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Foreword

The development of education in Lao PDR has taken place within the context of economic growth, followed by a downturn precipitated by the Asian financial crisis, ongoing transformation of the economy from centrally planned to market orientation, expansion of the industrial sector, and experimentation with decentralization of social sector institutions.

Over the last two decades, the Government of Lao PDR has implemented several important educational reforms. These reforms involve the development of a well-articulated formal education system with a legal, organizational and administrative infrastructure that identifies authority, responsibility, and internal decision making structures. National and local educational authorities and individual institutions have developed a number of capacity building programs for officials involved in education planning, administration and management. Reforms within the system have focused on improving teaching and learning processes, including upgraded teacher education and introduction of a supporting supervisory system; new curriculum and revised textbooks; and programs consolidating postsecondary institutions. Recognition of education as a national priority can be found in policy statements made by the 6th Congress of the Lao Peoples Revolutionary Party (1996) and in successive five-year national plans (1996-2000; 2001-2005).

As Lao educators are well aware and have identified in national plans, serious problems persist in developing an education system that adequately satisfies this emerging human resource requirements and meets the equity demands of a diverse population. If measured by the number of children, youth and adults served, progression and graduation rates within primary education, and quality of learning at all levels, the current educational system is underdeveloped. The diversity of Lao population, predominantly young, rural, and including over 47 ethnic and linguistic groups, poses a challenge to both efficient delivery and appropriate content of schooling. Of further concern, girls and women remain under represented at every level of the system and in the technical and professional ranks of the labor force. At the heart of the expanding system, many schools and their supporting communities struggle to find the resources to provide students with minimum literacy and numeracy skills.

To assess current conditions and assist in further development of the Lao education system, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) provided technical assistance to the Government to undertake a comprehensive policy and strategic review of the education sector, and to identify investment priorities. This five-month project, undertaken from October 1998 to March 1999, produced the Education Sector Development Plan. The Plan calls for controlled expansion of the sector, and makes specific recommendations in terms of improving the efficiency, quality, and financing of the sector. The highest priority and key long-term investment for further developing and sustaining an effective education system in Lao PDR is the achievement of quality basic education for all children, a condition attainable only with an adequate recurrent budget. The Plan and the policy dialogue accompanying

its preparation are expected to assist the Lao Government and other stakeholders in future sector and subsector planning and development.

In preparing the Plan, a team of international and Lao consultants worked closely with counterparts in the Ministry of Education (MOE) under the coordination of the Department of Planning and Cooperation (DPC). Special appreciation is extended to Bounthavy Insisienmay, the former director of DPC and to Sikhamtath Mittaray the current director of DPC. The tireless assistance provided by officials in the MOE and its branches at the provincial and local levels is also gratefully acknowledged. Although the working style in developing the report was collaborative and interactive, the responsibility for interpretations of existing conditions, relevance and accuracy of the content of the report rests with the consultant team.

Hickling Corporation in collaboration with the Canadian Higher Education Group, Canada, was contracted by the Bank to implement the technical assistance. Principal members of the team were Donald Adams (Team Leader), David Clark, David Chapman, Michael Lally, Khamphat Syhanath and Himmakone Manodham. Edward Haugh Jr., Manager, and Gudrun Forsberg, Senior Education Specialist from the ADB's Education, Health and Population (West) Division coordinated all phases of the preparation and the implementation of the project.



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List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CLC	community learning center
CRS	Catholic Relief Service
CWS	Church World Service
DEB	district education bureau
DGE	Department of General Education
DNFE	Department of Nonformal Education
DOF	Department of Finance
DOP	Department of Personnel
DPC	Department of Planning and Cooperation
DVTHE	Department of Vocational, Technical and Higher Education
EDP	Education Development Project
EMIS	education management information system
GDP	gross domestic product
GEMEU	Gender and Ethnic Minorities Education Unit
GER	gross enrollment ratio
GNP	gross national product
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation Agency
IMU	Instructional Materials Unit
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
JSRC	Japan Sotoshu Relief Committee
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LCHRD	Leading Committee for Human Resource Development
LECS	Lao PDR Expenditure and Consumption Survey
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
NER	net enrollment ratio
NGO	nongovernment organization
NRIES	National Research Institute for Education Studies
NSC	National Statistics Center
NTUC	Network Teacher Upgrading Center
NUOL	National University of Lao
PES	provincial education service
PUCDA	provincial unit for construction and development assistance
SCFA	Save the Children Fund-Australia
SCF-UK	Save the Children Fund-United Kingdom
SEAMEO	South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
SPC	State Planning Committee
TDC	Teacher Development Center
TTC	teacher training college
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Summary

