Key Sector Priorities and Strategies 10

Changes are taking place in the educational sector in Lao PDR. As indicated in earlier sections, progress is being made in many subsectors supported by an increasingly experienced and active MOE in the center and by MOE units at the provincial and district levels. Yet, as Lao educators are well aware and have identified in national plans, inefficiencies are highly visible throughout the system and many major challenges remain. In terms of percentages of children, youth and adults served, progression and graduation rates within primary education, and level of learning acquired at all levels, the educational system is underdeveloped. Educational policy analysis and planning, as well as public sector management, generally, have been widely subjected to criticism by Lao educators and external consultants because of lack of transparency in the policy process, separation of planning from budgeting, inadequate vertical and horizontal communication, high degree of centralization of decision authority, and shortage of technically qualified personnel.

At the heart of the expanding educational system, the schools and their supporting communities struggle to provide minimum literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers, a key ingredient of effective schooling, often are unable to support themselves on salaries, which, even when received on time, do not constitute a living wage. The most modest attempts at provision of a few years of schooling usually can not survive without significant and continued contributions of labor and funds from the village. Given the limited resource capacity of many Lao communities, the extent of community support is remarkable.

This section, drawing from the insight provided by prior subsector analyses but taking a more systemic view briefly reviews major achievements over the last 10 years, and provides a brief description of suggested system priorities and accompanying strategies for the Lao educational system.

10.1 Educational Achievements over the Last Decade

There have been many educational accomplishments in Lao PDR over the last 10 years. Some of these were initiated by the central government and several were projects basically designed by international donors, local education authorities and individual educational institutions. These changes, especially those promoted by large international agencies, have been reasonably well documented, if not fully evaluated. Yet, probably some innovations smaller in scope, but potentially of wide educational significance, go unnoticed beyond the institution or locality in which they were born.

This brief review will group achievements under three somewhat overlapping areas: growth and articulation of the education system; teaching/learning process and curriculum development; and, capacity development of the educational governance, planning and management institutions.

Growth and Articulation of the System

Article 25 of the Lao Constitution guarantees the right of all children to obtain an education. This constitutional right and the general decision and policy framework for all sectors, including education, is established by the Politburo. A specific decree from the Prime Minister's office in 1993 established the policy framework for the country and delineates in detail the required organization of MOE, the rules of appointment, rights and personnel, duties, conditions for promotion, etc. Based on the Prime Minister's regulations for civil servants, the minister of education established a decree in 1994 regarding education personnel. Further, a number of regulations issued by the minister of education identified the roles, responsibilities, and internal structure of different departments of MOE and the provincial and district education offices. Additionally, the minister established agreements in the organization of provincial and district offices. Within MOE the DPC was formed in 1998 combining a number of existing units. The new department is giving leadership to the coordination of strategic planning efforts, including an EMIS development within MOE, and interfaces with international donors and NGOs and with the SPC in intersectoral planning.

Other decrees of the minister of education created an Education Inspection Committee to monitor the implementation of Government and MOE policies, and a Private Education Bureau to promote private education as part of the national education system.

Enrollments at all levels of the formal and nonformal systems continue to expand and the behavior of the system is becoming better understood. Most major problems, constraints, and issues related to quality, equity, and efficiency are now well known. In the absence of extensive formal research informal insights reported by experienced educators have been validated by subsequent observers and paint an incomplete but generally clear picture of the functioning of schools. In some cases it has been possible to respond quickly and structurally to a given concern. By way of example, the GEMEU was formed in MOE to give special attention to achieving equity in educational opportunities for girls and ethnic minorities. Another example is in postsecondary education which has undergone major rationalization reforms. The number of TTCs has been reduced from 59 to nine newly constructed or refurbished colleges to provide preservice teacher training. The consolidation is expected to have important effects on national teacher production, the quality of teachers, and, in principle, should make it easier to control the numbers of teachers and avoid surpluses and shortages. Following recommendations emerging from the 1989 education sector study, MOE, with ADB assistance, undertook a project to consolidate 12 university-level institutions into a new structure, NUOL. Such rationalization and consolidation mean that a more coherent, integrated and potentially more efficient system is now functioning than was the case a decade ago.

In an effort to keep up with enrollment growth, school construction programs have involved all levels of government, international donors and village parent groups. Under the World Bank/Swiss-supported EDP, 245 primary and 37 lower secondary schools will have been built and equipped by the end of 1999, as well as several PES and DEB offices. Several hundred schools will be built under a planned

World Bank (EDP2) project, the Basic Education (Girls) project, and by the Government of Japan and other donors. Bilateral donors, international organizations and NGOs have also provided and equipped a large number of schools, often in remote areas. Certain major successful innovations have resulted from school construction projects. As one example, the World Bank, learning from past delays and inefficiencies, introduced a province level project construction management system. Apparently, the revised procurement approach and decentralized implementation have been successful and are strongly recommended by the World Bank as a model to be further utilized. Under this process, MOE's new national role is in overseeing and monitoring implementation.

The infrastructure for systemic planning in education has been elaborated over the last 10 years. A well-developed national planning mechanism has evolved in the center coordinated and integrated with the planning of other sectors by SPC. At the education sector level the establishment of DPC has improved coordination with SPC. A major output of expanded planning capability of the central level has been a number of national annual plans, five-year plans and a 20-year perspective plan extending to 2020.

