

# **Lao People's Democratic Republic**

## **Country Report**

**CONFITEA VI Conference**

**Seoul, Republic of Korea, 6 -8 October 2008**

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### **1. Overview of Country Information**

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) was established in 1975. It succeeded the Kingdom of Laos, following decades of civil war and heavy involvement in the larger Indochina War in the Eastern and Northeastern provinces. After the war, many Unexploded Ordnances (UXOs) were left from American bombing. The Lao PDR was one of the most heavily bombed countries in the world, and UXOs continue to have a major impact on rural lives. Thirty years after the war, lives are still being lost due to UXOs. Further, livelihoods are restricted as agricultural expansion in many areas is impossible until the land is cleared of UXOs.

The Lao PDR is a landlocked country and shares borders with China and Myanmar in the North, Viet Nam in the East, Thailand in the West and Cambodia in the South. The total land area covers 236,800 km<sup>2</sup> with 5.6 million inhabitants. The administrative structure consists of 17 provinces, 141 districts, 10,552 villages and 959,595 households (Population census 2005). The provinces are grouped into three regions – northern, central and southern. A large part of the country is hilly and mountainous. Mountains and plateaus cover approximately 80% of the country. In the northern and eastern regions, mountains and plateau above 1,000 meters cover about 30%, mountains and plateaus between 200 and 1,000 meters account for about 50% of the area, and elevation below 200 meters and floodplains the remaining 20% (Lao Geography, 1989).

The Lao PDR is one of the least developed countries (LDC). The estimated per capita income in 2005 is US\$491. In 2004, 71 percent of its population lived on less than US\$2 a day and 23 percent on less than US\$1.5 a day. Poverty is lower in cities than in villages; in areas with roads versus those without; and the lowlands versus the uplands.

The Lao PDR is one of the world's most ethnically diverse countries. According to Census 2005, there are 49 recognized ethnic groups. These 49 groups are classified into four main ethno-linguistic groups: Lao-Tai accounting for 65 percent; Austro-Asiatic; Hmong-Mien; and Sino-Tibetan; 24, 8, and 3 respectively. Lao-Tai group traditionally live on flat land, while Hmong-Mien group and Sino-Tibetan group live on hilly and mountainous areas and rely on shifting cultivation in the rural uplands for their living. Although this diversity can be seen as a very valuable asset for the country, the vast diversity of ethnic groups creates significant obstacles for Government and development partners due to different languages, different cultural belief systems and practice. It would for instance be very costly for the Lao Government to deliver basic social service including primary education and health. Many regions are accessible only in the dry season, and many only can travel by small footpaths. Communities are often distanced from one another by hours, or days, of travel time. Apparently, these communities tend to be the least developed than the lowland groups.

## **2. Administrative System of Education**

The education system is organized and administered by the Ministry of Education (MOE) at the national level. It reaches into the countryside through a network of Provincial Education Service (PES) offices and District Education Bureaus (DEB). Integration at the village level is the responsibility of the village heads, school management committees and school principals. In actuality, many villages, especially those who live in rural and remote areas, education often offers more than three years of primary schooling.

## **3. Education and National Goal**

In 1996, the 6<sup>th</sup> Lao People's Revolutionary Party Congress called for the country's national long-term development goal to graduate from the rank of the least developed

country (LDC) by the year 2020. To achieve this ambitious goal, education sector is one of the most important sector to build a young generation with global scientific knowledge, patriotic values, a spirit of solidarity with ethnic groups in the country and with friendly countries in the world; to know their rights and interests and obligation as citizens, how to preserve and expand the traditions and culture of the nation, and how to be self-dependent and self-strengthening; to be economical and know how to harmoniously combine personal interests with that of the collective; to equip themselves with general knowledge and knowledge in specialized fields, specifically in science and technical fields; to be moral, disciplined, responsible, and dutiful; to be healthy, innovative, and of a civilized mind; and to be prepared for the defense, construction and development of the nation (EFA National Action Plan 2003 – 2015).

#### **4. Non-Formal Education Situation**

After Independence in 1975, the Government of Lao PDR has input great efforts to solve illiteracy problem because it is perceived as a problem of overshadowing the national development. The MOE, PESs and DEBs, through the Department of Non-formal Education (DNFE), provide four types of NFE programs to improve living and working conditions in a participant's natural and cultural environment, and to develop activities oriented towards self-sufficiency and employment: (i) literacy training for out-of-school adults, usually organized at the village level and given in evenings and weekends; (ii) upgrading programs for the general adult population, enabling them to gain primary, lower secondary and upper secondary equivalency in full-time compressed programs, e.g., three years for primary education; (iii) upgrading courses for government cadres organized at both the provincial and district levels, sometimes using special facilities (the Ministry operates one Centre); these courses are primarily for upgrading educational qualifications to the lower and upper secondary level, and participants come from a range of line ministries; and (iv) skills development programs that are linked to literacy programs have been offered to the illiterate adults and out-of-school youth oriented towards income-generating activities.

