

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

NATIONAL REPORT: LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

**48th International Conference on Education
Geneva, 25-28 November 2008**

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15 October 2008

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ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
ASLO	Assessment of Learning Outcomes
CEDAW	International Convention: Eradication of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEWEC	Centre of Education Promotion for Women, Ethnic Groups, People with Disabilities
CLC	Community Learning Centre
CRC	Convention of the Rights of the Child
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DEB	District Education Bureau
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EDP II	Second Education Development Project
EFA	Education for All
EGSWG	Education and Gender Sector Working Group
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EQIP II	Second Educational Quality Improvement Project
ESDF	Education Sector Development Framework
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IE	Inclusive Education
ISTUC	In-service Teacher Training Center
LABEP	Lao-Australia Basic Education Project
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry of Education
NESRS	National Education System Reform Strategy
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NPA	National Plan of Action
NTEAB	National Teacher Education Advisory Board
PES	Provincial Education Service
QA	Quality Assurance
RIES	Research Institute for Educational Services
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TEED	Teacher Education Evaluation Division
TEI	Teacher Education Institution
TEIAB	Teacher Education Institution Advisory Board

TEMIS	Teacher Education Information System
TESAP	Teacher Education Strategy and Action Plan
TTEST	Teacher Training Enhancement and Status of Teachers Project
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UXO	Unexploded Ordinance

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

1.0 BACKGROUND

Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is located in the central Indo-China Peninsula in Southeast Asia. It borders China in the north, Cambodia in the south, Vietnam in the east, Myanmar in the northwest, and Thailand in the west.

Lao PDR consists of 16 provinces and the Capital City Vientiane. Together, these comprise 142 districts and 10,500 villages (Census 2005). There are 953,000 families within the total population of 5.6 million, with an annual population growth rate of 2.08 percent. 47 districts have been identified as the poorest districts of the country. Lao PDR is a culturally diverse nation: the census 2005 categorizes the population into forty-nine ethnicities that can be grouped into four main ethno-linguistic groups, in which the Lao-Tai group accounts for sixty-four percent and Chine-Tibetan accounts for the smallest percentage of the total population.

Language family	No. of ethnic groups	% of population	% of population aged 0-16
Lao-Tai	8	64.9	59.8
Mon-Khmer	32	22.6	25.1
Chine-Tibetan	7	2.8	3.0
Hmong-Iu Mien	2	8.5	10.7
Other/no answer		1.2	1.5

Source: Census 2005

The Lao government has always had a fair policy that protects and promotes the rights and benefits of Lao citizens. It also promotes gender equality as stated in the 1991 Constitution, "Lao citizens are all equal before the law irrespective of their gender, social status, education, beliefs and ethnic group." (Article 22) Article 24 of the Constitution further states that "Citizens of both genders enjoy equal rights in the political, economic, socio-cultural and family affairs."

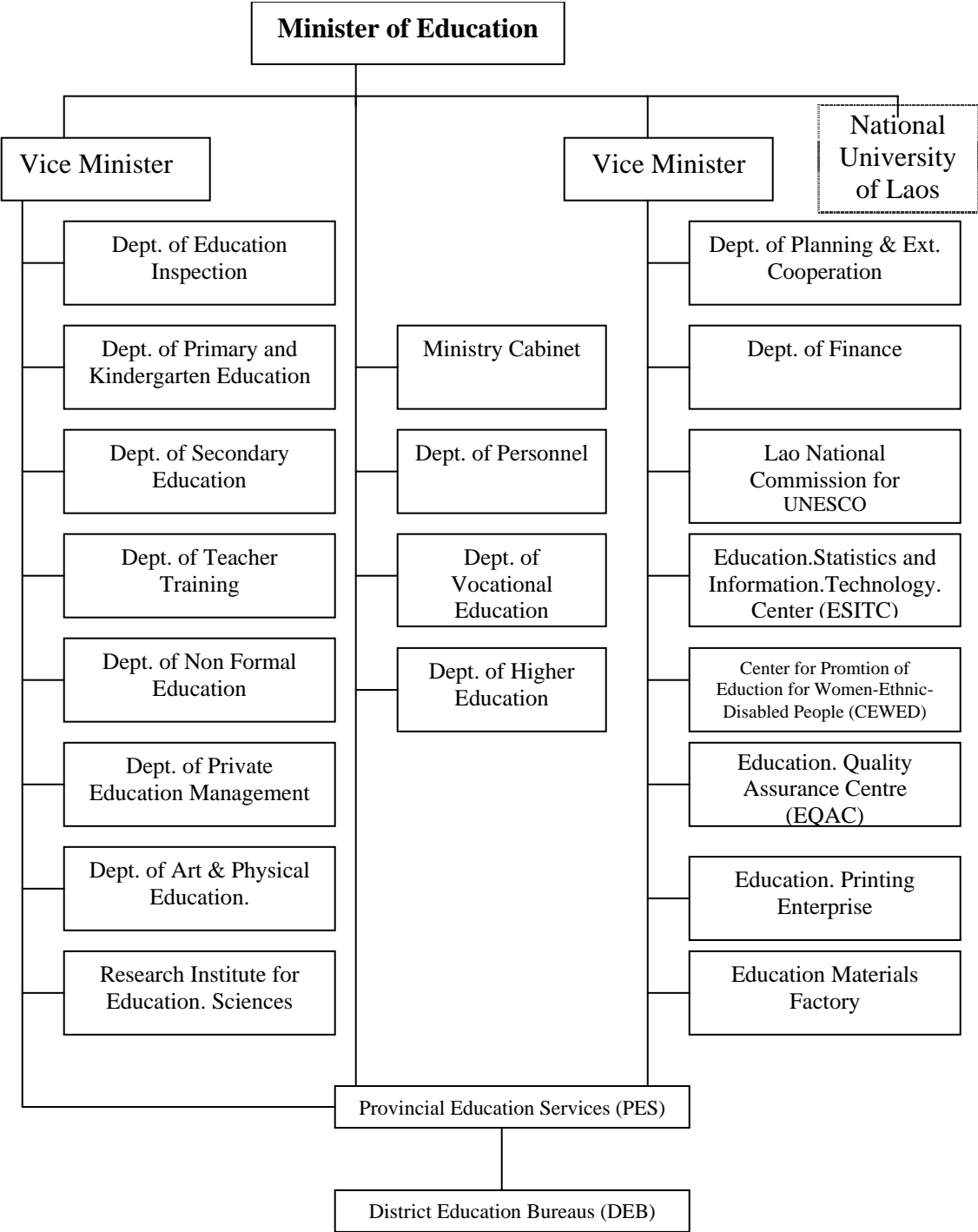
2.0 FACING THE CHALLENGES OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

2.1 Organization, structure and management of the education system

The institutional set up of the education sector consists of departments, institutes and centers. There is vertical coordination from the Ministry of Education (MOE) to the provincial, district and school education levels. Decentralization of educational policy has been acknowledged and enforced by the government since 2002 to increase ownership and responsibility of each administrative level. At

the same time, responsibilities of each level are clearly laid out. Training has been provided to education managers at all levels to ensure that they implement activities under their responsibilities. The structure is revised and improved from time to time to reflect international and domestic developments in education. In 2008, the Ministry of Education (MOE) structure was revised as shown below:

Organization Chart of Ministry of Education (MOE)

