

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT

Division: MKSS

TA No. Country and Name TA 3871-LAO: Strengthening Decentralized Education Management			Amount Approved: \$500,000	
			Revised Amount:	
Executing Agency: Ministry of Education		Source of Funding: OCR	TA Amount Undisbursed \$11,642.10	TA Amount Utilized \$488,357.90
Date			TA Completion Date	
Approval	Signing	Fielding of Consultants	Original	Actual
24 May 2002	15 Aug. 2002	25 Nov. 2002–20 Aug. 2003	31 March 2003	31 May 2004
			Account Closing Date	
			Original	Actual
			31 May 2004	15 December 2004 ¹
Description				
<p>The issuance of a Prime Ministerial Decree on decentralization in March 2000 resulted in a direction to decentralize the public administration framework in all socio-economic sectors including education. The objectives were to improve efficiency, relevance, and accountability for the results of public operations at provincial and district levels. The decentralized administration framework foresees the province as a strategic unit, the district as a planning and budgeting unit, and the village as a basic implementation unit, while the role of the central government will be to supervise and control the decentralization process. In the education sector, the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Provincial Education Services (PESs), the District Education Bureaus (DEBs), and the villages and/or schools will undertake defined roles. However, when the decree was issued, education management was not well structured and differed among provinces and districts due to the lack of clear operational guidelines and allocation of authorities. There were different levels of staff capacity and resources in each PES and DEB, and most were not yet prepared for the new management system. There was an urgent need in MOE to address these issues prior to introducing the decentralization framework in the sector.</p>				
Objectives and Scope				
<p>The immediate objective of the technical assistance (TA) was to help the Government and MOE prepare for introduction of decentralized education management. The expected outputs were (i) strengthened capacity of MOE to manage the decentralization process; (ii) short- (2002–2004), medium- (2005–2007), and long-term (2008–2010) decentralization strategies and a capacity building action plan for education; (iii) strengthened capacity at the provincial levels to manage the decentralized education system; and (iv) strengthened capacity at the district and village levels to deliver the education services through a decentralized education system. Activities in producing these outputs were carried out in four components: (i) policy support, (ii) planning support, (iii) capacity-building support for MOE and provinces, and (iv) capacity-building support for districts and villages. The TA objective was consistent with the Government's national policy for decentralization. The TA concept was designed to meet the Government's needs, the inputs were clearly defined, and the activities were planned to be commensurate with the absorptive capacity of the relevant departments and offices in MOE, PES, and DEB. The scope, terms of reference, and implementation arrangements and schedule of the TA were considered relevant and appropriate. Close attention was paid to ensure Government ownership and participation in the TA.</p>				
Evaluation of Inputs				
<p>The TA was financed by a grant of \$500,000 from the Asian Development Bank's (ADB's) TA funding program. The TA provided 11.8 person-months of international consultants and 25.7 person-months of domestic consulting services, compared to 10 person-months and 20 person-months, respectively, as originally planned in the TA paper. Apart from the consulting services, the TA included provision of equipment, seminars and workshops, and regional training for MOE, PESs, and DEBs. The inputs of international consultants were in accordance with the TA paper and detailed TORs. The TA successfully completed its planned activities. Both international and domestic consultants performed well and were productive. The MOE and project management unit (PMU) performed satisfactorily as the Executing Agency (EA) and Implementing Agency (IA), respectively. MOE provided the necessary data and statistics and office accommodation in a timely manner. The PMU worked closely with the consultant teams and actively learned the skills and practice of effective policy planning. ADB fielded administration missions for inception, midterm review, and final review. Each mission closely monitored progress and issues, reviewed reports and relevant documents carefully and provided advice on technical and management problems on time. Collaboration and communication among ADB, MOE and the consultants were maintained throughout the TA implementation. The performance of ADB was considered satisfactory.</p>				

¹ Subject to consultant's submission of certificate of full payment.

Evaluation of Outputs

The TA envisaged four outputs (see Objectives and Scope). The MOE's capacity to manage the upcoming decentralization process was strengthened by the development of (i) refined operational guidelines for decentralizing the education management structure and systems; (ii) a map of decentralization, incorporating government initiatives and funding partners' support; (iii) a set of training manuals for planning and implementing staff development programs at the national, provincial, district, village, and school levels; and (iv) programs for training of core national and provincial trainers for implementing training in decentralized education management (the first and the third outputs). The map included descriptions of ongoing and planned support to decentralized education management in a matrix form with the time frame of 2002–2010 with indicative investment needs in key function areas of management at the national, provincial, district, and village/school levels. The TA consultants helped MOE to prepare short- (2002–2005), medium- (2005–2007), and long-term (2008–2010) strategies and a capacity building action plan for implementing a decentralized education management system (the second output). The TA took a participatory approach in preparing the strategies that reflect issues at the national, provincial, district, village, and school levels. The TA also assessed the capacity of administrative functions at national and provincial, and district levels for preparation of the capacity building action plan. For the fourth output, the TA helped in developing model district school construction plans and community assistance programs.

TA outputs and recommendations were fully documented in the final report that was submitted on schedule to ADB. Following consultations with MOE, ADB approved an extension of the TA period by 10 months for disseminating new operational policies of the decentralized education management system to PESSs, DEBs, villages, and schools. During this period, MOE senior officials visited all 18 provinces to explain to, discuss with, and receive feedback from, provincial and district authorities about the TA findings and recommendations. Based on the final report and feedback from the dissemination process, the consultants prepared the *Operational Policy Report* as a concise guide for implementors.

Overall, the TA produced its outputs as envisaged in the original TA report. The outputs included useful guides and tools for MOE to undertake the decentralization process in education management. With a participatory approach undertaken at the national, provincial, district, and school levels of administration, the TA recommendations were well-received by MOE, PESSs, and DEBs. The additional time requested by MOE to reinforce the participatory approach in finalizing the TA recommendations reflected good judgment.

Overall Assessment and Rating

The TA was highly successful. It addressed the Government's needs and achieved its objective. Implementation generally followed the schedule and progress of the Government's overarching education sector strategy. All envisaged activities were fully completed and all planned outputs were produced. A fact-finding mission conducted in September 2004 for preparing a project preparatory technical assistance for the Basic Education Development Project agreed with the Government to include a component in the Project which supports the further implementation of the policy and operational recommendations set out in the TA final report.

Major Lessons Learned

The TA undertook a participatory approach in policy and system formulation process. The approach originally designed in the TA and further explored by MOE during TA implementation was a key to the success of the TA since the implementation of the new management system depends on public acceptance and awareness of a new policy and operational framework. Future projects of a similar nature should follow this practice of ensuring a participatory process with enough time provision for involvement of people and communities at different levels and locations.

Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions

Since the TA was well prepared and received by the Government, ADB should continue to assist MOE in implementing its recommendations, in coordination with other active donors. Follow-up actions will be to (i) continue the policy dialogue with the Government for adoption and implementation of the TA recommendations throughout the formulation process of the ensuing Basic Education Development Project, in close coordination with other donors; and (ii) include a component in the new project to further assist the decentralization process.