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

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

**Table 1: Reported Adult Literacy Rates (15+) between 1995 and 2008**

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

According to the Population Census 2005, the literacy rate was highest in Vientiane Capital (92%) and lowest in Phongsaly (43%), the ethnically diverse province in the country north bordering to China and Viet Nam. The rate was also higher in urban areas

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

## 5. Budget Allocation and Achievements

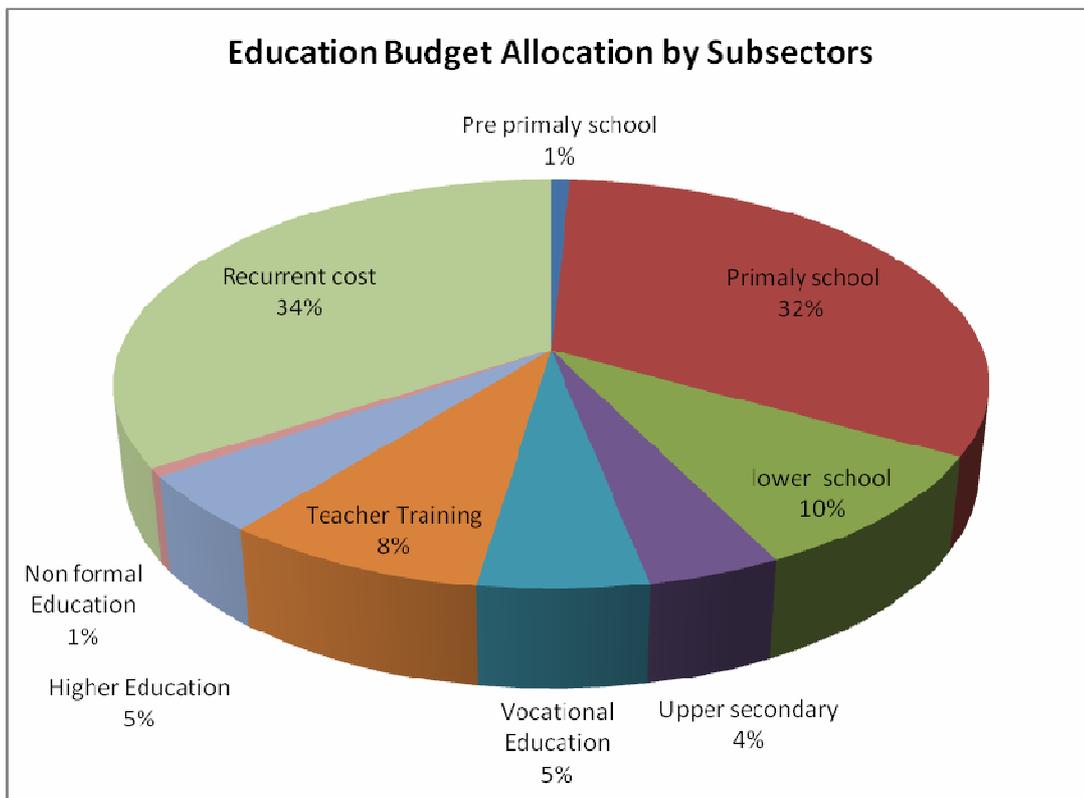
The Government has increased budget into NFE programs, and achievement is also improved (see Table 2). However, NFE sector is still small when compared with other subsectors (see Figure 1).

**Table 2: Budget Allocation for NFE Sector by Year.**

| Academic Year | Total Budget (in Lao Kip)* | Targets to be Eradicated Illiteracy | Actual Eradicated People |                | Target to be completed Equivalency primary education | Completed      |                |
|---------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|--|----------------|----------------|
|               |                            |                                     | Total                    | Female         |  | Total          | Female         |
| 1995-96       | 95,000,000                 | 44,188                              | 17,358                   | 9,533          | 15,346   | 12,455         | 6,981          |
| 1996-97       | 297,052,000                | 60,000                              | 65,338                   | 37,773         | 30,000   | 15,314         | 6,317          |
| 1997-98       | 497,152,800                | 100,000                             | 75,875                   | 42,455         | 18,000   | 15,221         | 8,468          |
| 1998-99       | 497,152,800                | 100,000                             | 60,843                   | 33,319         | 35,000   | 20,563         | 11,216         |
| 1999-00       | 600,000,000                | 100,000                             | 48,660                   | 25,366         | 40,000   | 30,735         | 14,300         |
| 2000-01       | 857,130,000                | 70,000                              | 49,729                   | 26,764         | 40,000   | 26,754         | 14,774         |
| 2001-02       | 857,040,000                | 75,000                              | 36,794                   | 20,668         | 35,000   | 26,415         | 13,015         |
| 2002-03       | 1,000,000,000              | 50,000                              | 33,508                   | 18,549         | 30,000   | 25,767         | 13,757         |
| 2003-04       | 1,000,000,000              | 50,000                              | 43,660                   | 23,994         | 30,000   | 23,409         | 11,252         |
| 2004-05       | 1,600,000,000              | 50,000                              | 45,558                   | 22,634         | 30,000   | 23,264         | 12,206         |
| 2005-06       | 1,600,000,000              | 50,000                              | 54,833                   | 31,108         | 30,000   | 26,452         | 14,626         |
| 2006-07       | 2,000,000,000              | 76,708                              | 46,545                   | 25,838         | 37,316   | 29,419         | 16,156         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>10,900,527,600</b>      | <b>825,896</b>                      | <b>578,701</b>           | <b>318,001</b> | <b>370,662</b>                                       | <b>275,768</b> | <b>143,068</b> |