Teaching/Learning Process and Curriculum Development

New curriculum and instructional programs for primary and lower secondary schools have been developed in the 1990s. Activities directly focused on instruction and learning include: production and distribution of new textbooks and implementation of a number of teacher training programs, teacher guides and learning materials. A cascade teacher training system for dissemination of new curriculum has been developed and implemented. Teacher guides and teacher orientation programs have been provided. Large-scale teacher orientation courses are taking place on schedule. A 1997 World Bank report noted that acceptance of new curriculum appears to be good and that the syllabus for each grade was completed. The World Bank report, in emphasizing the importance of textbooks, further observed that, "In most classrooms, no instructional materials other than text books are available, often not even a blackboard." Although some difficulties were encountered in the production of textbooks and others materials, as discussed elsewhere in this report, the major constraints were in timely distribution to the schools.

A primary and secondary education pedagogical advisory system began in 1995/1996 with World Bank support and has developed pedagogical advisers for each district and province in the country. Classroom teachers, principals and administrators on different levels appear to welcome the system and seem to be motivated to comply with it. Over 500 pedagogical advisers have been trained to support teachers in primary and secondary schools. Replacement training for 25 primary pedagogical advisers is scheduled for 1999 and 50 additional primary pedagogical advisers will be trained through the Basic Education (Girls) Project. Although a formal evaluation of the pedagogical adviser system at secondary level has been completed, the results are not available at this time.

Additional achievements of the past decade or planned for the near future include new national standardized test construction under the leadership of the Australian Council for Education Research. Within a period of a few years, there

will be the capacity for assessing certain learning outcomes in grades 4, 7, and 9. In principle, when this technology is fully developed and implemented, it will be possible to monitor progress and standards and provide feedback about the impact of curriculum materials. This is considered a major effort toward the national capability of assessment of student learning outcomes.

At the community and school level several innovations have been encouraged to cope with scarce teaching and material resources. UNICEF, working with the Teacher Training Department, initiated a project in 1998 to provide untrained teachers or unqualified teachers with pedagogical and content upgrading. This project, with AusAID support, has upgraded 55 percent of all untrained primary teachers in language, mathematics and child- centered learning and established NTUCs to support the improvement of teacher training and classroom management. Other NGOs, including Save the Children, CWS, Japan Sotoshu Relief Committee (JSRC), Redd Barna and CRS have also been actively concerned with various teaching materials at the village level. In an additional project UNICEF, working with NRIES, has been assisting in the development of student basic competencies in primary subjects and in producing a Lao grammar for instructional purposes in the preparation of supplementary readers. Several models of school networks or clusters are being experimented with for their potential to support the sharing of resources at primary and secondary levels. In response to the needs of rural and remote areas multigrade teaching has been introduced and is expanding primarily under leadership at the school and district levels.

Capacity Development of the Institutions Associated with Education Planning, Administration, and Management

In every country educational governance is embedded within the political, legal and policy environment to a degree unique to that country. In Lao PDR education decision making and planning have fluctuated between centralized and decentralized approaches. Since the mid 1990s the term deconcentration has been used to designate the national planning and decision model, a model which is still evolving but in which the provinces and districts have specified authority and responsibility.

As a partial basis for more effective development and implementation of plans and management in general, at least four computerized educational information management systems have thus far been developed: the EMIS system evolving under the leadership of DPC has been said to have the capacity to collect and provide much of the basic data that are required for system-level decision management in education; a personnel management information system is now available to support the management of human resources across the education sector; a construction management information system providing a database for school construction activities of the World Bank is now operational; and, a financial management information system is being developed. The Statistics Planning and Investment Unit, a rapidly developing unit of DPC, has a responsibility to develop further a national EMIS and collaborate with other departments in. integration of these separate systems. An integrated, functioning EMIS could greatly contribute to technical quality of planning and management.

At the grass roots level NGOs have been deeply involved in capacity building (see Box 10.1). MOE, UNICEF and Lao Women's Union carried out projects to strengthen community capacity to manage primary education and to develop nonformal education delivery systems. In particular, UNICEF is helping to develop the school cluster model by assisting local educators and communities to design school clusters and develop capabilities to manage and evaluate them. Among other activities UNICEF is currently engaged in is a multi-province village-level project to establish the organizational framework for planning and to train villagers to engage in local strategic planning.

Box 10.1
World Bank Evaluation of NGO Involvement in Project Activities

Innovation: NGOs, with their close knowledge of local communities and local knowledge, can identify new approaches and new models for development activities;

Local Accountability: NGOs' involvement in projects can help ensure that projects are implemented as planned.

Responsiveness: NGOs can help ensure that aspects of projects are implemented in a way that satisfies local needs;

Participation: NGOs can serve as a bridge between project authorities and affected communities, as well as providing structures for participation; and,

Sustainability: NGOs can provide continuity in project work, especially when project authorities and government officials lack capacity.

At least two major internationally funded projects are emerging which include significant attention to planning, administration, and management. The Basic Education (Girls) Project will offer: in-service training programs for teachers, teacher trainers, and school principals. Additionally, this project will assist in the further development of a national EMIS system and gives particular attention to raising the technical capabilities of departments in MOE (and supports a special role for DPC). The EDP will initiate a skill audit at all levels of administration of education. This study is expected to result in a costed prioritized plan for human resources development in MOE to the year 2005. The development of a national administration and management training center is also being considered. By the time the skill audit is completed, the Basic Education (Girls) Project should be well under way allowing the possibility for collaboration and integration between the projects as necessary.

10.2 Suggested Priorities and Strategies

The many educational achievements over the last several years, to an important extent, have laid a crucial foundation for the future educational development in Lao PDR. Although tough decisions lie ahead, there is reason for optimism about the educational future. Increasing the effectiveness of the education system of Lao

PDR requires making choices, setting priorities, developing and implementing strategies, and sustaining progress over time toward evolving targets. The highest educational priority of the Lao Government at this time appears to be basic education. In addition to a number of strategies directly focused on commitment of additional fiscal resources to basic education this priority needs support from higher quality teachers, curriculum and instructional materials. Yet, regardless of priority among subsystems, developing a planned and balanced education system of good quality is a key to long-term internal and external system efficiency. Improved educational governance, planning and administration support all other educational priorities through stronger leadership and technical capacity in designing, implementing, and monitoring the behavior of the education system.