Lao society and education are embedded in a heritage of indigenous cultures, colonialism, socialist revolution, and most recently, movement towards a market economy and privatization. Viewing the future, there is reason to be optimistic. During the last decade, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) has made advances in several areas, including economic and educational growth. Many communities are significantly involved in school affairs by contributing funds, providing labor for construction and participating in local school governance. Most teachers and administrators remain on the job in spite of grossly inadequate, and infrequently delivered, salaries. The education bureaucracy is increasingly active and a number of talented civil servants at all administrative levels can be found. Nevertheless, the education sector remains inadequately planned, under-financed and under-professionalized. Most children acquire some schooling but attendance is sporadic and nearly half of those who enter do not complete the primary cycle. The quality of instruction varies greatly but tends to be unsatisfactory.

The executive summary provides a brief review of the recent significant educational achievements in Lao PDR and then focuses on priorities for planned improvements and change. Priorities and suggested strategies for their implementation are organized around planning and management, and the typical subsectors of education. The final portion summarizes the investment plan built upon system priorities.

Educational Accomplishments and Key Future Priorities

There have been many educational accomplishments in Lao PDR over the last 10 years initiated by the central government, international donors, local education authorities and individual educational institutions. These include:

- system expansion in enrollments at primary, secondary and tertiary levels;
- clarification (by national decrees and policies) of roles, responsibilities and internal structures of the Ministry of Education (MOE), the provincial education service (PES), and the district education bureau (DEB);
- consolidation and rationalization of institutions of teacher education and tertiary education;
- development of new curriculum and instructional programs for primary and lower secondary schools;
- production and national distribution of new textbooks, teacher guides and learning materials;
- implementation of a number of in-service teacher training programs;
- appointment of pedagogical advisers for primary schools in each district and for secondary schools in each province.

At the community and school levels several innovations have been encouraged to cope with scarce teaching and material resources. For example, several models of school networks or clusters are being piloted to support the sharing of resources at primary and secondary level. Further, 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.

In support of major policy reforms of Lao PDR which focus on equity, economic growth, and poverty alleviation, the highest educational priority for the next several years should be development of effective basic education. As is well documented internationally, investment in primary and basic education contributes to social equity and economic productivity. The basic competencies of reading and mathematics taught in schools are fundamental to acquisition of labor force skills and in fostering the ability for further learning. Expansion of primary education positively influences nutritional and health care practices in the household and, over time, decreases population growth rates, reduces infant mortality rates, and increases the educational aspirations of families and communities. Universalization of basic education is increasingly viewed as an early requisite for a modernizing society.

Of immediate concern in Lao PDR is extension of access to complete primary schooling and increased efficiency in the management, teaching, and learning processes in primary schools. However, further improvements in primary education can only take place as part of overall development of the education system and its supporting policy and management environment.

Educational Governance, Planning, and Administration

The legal, organizational, and administrative infrastructure for education policy, planning, and management is now reasonably well developed at the central level. However, long-term capacity building and further human resource development at all administrative levels remain crucial to achieving a more effective educational system. High priority should be given to these long-term needs.

The first priority is to improve planning and management capabilities in MOE and its local affiliates. The first step is a training needs assessment of personnel at the central, provincial, and district levels. The study results would permit a long-term, multi-skill training program to be designed and implemented. The Government should make this priority clear and encourage international lending agencies and donors to make long-term commitments to a coordinated program.

