Policy Development of Education in Laos from 1990-2000: A historical perspective

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Objectives

- To seek for better understanding of ‘how’ and ‘why’ the education policy was influenced by global policy and agenda
- To provide data-based analysis on how the education policy was developed through external support … from the national perspective
Overview

- Briefing on the study
  - Research methods, data sources, etc.
- Findings …
  - Key moments happened in the sector
  - Policy production and implementation
  - Power relation in policy discussion
- Conclusion
- My reflection
The study

- Policy analysis drawing from a PhD study
- “Policy trajectory” approach (Maguire and Ball 1994)
- Source of data:
  - Interviews: policy makers and implementers
  - Documents: government policy frameworks
- Key questions:
  - Policy influence
  - Aid conditionalities
  - National ownership
  - Power relation in policy discussion
Key moments in early 1990s

In the education sector …

- Sector studies by UNESCO and UNICEF
- Mission studies by ADB and World Bank
- First Conference on EFA in 1990
  - Leading to education reform

Another key moments …

- The collapse of Soviet Union (early 1990s)
- Aid programs were changed toward the West
Policy formulation

- National Socio-Economic Development Plan
- National EFA Dissemination Workshop in 1990
- Setting up EFA targets by 2000: Enrollment, survival, etc.
- EFA targets were included in the policy framework
  - EFA influence was clear through languages used …
- External support for EFA implementation
  - Education reform programs and projects
- No comprehensive policy document prior to 2000
Challenges arisen …

- EFA conference had a positive impact on policy
- EFA targets are international standard
- High commitment from the government
  - Re-building the nation from the scratch
- Sector was unfunded due to many developing needs
  - Education budget: 8-9% (early 1990s):
- EFA implementation relied on external support
- Development partners played significant roles
- Unequal power relation in policy dialogues
Aid conditionalities

- National views:
  - Policy influence, conditional aid, etc.
- Some examples of aid conditionalities from expat’s views:

“Before you can get this [the aid] you have to come with prioritised costing plan. Before you can get the resources you have to have teacher reform, public service commission reform, and this type of thing. They will say we will never fix this mess unless you undertake some fundamental action. You are not going to get our money until you do … you get more money but you got to do this” (ITIP 24)
“The donors put a lot of conditions on the money as well … we’re not going to give you that loan unless you address …; or unless you address participatory approaches; … we’ll give you that money but you can only build 10 schools. They put restrictions on them [the government] which makes it really difficult for the Ministry to be focusing on what they’re actually trying to achieve” (ITIP10)
“... well, because the sector is desperate for money, desperate for finances. I mean you look at the sector, it’s under-funded. The government is only putting 10 or 11 percent of their budget into the education sector whereas the regional standard is about 20 percent. So the money that comes into education is only sufficient to pay salaries to people. So the government doesn’t have any money to do ... investment. So when a donor comes in and says we’ll give you $20 million to invest in this, the government says, ‘yes, of course’... without considering their conditionalities” (ITIP03).
Limited human resource capacity
  - Technical capacity

Laos was just “re-born” from civil war in 1975

Highly educated people fled overseas

Short of staff with appropriate qualifications

Many of them were just “rounded up”

Could not manage projects that too many

Qualified staff in great demand for projects
The government has to face major challenges of lack of capacity. Many government officials may not even know what exactly they want. So, if they don’t know what they want, they may … be easily persuaded by some donors. Today somebody presents these ideas. Tomorrow somebody else presents another idea. The lack of capacity to analyse the situation can make them accept all ideas, which I think is the situation in Laos. You have money. A donor comes in with some money, for this project and that project, and they accept it all, without being very selective of what would suit their situation best
Conclusion

- The education policy was influenced by global policy and agenda, like EFA
- Unequal power relationship in policy discussion
- Aid conditionalities
- National ownership
- Major contribution from development partners
- Education policy was influenced by external support
My reflection

- National government should manage donor funding projects more effectively
- The government should take lead developing its national goals and objectives
- Policy influence has positive and negative impacts
- Roles of development partners to support
  - Intention of supporting the government
- Influence on policy development still exits today
Thank you = Khob Chai