Country Report
Community Learning Centres in Lao PDR

1. Rationale
It is a priority of Department of Non-formal Education that to provide literacy programme for the People aged between 15 – 40 years old and 15 years old and over. This directly contributes to achieve the EFA goals by the year 2015 and as to achieve the national goal as to achieve primary education completion for the People aged 15 – 40 years old by 2015. In so doing, Department of Non-formal Education has been expanding learning opportunities to over the country, particularly in rural and remote areas to ensure the target groups receive literacy programme and continuing learning to complete at least primary education level, by establishing Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in such areas as they are community based learning facilities to undertake non-formal education duties and established since 1992. Since then, the numbers of CLCs have been increasing over the country supported by different agencies including International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and international development organizations such as UNESCO, Unicef, Save Children Norway, World Vision, and so on. However, the expansion of the CLCs not yet parallel with quality and effectiveness. This is mainly due to weak management skill resulting the CLCs not function and not unsustainable, particularly after the external supporters end their support. In order to solve this problem, the DNFE has been tried and creased its efforts to overcome this problem by developing CLC management handbook and distributed and organized trainings on CLC management for CLC facilitators and administrators at different level.

2. Objective and Groups of targeted
2.1 Overall Objective
To improve CLCMC members’ capacity on CLC management – be able to identify issues and problems of community people through learning process and be able to mobilize local and external resources for the issues and problems, which the community shall be able to cover the cost of logistic work.

2.2 Specific Objectives
1. To provide learning opportunities for community people through literacy program, particularly for illiterate people and for those have not completed primary education aged between 15 and 40.
2. To improve living conditions of the project participants through CLCs activities.
3. To establish networking between CLC programs and related developmental organizations at local level.

2.3 Groups targeted of CLCs
Youth adults from 15-24 years and 25-40 years and year 41 up that illiterate and not completed primary school and cannot earn income and all peoples want to learn in Lao language.

Table 1: Number of CLCs in Laos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLC</th>
<th>Other learning or non-formal education centres (with multiple learning programmes)</th>
<th>Adult literacy Centres (only focusing on literacy)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>NGO/others</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Conceptual Frameworks
According to lessons learnt and the problems of CLC development (CLC establishment and management) since the first CLC was introduced to Lao PDR (in 1992), it can be concluded that CLCs have not been functioned as its roles and functions. Furthermore, many CLCs are not sustainable, for example, CLCs do not function after completing literacy programme and primary education or after the pilot projects end (after the donors end their support to CLC projects) and leave the CLCs un-maintenance and finally the CLCs were
collapsed. There are different viewpoints toward such situation, particularly between the donors and the People. The donors cited that the People lack of readiness and lack of ownership to continue the CLC projects, while the People oppositely cited that financial support is an enabling condition to make CLCs function.

In general, there numbers of people including staff working for non-formal education at each level particularly staff responsible for CLCs do not have common understanding toward non-formal education and CLC. Many people understand that the establishment of CLCs is for organizing literacy programme only and when this object was completed, then, it is not necessary to have a CLC in their community.

4. Sustainability of CLC

4.1 Definition of “sustainable CLC”

Before the CLC sustainability is defined, it is needed to understand the purpose of CLC by using a simple question “why do we need a CLC be established in a community?” Differently, context to context and community to community, CLC is established for different purpose. However, the common purpose is to facilitate learning for community people as to utilize both local and external resources for improving their quality of life. In Lao PDR – Lao People’s Democratic – CLC concept has been implementing since 1990 for literacy, basic vocational skills, and for a community meeting hall. In short, a CLC is known as a learning venue for community people including educational activities and basic vocational skill development.

4.1.1 Educational Activities

Many people have missed and dropped out formal education system, so high illiteracy rate is a big problem for Lao PDR, especially in rural and remote areas. CLCs are used to organize literacy classes for these people at a flexible time/schedule.

4.1.2 Basic Vocational Skill Development

To utilize knowledge and skills gained from their learning, CLC is used as a learning venue for gathering and sharing their experiences and training new skills through a form of training, meeting, and discussion.

By based on above CLC framework, a sustainable CLC should be used for the following functions:

- Learning venue including literacy and equivalency education and skill development
- A resource center for lifelong learning through different form of learning and education including informal learning through media.
- CLC shall be open at least 8 hours per day and 5 days a week so that people use it any time they want. However, all these functions should be worked under the enabling conditions including policy for human resource and budget support.

4.2 Means for strengthening CLC sustainability (Case studies)

As stated on the 1.1, the mean for strengthening CLC sustainability, then, should be the supporting mechanism to make the functions of CLC work. The followings case studies may be the initiative stage for CLCs:

Case study 1

CLC of Hom village, Hatxaifong District, Vientiane Capital was established in 1995. After the CLC concept was introduced, with cooperation of local authority, the community people established a CLC in the center of their community to organize literacy classes and basic vocational skill training. After years later, all youth people in the community complete NFE primary education and many people in the community and around received skill training.