The second priority is to increase the effort given to program and project implementation and sustainability. Strategies should include: appropriately staffing the administrative and planning units responsible for monitoring and evaluation; collecting of relevant information on the potential for sustainability during implementation planning; and, projecting of recurrent costs for the post project period.

The third priority is to strengthen school-level management. The importance of strong school-level management to the development of effective schools is well established internationally and in Lao PDR. A long-term, nationwide, in-service training program should be a central component of development of professional

school administrators. Much of the principal training should focus directly on two basic types of information needed for school-level planning for efficiency and quality improvement: information on the community context of the school; and, information on instruction and learning. To the extent feasible, the training should take place at the school level.

Pre-primary and Primary Education

Approximately 80 percent of the children of Lao PDR attend school for some period of time in their life. The quality of inputs to pre-primary and primary schools such as textbooks, teaching methods and facilities tends to be inadequate for attaining satisfactory learning outcomes. Moreover, as school quality and efficiency varies widely across provinces, districts and villages, planning and monitoring should be decentralized.

The main priority for pre-primary education is to seek alternative financing for expansion of the system, which can contribute significantly to the children's educational development. Nevertheless, in view of the low participation rates, and the urgent need to improve the quality of learning and efficiency in primary level education, Government support for such expansion at this time should be limited. The private sector should be used as the main provider of pre-primary education, either completely or through the use of a voucher system; a voucher system is preferred since a more equitable access mechanism could be achieved. The major source of additional funds for pre-primary schools should be parents and communities. To reduce costs to government, fees adjusted to ability to pay could be charged to families who send their children to pre-primary school.

For primary education, the first priority is to expand access. The setting and monitoring of targets for enrollment growth should be encouraged at the provincial and district levels. Utilizing accurate enrollment data, a review should be undertaken of teacher training college (TTC) quota distribution to match teacher supply to areas of need. These actions, complemented with efficient redeployment of teachers and expansion of multigrade teaching, should significantly extend access.

The second priority is to develop, deliver and appropriately use textbooks. Textbooks do not exist for four of the seven subjects, and for one of the three basic subjects, a textbook is available only for grades 4 to 5. Further, textbooks are largely text-based with relatively few graphics. To encourage children to learn to read, explicit training should be provided for teachers on how to use textbooks in an effective manner; emphasis should be placed on the development of student workbooks for the three core subjects; and interactive textbooks (a combination of textbook and workbook with graphics and pictures) should be developed to stimulate the interest of children in the core subject *The World Around Us*.

The third priority is to improve the internal efficiency of primary education. Dropout and repetition rates at grade 1, in particular, need significant reduction. Possible strategies include: introduction of multigrade teaching in incomplete schools; improvement in the quality of teaching; increased relevance of education; and, flexibility in the entry age of rural children. Training of school principals in leadership and instructional supervision should also be implemented.

The fourth priority is to improve teacher training. Teachers must have sufficient content knowledge and know how to utilize textbooks in the classroom. As a prior condition, TTC staff must understand the content and know how to use textbooks. A more intensive in-service training program with extended time, follow-up, demonstration and monitoring should be developed. Much in-service training should occur through the pedagogical advisers or through additional school-based trainers. However, to ensure teaching quality, the skill level of pedagogical advisers needs to be monitored. To adequately train teachers in pedagogy and management for multigrade teaching, TTC staff should receive upgrading in the organization and function of multigrade teaching, including practical experience in the pedagogy and management of multigrade classes.

The fifth priority is to develop an action plan for special education. Providing sufficient government resources to offer extensive support for children with special needs will be difficult. One suggested immediate action is to raise the awareness of parents, nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and international donors to needs for special education. Further, a set of simple and inexpensive teacher intervention strategies should be developed to help teachers deal with the more frequent needs (e.g. hearing loss through poor sanitation and health). The Government could also aggressively seek international assistance in determining the magnitude of necessary support for training of special education teachers.

