Improving Local Service Delivery for the MDGs in Asia:
The Education Sector in Lao PDR

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<td>DEB</td>
<td>District Education Bureau</td>
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<td>DPC</td>
<td>Department of Planning and Cooperation</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>ESDF</td>
<td>Education Sector Development Framework</td>
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<td>LECS</td>
<td>Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey</td>
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<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>MOF</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
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<td>MPI</td>
<td>Ministry of Planning and Investment</td>
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<td>MWP</td>
<td>Manuals of Work Procedures</td>
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<td>NESR</td>
<td>National Education System Reform</td>
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<td>NGO(s)</td>
<td>Non-Government Organization(s)</td>
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<td>ODA</td>
<td>Overseas Development Assistance</td>
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<td>PDR</td>
<td>People’s Democratic Republic</td>
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<td>PES</td>
<td>Provincial Education Service</td>
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<td>PFS</td>
<td>Provincial Finance Services</td>
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<td>PPS</td>
<td>Provincial Planning Services</td>
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<td>PTA</td>
<td>Parent Teacher Association</td>
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<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Education and Training</td>
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<td>UNCDF</td>
<td>United Nations Capital Development Fund</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>VEDC</td>
<td>Village Education Development Committee</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Program</td>
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THE REPORT

This report is based on the original report prepared by an independent consultant, Ian Birch. Efforts were made to highlight the key policy findings on education sector planning and management related topics that deserve the government’s immediate attention, and the possible ensuing actions, rather than a full account of the original report. As such, the compilation of this report aims to quickly disseminate the summarized, but credible, information in a clear and easily decipherable format for informing and strengthening knowledge in policy making. The full original report is available upon request.

INTRODUCTION

Country Development Context

The Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is a small, sparsely populated, landlocked country with a rich but vulnerable natural resource base of water, forests, and minerals. In 1975, decades of civil war and heavy involvement in the larger Indochina war in the eastern and north eastern provinces officially ended. Tough geographic conditions restrict both the quantity and quality of agricultural land and pose difficulties in the development of trade, social infrastructure, and transport and communications links. A highly dispersed and thinly spread population further compounds this. Nevertheless, Lao PDR is located at the geographic centre of the dynamic and prospering Greater Mekong Sub-region.

The population, estimated at 5.62 million (Census 2005), is growing at a relatively rapid rate of 2.1% per annum. People are scattered in 10,552 villages across the country. Some 62% of the population is under the age of 24, while 44% is under the age of 15. Life expectancy is estimated at 59 years for males and 63 years for females. Urbanization remains relatively low at 27%. Lao PDR is an overwhelmingly agrarian society, and it is one of the poorest countries in South-East Asia. Although the adult literacy rate is estimated to be about 73%, it is clear that the overall quality and level of education remain inadequate. The incidence of poverty is high at 33% in 2003 (LECS, 2002/2003).

The population is ethnically diverse with 49 officially recognised ethnic groups, each with their own custom and language. The ethnic groups are widely categorised in terms of four major ethno-linguistic families: (i) Tai-Kadai (also referred to as Lao-Tai) comprises eight ethnic groups, which includes the ethnic Lao group (30% of the population) and lowland Tai speaking groups (36%), (ii) Austro-Asiatic, 32 ethnic groups (23%), (iii) Hmong-Yu Mien, two ethnic groups (7%), and (iv) Sino-Tibetan, seven ethnic groups (3%).

Background Summary of the Education System

Formal education in Lao PDR consists of five stages:

- primary education (five years),
- lower-secondary education (which increased from three to four years in the 2009/10 academic year),
- upper-secondary education (three years),

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1 The main sources for this section are the UNESCO National Education Support Strategy (UNESS) and verified from other sources such as Winter (2002) and Phetsiriseng (2009).

2 The main sources for this section are the EFA National Plan of Action and the EFA MDA, as well as the UNESCO-Bangkok’s document for a national education support strategy for Lao PDR (UNESS).
post-secondary education (one to two years) and tertiary education (three to seven years).

Primary education is compulsory. Specialisation starts following lower secondary or upper secondary levels, where three strands are offered: academic, vocational and teacher training. Non-formal and technical education complements and supplements the general schooling provision. Non-formal education and training includes basic literacy and numeracy training, and a wide range of programmes for youth and adults. The National University of Lao offers tertiary education.