Currently, this CLC is considered as one of the formal system because one formal school teacher is nominated to be facilitator in charge of taking care of the CLC – opening – closing. The CLC opens
every day from Monday – Friday day, 8 hours per day (morning and after session). The CLC consists of two rooms – one for library and another is for basic vocational skill training. There are many kinds of books for both villagers and students. The vocational skill training is sometimes organized by based on the requests and interests of community people. Due to all people access to formal education, neither literacy nor equivalency education program is organized in this village.

Case study 2

CLC of Nanok-khuom village, Thulakhom District, Vientiane Province was established in 1996 by the initiative fund from UNESCO Paris and together with community contributions. Same as the CLC of Hom village, the purpose for the beginning stage of this CLC was to provide literacy program and basic skill training for villagers. After the UNESCO Paris stops its support to this CLC, the CLC did not function well and use for village meeting room only for many year till few years ago supported by Room to Read Laos, this CLC is renovated and used for library and discussion room/reading room.

There are 2 rooms in this CLC. One is for library and another is for discussion room (small room). Similar to CLC of Hom village, this CLC functions as library for formal school and community people. A teacher from primary school is assigned to be a facilitator for library. CLC opens everyday from Monday – Friday and 8 hours a day. Unlike CLC of Hom village, this CLC is just for library service and sometimes village authority uses it for their discussion.

When compared to other CLCs, these two CLCs are considered as sustainable CLC due to CLC is regularly open and used (base on Lao context).

4.3 Challenges regarding CLC sustainability

By based on the functions of a CLC, the challenges for making CLC sustainable should be policy and budget support from government for CLC facilitators. Although CLC is from people, for people and by people, it is learned from experiences that CLC need to be included in the education law and as an educational system. At least there should be one well-trained permanent staff should be in charge of a CLC as a CLC facilitator to maintain CLC building, open – close everyday (TV concept), take care of planning, coordinating, implementing, and evaluation.

4.4 Measures to be taken to overcome the challenges

a. For short-term (especially for CLCs receive support from INGOs)
   Employ university graduates, especially for those from rural and remote areas and provide pre-and in-service training to become CLC facilitators. He/she should work at least 2 years but the evaluation should be done year by year. For the extension, it is up to the result of external evaluation result. He/she should be paid under his/her criteria.

b. For long-term
   Continue from a. the government should provide him salary and recruit him/her to become a government officer if he/she needs or provide him/her to go on higher education.

5. Strategies for strengthening self-sustainability – from the implementer’s point of view

5.1 Definition of “self-sustainability” (who’s self-sustainability about what?)

The sustainability should refer to self-sustainability, so it should be a condition to keep CLC functioning to meet the needs of community people under the conditions of community people themselves. However, due to a CLC functions as coordinating or focal point for community development and facilitators are not experts for all issues, the external existence is needed. Also due to lake of quality human resource, outside facilitators (not from the community of the CLC) should be accepted.

5.2 Indicators to evaluate self-sustainability

Self-sustainability of a CLC should be evaluated whether the following issues happen for the CLC:

- Identifying and utilization of local and external resources
• Identify needs of people, planning, implementing, and evaluation process
• Provide service to meet the needs of people including opening-closing, and time
• People use the CLC for improving their life skills

5.3 Degrees of self-sustainability today (to what extent we, as “implementer”, have achieved self-
sustainability)

Today most of CLCs are used for literacy program (about 2 hours per day) and village meeting
(sometimes) with the following degree of self-sustainability:
• Convenient CLC including building and environment (easy to access, few facilities, some decoration)
• Open for sometimes, especially for literacy program and village meeting

5.4 Challenges regarding self-sustainability

By based on the characteristic of Lao context, the main actor of the a CLC is facilitator – a person
expected to plan, coordinate, implement, and evaluate all CLC activities – and all facilitators are community
people with some level of education. Working for CLC is just his/her part-time job and most of his/her time
spends on earning a living. Therefore, the challenge should be supporting the university graduates to work
for CLC as facilitators particularly the local persons and work permanently at CLCs. This should be the first
step challenge for all.

For the external conditions related to the internal conditions above should be make society particularly
related organizations including NGOs recognize CLC as grassroots development center, and once the CLCs
are recognized as a focal point for community development, the inputs for CLC activities should be
increased and CLC activities should be regularly planned, implemented and evaluated which will lead to
sustainability in terms of CLC activities and CLC management.

5.5 Measures to be taken to overcome the challenges

In short-term, capacity development for CLC facilitators is necessary, while numbers of the university
graduates are unemployed they should be promoted to be CLC facilitators and priority should local people.
In this regarding, policy and budget support - either policy for employing them as NFE teachers (officials)
or policy to provide them quotation to go on higher education, or provide them wage for their job is
necessary.

In long-term, CLC should be included in the Government system with permanent staff to undertake all
duty of government as coordinator between villagers and village authority or village authority and higher
authority.