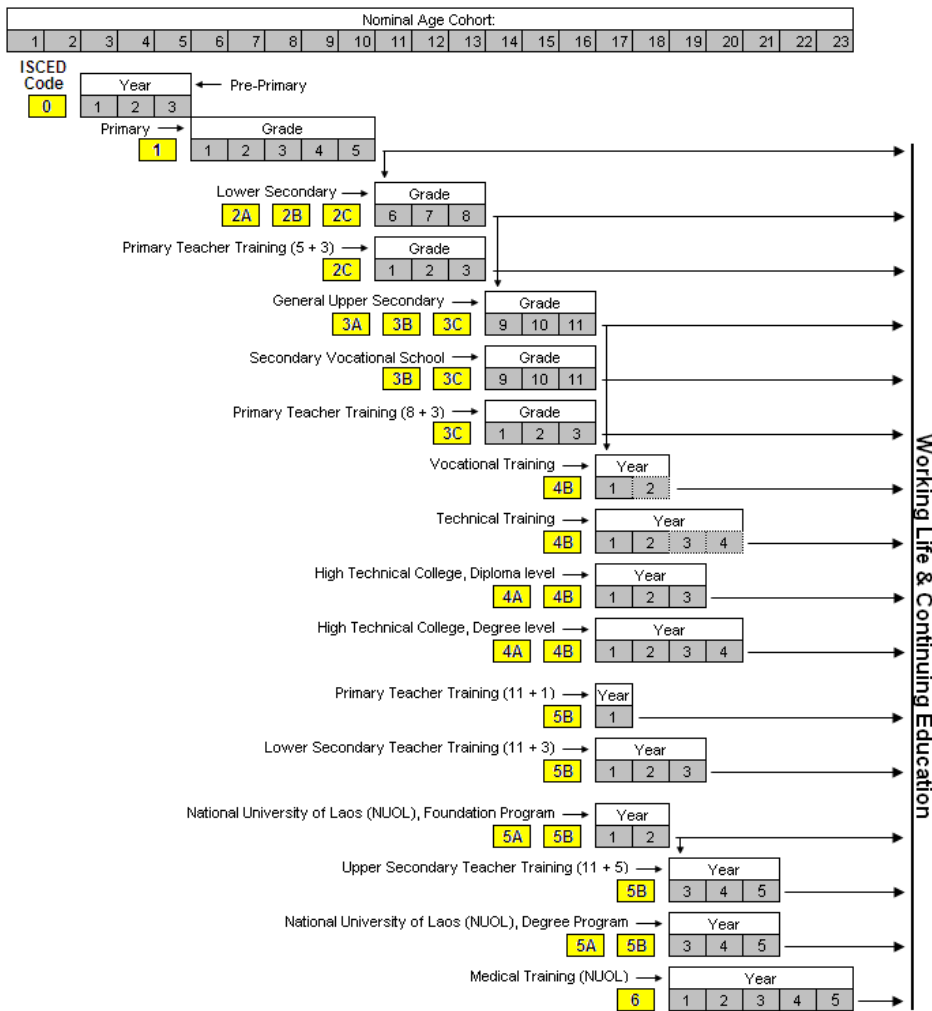


Source: MOE Decree No.2239/MOE.CB.08 dated 02 Sep. 2008

The formal education system of Lao PDR consists of different levels:

1. Pre-school (Crèches and Kindergarten) for children aged three months old to six years old - with a number of alternative models.
2. Primary education for children aged six to ten years old - five-year duration
3. Lower secondary education - three-year duration (the duration will be expanded to four years starting with the new grade 6 in 2009-2010)
4. Upper secondary school - three-year duration
5. Vocational training and higher technical college - two to four-year duration
6. Undergraduate/Bachelor level - five-year duration (Seven year for medical science)
7. Master degree, research and PhD – up to six years duration.

Graph of the Education System in Lao PDR



2.2 Aims and purposes of general education

The Constitution and the educational strategies of the MOE are the main sources of educational principles and goals in Lao PDR. The most recent National Education Reform Strategy (2000-2015) provides that general education should focus on five dimensions of education: the moral, intellectual, vocational and physical aspects, as well as aesthetic education. Primary education's aims are to fully develop students to become patriotic, to love the people's democracy, and to acknowledge and preserve the national multi-culture. It builds students' knowledge, skills and the capacity to continue to higher education. It develops the students' basic competency in general vocational skills to improve local living conditions. It also emphasizes the education of students to live in society by fostering the spirit of patriotism; loving their hometown, village, family and their own school; admiring leaders, parents, seniors and friends; having patience in study; basic knowledge of nature, society and humans; and having basic knowledge on social-natural science and humanity.

Secondary education, comprising of lower and upper levels, aims to enhance knowledge, life skills attitude and talent of students. It generally emphasizes learning how to accurately use the Lao language and to have basic knowledge of mathematics, natural sciences and social sciences, laws, information systems, international language, technology and vocational skills.

2.3 Curricular policies, educational content and teaching and learning strategies

The Law on National Education (Article 28), National Education Reform Strategy (2006-2015) and the strategies of each department have a clear direction on developing local curriculums to ensure that the content of teaching-learning reflects the real need and situation of local communities. The formal education curriculum specifies twenty percent for local curricular development, while the non-formal education curriculum sets aside forty percent for local curricular development to integrate into curriculums local knowledge related to economic and socio-cultural aspects of the communities and their important local persons. This is meant to teach the younger generation the spirit of patriotism and to love their hometown and respect their ancestors. However, in reality, no province or district has been able to develop a local curriculum due to limited technical capacity.

2.4 Legal framework of education

The government is working to achieve the educational objectives of international initiatives including Education For All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To implement and achieve the goals of EFA, the government focuses on expanding education into rural, ethnic and remote areas to make sure that all ethnic groups, both sexes and all ages, have equal access to education, aligning with human rights in education. The government always sees the solidarity among ethnic groups as central to the peace and sustainability of society.

The government expanded the education program to remote and ethnic areas in order to ensure equal access to education by all school-aged students, and to reduce adult illiteracy in the whole country. Since 2000, improvement of private education (which is rapidly growing in all provinces and will extend up to tertiary level) gained more attention from the government. The education

system is gradually being developed and improved to meet the international educational standards, especially in terms of quality. Article 22 of the Constitution states that the government should make the effort of developing education, and implementing compulsory education to equip Lao people with morality and capacity. The State promotes and supports private sector investment in the development of the education system in the country. There is a need to identify priority areas in education, especially for ethnic areas. In addition, Article 22 emphasizes the right to education of all Lao citizens, particularly those in remote areas, women, ethnic groups, children, and the disadvantaged people. The Education Law was revised in 2007.

2.5 Objectives and principal characteristics of current and forthcoming reforms

Some specialized education centers are recently established for various purposes. One relevant center is the Centre of Education Promotion for Women, Ethnic Groups and the People with Disabilities (CEWEC). The objective of this center is to gather all activities that are related to the promotion of education for women, girls, ethnic groups and people with disabilities. It aims to assure equality in education in society. This education reform also focuses on creating female and ethnic staff at all educational levels, a strategy that enhances equality, justice and fulfillment of human rights in the education sector.

In line with the 2005 Education for All National Plan of Action, the government is initiating an education reform that will lead to more pre-school education, extension of general education from eleven to twelve years, construction of more school buildings, teacher training and upgrading, reform of curriculums and development of teaching-learning materials, empowerment of all universities, and establishment of technical and vocational colleges in all provinces.

2.6 Main policies, achievements and lessons learned

The National Education For All Framework addressed that the Education Strategic Vision by 2010 and 2020, issued by the MOE in 2000, links education broader socio-economic development, as well as to the immediate local situation. It recognizes the need for lifelong educational opportunities to ensure that all persons can continue to upgrade their level of education as circumstances change during their lifetimes. The strategic vision seeks to mobilize education as a core component in overall human resources development for the development of Lao PDR.

The strategic vision summarizes policy objectives in eleven basic points that can serve to guide the development of education sector as follows:

- Educational development needs to serve two criteria: (1) promotion of political, ideological and sociological consequences, and (2) promotion of educational quality to international standards.
- Teaching/learning should be well-rounded to promote desirable behaviors and attitudes in the moral, intellectual, artistic, physical, and work ethic dimensions of the individual.
- Greater focus should be placed on developing the pre-school level.
- Basic education should be expanded to include compulsory primary schooling, abolition of illiteracy, and upgrades in people's education levels through continuing education.

- Education authorities must aim for universal lower secondary education, increase upper secondary, vocational and university education, and promote science, language and modern technology.
- Education must be expanded in rural areas, and especially focus on girls, the disadvantaged, ethnic groups, and the disabled.
- Talented students should be guided towards science and management.
- Focus on quality of education at all levels should be maintained.
- Community involvement in education and the expansion of private education is critical, and should be encouraged.
- Higher effectiveness can be achieved through better administration and management.
- Foreign countries and international organizations have an important role to play in helping the country to EFA NPA goals.