In recent years, enrolment rates in primary, lower and upper secondary education have grown. Technical education and higher education opportunities have expanded including growth in public-private partnerships in education. In basic education, there are some 1.37 million students and a teaching staff of some 40,000. The average teacher-student ratio is 34.25. The ratio in one school visited for this study was 1:64, with one class of 100 students. Class numbers are higher in rural and remote areas.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for formal and non-formal education at all levels. In addition to the public provision of education, there is also a growing private sector provision, for which the MOE oversees. Public expenditure on education, though still comparatively low by regional standards, has grown significantly, alongside sustained and high-levels of external development assistance. The Education Budget (Central MOE) as part of total government expenditure was 14.4% in 2005-6 – up from 8% five years earlier – 11.7% in 2006-7, and 10.8% in 2007-8. The Education Budget as a proportion of GDP was 3.0% in 2005-6, 3.1% in 2006-7 and 2.3% in 2007-8.

THE STUDY

Objectives of the Study
The objectives of this study have been taken from the main document for the UN Initiative on “Improving Local Service Delivery for the MDGs in Asia: Pilot of Methodology for Support to National Policy and MDG Strategies”, which were adapted to:

- conduct a review about the education policy and evaluate the performance focusing on service delivery and decentralization,
- examine current system of formal and informal institutional and fiscal arrangements and its effect over actual functioning of the sector,
- bring out findings that support the government and its partners in enhancing the education service delivery, and
- identify issues, draw lessons learned and provide options for improving education service delivery.

The Methodology
The principal data collection instrument for this study was interviews. The focus of the questions were on identifying: (i) the current issues in education management, finance and governance at the local level; (ii) the range of activities and programs that are conducted at the local level; (iii) the types, levels and sources of resources employed at the school level; and assessing, if possible, the outcomes of management processes, particularly deconcentration, in terms of their impact on both school improvement and student outcomes. The questions in the interview schedule were administered very informally and in no
particular order, depending on the flow of conversation. Lao language was used extensively, with the consultant noting the interviewees’ responses through translation during or after the consultations.

The study was designed to tap the education stakeholders, in the main but not exclusively at the central MOE (Vientiane-based in general), central provincial and central educational administrative levels (Provincial Education Service (PES) and District Education Bureau (DEB)), and at the local administrative and local participative levels (villages, especially the headperson and the chairperson of the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) or Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and schools, especially the principals). A central think tank was formed comprising Vientiane-based MOE personnel. Details of the actual stakeholders participating were determined within the Department of Planning and Cooperation (DPC) of the MOE.

For activities outside the central MOE, it was decided to hold a series of consultations with the PES, DEB, school principals, the local head person and the chairperson of the VEDC or PTA, as the case might be. Teachers and villagers were also invited but, with the rice-planting season in full swing, few were available to attend. Two provinces, a district in each and three villages and three schools in each district were selected on the basis of their being from amongst the 47 poorest districts in Lao PDR.

Rather than using a case study approach, a sample of the population in these selected areas was approached. The local population in the sampled areas provided only a small percentage of the relevant total population in Lao PDR. However, the purpose of the sample was to identify thoughts and processes, not to predicate national inferences. The Director-General of the DPC, convened a meeting of persons selected in the DPC to act as an advisory group to the consultant. A Team Leader and Facilitator were appointed. The advisor group determined the locations for the fieldwork and the work plan for the activities was discussed and finally drafted by the consultant. The External Relations Division of the DPC undertook the tasks of planning, arranging and implementing operational plans and also translated for the consultant in the MOE and in the field.

**REVIEW RESULTS**

1. **Legal and Policy Frameworks**


For education, several primary documents were consulted for this study as identified in the bibliography. However, the principal primary policy document was the Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF). The reason for this focus was that the ESDF has now been mandated by the GOL as the way forward for education policy in Lao PDR into the foreseeable future.
**Right to Education**

There is a right to education mandated in the national constitution, in legislation and in policy documents, which is made possible through support in areas such as finance, budget, or the powers of local government. Since primary education is **compulsory**, parents are legally bound to send children of primary school age to school. If they do not, however, evidence suggests that often nothing happens even though there are regulations to enforce as well as encourage attendance.