The sixth priority is to develop a link between curriculum and life skills. At present, the same curriculum is used throughout the country with little adaptation for geographical and ethnic differences. By linking curriculum to practical life skills, the possibility of adaptation of the Vietnamese VAC (acronym for “Stable, Garden, Pond”) school model to Lao PDR context should be explored. The Basic Education (Girls) Project, supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), can provide a further opportunity to make schooling relevant to everyday skills.

The final priority is to better adapt education to local cultural and economic conditions. One example would be congruence between the agricultural and school calendars. If changing school calendars restricts the additional income of teachers, their earnings should be supplemented with some form of allowance. Gender equity enrollment targets should be set for each province, and specific targets should be set and monitored by each district to improve the attendance of ethnic minority groups.

Secondary Education

Since 1993/94 secondary education has been the fastest growing educational level. It does not appear that such a growth rate is fiscally sustainable within the context of educational priorities of Lao PDR. The top national priority for secondary education should be the improvement of quality. This should be accomplished largely through: in-service teacher training, with a focus on strengthening the content knowledge of teachers; maximizing teacher compensation; increasing instructional time; and, providing instructional support.

The first priority is to improve the quality of education. The initial action should be a study of the reasons why textbooks prepared under the World Bank/

Swiss-supported Education Development Project (EDP) are not in wider use. A second important strategy, with international assistance, should be the upgrading of the curriculum of upper secondary schools as an extension of the junior secondary curriculum. Based on the study results, in-service training should be undertaken to strengthen the content knowledge of teachers and to identify ways to increase instructional time.

The second priority should be to ensure an adequate supply of qualified teachers. This requires a set of strategies and actions to attract new teachers, limit the enrollments of secondary education, encourage new graduates to work in underserved provinces, and increase the compensation of teachers.

The third priority is to strengthen the administration of secondary schools. Paralleling the training of primary school principals, secondary school principals should be given training in leadership development, instructional supervision and school-community relations. Principals should also become familiar with the content, organization and demands of the new curriculum.

The fourth priority is to improve student flow at the secondary level. Student flow is a factor of institutional quality, availability of places, cost, selection and characteristics of the school and student population. An improved procedure for determining grade promotion could have a positive impact.

Facilities Development

In Lao PDR less than 20 percent of the school buildings are considered to be in good condition. At least a threshold level of acceptable quality of primary facilities needs to be reached in order to conduct school programs satisfactorily. Currently, in the urban areas primary and secondary schools tend to be crowded, unhealthy and sometimes unsafe. In the rural areas primary and secondary schools are identifiable as schools largely because of the congregation of children and youth rather than by presence of specialized facilities and equipment. Particularly in rural areas, schools often lack instructional materials, a usable well and toilet facilities. Frequently, these schools are so poorly constructed that they cannot be used during much of the rainy season. For many years the community contribution to facilities maintenance and construction has been important. In the future, full participation of the community in facilities development will be imperative.

The first priority is to maintain existing buildings and to repair and, if necessary, replace furniture. The second priority is to rehabilitate the most dilapidated buildings and replace, as necessary, temporary buildings which are no longer usable.

The third priority is to construct new buildings and classrooms. The distribution of primary and secondary schools varies greatly across districts and provinces. An estimated 30 percent of villages have no primary schools. Over the next five years an estimated 8,300 classrooms will be needed. Some of these classrooms may be added to existing buildings and in other cases new buildings will be required. The choice of types of buildings (permanent, semi-permanent and temporary) has significant cost implications. The cost of construction of a semi-permanent building is about 10 times the cost for a temporary building and the cost

of a permanent building is three times that of a semi-permanent building. As a general rule the building should be simple, cheap and suitable to the location.

The fourth priority is to improve facilities management by involving each level of education administration from the school to MOE. The school and community should maintain the building and furniture; the district should inventory facilities annually and report to PES; and, PES should revise district proposals and submit requests to MOE for the next annual budget.

Nonformal Education

The first priority is to ensure a more equitable basis of the provision of literacy skills. Given the variability in literacy and educational attainment across provinces, districts, and minority groups, planning targets for equivalency nonformal education should be developed at the district level and set for literacy and the different education levels (primary, lower, and upper secondary schools). These targets should be determined on the basis of a planned expansion of the formal system.