Every educational system can improve itself. Developing and sustaining higher quality and more effective education systems in Lao PDR, at minimum, require the following educational priorities:

- Providing an adequate recurrent budget for the education sector;
- Continuing to strengthen basic education;
- Directing more resources to teachers, teaching and instructional materials;
- Maintaining balance of the educational system;
- Improving effectiveness of educational governance, strategic planning and management.

Priority 1 Providing an Adequate Recurrent Budget for the Education Sector

The proposed future educational system is more efficient, of higher quality, better financed and is characterized by controlled expansion. However, to meet the requirements of the Investment Plan more fiscal resources are needed (see section 12, Investment Plan).

Priority 2 Developing More Effective Basic Education

Under any future scenario for Lao economy and society basic education should continue to be a policy priority. To ease the transition to more technologically advanced agriculture and toward a beginning industrial economy will require an increase in human capital by targeting the expansion and quality development of primary and nonformal education. Even the limited application of technology requires an understanding of basic mathematics, elementary science, written communication, reading comprehension, and access to information sources. Not only a prerequisite for economic productivity, basic education also supports many other desirable social and demographic changes, has high independent impact on academic achievement, contributes to social mobility, and raises participation rates in civic society. Thus, there are economic, social equity, and political reasons to justify this priority. The disadvantages of the absence of effective basic education last decades for a society and a lifetime for individuals.

Basic education as currently organized in Lao PDR usually refers to primary education, however, the definition may also include lower secondary education. Although there is considerable discussion about extending basic education to eight years, such a policy at this time would be premature. The recommendation of this

report is for restraining government support for rapid expansion of lower secondary schooling and for focusing efforts at the secondary level on quality improvements. However, because of the impact of any extension of basic education on costs, teacher preservice preparation, curriculum, and facilities, significant lead time is necessary to develop and implement expansion plans. Thus, planning the restructuring of basic education to include eight or more years may well need to be initiated before primary education becomes universal. Moreover, as the system further develops basic education may include not only primary and lower secondary education but also expanded pre-primary and certain programs of nonformal education.

Strategies:

1. Improving the Flow of Students through the System: Basic education in Lao PDR is important by itself because of the skills it produces and the foundation it lays for a more educable work force. Basic education also prepares individuals for further academic or vocational education. Thus, improving basic education has consequences for development of the whole education system. A long-term set of strategies is needed which include innovations to be field tested, a feasible program for improvement of teacher compensation, and continuous relevant teacher training. Significant efficiencies are possible and cost savings can help finance necessary expansion as well as improvements in quality.

   In order to increase the flow of the age cohort through primary schooling, innovations to be piloted and evaluated should include: new approaches to improve access (e.g., multigrade teaching, rationalization of teacher deployment); programs and actions to counteract language handicaps of non-Lao speaking pupils (e.g., additional learning time, additional learning materials); and, better responses to current local demand (e.g., by aligning school schedules with agriculture cycles, adapting entrance age to community preference). Some strategies may prove to be workable nationally; others become relevant only in a given province, district or village.

   Improving access and flow of students will require expansion and refurbishment of many existing primary school buildings and new school construction. Adequate facilities are also requisite to equitable access to lower and upper secondary schooling and for improvement of the quality of teaching and learning at these levels.

2. Develop and Implement Core Ingredients for Adequate Teaching and Learning[1]: At minimum improving primary education means upgrading the efficiency of delivery of textbooks, better utilization of textbooks, and delivery and utilization of textbooks, and preparation and delivery of student workbooks and other supplementary instruction materials. Intensive work of TDC and pedagogical advisers with teachers will be necessary on how to use the new textbooks. This strategy assumes a richer learning environment and significant increases in student learning can result from concentration on those relatively simple, relatively inexpensive input which have been demonstrated internationally to improve student performance.

Priority 3 Strengthening Teaching, Learning, and Relevance

Satisfactory quality of schooling in Lao PDR can not be attained without better teaching. The concept of quality teaching is somewhat illusive but most fundamentally requires sufficient understanding of teaching content, competence in classroom management, and motivation to help students learn. In addition to professional preparation, teacher quality is interwoven with teacher status, certification requisites, teacher salaries, and civil service prerequisites. In neighboring Asian countries a variety of financial and non-financial incentives have been successfully employed to improve the attractiveness of teaching. Which feasible incentives can be effective in Lao PDR has yet to be satisfactorily explored.

Given the importance of relevance, the content of basic education need not be constant over time nor precisely the same across villages, or provinces. For example, the satisfaction of demand and need may lead to somewhat different programs in Vientiane municipality and in rural areas. A major issue common to Lao PDR and other countries in the region broadly relates to the schools' linkage with work. Can the learning of basic literacy and numeracy skills be integrated with learning about the tools and characteristics of local work? In recent response to this concern MOE has introduced the "Life Skills" curriculum, a potentially important reform.[2]

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1 Another strategy being discussed is the development and implementation of national quality standards. There has been little systemic study of what pupils learn in Lao classrooms and little opportunity to compare student achievement over time or across schools, districts and provinces. National standards have been under discussion in MOE for some time often in association with a current attempt to measure student performance in selected grades. National tests are one of the few elements of an education system that are controlled at the central level of the system but which have direct impact at the classroom level. Testing can be used effectively to modify classroom instruction, but when carried out appropriately, it is not necessarily as low cost, as efficient, or as easy to implement as some claims for measurement-driven instruction imply. While changing national examinations is relatively easy, getting teachers to understand the actions they should take to protect their students' interests is not.