Lao PDR has outlawed child labour. There is a gap, however, between the end age of compulsory education at ten years and the minimum age for entering the work force at 17. Primary education in Lao PDR provides schooling for pupils in grades one to five, notionally ages 6 to 10 years. In rural and remote contexts, children may not start school until much older, and, if they complete, are, therefore, older than 10. Lower secondary education provides three more years of schooling, and upper secondary provides another three years. Thus, the minimum age of school completion is 16. Progression through all grades is based on assessment. Should a child proceed through a grade a year, there will still be a gap of one year between schooling and entering the labour force, at least officially. This is being addressed by an additional year to lower secondary that has been added in 2009/2010. Furthermore, the addition of a year brings the length of schooling in line with international standards.

**Access and Equity in Education**

Lao PDR is a signatory to the International Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (1994) which includes provision for “the development of respect for the child’s own cultural identity language and values”. The need for the reconciliation of such a provision and those in the Education Law was addressed by the commissioned review of that law; which was amended in 2007. Accordingly, Article 33 of the Education Law requires all teaching to be in Lao language stating that:

*Lao language and Lao characters are official language and are characters which are used in teaching-learning in all schools, learning centres and education institutions. The teaching of foreign language can be conducted after the authorization of the Ministry of Education.*

As for the teaching of foreign languages, the same article notes that “the Government promotes the wide spread teaching-learning of foreign languages”. The field visits revealed that one of the primary issues in retaining ethnic children in school was the teaching language. There is no provision for teaching in mother language; however, anecdotal evidence suggests that some schools in ethnic minority areas also use the local language for instruction in the early grades (EFA MDA Report, Table 45, p.59). Hence, those who came from families where the home language was a Language Other Than Lao do not understand the teacher and the teacher does not understand the child. Unless this obstacle is addressed, achieving Education for All (EFA) in Lao PDR will always remain problematic.

Given that approximately 30% of the population do not speak Lao, the problem is obviously sizeable. Local stakeholders support education for ethnic people, particularly by mobilising parents to have their children attend school. This mobilisation activity was particularly addressed to girls, since, if there was a question of limited resources being available to a family, boys would be given preference for schooling over girls.
Birth Registration
The registration of births is handled centrally or locally, at the village level. But registration is not universally applied, particularly for the most remote communities. The greatest impacts of failed registration are related to the placement of children in the right grade and having accurate data to support planning.

2. Institutional Roles and Functional Assignments

Education Deconcentration
In Lao PDR education decision making and planning have fluctuated between centralised and decentralised approaches. Since the mid 1990s, the term deconcentration has been used to designate the national planning and decision model. Although at the time of this study the model was still evolving, the provinces and districts had specified authority and responsibility. Currently, the management of the national education system comprises four levels namely:

- central level under the MOE,
- provincial level under the PES,
- the district level under the DEB, and
- school level.

These organisations function to implement government policy on education including planning, programming, projecting and budgeting. The deconcentration in the education sector covers: planning and management, budgeting and financial management, personnel and human resources management, academic management, and properties and procurement (including school construction) management. In addition to the roles and responsibilities of the MOE, PES, and DEB, individual communities often take initiative in support of primary education. Sometimes this initiative extends to construction and maintenance of school facilities, the employment of contract teachers, and the payment of teacher salaries.

Central MOE Governance
The MOE is responsible for macro planning, teacher training, textbook development, inspection and supervision, capacity building of educational administrators, norms and standards, rules and regulations, experimentation and evaluation; as well as for direct responsibility of the vocational, technical and higher education institutions. Under the government’s deconcentration process, initiated in 2000, the MOE shares responsibilities with the PES and the DEB.

Local Governance: PES, DEB, the Village and the School
When deconcentration was mandated in 2002, the following were designated functions for the local units: (a) The Province as the Strategic Unit, (b) The District as the Planning and Budgeting Unit, and (c) The Village as the Basic Implementation Unit. There were no specifications related to the school, rather its role was listed under the Village.

The Province as the Strategic Unit:
The PES represents the MOE in the province and supervises all DEBs in the province to develop and improve the quality of education. The PES implements government policies, resolutions, directives, provisions and the regulations of the MOE; and is responsible for the
development of education in the province relevant to the changing conditions of the economy and society, by implementing government policies, under the supervision of the MOE and provincial authority. It is supposed to improve and upgrade the quality of education and to provide equal education to all within the province. The PES directs the preparation and implementation of education development plans and the number of schools in coordination with the DEB. At the same time, the PES is responsible for the inspection, monitoring, evaluation and appraisal of the education process and of staff; for personnel, schools’, and students’ management within the province (including staff and student recruitment, promotion, capacity upgrading, and penalizing); and for the management of the implementation of curricula, studying, teaching, evaluation, and examinations in order to ensure the quality of education in the province. The PES is accountable for providing and safekeeping of instructional materials corresponding to the growth of the education.