The broad strategic vision includes providing an adequate supply of teachers, increasing investment in education, promoting private education, expanding ethnic education, adapting literacy and skills training to local needs, establishing special schools for talent students, developing better curriculum and textbooks, strengthening multi-grade teaching, expanding cluster schools, coordinating literacy in remote areas with armed forces social activities, promoting distance education, improving administration and management, and decentralization of management, mobilization and advocacy for education, strengthening party and local leadership, seeking international funding, using modern methods for science, languages, and technology and reform of the education system.

To immediately implement the mentioned strategic vision plan, the Five Year Education Development Plan (2001-2005) was developed and effectively implemented. This plan provided detailed annual targets for the five-year period. It identified three pillars of educational development: (i) improving equity and access, (ii) improving quality and relevance and (iii) improving administration and management.

Due to increased investment in education by both the government and the private sectors, including international development partners, children of all ethnic groups have increasingly been able to receive education and awareness raising on the importance of education showing positive results. As a result, the number of students and teachers in the latest education sector report 2007-2008 has increased, for instance, net enrollment at primary school is 89.2%.

The EFA mid-decade assessment of EFA report illustrates that the adult literacy rate (aged 15+) in 2005-2006 was 72.7% (63.2% for females and 82.5% for males). The literacy rate of youth (aged 15-24) is 83.9% (females 78.7% and males 89.2%). The indicator on gender equality in literacy (aged 15+) is 0.76.

However, the expansion of education at all levels has mainly occurred in urban areas, especially for the pre-school education level. There is a need to fully implement the EFA program particularly in relation to early education for ethnic children, girls and children from the poorest families.

The government has a policy to promote the involvement of women in all sectors and in capacity development. In the past, a number of female educators have participated in training and capacity-building activities within the country and overseas. In addition, the promotion of the advancement

of women in career development is one of the government's priorities together with greater efforts of female officials to develop their professional qualifications. The number of women holding a higher position in the education sector is on the increase.

To achieve the objectives of the Constitution, laws and decrees mentioned above, the MOE has implemented different projects supported by international organizations, non-governmental organizations and donors. These projects help construct schools, support teachers, support students from poor families, support girls and those in rural areas, establish facilities for ethnic students (such as boarding schools) and students with physical and visual disabilities (schools and dormitories), provide health and nutrition support to students, train communities to support education, promote women empowerment of women, and develop curriculums and teaching-learning materials. These projects have been implemented in many provinces of the country.

The MOE actively raises funds from various international organizations, such as UNICEF and UNESCO Bangkok to support several activities including the provision of training on gender to education managers from the ministry level to the provincial, district, school clusters, teachers and teacher training school management levels; and research on various topics for planning purposes related to gender equality. In every training workshop, "child rights" is a vital topic to increase the knowledge of the participants, and support the mainstreaming of child rights principles into the teaching-learning process and education management. The discussion of child rights focuses on the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) (mainly the forty articles and the four basic rights such as the right to survive, the right to protection, the right to full development, and the right to participation). Training makes sure that participants are aware of these rights, able to distinguish the responsibilities of the parents, teachers and governments, and can apply and mainstream them into teaching and learning processes as well as education management practice as part of their daily work.

The Child Friendly School Project has been implemented for several years in the country in order to ensure that children equally receive quality education in the same appropriate school environment. The project focuses on improving the learning environment and quality of education by emphasizing six aspects: (i) access to schooling of all children, (ii) effective teaching and learning, (iii) children's health and protection, (iv) gender responsiveness, (v) participation of children, parents and community, and (vi) effective leadership and administration. The project began as pilot program in 2004 (three primary schools in three provinces). With satisfactory results during the pilot period, the project was expanded to twenty-four more primary schools of seven provinces. The MOE and UNICEF cooperate on this project, which constitutes a significant component of the cooperation plan (2007-2011).

With effective results during the pilot period, the project was expanded to cover more schools. However, the implementation of the project has been limited for many years to the primary level and in limited target sites in thirty-eight districts of nine provinces only. At present, there are seven hundred sixty-five Child Friendly Schools. Even if the project is expanded up to 80 percent of the total schools in the target districts as mentioned, there is still a huge need because there are a total 8,830 primary schools (4,242 are complete primary schools in one hundred forty-one districts of seventeen provinces the remaining are incomplete only covering some grades). When an evaluation

is done at the end of the project in 2011, the project will not have covered all the primary schools in all provinces, nor expanded to secondary schools.

At the same time, the MOE also cooperates with Save the Children-Norway and Catholic Relief Services to implement the Inclusive Education (IE) Project. The Project started in 1994 under CRS in two provinces currently there are 367 schools for kindergarten, primary and secondary education in 101 districts of 17 provinces. The target groups are children with disabilities, children failing in school and all other children attending IE schools. Children were mainly pre-school or primary school age, but now 11 lower secondary schools are included.

The Goals and Objectives of Inclusive Education are:

- To include all children with disabilities in Laos in schooling and activities
- To combat discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities and building an inclusive society and achieving Education for All
- To assess the needs of disabled children
- To change community attitudes to ensure children with disabilities are able to develop their abilities and maximize their potential
- To train teachers to be able to use methods of teaching and supporting children with different needs in the class.

To achieve the goals of the IE projects, many activities are implemented such as training workshops for every level and for concerned organizations, especially for teachers to gain effective instruction, teaching children with hearing loss/problem, seeing difficulties, including sign language and Braille training, and curriculum adjustment based on children special needs and monitoring and the recording of children's progress. In-service teacher training is significant for current teachers, but pre-service teacher training is a current key focus, so IE concepts will be integrated into the teacher training curriculum to ensure the pre-service teacher trainees have capacity in teaching inclusive classes and IE will be mainstreamed into the national education system.

The objective of another project, the Education Development Project Phase II (EDP) II, is to achieve universal completion of primary education for all in the long term. The short-term objective is to increase primary school enrollment and completion. The project covers the nineteen poorest districts of the six poorest provinces of the country. The project's implementation period is five years starting from 2005 and completing in 2010. The main activities of the project are construction of new complete primary schools by applying a community-based contracting approach, providing school grants assistance to ensure children in poor families can graduate on completion of primary education; strengthening capacities for policy analysis and management; strengthening information systems on data collection, analysis, reporting, filing, storing and maintenance; strengthening capacity building on education management to all levels of the target areas; supporting key policy and institutional reforms; improving the education quality in evaluating, revising, publishing and distributing new primary textbooks and teacher guides; research on teaching Lao language to ethnic children in early grades; training of trainers on applying multi-grade teaching in classrooms and the use of a newly developed curriculum; recruitment of teachers for remote areas, etc. The new textbooks and teacher guides for Grades 1-3 start to be used this school year (2008-2009) and new

The Second Education Quality Improvement Project-Teacher Training Enhancement and Status of Teachers (EQIP II-TTEST) has revised, improved and developed the pre-service and in-service teaching training curriculum. The Second Education Development Project (EDP II) has revised, improved and published primary education textbooks. These projects also mainstreamed gender, culture of ethnic groups, human rights and HIV/AIDS prevention concepts into the contents of the textbooks. EQIP II is an on going loan project from the Asian Development Bank, starting in 2002, scheduled to be completed in 2008 the project has been extended to 2010 to ensure all planned activities are completed. The Sida-funded TTEST component has also been extended to 2010. The long-term goal is to contribute to poverty reduction in Lao PDR by assisting the Government in achieving quality education for children. The objectives of the project are (i) to improve the relevance, quality and efficiency for primary and secondary education (ii) to expand access to and improve retention in primary schools, especially of girls in poor, underserved areas of the country (iii) to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Government at center, provincial, district and village levels to plan and manage the decentralized education system and implement the project. The project covers 61 districts of 9 provinces. Key activities include preparing a Teacher Educational Strategy (2006-2015) and Action Plan (2006-2010), developing the teacher education system, developing the cadre of teacher trainers including upgrading primary and secondary education pedagogical advisors, construction and upgrading of training facilities, delivering provincial and district level capacity on education management, new primary schools construction and upgrading including furniture, reprinting existing primary education core textbooks for the targets schools and other non target primary schools in sixty five districts of the country.