2 Other countries have added technology to the curriculum for all years of basic education. An example of a well-developed technology curriculum for primary schools can be found in Papua New Guinea. This program includes content built around: health and safety, tools and equipment, working techniques, design, and materials; and applications which focus on: useful community technologies; water, power, and sanitation systems, etc; houses and building maintenance; machines and household equipment; food and nutrition; clothing construction and household sewing; and, home management (Institute of National Affairs, PNG, 1997).

Strategies:

1. Increase Compensation for Teachers: Teacher compensation constitutes a major educational issue in Laos. The long-term future impact of current low salaries on the quality of the educational system may be extremely serious. As Mingat (1998a) has observed, teacher salaries in poor countries are usually high as a multiple of per capita income and, typically, as GNP per capita increases, teacher salaries on a per capita basis decrease (Mingat, 1996). Salaries in Lao are low in comparison with most Asian countries; the average teacher salary is about equal to per capita GNP. In some Asian countries it is as high as 2.6 times GNP. In Lao PDR a package of salaries and other incentives which demonstrate that teachers are valued is badly needed. One approach is to link additional bonuses or salary increments to successful completion of stages in a long-term, structured training program. However, if the rapid rate of recruiting 11th graders as contract teachers continues, such a policy might have little popularity. After an acceptable level of compensation is reached, overall quality of worklife rather than efficacy of any particular reward may be the most important factor motivating teachers. The challenge will then be to identify and implement the effective mix of benefits and types of recognition for teachers in each locality.

2. Commit to Long Term Development of In-service Teacher Education: In-service teacher training is a popular strategy worldwide for improving teacher quality. For some time to come this will be an important strategy for upgrading teacher skills and increasing teacher enthusiasm in Lao PDR. However, internationally there appears to be a wide range of effectiveness among in-service training programs and a prudent approach suggests that the cost effectiveness of all training programs should be carefully monitored. Moreover, in-service program development for both primary and secondary schools should utilize the insights which reside with those teachers who have demonstrated superior teaching skills in the classroom and the lessons learned from successful training programs already in place. NTUCs, implemented by MOE and UNICEF, have demonstrated success in upgrading the least trained teachers. Fortunately, in spite of severe constraints or working conditions, Lao PDR has teachers who have outstanding instructional and classroom management capabilities. Early effort should be made to identify and fully utilize the skills of such teachers in local and national in-service training.

Priority 4 Developing and Maintaining System Balance

Education systems comprise interdependent levels and institutions with the quality and efficiency of each successive level strongly influenced by those characteristics in preceding levels. The education and social functions of primary, secondary, and tertiary education overlap. Policies and investments focusing on only one level to the exclusion of others may create distortions. The interdependence of levels and programs

of the system is demonstrated in the necessity for articulation of curriculum and examinations between system levels. Interdependence is further shown because education systems are staffed by their own products and, thus, the quality of higher levels of education affects teaching and administration throughout much of the system.

Giving priority to basic education does not mean ignoring other educational levels. Moreover, policies which merely encourage higher proportions of young people to acquire more schooling have limited long-term impact on either social or individual objectives. Not only quality basic education but quality secondary and tertiary education, as well, are needed to maintain a viable education system and to achieve national, social and economic goals. Policies and programs for improvements in secondary education, for example, can not wait until objectives of high quality basic education are achieved. The challenge is to attain acceptable standards in post basic education within cost constraints and without inhibiting equity. Allocation of funds between system levels can be expected to be a continuing issue. Within the Lao fiscal constraints, however, it is clear that cost-sharing must be realized at the secondary and tertiary levels.

Options in cost-sharing vary somewhat by levels of education and by the set of problems being addressed. For example, to improve management and capacity, financing options at the primary level may include community financing, community grants, foreign aid, mixture of private funding and government grants; at the secondary level, funding and government grants; and at the higher level, foreign aid. To improve efficiency, financing options at the primary level may include parental financing and vouchers; at the secondary level, parental financing and vouchers, and, at the higher level, parental financing. To improve equity, financing options at the primary level may include assistance to private schools, stipends, scholarships, targeted bursaries, deficit financing, and taxes/earmarked taxes; and, at the higher level, student loans, user charges, scholarships, and use of co-signers.

Significant expansion of the Government role in post-primary education probably is not sustainable at this time. Nevertheless, the Government, at minimum, has a role at all levels of the system to ensure that entrance and success standards are based on merit and that opportunities for primary, post-primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions are open to the poor.

Strategies:

1. Plan a Balanced Educational System: The basic legal, administrative and curricula requirements for a functioning, articulated Lao educational system are in place. Further internal system development will involve addressing ongoing efficiency and equity concerns. The most efficient system, but not necessarily most equitable, is the system within which students complete the cycles they enter, e.g., primary or secondary education, with most program variation and student selection taking place between cycles. The task of policy makers and administrators is to help plan and shape a system that allows and encourages complete cycles of learning at each system level. Equity concerns within the system can at least partly be met through entrance and exit standards, coupled with support for those qualified but with inadequate financial resources. As

enrollments expand new pathways should be developed for education and training and the transferability across programs should be protected. A persistent issue, typically examined in terms of equity of provision of education, is determining where public responsibility ends and where private responsibility begins.