Although the PES is an arm of the MOE, PESs report to the Provincial Governor who ranks as a Minister. The Provincial Governors have discretionary funds that may be allotted to education, and together with the PESs they are also involved in establishing intersectorial priorities and appointments of PES personnel.

**The District as the Planning and Budgeting Unit:**
The DEB acts as an administrative agency, representing the PES at district level. The DEBs provide for education and improvement of its quality, and for the development of education within districts to suit the socio-economic growth, by following the government guidelines and policies, under the guidance of the PES and the district authority. As such, DEBs develop and implement government policies, resolutions and orders; supervise all primary schools and villages of the district to expand and improve education quality; lead the planning of comprehensive expansion of education and schools in collaboration with villages; manage teachers, students and schools within districts, including the parent association; implement the curriculum, teaching-learning and testing in order to ensure education quality in districts; and have responsibility for basic materials and equipment to supply to the growing teaching-learning needs of teachers and students. DEBs assist schools and communities in their planning of primary and pre-primary education and prepare a district plan for each academic year and each school term. At the same time, the DEBs are responsible for budgeting and financing.

**The Village as the Basic Implementation Unit:**
The Headperson of the village is the comptroller of all aspects of village life including its educational responsibilities. They may be assisted in their job in the form of a VEDC or PTA, which the village head may chair. The VEDC or PTA have functions particularly related to school attendance, villagers’ contribution to the school, school building and facilities’ maintenance, and the provision of advice to the school principal, particularly relating to the school improvement plan and the school budget.

As far as service delivery at the school level is concerned, the MOE still controls the national examinations and school-level supervision. The examinations in grades 1 to 5 are set by the DEB and by teachers; however, the MOE and the PES are responsible for the examinations in lower and upper secondary schools. The PESs and DEBs have operational responsibility for implementing primary and secondary education. In some cases, responsibilities may be shared, such as school building initiatives, and vocational and technical education. With guidelines from the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and its provincial unit, PESs participate in national annual and multi-year planning.
Manuals for Work Procedures (MWP)
Following the introduction of deconcentration, MWP's were designed for each department in the MOE, the PES and DEB. The MWP detailed the roles and functions of educational personnel at all the levels, taking into account legislation at the time of their formulation. The evidence on all sides is, however, that the respective MWP for each government entity, and the roles and duties of personnel are not widely known, if at all, at the provincial, district and village levels. The MWP are not operational, which is not surprising if they are not known. Thus, this aspect of deconcentration has become redundant. It is proposed in the ESDF policies that the MWP will be revised. Whilst this is commendable, it will serve little purpose, if reviews are not followed by advocacy and implementation.

Despite the lack of implementation of deconcentration in terms of roles and functions, a positive result apparent from this survey was the commitment of the villages visited to ensuring EFA in their villages, as far as possible. Villages monitor and encourage school attendance, liaise closely with school principals in terms of determining the fees to be charged, exemptions to fee payments, discipline issues, and the preparation and implementation of school development plans.

3. Education Financing and Financial Management

Policies and Funding Trends
The legal framework and policy for financing education are the PM decrees, the Education Law and National Budget Laws. The PM Decree 01/PM granted the provinces “de facto autonomy in collecting revenue, in allocating it within the envelopes set by the centre and in establishing their budget process” (Phetsiriseng, 2009, p. 276). The education law provides the mandate for providing all education in Lao and prescribes the respective responsibilities of each arm of government. The national budget laws provide the detailed requirements for each arm of government in terms of budget requests and budget allocation amounts and mechanisms. The Provincial Governor determines the amount to be spent on education and the percentage of that amount to be allocated to salaries (usually about 85%).

Apart from the 18 institutions for which it has sole responsibility, the MOE’s education budget provides for investment (capital) funding for schooling in the provinces down to the local levels. A province’s education budget funds all salaries for the schools in the province, apart from teachers contracted at the local level. Provincial funding also supports school requirements such as textbooks, and the administration requirements of the province.