The MOE recognizes the value and importance of access to high quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs, which are driven by a comprehensive holistic national policy. With support from development partners, MOE is now developing such a policy which is expected to be finalized in early 2008. In the Education Strategic Vision document, the MOE states its goal of promoting pre-primary education gradually, focusing on developing pre-school education by improving and increasing more crèches and kindergartens. The EFA National Plan of Action adopts pre-primary classes, targeted at “ethnic groups, girls and children from poorest families” as a means for expanding pre-primary education. MOE aims to increase the state budget to create model crèches and kindergartens in provincial and district capital towns, while at the same time stimulating the private sector to open crèches and kindergartens. MOE will continue to promote and establish public and private crèches, kindergartens and, under a Ministerial Decree, continue to “Establish pre-primary classes in primary schools in rural and remote areas, which have no kindergartens, but do have classrooms and teachers available”.

MOE has been piloting a program since 2002 that adds a pre-primary class to existing primary schools in rural and remote areas. The pilot programs were found to be successful and a phased expansion nation-wide is intended. Pre-primary classes appear to be an affordable option for the expansion of ECD programs since resources for ECD will most likely be scarce and the private sector will not be able to create sufficient public and community ECD facilities in rural and remote areas. The MOE will ensure that the community-managed and operated ECD programs do not result in inequalities in access to a quality pre-primary education. Furthermore, the rapid growth in the number of privately owned and governed ECD programs provides evidence that MOE policy to stimulate the private sector involvement has been successful in increasing access to ECD programs

in urban areas. The ECD sub-sector has also witnessed increasing coordination and cooperation between MOE and development partners through the Pre-Primary Division.

Lao PDR hasn't yet developed a national holistic ECD policy and only limited resource allocations have been possible to date, including quotas of teachers and the omission of pre-school accommodation in newly constructed schools. There remains an expectation that community-managed early learning centers will be developed to limit the costs to public education.

As a result of the lack of financial resources for ECD programs, as well as access to health and sanitation facilities and clean water for the vast majority, these facilities remain limited to urban and wealthy communities. The policy of establishing public and community ECD programs in rural, remote, and ethnic communities has some way to go to correct the disparities in enrollment ratios between urban and rural areas. Despite advances during the past half decade, it is clear that little attention is given to the provision of ECD educational services. The government is concerned that many children who are deprived of early childhood education are also affected by malnutrition, including micro-nutrient deficiencies. The combination greatly affects their school readiness and therefore hinders their right to obtain a quality education.

The access to education and the quality of education represent a current concern in Laos. The Lao Government tries to reform the educational and training systems in order to improve these issues.

During the curriculum reform in the beginning of 1990, the issue of evaluation, especially the assessment on students learning outcomes was raised and introduced in Laos. The evaluation in education, especially the learning assessment, plays a crucial role in the actual teaching learning activities in school. The emphasis on evaluation comes from increased concerns to improve the quality of the education process as a whole, to control, to diagnose the results; in order to find out appropriate ways to remedy weaknesses.

It is important for any Ministry of Education to know about the quality of education not only in terms of inputs to the system but also in terms of output, namely pupil achievement. Little was known about the achievement of the pupils. Hence the Ministry decided to conduct, from 1996 to 2000 a series of surveys at different grade levels. In 2004 the MOE undertook a sample survey to assess the achievement in the last grade of primary school - Grade 5 pupils in reading, mathematics, and sciences or 'The World Around Us'. The Ministry assigned the Research Institute for Educational Sciences (RIES) to carry out the study, under the Ministry's EDP II Project. The role and function of RIES is to design and develop curricula and teaching and learning materials for general education, to be in charge of Television and Radio broadcasting education programs, as well as being responsible for the assessment of pupil achievement in the country. This first national Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (ASLO) undertaken in 2006 involved 362 schools and 7450 students (119 districts, 17 provinces). The survey focused on three major subjects: Lao language, Mathematic and World Around Us.

The purpose of the survey was:

1. To assess learning achievement of grade 5 students across the country, in the three major subjects;
2. To find out the appropriateness of the curricula, teaching and learning materials, teaching methods, characteristics of teachers and education administrators and other teaching and learning facilities;
3. To collect and supply data and information about policy on general education quality improvement particularly for the primary school level; and
4. To strengthen the capacity of the Research Institute for Education Sciences (RIES) in the field of assessment and evaluation.

Several key findings emerged from the analyses presented in the ASLO report. They concern the presence of differences in achievement by province, school location and pupil socio-economic status. From these differences stem implications for test construction, teacher training, curriculum review, and resource allocation.

The skill levels of students have been examined at the national level, and the province level. To summarize the results, pupils demonstrated sound ability in Lao language skills and also in the natural and social science topics tested in the World Around Us test. The Grade 5 pupil population of Laos appear to be slightly weaker in mathematics, with the vast majority of pupils (65.4%) performing in the lower two levels (of six ability levels). Implications for teacher training and curriculum content are perhaps apparent.

It was quite clear that there were considerable difference between provinces and in these cases it is up to the MOE to inform the particular provinces about the low achievement performance and to be able to take conjoint efforts to improve the lot of pupils in the poor-performing provinces.

It is often said that the homes from which pupils come is a determining factor in the kinds of achievement they exhibit at school. It was seen in the report that there was a strong socio-economic effect on achievement in all three subject areas. Based on the several aspects of the home background examined, it was seen that most Grade 5 pupils were aged between 11 and 13 years, and that there were equal numbers of boys and girls in school tested. Most pupils had very few books at home so that reading opportunities were limited. The families of the pupils were not very well-off although there were some provinces where the families were poorer than in others. The pupils ate well and had three meals per day. Nearly three-quarters of them were from the main group Lao-Tai. But in some provinces up to 50 percent of the pupils did not speak Lao at home. Absenteeism was not a problem. But not many pupils were from homes where the parents provided a private corner for study. It was the better educated parents that did this. Most pupils did not have more than two kilometres to walk to school. And they only worked for about two hours per day to help their families. Grade repetition was very high and an issue to be addressed. Finally, it was some of the home background variables (number of books in the home, possessions, speaking Lao outside the school, and homework in mathematics) that were strongly related to pupil achievement.

Homework was only given by about half the pupils in Lao language and about 70 percent in mathematics. Not all of the homework was corrected despite the fact that the more homework was corrected the better the pupils achieved. About 20 percent of pupils did not have homework or were not reminded about it by parents. But 55 percent had parents who did care about their school work. In Lao language 75 percent of pupils had their own textbook or shared with one other person whereas in mathematics only 19 percent had their own textbook or shared with one other person. Briefly, the schools were still not fully equipped with textbooks and teaching aids, and there was much grade repeating. Not all teachers gave and corrected homework. Some parents tried hard to help the children but some 45.2 percent did not do so.

The results from ASLO have showed that the level, and the quality of education, has to be improved. Besides that, the questions raised currently by many decision makers and stakeholders on the assessment of teaching and learning still represent a big challenge.

The Prime Minister approved the Teacher Education Strategy 2006-2015 and Action Plan 2006-2010 (TESAP) in 2006. Implementation of TESAP is ongoing with: policy analysis for management of the teacher education system improving, a background paper on modalities for teacher upgrade in remote areas prepared and a program initiated, a Decree for teacher titles and teacher positions issued which will support changes in salary scales; EFA projections updated in the EFA MDA/FTI Report; and some policy studies had been completed.