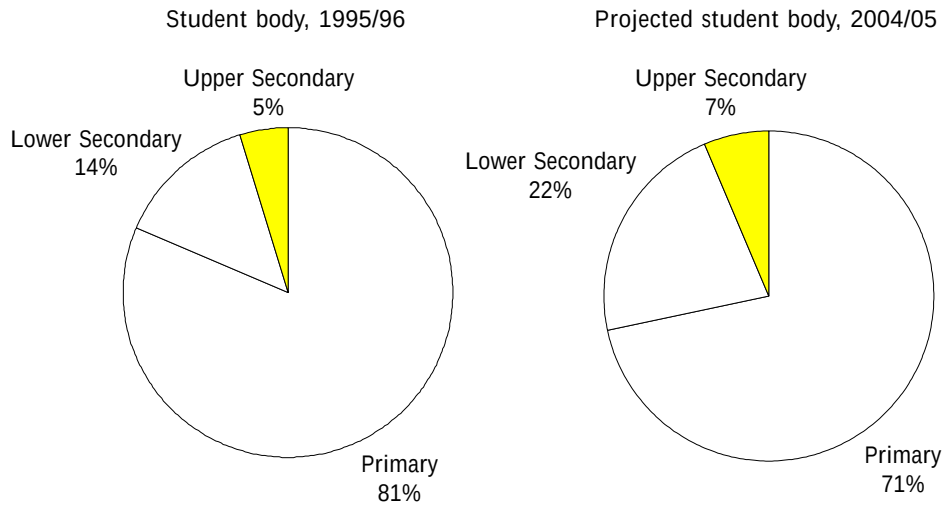
Of equal importance to a balanced system are policy decisions, planning and actions to shape the education system to reflect national priorities. Two examples are provided to illustrate the dependence of a balanced system on careful planning.

Example 1: Controlling Expansion

Without careful planning, systemic changes may make statements of priorities meaningless. This can be demonstrated by apparently uncontrolled changes currently taking place between developments at the different subsector levels. Earlier analysis has indicated an overall average annual growth rate for primary entrants that just matches population growth (2.4 percent). On the other hand, annual growth of new entrants at lower secondary has averaged 10.1 percent and for upper secondary new entrants is 8.1 percent. These annual growth rates have been averaged over the period 1993/94 to 1996/97.

Figure 10.1 presents the relative size of the three subsectors, according to total student enrollment. (Pre-primary and postsecondary enrollments have not been included since they are substantially smaller than those at the other levels.) On the left is the most current (1995/96) situation. Using the annual growth rates noted above, the righthand side of Figure 10.1 represents the projected relative size of the three subsectors for 2004/05.

Figure 10.1
Relative Size of Primary and Secondary,
Based on Growth of New Entrants to Grade 1



It is clear that with current rates of expansion there will be a significant change in the relative size of the three subsectors. Given the much higher unit cost of secondary education compared to primary, this may create difficulties for the financing of education as a whole. The rapid expansion of secondary level education has occurred very recently and appears to be demand driven. The annual growth rates used above are averaged across four school years, 1993/94 to 1996/97. However, the subsector growth rate for the two-year period, 1995/96 to 1996/97 for lower secondary enrollment is much greater and suggests a recent trend that, if continued, will further exacerbate the problem of having a balanced system of formal education.

Planning for the desired relative size of the subsectors should be a priority. This rapid recent expansion of new entrants into secondary school is occurring outside of any planning framework. One reason for this large expansion is the relatively large number of primary graduates who have not made the transition to secondary. The recent changes in the Lao economy make secondary and postsecondary graduation more attractive. At the same time, the number of new entrants to primary education is not increasing and in some provinces the number is actually decreasing. The end result is a system where the profile of student enrollments is demand driven rather than being planned. This change in profile, if not controlled or planned, may have a number of negative impacts. These include:

- A greater proportion of the limited education budget being diverted to secondary education;
- More graduates of secondary level education than can be supported by the economy of the country;
- A lowering of the quality of secondary education since qualified teacher supply cannot match demand;
- A consequent lowering of the quality of students entering TTCs;
- A greater demand for access to postsecondary education, specifically NUOL;
- A continued need for the two-year foundation studies program at NUOL;
- Greater difficulty in achieving universal access to primary education.

Perhaps the greatest impact of this unplanned expansion of secondary level education is the de facto move away from expansion and quality improvement of primary education as the first priority for education in Lao PDR.

A fundamental issue to address is the cause of this unbalanced system. One possible but speculative scenario is as follows. Families are making an economic decision in regard to the benefit of educating their children. There is a perception that during the transition to the market-economy, significant economic benefits can be quickly realized by having a child graduate from secondary education or, even better, from university level education. This perception is strengthened and supported by the current small size of university enrolments. Given the Lao culture of children continuing to support their families, a reasonable strategy is then to ensure that at least one child completes secondary education even if this means that siblings do not complete primary school or their entry to primary school is delayed.