Fiscal transfer is of two kinds in Lao PDR: investment (capital) funding and recurrent funding. Overall, the recurrent budget is funded out of domestic resources under the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance (MOF), and the investment budget is, to a large extent, funded by external resources and managed by the MPI. The investment budget has two sources, namely government and donor. Government investment funding originates in the MOF and flows to the individual PES for projects under its jurisdiction. The PES approves and supervises all educational building projects. Recurrent funding originates almost entirely from the Governor’s offices in the province and from there goes to educational personnel for salaries or through the DEB to schools for recurrent funding.

Local funding is primarily raised for the maintenance of schools and school activities, and making up, as best as possible, for shortfalls in MOE and provincial funding. Local funding
may also be used to employ contract teachers. Local government and local education officials play an important role in determining the fees to be paid for schooling. Apart from salaries which are paid from the PES, fees are the main, form of income available to schools for recurrent expenditure.

In terms of planning and budgeting, the provincial governors play an important role in financial management. Inter-sectorial budget resource flows are horizontal instead of vertical. The provincial and district governments administer a large proportion of the central assigned taxes. Provinces have authority to negotiate how much tax revenue they will remit to the central government and how much they will retain (Winter, 2002; Phetsiriseng, 2009). Budget allocations depend mainly on negotiations between provincial governor and the central government. As a consequence, the budget process does not effectively link explicit national educational objectives to the allocation and disbursement of public resources.

Funding Flows
The procedures of annual budget and plan preparation for education in Lao PDR consist of 14 actions that follow a “top-down” process, followed by a “bottom-up”, process, which is finalized with a second “top-down” process. After the National Assembly approves the budget plan, MOF and MPI announce the provincial recurrent and capital budget allocation amounts to all provinces. Then the Provincial Finance Services (PFS) and Provincial Planning Services (PPS), in turn, announce the recurrent and investment budget to the PES. Arrangements for the PESs to report to the MOE’s Department of Finance and the DPC are incomplete making the monitoring and tracking of the budget very difficult.

In practice, at the provincial level, the governor has the authority for the allocation, authorization, and revision of both recurrent and capital implementations. The implementation of the education budget is dependent on the governor, as well as on the provincial financial situation; those provinces that have sufficient revenue can implement more easily and effectively.

No central recurrent funding flows to PES, DEB and schools. MOE only funds recurrent costs for its own central financial units and project counterpart funds in some cases. Funding flows from the PFS to PES to DEBs and to Schools. Project funds go directly to line Departments, Provinces, Districts and project schools. Budget submissions from schools go through the DEB to PES to the provincial government for provincial funding; the same line on through PES to the MOE to the government for central (investment) funding. Donor funding may be to individual villages or through contracts with the government. Most funding would be by way of contract with the government, with locations determined mutually.

There are delays in some fund allocations, but the former desperate situation of the very late payment of salaries no longer prevails. Salaries were being paid on time in every location visited for this study. It was found, however, that although frameworks and other guidelines exist they are not being applied totally, rationally or equitably. The budget law of 1994 was replaced in 2006, with reforms still in progress. It is difficult to ascertain what norms and formulas exist for allocations from the central government to sub-national levels (which would only apply to investment funds as no other funds go to the PES and any further, except to Teacher Training Colleges and TVET) and what norms exist for allocations from the province to levels further below, i.e. district, village.
There are disparities between regions/provinces due to norms or formulas of intergovernmental transfers. Inequalities may be attributable to political involvement, the influence of powerful parents and proximity. For example, some provinces with borders to other countries also receive significant revenue mostly from the collection of import and export taxes on goods travelling between the provinces and neighbouring countries. This additional income places them in the surplus province category. It was intended that these provinces would transfer surpluses to the MOF in Vientiane to enable poorer provinces to be supported. Only three provinces fall into the surplus category. This is not the present practice. Revenue is shared between the national and local levels from capital works. Salaries come from provincial incomes and school recurrent expenditure from villagers.

There is no reverse transfer of funds from local to central level in the education sector. Delays occur in procurement through bureaucratic requirements. This has a negative effect on ownership and responsibility of service delivery, information flow and for service quality assurance. There are no enforceable mechanisms for capturing educational services not included in regular budgeting such as political gifts, labour and cash provided by the community, NGO activities, and donor grants. Nor are there enforceable mechanisms for capturing budgeted educational service provisions such as NGO activity and donor grants. DPC has a Project Management Division which is meant to manage Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). However, the ODA database was found to be very out of date.