The second priority is to improve the literacy rates of women and ethnic minority groups. Special programs should be implemented for those ethnic minority groups where female literacy is below 20 percent. Districts where female literacy rates are especially low should receive priority attention from nonformal education programs, particularly with the establishment of community learning centers (CLCs). Provinces and districts where minority literacy levels are above average should be used as a model in the design of special intervention programs for illiterate ethnic minority groups.

The third priority is to expand the number of CLCs and to ensure they are provided on the basis of need. Villages where female literacy is low and primary school dropout is high should be a priority for new sites. A public awareness campaign should be implemented to explain the advantages of village CLCs.

The fourth priority is to ensure linkages between literacy and alternative income generation. Literacy training should result in marketable skills. A mechanism should be developed to allow interaction between the Department of Nonformal Education (DNFE) and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) to avoid duplication, competition and wastage of scarce resources.

Teacher Training

Considerable success has been made in consolidating and strengthening teacher training. Nevertheless, there are several urgent issues in teacher training: ensuring a sufficient supply of teachers; increasing teacher qualifications; and, controlling costs of teacher preparation.

The first priority is to strengthen and expand in-service teacher training. Strategies associated with this priority include implementation of large-scale, long-term, in-service teacher-training programs. Integral to these strategies should be support to the Teacher Development Center (TDC) in expanding its programs in in-service training and in coordinating the activities related to teacher training currently found in various departments within MOE.

The second priority is to increase the relevance of preservice teacher training. The relevance of preservice teacher training to classroom teaching has been questioned in many countries, including Lao PDR. A threefold approach is recommended which includes: providing TTC students with copies of the curriculum and instructional materials they will eventually teach in the schools; strengthening the content knowledge of future teachers; and, providing opportunities for TTC instructors to teach in primary and lower secondary schools.

The third priority is to increase the supply of trained teachers. As recommended throughout this report, adequate teacher compensation should be the centerpiece of strategies related to supply and quality of teachers. However, improving the deployment of teachers could have considerable impact on matching numbers of teachers with need. Other approaches would be to: revise and enforce the contract that commits graduates of preservice teaching training to enter teaching; lower the cost of preservice teacher training; provide incentive packages to encourage more teacher training graduates to enter teaching; and, assess the feasibility of closing low enrollment, high cost preservice teacher preparation programs.

Vocational and Technical Training

Considerable changes are taking place in vocational and technical training. Vocational programs have been lengthened from two years to three years (8+3) and technical training shortened from three years to two years (11+2 or 8+3+2). A National Committee for Improving Vocational and Technical Curriculum was established in 1998 to provide curriculum development and national standards. The Center for Vocational Education Development, established in 1998, will decide curriculum for vocational schools beginning in 1999. The Lao-German Technical School offers upgrading courses to assist teachers to adapt the curriculum of their school and provide participants opportunity to practice their skills.

The first priority is to reduce the cost to government of vocational and technical education. Considering the high costs and low external efficiency of vocational and technical education, the feasibility of current plans for establishing vocational schools in two provinces should be assessed. The best long-term strategy of cost savings to Government is probably through strongly encouraging an increased role for the private sector. A variety of delivery programs involving public-private partnerships could also be considered. An additional strategy would be to assess the feasibility of charging tuition to provide incentive for schools to ensure their curriculum reflects market needs.

The second priority is to improve the relevance of vocational and technical training. Tracer and employer studies are needed to understand the relevance between vocational/technical training and employment, to determine the types of jobs available, the knowledge and skills required, and to assess the skills and abilities of graduates. A number of strategies should be employed to develop better information on labor market demand, which could serve as a basis for planning offerings, designing curriculum and advising students.

The third priority is to improve linkages between vocational and technical education and other organizations to extend vocational training opportunities. One

possibility would be to assess the feasibility of graduates being able to access baccalaureate programs at the National University of Lao (NUOL). Additionally, collaboration with MOLSA should be explored to deliver vocational skills training through nonformal education programs.