\* This budget is for honorarium for NFE facilitators only.

**Figure 1: Education Budget Allocation by Subsectors**



## 6. Keys Issues and Challenges

- Inadequate NFE personnel both quantity and quality, and most of them neither receive pre-training nor in-service training about NFE.
- In rural and remote areas, NFE facilitators' education level is low and most of them neither receive pre-training nor in-service training on methodology of facilitating/teaching NFE programs.
- Literacy learners are not interested in NFE programs because of poverty incidence and NFE contents do not meet their needs.
- Provision of NFE programs for improving quality of life is not various (do not meet learners' needs).

- Budget allocation for NFE is not sufficient, for example, for honorarium, material development, training, and for purchase needed equipments.
- As the Census and Household Survey 2005 indicates that 20 percent of total villages in the country do not have school in the villages, this challenges NFE sector to deliver education to unreached targets, especially in rural and remote areas where formal schooling cannot covers or partly covers (especially areas where formal education offers only grade 1 to 2 or 3), while investment on NFE is limited compare to such demand.
- Weak management and administration of Community Learning Centers (CLCs) is a big issue. People including NFE personnel do not understand well about the role and function of CLCs resulting low participation from community people and other organizations concerned; and CLCs are not fully utilized as they are multi-purpose centers.
- Data and statistic of NFE are not reliable, especially numbers of literates and primary education completers.
- Provision of materials and equipments are not sufficient compared to demands particularly in rural and remote areas.
- There is not system for monitoring, inspection and evaluation of NFE programs.
- Coordination and participation from public organizations concerned, private sectors, international development agencies for NFE are not strong.
- According to MOE annual report, about 17% of children aged between 6 – 10 years old still stay without schooling; and the dropout rate is 9.4% which will become target of NFE.
- According to census 2005, there are 929,407 people aged 15 and over (634,935 females) stay illiterate.

## **7. Upcoming Plans/Actions** *(Abstracted from NFE Strategy 2008 – 2015)*

### **6.1 Plan 2008 – 2010:**

1. Eradicate illiteracy among people aged between 15 and 40 by 88%; and adult literacy rate (aged 15 and over) by 80%.
2. Provide primary education for 300 villages and district authority members.
3. 25 districts will be achieved universal primary education.
4. Improve 299 existing CLCs and establish 30 new CLCs
5. Upgrading education level from primary to lower secondary level by 30% (42,000 people) of the primary completers.
6. Organize literacy program, primary education and vocational skill training in 150 villages without formal schools.
7. 10,000 people including youths, civil servants, workers, soldiers and police officers will be upgraded their education level from primary education to complete lower secondary education level; and 15,000 people for upper secondary education level.
8. 10,000 people will be trained on basic vocation skills based on their needs and local condition.
9. Finalize curriculum, textbooks, guidelines on literacy level and primary education level.
10. Develop and finalize curriculum of lower secondary education level for the people; and upper secondary education level for civil servants, soldiers, police officers, and youths.
11. Develop and revise basic vocational curriculum for 8 vocational subjects including food processing, beauty make up, tourism and services, dress making, livestock farming, agro-agriculture, carpentries, and weaving.
12. Print and supply curriculum, textbooks, guidelines on literacy, primary education, lower secondary education level (for the people), and upper

- secondary education level (for civil servants, soldiers, police officers, youths), and to provide adequate basic vocational trainings for the targets.
13. Provide training for 200 NFE facilitators, 100 NFE teachers for secondary education level, 150 vocational trainers, 150 for NFE managers and NFE personnel.
  14. Improve and construct Non-Formal Education Development Center, 2 NFE promotion centers, 2 provincial NFE and basic vocational training centers, and 3 for district centers (Nambak, Namor and Boun Nuea center).
  15. Create condition for transforming 8 provincial upgrading schools, 10 district upgrading schools, and establish NFE center in 47 pro-poor districts nationwide.

## **6.2 Plan 2011 – 2015**

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

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