Village/School Educational Decision Making, Management and Finance

It is difficult to assess what parts of the service delivery system appear to be working well. There are specific incentives for staff to work in remote areas, such as a relocation cost and a salary supplement up to 35%. There is a policy of rotating staff between urban and rural areas, and of ensuring some rural service as a precondition to long term employment. But it was not observable in this study. There are no special provisions to hire local educational staff (i.e., teachers or supervisors) with lower qualifications or levels of education to work in remote areas, however, the VEDC can hire contract staff. There are special training and support mechanisms for remote staff and there is a special program for teachers for remote and ethnic areas, and for girls.

Villages also participated in their own right in school management and planning particularly with respect to educational matters such as school enrolments, school attendance and disciplinary issues. The conclusion to be drawn is that villages participate considerably in the local organization of schools; however, there is no involvement in the more formal educational matters such as in the selection of teachers or principals, as might be expected in a more decentralized context.

Districts, villages and schools do not have adequate recurrent funds to meet the expenditures required by their delivery responsibilities. Such funds need to come from the “top” i.e. the DEB, PES or the MOE. Villages do not have sources of revenue (especially poor villages). Some schools have little or no parental contributions from the villagers, and the little they receive may be in the form of rice for the teacher or labour for school repairs. Therefore, at the local level one of the big issues is resource availability, particularly but not only in the poorest districts. Collectively, the resources needed are categorised as human and physical. The former category includes staff, whether they are for PES and DEB organizational purposes, or teachers for schools. For teachers there is the question of training both pre-service and in-service, especially when schools are required to engage in forms of teaching such as multigrade teaching or teachers are required to teach subject areas for which they are
not qualified. The lists of physical resources which are lacking are almost limitless, but typically include: school buildings, toilets, play areas, furniture and fittings and education materials. Consequently, a lack of resources impacts on the delivery of services both geographically and educationally.

CONCLUSIONS

The major findings from this study include:

(a) That the fiscal transfer processes are not well-understood, if known at all;
(b) Provinces are basically a law unto themselves in terms of educational and other funding allocations;
(c) Villages/schools are little affected by the funding process as they simply make a school-based budget submission and await the outcome;
(d) Transfers in terms of timeliness are acceptable in terms of salaries, less so for matters related to school refurbishments, materials and the like which were often found to be late, if not too late for the school year being funded; and
(e) Poverty, in educational terms, is unlikely to be addressed until either there are systemic changes or there is a nation-wide equalization system in place and implemented.

Furthermore, educational policy analysis and planning, as well as public sector management, generally, have been widely subjected to criticism by Lao educators and external experts because of lack of transparency in the policy process, separation of planning from budgeting, inadequate vertical and horizontal communication, high degree of centralisation of decision authority, and shortage of technically qualified personnel.

The role of deconcentration, whether in terms of actual service delivery or school and student outcomes, is minimal. The deconcentration proposals for education are little known and therefore have not been implemented. Insofar as there is a role for village/school management and finance, the findings from this study are that these tasks are being well carried out. The limiting circumstances are poverty, lack of capacity building and lack of support from outside the village.

Education Specific Recommendations

- That advocacy for EFA and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) be strengthened in the different tiers of government;
- That the issue of access, as it affects children out-of-reach of schools, be investigated and addressed to ensure a maximum EFA possibility;
- That the MOE expands its advocacy of government policies and programmes such as the ESDF;
- That an implementation plan for the ESDF be designed, prioritized, publicized and implemented, at least as far as funding support is available;
- That the deconcentration policies and implementation procedures be reviewed and revised, and implemented in a timely manner;
- That the capacity-building needs of all stakeholders in education be assessed;

Areas for Reform

There are two considerations which have limited the scope of the changes and reforms identified in this study. Lao PDR has been subject to wide-ranging recommendations for
systemic change and reform in terms of legal frameworks, budgeting procedures, fiscal processes, fiduciary trust, governmental administrative processes and poverty reduction. Most changes and reforms identified entail considerable costs, if implemented. This will drive an already poor country into greater poverty. In terms of education, the ESDF is laden with proposed changes and reforms which, if implemented, will enhance the more possible achievement of EFA and MDG goals than would otherwise be the case.
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Manuals of Work Procedure (MWP)