Other areas of TESAP being implemented include: management of the teacher education system; strengthening of the National Teacher Education Advisory Board (NTEAB) and Teacher Education Institutions Advisory Boards (TEIAB); changes to the internal organisation of teacher education institutions; internal and external channels of communication and working procedures between institutions involved in teacher education clarified, ongoing capacity building of DTT divisions, Teacher Education Evaluation Division (TEED) established and operational, a five-year plan to develop a Teacher Education Management Information System (TEMIS) finalised and under implementation. Other keys areas currently being implemented include a Quality Assurance (QA) system, new pre-service programs, new curriculums and course outlines, degree level continuing professional development upgrading, National Charter of Teacher Competencies, teacher upgrading program allowing teachers trained earlier to upgrade their qualifications, Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) system prepared, Lao teacher accreditation and certification (pre-in service) prepared. Plans to ensure a sufficient number of teachers and improved salaries for teachers are being prepared.

2.7 Forthcoming reforms: National Education Reform Strategy 2006-2015

The “Education Strategic Vision by 2010 and 2020”, issued by the MOE in 2000, links education to broader socio-economic development, as well as to the immediate local situation. It recognizes the need for lifelong educational opportunities to ensure that all persons can continue to upgrade their level of education as circumstances change during their lifetimes. The Vision aims to incorporate international trends and standards into the Lao education system and to develop all levels of education systematically and continuously, including strengthening the role of the private sector in the provision of education.

In general, the Vision emphasizes education as a core component in overall human resources development for the development of the Lao PDR. The Vision summarizes policy objectives in eleven basic points that serve to guide the development of the education sector: Many of these points are absorbed within the EFA NPA, for instance the increased focus on pre-school level, expansion of basic education, increasing participation of girls and peoples living in remote areas, increasing the quality of education experiences and enhanced management of education.

In March 2006 the Eighth Lao People's Revolutionary Party Congress re-emphasized its long-term national development goal of enabling the Lao PDR to graduate from the ranks of the Least Developed Countries by 2020 and to build the basic human and physical infrastructure for the shift to industrialization and modernity.

In order to achieve this goal, the Congress confirmed in that during the period 2006 to 2010 education is to be considered the main focus for human resource development. Reform of the national education system was seen as urgently required for the improvement of educational quality and standards. The aims of a reformed national system of education will be to educate the Lao people to be good citizens, to be knowledgeable, to be creative and enthusiastic and to contribute to the development of both the country and themselves. Through education people will gain employment, will learn to protect their own health and will behave with the integrity necessary to meet the demands of the socio-economic development of the country and its growing movement towards globalization.

With reference to the resolution of the Eighth Lao People's Revolution Party Congress, the guidance of the Prime Minister and the Government Cabinet Meeting, the National Education System Reform Strategy consists of six directives:

1. The National Education System Reform Strategy aims to develop human resources that are applicable to the strategic development of the country's economic components as well as to the need to link the country with international goals.
2. Education reform should emphasize the national education structure. If change is to become a reality, then the attitudes and perceptions in society about the educational structural reforms need to be widely understood.
3. The National Education System Reform Strategy should be implemented with the participation of society to ensure that education will continue to grow and develop.
4. The National Education System Reform Strategy should expand the intellectual life, preserve the traditions and culture of the nation and inspire a spirit of solidarity amongst the population throughout the country.
5. The National Education System Reform Strategy should expand access to education, promote the capabilities of people, improve their living conditions and compete and link with regional and international situations.
6. The National Education System Reform Strategy should enhance the status of teachers and uphold the importance of their roles and positions.

3.0 ROLE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN COMBATING POVERTY AS WELL AS OTHER FORMS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND CULTURAL MARGINALIZATION

Based on the current situation and the current educational concerns, the Government of Lao PDR gives priority to the development of education and considers education as central to human development. To achieve of the goals of EFA, MDGs and National Strategies for Growth and Poverty Eradication (which focuses on lifting the country out of the least developed status by 2020), the goal of the government is to make sure that the Lao population from all ethnic groups and both sexes can read and write, achieve education attainment, and have knowledge to apply modern technology-sciences to the production process, so that they can participate in the development of the national socio-economy and can contribute to the competitiveness of the country at the regional and international levels. The promotion of education for women is also viewed as a priority. The National Strategy on the Promotion of Education for Girls and the Advancement of Women in the Education Sector (2006-2010) was adapted from the national policy of the Lao People's Party and government under the Constitution, laws and agreements that ensure gender equality in terms of quantity and gender roles. In achieving equality in education, the development of quality human resources of both sexes to support the socio-economic development of the country is needed.

The government views education as having a vital role in reducing poverty. Education can improve the living standards of the people and provide a basis for the growth of the economy. The National Strategy on Poverty Reduction states that education is a main feature to reduce poverty. Under this framework, illiteracy must be eradicated, and the people should have an opportunity to access modern technology that can be applied to agriculture production. Thus, it is significant to ensure equal access to education for all ethnic groups. The equal opportunity in education will allow Lao people to use their knowledge to improve their economic conditions that will then contribute to the reduction of poverty by 2020.

The resolution of the 5th national conference of the Lao People's Party in 2007 requires the MOE in collaboration with the social sciences research center to conduct further research on the development of the Lao alphabets to match ethnic verbal languages and support quality teaching of the Lao language to ethnic groups. The MOE has implemented the resolution through different approaches. For example, the initial consultation meeting was organized in June 2008 to provide quality education to ethnic children and adults.

These policies and programs are based on the policy direction of the government under the Constitution, laws and decrees that ensure qualitative and quantitative equality, particularly to ensure the achievement of equality in education in order to supply quality female, male and ethnic human resources to the socio-economic development of the country.

4.0 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE WAY OF THE FUTURE

4.1 Approach, scope and content

The Ministry of Education in cooperation with some NGOs has implemented Inclusive Education policies for more than ten years. However, the concept of Inclusive Education is still generally understood as education for “children with disabilities” and focused on Primary Education level and an initial pilot project at the Secondary Education level. To implement and achieve the National EFA Plan of Action, the Center for Promotion of Education for Women-Ethnic-Disabled People was established in April 2008. The role of this Center is to conduct studies and researches to be the foundation of policy guidelines and strategy development related to inclusive education. Moreover, Inclusive Education Concepts will be interpreted and advocated through different media to ensure all citizens have a unanimous understanding. Another role of the Center is to coordinate concerned technical departments, in-country and overseas organizations related to the promotion of education for women, girls, ethnic, disabled people, people with special needs and disadvantaged people. The Center has a role in supervising and monitoring projects, programs and activities related to the promotion of education for women, girls, ethnic, disabled people, people with special needs and disadvantaged people. Policy guidelines and strategies of IE will be developed to ensure that the IE is better mainstreamed into the whole education system.

4.2 Most important challenges for ensuring educational and social inclusion

Over the years there has been great achievements in the education sector but many challenges still remain:

- 10 percent of children have never attended school. The distance to school was found to be one of the major causes of never attending primary education. Expansion of access to ‘child friendly’ school facilities of the mainly poor, remote and ethnic communities has been slow and costly.
- The existence of many incomplete schools.
- It will be even more challenging to convince and show those, who indicated ‘not interested’ as the reason for them not attending primary school, the value of primary schooling.
- Repetition rates are extraordinarily high and are likely to even be under-estimated. Repetition by boys is higher than for girls.
- Through adding one grade, grade 9, to lower secondary education from 2009/2010, poor families may find it even more difficult to let their children complete (lower) secondary schooling. The additional year of opportunity costs might be too high for many, possibly resulting in increasing disparities between ‘the rich’ and ‘the poor’ in secondary schooling opportunities.

