao) is small in SKR.

The distribution patterns of Lao Loum and Lao Theung are illustrated on the following page. Lao Loum generally dominates the Mekong coastal districts, while the eastern part of Savannakhet is inhabited by many Lao Theung who often practice shifting cultivation.



Source: Basic Statistics of Savannakhet and Khammouan Provinces, 1998

Figure 2-11 Distribution of Lao Loum



Source: Basic Statistics of Savannakhet and Khammouan Provinces, 1998

Figure 2-12 Distribution of Lao Theung