Tertiary Education

The focus of effort on tertiary education is to improve quality and efficiency. Another important issue is to ensure fairness and equity in admission and program operation. To accomplish these goals, the first priority is to improve the linkage between NUOL academic programs and labor market needs through: tracer studies and employer studies to refine instructional programs and understand the relevance of NUOL programs to employment needs; and, more flexibility in implementing the student quota contract.

The second priority is to meet the recurrent budget requirements of NUOL. Although cost is not the only criterion for including or excluding any program, a critical examination of the less cost-efficient programs is warranted. Suggested actions include assessment of: the capacity to meet the recurrent costs associated with developing regional colleges; and, the viability of the Faculty of Education. Should efforts to increase enrollments to a satisfactory level fail, the feasibility of transferring upper secondary teacher training to the TTCs and reallocating the facilities to higher demand areas of study should be assessed.

The third priority is to reduce public costs of higher post-secondary education. For both efficiency and equity concerns, a thorough scrutiny of these costs is advised. Cost reviews should assess the feasibility of: accelerating tuition charge and providing loan or scholarship for students at NUOL unable to pay the tuition; a needs-based assignment of bursaries; and, establishing a private corporation or business to provide an additional source of revenue for the university. Monitoring of the quality of instruction in the regular program of the university is necessary to minimize distortions due to the operation of special programs.

Investment Plan

The Investment Plan is built upon five priorities for developing a more effective education system in Lao PDR:

1. Providing an adequate recurrent budget for the education sector;
2. Continuing to strengthen basic education;
3. Directing more resources to teachers, teaching and instructional materials, and regular maintenance of schools;
4. Maintaining balance in the development of the educational system;
5. Improving effectiveness of educational governance, strategic planning and management.

A financial model was used to estimate the size of an adequate budget for 2004/05. The budget calls for:

- providing higher teacher salaries and more funds to support day-to-day teaching activities;
- moving toward universal access to primary education;
- delaying expansion of lower and upper secondary education to focus on improvements of quality;
- making more efficient use of teachers;
- lowering costs and increasing efficiency by reducing the number of repeaters and increasing the completion rate (by reductions in the number of dropouts) in each cycle of education, particularly in primary schools.

An amount equaling 20 percent of the entire education budget was added to the estimated recurrent budget to provide an estimate of the investment budget. The result is summarized in the table below: a total budget representing 3 percent of GDP, very similar to the current size of the budget. However, distribution of the total education budget would be very different, with a much larger recurrent budget and a much smaller investment budget.

	Distribution of Total Education Budget, 1996/97		Proposed Budget 2004/05	
	1996/97 (Actual) As % of GDP		2004/05 (Proposed) As % of GDP	
Recurrent	1.6%	55%	2.4%	80%
Investment	1.3%	45%	0.6%	20%
Total Budget	2.9%	100%	3.0%	100%

Adoption of an appropriate recurrent budget along the lines spelled out in this report, including a significant increase in teacher compensation, should be a precondition before substantial new investments are made in the Lao PDR education system. The actual amount contained in the investment budget will depend on future growth rates of the economy. At a 4 percent growth rate for the economy yearly investments in 2004/05 should be about \$16 million out of a total government educational budget of \$80 million; at 8 percent, \$20 million out of a total budget of \$100 million.

A prioritized list of investments is presented in the body of the report based upon: the estimated amount of funds available for investments; and, the agreed upon priorities and goals as set out earlier (moving toward universal literacy by getting every child through primary 5 and meeting the needs of the developing economy).

Summary

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 priority is further development of basic education to better serve all children in Lao PDR. In addition to

a number of strategies directly focused on basic education this priority needs support from quality teachers, teachable curriculum and adequate instructional materials. Yet, regardless of priority, developing a balanced and planned education system of good quality is a requisite for national education development. Improved governance, planning and management support all other priorities through stronger leadership and technical capacity in designing, administrating, and monitoring the education system. To manage and sustain systemic change successfully there should be a larger role for provinces and districts. To achieve sustainable institutional improvement levels, as well, the villages and individual schools must share more fully in education ownership.