- Adding one grade to lower secondary will result in an additional need for classrooms, teachers, textbooks, materials, etc. It will be challenging to ensure that this reform is implemented on time and with adequate facilities.
- Drop-out rates are high, though actual drop-outs may be less since some students drop back into school later. The reasons for drop-outs are in part due to lack of perceived relevance, but also largely due to poor quality of instruction which arises from the lack of appropriate instructional methods and to the lack of instructional materials available to all students. The absence of textbooks and qualified, bilingual ethnic teachers is particularly a problem of poor, remote and ethnic group communities.
- For the most disadvantaged group – women living in rural areas without access to roads – the challenge of ensuring lasting literacy will be substantial.
- With a high percentages of the population not having a basic literacy level in the Lao language, many children are deprived of the opportunity of being sufficiently ‘home schooled’ in the basics of Lao language before entering the school system.
- For the sake of nation building and social, economic, and cultural integration, it is important that children and adults of other ethno-linguistic groups learn to read, write, and speak Lao and to understand spoken Lao. Given the demographic, linguistic and pedagogical complexities involved, it is not likely that any one approach to Lao language teaching will suit the needs of all communities.
- In primary schools - only 15 percent of schools have been reached through integrating Reproductive Health/HIV/AIDS/STIs and drugs education into the core subject “World Around Us” for Grade 4 and 5. For final year Primary Students in rural areas where many children do not progress to secondary school, this may be the only opportunity to receive essential information on these issues. With only 85 percent of students being reached in primary education and many not continuing their studies after primary education it will be very difficult to reach the “proportion of 70 percent of 15-24 year old women who know how to prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)”.
- MOE will integrate the Reproductive Health/HIV/AIDS/STIs and drugs education curriculum into the reform of the national lower and upper secondary school curriculum, starting in 2008. It will be important that this curriculum is mainstreamed and given sufficient emphasis and resources. Thus, during the period from 2007 to 2015, there is a need to provide clear policy directives (eg by making the topic a compulsory and graded course) and to build commitment among the teacher workforce to ensure they are indeed teaching the Reproductive Health/HIV/AIDS/STIs and drugs education curriculum using a life kills approach. With many newly graduated teachers not receiving training in these issues within their curriculum it will be challenging to ensure these topics continue to be taught.
- While EFA NPA Program 5 targets the “disadvantaged” there is too little evidence that the various TVET programs have yet succeeded in reaching the disadvantaged.

- Evidence shows it will remain a considerable challenge to establish and promote gender neutral and inclusive TVET programs.
- There is still a significant gap in female participation which grows from primary (46 percent of enrolments are girls), to lower secondary (44 percent girls), to upper secondary (42 percent girls). Moreover, girls living in rural areas without access to roads are very much less likely to be in school.
- For TVET under the responsibility of MOE, only a third of the places are filled by females and the trend in the past half-decade has been irregular. Ensuring that more girls make the transition to higher levels of education, especially TVET, from each of these sub-sectors will form a great challenge for the MOE and other ministries as multiple factors are causing the gender disparities.
- It will be particularly challenging to raise the awareness of community leaders, parents and children and youth of the importance of education, particularly in some of the ethnic, remote and rural communities.
- Changing the inequality between the number of female and male teachers and school administrators will be very difficult to achieve, especially for ECCD and TVET. Only a recruitment policy which is gender-responsive will, in the long run, remove the gender disparities among teachers and school directors.
- Gender mainstreaming and integration into education efforts nationwide will be a big challenge. This includes monitoring and evaluation of its progress.
- Development of policies and strategies related to gender equality and ethnic, inclusive and human rights education will need to be a priority action in the next decade as well as efforts to enhance gender parity and equality in terms of education administration at all levels.

4.3 Indicators and data are used to inform inclusive education policies

The “Guidelines for the Asia and Pacific Mid-Decade Assessment: Identifying and Reaching the Unreached” is commonly used as a reference for the collection and analysis of data for evidence-based policymaking.

With the over-arching theme of identifying “unreached” populations and areas of greatest inequity, the EFA MDA emphasizes the need for greater disaggregation. While the Dakar EFA Reports included male/female breakdowns, and occasional references to urban/rural, the Lao PDR EFA MDA report breaks data down further on the EFA core indicators by geographic regions (provinces and districts), by ethnicity, by private/public, by age and socio-economic status and disability where data is available. The indicators used are divided into three types for each of the 7 NPA Programs: (1) Core Indicators; (2) Policy Development; and (3) Additional indicators. The core indicators require quantitative data sets at as many levels of disaggregation as possible. Comparisons between 2000/1 and 2005/6 data have been used wherever possible but significant gaps remain. Policy development indicators are new and are designed to provide more substantive, qualitative responses

on topics such as partnerships, capacities and policies. Lastly, the Additional Indicators allow for more detailed reporting using refined data sets where these are available.

Education Management Information System (EMIS) data collection is based on school reporting. The education data and indicators obtained from census and surveys are based on the reporting of a respondent from the household. However, to analyze and address the situation of “the excluded”, it is also necessary to improve data collection beyond the standard use of the annual school surveys which are entered in the EMIS. Therefore additional data sets have been used, including the National Population Census 2005 data, the Multiple Indicators Cluster Surveys (MICS), Lao Expenditure and Consumption Surveys (LECS), the Lao Reproductive Health Survey (LRHS) and Public Expenditure Review (PER).

4.4 Inclusive education issues have been, are, or are going to be relevant for educational policies

Under the Vientiane Declaration the Government of Lao PDR and its Development Partners jointly agreed to produce a strategic plan for the education sector. The Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF) must also make sure that it takes into account ALL the existing policy and strategy documents, which are relevant to the sector. This includes overall planning documents such as the 6th National Socio Economic Development Plan, Education Strategic Planning 20 years 2001-2020 and the Education For All National Plan of Action. It will also include sub-sector plans which have been or are in the process of being developed, including the Early Childhood Development policy and the Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) strategy and master-plan.

Following the Vientiane Declaration and the discussions at the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) meeting, the Ministry of Education (MOE) seeks support from the donor partners to assist it to move forward in developing the current ESDF into a realistic and prioritized strategic plan that can guide both government and donors for a balanced development of the education sector over the next 10 years. There is common agreement that the ESDF must identify key policy choices, achieve the maximum impact on the most serious constraints facing the sector and be based on a realistic assessment of available resources. Both the Ministry and the Donor Partners acknowledge that further technical assistance must be forthcoming if these objectives are to be achieved.

This sector wide framework for planning and management purposes, the Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF) allows:

- (i) comprehensive projection of education sector resource requirements;
- (ii) focused and better coordinated external assistance; and

MOE is assessing the projected expansion of enrollments at the primary, lower, upper secondary and Non Formal Education (NFE), TVET and higher education levels and the impact this expansion will have on the demand for physical facilities (teachers, textbooks, learning materials), institutional and management capacity at all levels of education management and delivery, and will establish priorities to match resource availability.

The ESDF is the first step towards a sector-wide approach and is critical to developing robust policies and strategies to achieve EFA goals and ensure future balanced development within the education sector. It will also enable MOE and development partners to fulfill one of the key commitments under the Country Action Plan of the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness by facilitating the production of an annual costed and prioritized sector plan.

Social Development and Inclusive Education is one of the key issues recognized by the MOE. Under ESDF, social development and inclusive education will be integrated into the education plans and system. Inclusive Education will be interpreted and related to the UNESCO current definition, to ensure all the disadvantaged people have access to the quality education. Different strategies related to inclusive education have already been identified and prioritized during the first phase of the ESDF. The key points raised under the Social Development and Inclusive Education Group are the promotion of education for ethnic people, people in remote areas, gender equality in education, and education for disabled people and people with special needs. The small schools in remote areas will become complete schools by applying multi-grade school approach; more researches and pilot projects will be continued to conduct to find out the better strategies to provide good education to ethnic children and people who have problem because of language issues. So teacher upgrading is the key role to lift the education to quality and relevance. Moreover, policy guidelines and strategies will be developed to make sure all disadvantaged groups have opportunity to access to good education.

4.5 Main barriers to inclusive education

There are different barriers to inclusive education, cultural, geographic, and socio-economic, language and policy development issues are involved factors.

Lao PDR has a relatively young population, with 39 percent of the population under 15 years of age. One of the most prominent cultural features is ethno-linguistic diversity. According to the 2005 census, among children between the ages of 0 and 16, the Lao-Tai represent only 59.8 percent. Hence, the non-Lao-Tai population is growing more rapidly than the Lao-Tai population.

The average current household size is 5.9 persons (5.7 persons for urban households, 5.9 persons for households in rural areas with roads, and 6.1 persons in rural areas without roads). Almost 73 percent of the population lives in the rural areas.