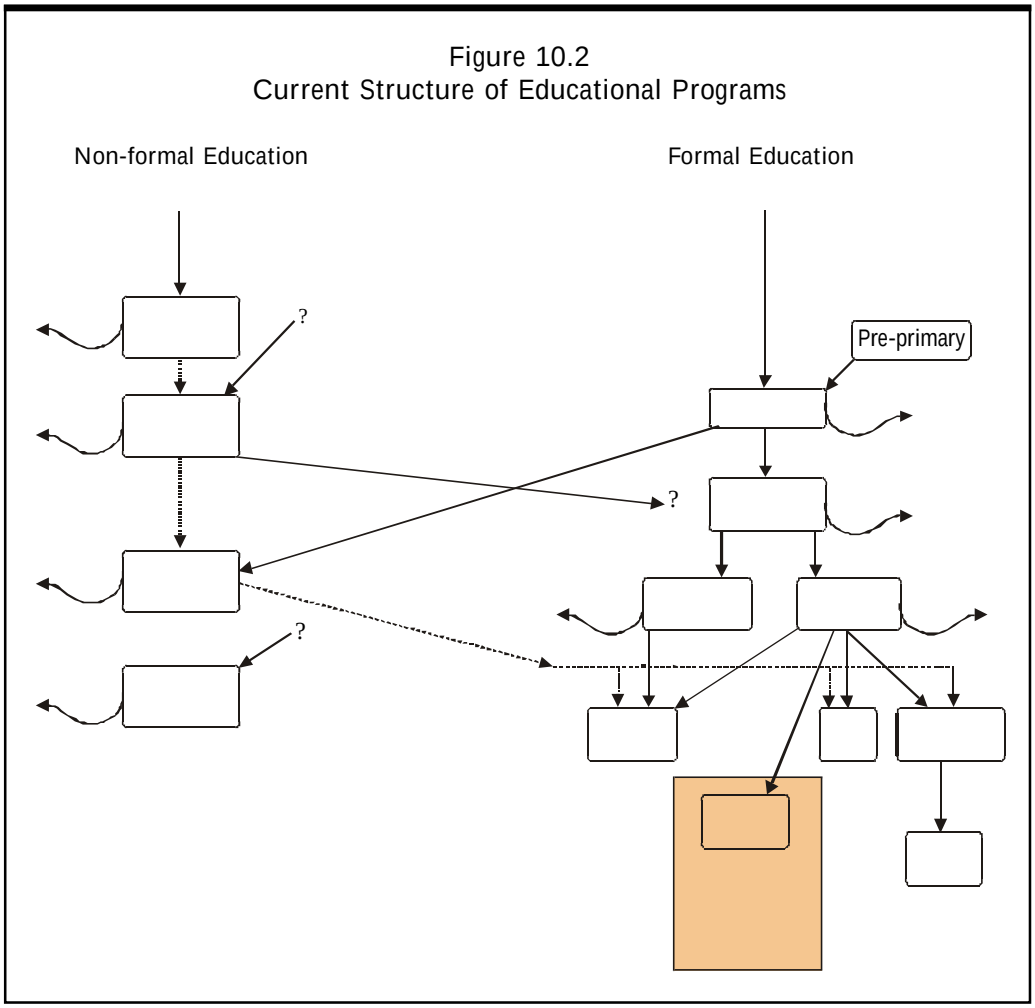
The challenge is to develop a secondary education subsector that provides quality education and serves the needs of the Lao economy. For the next few years

this may imply maintaining the subsector approximately at its current levels while improving quality. If this subsector is to be made larger, then an equitable mechanism for planned expansion of secondary education while maintaining the priority of universal access and participation in primary level education needs to be implemented. Unless such decisions are made, implemented and enforced, the system of education will continue to develop in an unbalanced manner with the consequent negative impacts identified earlier. In essence, quality improvements at all levels of education may not be possible within the system while expansion is unplanned and uncontrolled.

Example 2: Integrating System of Education and Training

The analysis provided throughout this report has identified the crucial role that lower secondary has as the single pathway to other types of postsecondary education. The recommendation is to place an upper limit on participation in secondary education. At the same time the availability of nonformal educational opportunities should be increased at senior secondary and postsecondary levels. Opportunities to continue education beyond lower secondary should not be limited to traditional schooling. The current structure of educational programs is shown in Figure 10.2.

Figure 10.2
Current Structure of Educational Programs



Articulation between formal and nonformal programs is very weak, and although those graduating from primary equivalence programs in the nonformal sector are not excluded from moving into the formal secondary area, in practice such movement usually does not happen. Nonformal equivalence programs are largely targeted towards upgrading of civil servants, police and military personnel. Vocational training programs offered by DNFE are limited in size and have no coordination or articulation with those of vocational schools or technical colleges.

Figure 10.2 also demonstrates the pivotal role that lower secondary education plays as the main pathway to all postsecondary education programs, which is problematic since it places many pressures on a subsector that is struggling to maintain quality. Furthermore, the analysis of this report consistently concludes a need to control growth in lower secondary education, particularly in view of slow progress and financial constraints in achieving universal access to primary education.

Box 10.2
Matching Plans and Resources

The ability to formulate quality plans and to match resources to those through the budget process is potentially one of the strongest management tools available to government. Effective planning allows government to prioritize public investments and secure national coordination and rational resource utilization, while giving people and organizations say in decisions which affect their lives. Matching budgetary resources to plans helps to ensure that priorities are met, policies are enacted and goals are achieved (World Bank, Lao PDR: Financial and Management of Education: Strategic Considerations for Strengthening the Education Sector, 1997a).

On the other hand, there are dangers in capping lower secondary growth since this effectively stops many people from receiving any further general education or technical and vocational education. It is also the case that attempts to limit the size of the lower secondary cohort may particularly disadvantage the poor and those living in more remote provinces and districts.

There is, therefore, a need for alternate routes to attend primary and secondary education and to allow entrance to technical and vocational education. At the same time, alternate routes need to be flexible and strongly linked to the private sector. There would appear to be a number of requirements for a more articulated education system for Lao PDR, including:

- Multiple paths to attain educational goals;
- Transferability at different educational levels;
- Responsiveness to changing economic circumstances and demand for skills;
- Relevance to daily lives and work of learners;
- Strong links between literacy and skills training for income generation;
- Greater use of the nonformal education subsector and the private sector.