Lao PDR is predominantly a rural society with an agriculture-based economic structure. Improvement in social conditions and the creation of income, especially in rural areas, are top government priorities. The integration of rural areas into the national market economy is central to eliminating widespread poverty. Thus, rural development, both its social and physical dimensions, is considered key to the eradication of mass poverty and sustainable improvement in social well-being.

The economically active population comprises 67 percent of the population aged 18-60 years (58 percent in urban areas, 69 percent in rural areas with roads and 73 percent without roads). By far the largest categories of employment are “unpaid family workers” (46 percent) and “own account workers” (self-employed, 42 percent).

The movement of people from rural to urban or flat land areas has been happening, so it impacts the economic differentials within and between people. And many diverse factors, including natural disasters (mainly floods and droughts), unbalanced population growth (mainly high population growth in more remote areas with low economic growth) and strains on education and employment opportunities, have increased migration.

Only 1.4 percent of the economically active population is counted as “unemployed”. This can be attributed to the nature of the labor market: (a) There is little in the way of unemployment “benefits”; (b) There is a large informal labor market; and (c) For many people, it is possible quite literally to live for some time off the “fruits of the land”.

Due to the diversity of ethnic groups language instruction is a barrier of young children’s learning in early age. The education policy guidelines related to IE have yet to be developed. However, the MOE has tried to develop some appropriate strategies to provide quality education for particularly ethnic children and adults, for examples, the recruitment of ethnic teachers and development of supplementary materials.

Public expenditure on education was not sustainable due to the financial crisis of late 1990s. It has increased yearly, in the school year 2006-2007; the total education budget was 15.0% of the GDP. However, if it compares to the education needs it is still under the line.

The ESDF development process recognizes that Inclusive Education is an overall focus and the most disadvantaged groups are determined such as women and girls, ethnic groups, children with disabilities, and people with special needs. Up to now, the MOE has yet an exact disaggregated data on these groups, especially ethnic and disabled people groups. So, it is quite hard to develop the education plan for these groups, it needs urgent surveys in coming year.

4.6 New approaches and measures to make the education system more inclusive

There are many approaches that can make the education more inclusive in Lao PDR. The policy guidelines and strategies related IE should be developed. The Child Friendly School program, education for disabled children/people, the extension of education to remote areas, the multigrade teaching in needed areas, local teacher recruitment and deployment, IE concepts are integrated into the reformed curriculum including the curriculum of the TTCs and TTSs that is the main impact. The teacher education is needed to improve both pre-service and in-service programs as follows:

In the Teacher Educational Strategy and Action Plan (TESAP), the Lao Government improves the quality of teachers through longer periods of pre-service as well as in-service teacher training. The intention of preschool and primary school teacher level is to move steadily from the existing program of 11+1 to amore consistent standard of 11+3, via an 11+2 program which is implemented from the year 2008-2009. The existing 5+4 and 8+3 programs for school primary teacher level will continue to play a specialist role for remote and ethnic areas although current levels of formal education are low. Also, lower secondary teacher level is expected to divide the current program of 11+3 (3 courses to 11+3 (5 courses) which are implemented from the year 2008-2009.

The Government tries to establish a few programs for pre-service teacher training. Up to now, there are in total 15 Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), and they are divided into six kinds of TEI to make sure teaching is available for all citizens. First, five Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) running six systems as 5+4, 8+3, 11+1, and 11+3 years, producing preschool, primary and lower secondary school teachers. Secondly, there three Teacher Training Schools (TTSs) running four systems as 5+4, 8+3, 11+1 and 11+2 years, producing preschool and primary school teachers. Third, there is one National Art Education Teacher Training School running 8+3 years, producing art teachers. Fourth, there is one National Physical Education Teacher Training running 11+3 years, producing physical education teachers. Fifth, there are two Monk Colleges running 11+3 years, producing secondary teachers for Monk schools. Final, there are three Faculties of Education running 11+5 years, producing upper secondary school teachers.

In addition, to make the unqualified or low level of teachers having opportunity for upgrading their knowledge, there is also an In-service Teacher Training Center (ISTUC) in every province for primary school level. These ISTUCs are under the supervision of the in-Service Teacher Training Division in the Department of Teacher Training. In the future, the the TTCs/TTSs and ISTUCs will be linked for technical support from existing TTCs/TTSs in their respective provinces. TTCs/TTSs will be facilitating in-service teacher training courses for primary and lower secondary teachers in co-operation with teacher upgrading centers.

Moreover, some specific approaches and measures also develop to tackle the issues and to ensure the education more inclusive as follows:

1. formulate affordable expanded access strategies, especially for currently poorer and underserved districts, through kindergarten/reception classes within primary schools and community based play group models of provision;
2. rapidly eliminate incomplete primary schools through a combination of incentives and facilities expansion and school rationalization;
3. adopt strategies and programs to promote the value of primary education and rigorous regulation of age of entry at six years;
4. develop affordable measures to reduce direct and indirect cost barriers for enrolment and sustained participation in primary schooling;
5. ensure that there are sufficient teachers who are distributed fairly across the Provinces, Districts and schools, with the remotest schools being given priority in staffing. This will result in more equitable distribution and retention of better qualified teachers, especially in currently underserved districts and schools.
6. establish sustainable institutional and organizational arrangements for village level lifelong learning (e.g. community learning centers), including management capacity development;
7. increase the ways in which school drop-outs can conveniently resume their education (ie re-entry into lifelong learning programs) and for their qualifications to be regarded as equivalent to formal schooling.
8. expand innovative models of adult literacy service delivery, building on lessons learned from current community based models;
9. formulate innovative strategies for expansion of informal skills training opportunities, including informal apprenticeship models, increasingly delivered through village Community Learning Centers (CLCs);

10. adopt innovative policy guidelines and strategies that begin to mitigate against social, cultural and cost barriers for girls, women, ethnic and disabled people accessing and progressing through pre-school, primary, secondary education, and the whole education sector;
11. increase the provision of innovative strategies and programs of non-formal and informal primary and secondary education and skills training opportunities that are easier for older females and ethnic groups to access;
12. increase the provision of female teachers in currently underserved areas, given the strong correlation between the presence of female teachers and retention of female students;
13. Strengthening education partnerships in strategy/ program/project formulation and implementation.

5.0 NON-FORMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

5.1 Literacy

The Government of Lao PDR has input great efforts to solve illiteracy problem because it is perceived as a problem of overshadowing the national development. The MOE, PESs and DEBs, through the Department of Non-formal Education (DNFE), provide four types of NFE programs to improve living and working conditions in a participant's natural and cultural environment, and to develop activities oriented towards self-sufficiency and employment: (i) literacy training for out-of-school adults, usually organized at the village level and given in evenings and weekends; (ii) upgrading programs for the general adult population, enabling them to gain primary, lower secondary and upper secondary equivalency in full-time compressed programs, e.g., three years for primary education; (iii) upgrading courses for government cadres organized at both the provincial and district levels, sometimes using special facilities (the Ministry of Education operates one Centre); these courses are primarily for upgrading educational qualifications to the lower and upper secondary level, and participants come from a range of line ministries; and (iv) skills development programs that are linked to literacy programs have been offered to the illiterate adults and out-of-school youth oriented towards income-generating activities.

The NFE programs are implemented in various places, including the Community Learning Centers (CLC), NFE centers, primary and secondary schools and villages (in temples or in houses of village heads). The CLC is the institution that carries out literacy activities, continuing education, and basic vocational/skills training for improving the quality of life. The CLC coordinates with local rural development in each area, and supports/promotes the educational activities of the formal system. With assistance from a resource person, the CLC also acts as the main source of adult education for village communities. Fundamentally, the CLC acts to network NFE structural services with the active participation of all community organs in planning, coordination and implementation of education programs.

In 2007/08, 113,683 people, 62,845 females completed non-formal education program; 44,099 people, 24,920 females completed literacy program; 65,736 people, 36,804 females completed equivalency primary education, 1,013 people, 373 females completed equivalency lower secondary education; and 2,835 people, 748 females completed equivalency upper secondary education. Literacy is slightly increased from 73 percent in 2005 (Population census 2005) to 77 percent (calculated from Education Ministry Line Report 2008).

Reported Adult Literacy Rates (15+) between 1995 and 2008

Source of information	Total	Male	Female
Population Census 1995	60.2%	73.5%	47.9%
LECS 2 (1997/98)	-	82%	55%
MICS II 2000	70.0%	81.7%	59.1%
LNLS 2001	68.7%	77.0%	60.9%
LECS 3 (2002/03)	74%	85%	64%
Population Census 2005	72.7%	82.5%	63.2%
Ministry Line Report 2008	77.09%	-	-

Source: MOE/NFE Report, 2008

According to the Population Census 2005, the literacy rate was highest in Vientiane Capital (92%) and lowest in Phongsaly (43%), the ethnically diverse province in the country north bordering to China and Viet Nam. The rate was also higher in urban areas (89%) and lowest were in rural areas without road (54%). There were improvements across all age groups compared to 1995 but a more accentuated for women. The result also shows the impact education has on literacy, in lower ages the literacy rates are high and the ability to read and write declines with age. The literacy rate differed considerably among the ethnic groups. The literacy rate for the non-Lao-Tai groups was 49%, with 33% for females and 65% for males. This is relatively low, compared to the Lao-Tai group, 76% for females and 90% for males. This scenario reveals that non-formal education needs to pay more attention to rural and remote areas in the upcoming plan/years though progress has been made.

To achieve the EFA goals, the Government has increased budget into NFE programs. For example, in the year 2000-2001, the budget invested was 857,130,000 kip. In the year 2006-2007 it was 2,000,000,000 kip. Through out the dramatically investment, the achievement of the literacy is also improved, for instance, in the year 2000-2001, there were 26,754 people who completed the literacy program in which 14,774 were women and 11,980 men. In the year 2006-2007, there were more 29,419 people who completed the literacy program in which 16,156 were women and 13,263 men.

5.2 Keys Issues and Challenges on NFE

- Inadequate NFE personnel both quantity and quality, and most of them neither receive pre-training nor in-service training about NFE.

- In rural and remote areas, NFE facilitators' education level is low and most of them neither receive pre-training nor in-service training on methodology of facilitating/teaching NFE programs.
- Literacy learners are not interested in NFE programs because of poverty incidence and NFE contents do not meet their needs.
- Provision of NFE programs for improving quality of life is not various (do not meet learners' needs).
- Budget allocation for NFE is not sufficient, for example, for honorarium, material development, training, and for purchase needed equipments.
- As the Census and Household Survey 2005 indicates that 20 percent of total villages in the country do not have school in the villages, this challenges NFE sector to deliver education to unreached targets, especially in rural and remote areas where formal schooling cannot covers or partly covers (especially areas where formal education offers only grade 1 to 2 or 3), while investment on NFE is limited compare to such demand.
- Weak management and administration of Community Learning Centers (CLCs) is a big issue. People including NFE personnel do not understand well about the role and function of CLCs resulting low participation from community people and other organizations concerned; and CLCs are not fully utilized as they are multi-purpose centers.
- Data and statistic of NFE are not reliable, especially numbers of literates and primary education completers.
- Provision of materials and equipments are not sufficient compared to demands particularly in rural and remote areas.
- There is not system for monitoring, inspection and evaluation of NFE programs.
- Coordination and participation from public organizations concerned, private sectors, international development agencies for NFE are not strong.
- According to MOE annual report, about 17% of children aged between 6 – 10 years old still stay without schooling; and the dropout rate is 9.4% which will become target of NFE.
- According to census 2005, there are 929,407 people aged 15 and over (634,935 females) stay illiterate.

5.3 Upcoming NFE plans and actions

Abstracted from NFE Strategy 2008 – 2015) and Plan 2008 – 2010:

1. Eradicate illiteracy among people aged between 15 and 40 by 88%; and adult literacy rate (aged 15 and over) by 80%.
2. Provide primary education for 300 villages and district authority members.
3. 25 districts will be achieved universal primary education.

4. Improve 299 existing CLCs and establish 30 new CLCs
5. Upgrading education level from primary to lower secondary level by 30% (42,000 people) of the primary completers.
6. Organize literacy program, primary education and vocational skill training in 150 villages without formal schools.
7. 10,000 people including youths, civil servants, workers, soldiers and police officers will be upgraded their education level from primary education to complete lower secondary education level; and 15,000 people for upper secondary education level.
8. 10,000 people will be trained on basic vocation skills based on their needs and local condition.
9. Finalize curriculum, textbooks, guidelines on literacy level and primary education level.
10. Develop and finalize curriculum of lower secondary education level for the people; and upper secondary education level for civil servants, soldiers, police officers, and youths.
11. Develop and revise basic vocational curriculum for 8 vocational subjects including food processing, beauty make up, tourism and services, dress making, livestock farming, agro-agriculture, carpentries, and weaving.
12. Print and supply curriculum, textbooks, guidelines on literacy, primary education, lower secondary education level (for the people), and upper secondary education level (for civil servants, soldiers, police officers, youths), and to provide adequate basic vocational trainings for the targets.
13. Provide training for 200 NFE facilitators, 100 NFE teachers for secondary education level, 150 vocational trainers, 150 for NFE managers and NFE personnel.
14. Improve and construct Non-Formal Education Development Center, 2 NFE promotion centers, 2 provincial NFE and basic vocational training centers, and 3 for district centers (Nambak, Namor and Boun Nuea center).
15. Create condition for transforming 8 provincial upgrading schools, 10 district upgrading schools, and establish NFE center in 47 pro-poor districts nationwide.

Plan 2011 – 2015

1. Increase literacy rate among people aged between 15 – 40 years old by 93%, and 87% for people aged between 15 and over by 2015.
2. Continue upgrading the target groups who have already completed literacy program to complete primary education by 90% in 2015, and create conditions and increase inputs to achieve universal primary education completion for 50 districts in 2015 (110 districts in total).
3. Continue upgrading target groups who have already finished primary education to complete lower secondary education by 70% (140,000 people) in 2015.
4. Increase efforts to upgrade education level for the youths, civil servants, workers, soldiers and police officers to complete lower secondary education for 15,000 people in 2015, and complete upper secondary education for 20,000 people in 2015.

5. Increase efforts and inputs to provide basic vocational trainings for people particularly in ethnic areas which appropriates to the needs and local situations for 20,000 people in 2015.
6. Expand NFE programs to 200 villages without primary schools by 2015.
7. Revitalize the 30 existing CLCs and establish 100 new CLCs.
8. Improve the existing NFE centers and establish new NFE centers for provincial and district level (8 for provincial level, and 25 for district level).
9. Conduct assessment of NFE curriculum, textbooks, and literacy facilitators' guidelines as well teachers' guidelines for primary education level.
10. Develop curriculum, textbooks, teachers' guidelines for primary education level, lower and upper secondary education level for government officials, soldier, police officers and youth by 2015.
11. Develop and improve basic vocational curriculum for 10 vocation subjects
12. Supply curriculum, textbooks, guidelines for literacy education, primary education, lower secondary (for villager people), and lower/upper secondary manuals (for government officials, soldiers, police officers, and the youths) and basic vocational training manuals in order to serve enough supplies to the target groups.
13. Train volunteer teachers, teachers for lower secondary level, teachers for upper secondary level and trainers for basic vocation training for 1,000 teachers by 2015.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Although the expansion in the primary, secondary and teacher training areas has been impressive, the output in terms of quality and efficiency leaves much scope for improvement. In its present state the education sector still lacks the capacity and capability to respond to all modern socio-economic and skills manpower need. Apart from strengthening the key levels of education to consolidate and vocational and technical education in the country for developing human resources required for implementing the Government's strategies for accelerating the pace of socio-economic development in the country.

Improving the quality of education is a major challenge that faces the education sector. The factors that influence the quality of education for improvement relate to the curriculum in all aspects, including inclusive education; to the quality of teachers; to the instructional methods, instructional materials, etc. Yet other questions may include the implementation of educational reform in extremely decentralized management context and the potential between the cost of inclusive education and the principle of equity for both formal and non formal education.

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