Priority 5 Improving Educational Governance, Strategic Planning, Administration, and Management

Current national education plans (the five-year plans: 1996-2000, 2001-2005) call for expansion of all levels of the education system. These general thrusts suggest, but give inadequate definition of, the planning and management challenge. Implementation of these plans would seem to mean that the limited existing resources in the future will be spread even more thinly requiring much higher levels of system efficiency. However, even the controlled expansion recommended in the Investment Plan implies that successful further development of the education system in Lao PDR will require increased capacity of the policy environment, improved analytic skills in comprehensive and strategic planning and management, and increasingly active coordination of public and private sectors. Considerable international technical assistance has been received over the past few years broadly directed toward developing tools for planning and management. Nevertheless, within the educational sector the need for focused, monitored, long-term development in these areas remains. In this context the institutions and processes of concern extend from MOE and its affiliated institutions in the center to the management of schools at the village level. Box 10.3 summarizes the current situation with respect to education administration and management.

Box 10.3
The Need for Training in Management

1. The Lao PDR education system is currently short of staff with appropriate management skills to administer the system effectively.
2. Educational activities are expanding rapidly and becoming more complex. There is, therefore, an urgent need for strengthening administrative and management capacity at all levels of the system.
3. Few people are trained in modern management techniques, including office automation and the role of education sector management in a market economy.
4. Some training is being undertaken, but continued and sustained assistance is required to ensure that training is followed up and re-enforced.
5. Establishing training needs and mounting appropriate training programs need to be addressed in systematic fashion.
6. The penalty for not responding to the training requirements will be markedly reduced effectiveness of loan and donor financing for education and consequent failure to meet Government objectives for the reform and development of the sector (MOE Discussion paper, Evaluation on the National Education Plan, 1998f).

The design of appropriate training programs in planning and management is further complicated by changes in administration and policy roles taking place or anticipated in the future. Under the policy of deconcentration changes in the role of central Government are beginning to take place. Box 10.4 identifies the direction

Box 10.4
Policy Environment and Strategic Planning:
Changing Roles of National Government

	From	To
Role of Government	Financier of development	Catalyst and partner in development
Purpose of policy planning	Control/compliance	Policy coordination, management, and monitoring of regulations
Strategic planning	Allocation of public resources	Active public/private coordination
Management and administration	Control oriented	Mobilization/Coordination of support groups
	Detailed administration	Setting national vision
	Provider of services	Leadership in equalizing services Monitoring of national standards and research and development Facilitator of good services

of some of these envisioned changes. Highly specific training programs focused on achieving efficiencies in current tasks may require adaptation to avoid being dysfunctional to effective future performance.

It is important to understand that improving planning and management in Lao education goes beyond acquisition of a few new specific skills. The keys to successful planned change in education, as in other social sectors, is the capability to understand thoroughly the existing system, anticipate a desired future set of conditions, organize and deliver resources for maximum achievement of objectives, cope with necessary adaptations, and sustain the direction of positive change. In addition to technical requisites, such planned systemic change in education requires experienced planning and policy bodies that are part of a structure of national decision-making which will: engage stakeholders in open dialogue; generate a shared strategic vision; encourage, value, and utilize analysis and research-based information; create a willingness of involved institutions to share information; and, demonstrate political will for implementing stringent measures. The further development of such capabilities, at minimum, requires significant fiscal resources, long term capacity building of institutions of planning and administration, and considerable technical training of administrative personnel. Given adequate funding, the necessary technical skills may be acquired over a few years; how quickly the Lao society and Government can commit to utilization of technical knowledge, and fully adapt to open decision processes and participatory planning is more difficult to predict.

Strategies:

1. Create a Strategic, Attainable National Educational Vision: A strategic vision demands that systems, and not their parts, are the overarching

concern of policy makers. Under the current organizational structure, MOE is in the best position to understand educational system options, take leadership in mobilization of other government agencies, and inform and involve the public in creating the attainable vision of educational futures. Conditions within MOE for leadership in creating such vision are improving; however, at this time there does not appear to be a fully functioning strategy dialogue group of senior officials.

2. Strengthen Institutional Infrastructure in the Center through Long-Term Capacity Building Support: Support for this strategy should be viewed not as a means for further extending the concentration of centralized power but as a strategy to promote transparency and efficiency in education decision making and to assist the central government in assuming new functions and responsibilities as education policy and planning are deconcentrated. Medium- and long-term planning tend to lack credibility because the process of making choices is not transparent, technical analyses are not clearly demonstrated, and accountability for achieving targets is unspecified. Increased capabilities need to be built into policy analysis, planning, management, research and development, monitoring, and evaluation. MOE, in its role in central planning, should be able to concentrate on major critical issues and establish priorities rather than try to cover all aspects of education in detail. With increased systemic capabilities the center can better promote quality assurance through monitoring and evaluating allocation of resources at all levels to ensure utilization of results of local experiences and international research. At minimum, the center can provide leadership in mapping, developing, and implementing research and development programs; developing demonstration and experimental programs; and, evaluating and disseminating information on the behavior of the educational system.

   Specific programs for further human resource development in the center and at the province and district levels should be planned following the comprehensive training needs assessment to be undertaken by the EDP. Nevertheless, some of the training and capacity building needs are now generally identifiable. For example, DPC personnel need a range of additional strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation skills. The multiple existing management information systems which now lack compatibility can, to a degree, be integrated contributing to the efficiency of systemic planning and strategic decision making. And, further capacity building of the Statistics Planning and Implementation Unit will allow this unit to give technical leadership in further development of EMIS capability.

3. Improve Policy and Planning Capabilities at Provincial and District Institutions: Stronger, refocused central education bodies with more effective standards can facilitate further sharing of the provision of education with the provinces and districts. Given fiscal limitations of the center and

current consideration for some level of deconcentration of all social services, increasingly local educational services will also share in education ownership. Decisions on assignment of management responsibilities between the center and local authorities include such areas as: strategic planning and finance, including school-level use of resources, educational finance, curriculum development, teacher recruitment and deployment, salaries, training, and supervision of academic performance. A clear redefinition of roles is necessary separating strategic and systemic planning from operational functions.

Box 10.5
Strengths of Deconcentration

The strengths of deconcentration are that it provides a phased approach building on existing administrative systems, allowing time for capacity building in financial/technical operational planning and management at lower levels in the delivery system (ADB, Education and National Development in Asia: Trends, Issues, Policies and Strategies, 1998).

In principle, the major advantage of devolution of responsibility to the community level is the involvement of those who have the most relevant and complete information for making local educational decisions. However, the difficulty and complexity of planning and management are not diminished through localization of functions. Indeed, many persistent issues and problems of the center will be revisited at local levels and many of the technical skills needed at the center will also be needed in the provinces and districts. Further, under deconcentration, new problems may emerge related to resource generation, resource allocation, and staff development. And, certain new functions may need to be developed at the province and district levels including: facilitating communication and exchange networks, better utilization of supervisors and supervision, and analysis and feedback to schools of data forwarded from the school level. Given the old responsibilities carried forward and the newly acquired authorities, major long-term training and capacity building efforts will be needed.

4. Restructure School-Level Management: The importance of strong school-level management to the development of effective schools is well established internationally. Moreover, well-managed, productive schools can be found throughout Lao PDR. School principals in Lao PDR may have responsibility in several areas that impact on the quality of learning and instruction including: management of the school as an institution, e.g., ensuring textbooks, teacher manuals and other resources are available; development of school-MOE communications, e.g., ensuring that the national curriculum is available and understood by teachers; and, utilization of needs assessment technologies. Fulfilling the responsibilities

related to instructional materials and curriculum have often proved to be extremely difficult. Effective school principals may also assist in instructional supervision; develop collaborative relations with the community and mobilize community support for school improvement; adapt the school program to local conditions; monitor school quality and efficiency; adjust student costs to ability to pay through modification of fee requirements; reduce opportunity costs by income generation; and, to the extent possible, demonstrate the school program's reliance on local resources. Although principals vary widely in these capacities, many success cases can be found.

A nation-wide in-service training program for primary and secondary school principals should be developed and linked to the results of the sector level training needs assessment. This program should be a central aspect of long-term development of professional school administrators. Much of principal training should focus directly on two basic types of information needed for school level planning for improving efficiency and quality: (1) information on school context (school demographics, i.e., an analysis of those features of the internal and external school environments which impact on school management and classroom dynamics); and, (2) information on instruction and learning (i.e., information to assist teachers in deciding what to do and think, what they are expected to achieve with their students, and the most effective pedagogical practices).

5. Plan Beyond Implementation and Monitoring: Sustaining a More Effective Education System

Box 10.6
Future Organizations

There are organizations that seem to generate order out of chaos as opposed to traditional organizations that try to impose order. Those that succeed will, I believe, have unique advantages in the 21st century because they will harness the imagination, spirit, and intelligence of people in the ways that no authoritarian organization ever can (Gibson, R., Rethinking the Future, 1997, p. 132, 136).

National reforms formulated and disseminated from the center may successfully demand compliance and can facilitate major adjustments in the design, scope, and delivery of educational services but may not be able to foster many fundamental changes in teaching and learning. Nor are there any guarantees that innovations locally initiated will persist and prosper. However, localized programs, unlike nationwide programs often improve participation, a requisite for sustainability. Sustainability partly depends on answering the related questions: which educational activities are best carried out at which level? Which decision-making authority is best allocated to each administrative level? Answers can be tested only through

experience and may vary by local context. There is also a need to learn through continued feedback from cycles of program and project design, implementation, evaluation, and utilization.

Given the limited fiscal capacity of the Lao Government and the shortage of human resources, problems of program and project sustainability in Lao PDR have become a concern among both donors and government officials. For example, the World Bank has introduced a new loan mechanism called Adaptable Program Lending. This loan modality is designed to provide phased and sustained support through a series of loans, for the implementation of long-term development programs. In general, each phase of a 7-10 year supported program would last three to five years, and the mechanism is expected to allow for greater flexibility in adapting project design and financing over time to meet development objectives as borrower conditions and partnerships evolve.

At the school level several general conditions appear to be necessary to support sustainability of planned change: shared goals related to the learning objectives of the school; autonomy of management to adapt allocation of human and fiscal resources; and, motivation and commitment of teachers to continue the innovation or reform.

Box 10.7
Conditions for Sustainability of Successful Change at the School Level

1. Information to interpret the meaningful internal and external environment of the school. The existing and potential influence of such context defines opportunities and limitations of the school as an organization. What simple indicators or technology is useful for a school level test for readiness? A basic question is: How can the school and its environment be altered to enable teachers, administrators, and students to do what needs to be done to achieve the school's objectives?
2. Information in support of school objectives on how given classroom teaching and learning processes lead to specific student outputs. What could teachers and administrators be doing which could help achieve the various learning and performance targets?
3. Information on the somewhat unpredictable process involving a number of community stakeholders in transforming insights on effective school practice and context into acceptable school and classroom interventions. Which potentially useful changes or innovations make acceptable demands on the teacher?
4. Information on the processes of monitoring and evaluating pupil performance and other learning integral to the process of improving school practice, collected and analyzed over time. Which innovative technology is promising, available, and user friendly?
5. Continued acceptance by teachers of the validity of the new practice. What opportunities can be developed to share experiences and problems with administrators and teachers from other schools to provide a useful forum in which teachers can reassess their support for an innovation in light of the experience of other teachers? What are the incentives for teachers to support changes?
6. Continued sense of ownership of the new practice by teachers and administrators. What are the indicators of ownership and lack of ownership?
7. In the long term, integrating school-level change into the behavior of the larger educational system. What are the communication channels that need to be opened and decision processes that need to be penetrated to extend quality improvements?