

# RTM Education report

## Priority challenges for educations sector

**Universal primary education is at risk** with access to primary teachers declining.

**Low learning outcomes** as the consequence of (i) inadequate capacity of teachers in both content knowledge and pedagogical skills; (ii) challenges for teachers to adapt to the new primary curriculum, particularly in providing adequate follow-up support; and (iii) low investment on teacher training to build capacity of teacher workforce (resulting from low budget allocation and insufficient allocation to non-wage budget lines).

- Low learning outcome of Lao primary Grade 5 students compared to other ASEAN countries.
- Flow-on effect of poor learning outcomes at primary level to secondary, TVET and Higher Education, preventing production of skilled workers who can compete in ASEAN Economic Community.
- Benefits from lower secondary education being legislated as compulsory will not occur if learning outcomes remain as low as is the case now.

Learning outcomes may get worse due to **shortage of teachers (low quota) and lack of non-wage recurrent budget** (low share of GoL non-wage recurrent budget) to improve the quality of learning, particularly teacher training; and the impact of COVID-19.

- One impact of the lower quota is the large exit of volunteer teachers from the sector and the inability to replace these teachers with civil service teachers (There are just over 100 primary schools that do not have any civil service teachers).

### COVID-19 impact on education

- possible increased dropouts particularly for secondary education
- possible worsening of learning outcomes
- deterioration of the national budget and the share allocated to the education sector (level already insufficient) that further impact on quality of education and expansion of some areas
- School prolonged closures may mean that the gains made in education over the last decade could be eroded which will reduce the future productivity and lifetime earnings of affected students<sup>i</sup>

## A. Actions/activities relating to the RTIM key recommendations and those highlighted in SWG Call for Action 2020/2021

### Summary of 2019 RTM Recommendations

1. *RTM: "Quality of education: RTIM participants commend the progress in education, for example, in improving enrolment in basic education, as evidenced by now close to universal primary enrolment. There has also been development of a new national primary curriculum along with new teaching and learning materials which present a major transition towards "active learning" and will have spin-off effects on the quality of education. Evidence shows that inadequate learning outcomes at primary level, particularly in Lao language and mathematics are the key constraints and have continued effects at higher levels of education."*

### Action by education sector to respond to RTM recommendation

There is a risk to universal primary education due to the decline in the number of primary (and secondary) teachers<sup>ii</sup> due to a much-reduced quota<sup>iii</sup> of new civil service positions (much lower than attrition) for the education sector, leading to more multi-grade classes and school shifts. The education sector cannot plan to mitigate against declining number of teachers due to lack of a medium-term civil-service staffing framework from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The roll-out of the new primary curriculum and limited training of teachers in the new curriculum continues to be supported by Development Partners but there is a lack of GoL budget to support the required training of all primary teachers and school principals in the use of new curriculum and strengthened content knowledge and pedagogical skills, including training of teachers to support students with disabilities.

The M&E framework of ESSDP 2021-25 includes a number of sex-disaggregated indicators to evaluate the quality of education: (i) Improved student learning outcomes measurement at Grade 3, Grade 5, Grade 9, and Grade 11; (ii) Strengthened capacity of teachers to implement the new school curricula through support from clusters and PAs and continuous professional capacity development; and (iii) Increased number of knowledgeable and competent teachers and principals meeting the teaching standards. Development Partners have indicated support to measure these indicators.

2. *RTM: "Greater investment in training of the primary teacher workforce: In order to take full advantage of new teaching materials and the improved pedagogy, a much greater investment in training of the primary teacher workforce is required. It is important that the national budget for education is protected, including that a national budget for school-feeding be provided to maintain the gains in enrolment and attendance in primary education."*

### Action by education sector to respond to RTM recommendation

Development Partners can support training of primary teachers in selected target districts but there is a need for a GoL budget to train teachers and provide continuous professional capacity development across all other districts of the country. New teacher recruitment will be prioritized to ECE and primary schools

The national budget for education has not been protected with deep cuts to the share of the GoL non-wage recurrent budget<sup>iv</sup> leading to reliance on Development Partners for quality improvements. There has been an increased financial allocation for school meals. Separately, in the same mid-financial year budget reallocation, a significant reduction in financial support for other activities (in different budget chapters) has occurred, resulting in an overall slight net decrease in the overall education recurrent budget.

The overall amount of GoL expenditure declining is understood as necessary, (because of the financial fall-out from the COVID-19 pandemic) but the reduced share to education is the issue and the current education budget allocation is below internationally recommended levels and one of the lowest among ASEAN countries.

Improving resource management is necessary to strengthen teacher management as well as financial management. The Planning and Budgeting Committee must play an important role in budget allocation based on sector priorities and the mandate of the PBC is being updated.

3. *RTM: "Enhancing early child development and school readiness, reducing drop-out rate, particularly among girls, and ensuring education quality and efficiency"*

### Action by education sector to respond to RTM recommendation

With development partner support, piloting of (i) shorter pre-service training of ECE teachers, and (ii) alternative approaches using caregivers rather than fully qualified teachers, in response to the reduced quota of new civil service teachers is being implemented. However, national rollouts of these

piloted interventions will require an increase in the education budget from GoL will be more affordable for the government than setting up separate kindergartens.

Several Development Partners are working with DECE and DTE to develop and pilot school readiness programs with a focus on reading in Lao language, particularly among children who do not have Lao as their first language (about 40% of population).

#### 4. RTM: *“Increase investment and cooperation with the private sector in TVET”*

##### Action by education sector to respond to RTM recommendation

Enrolments while on a downward trend in general in TVET, are increasing in courses that have been developed to be more relevant to the domestic labour market. For example, a module on entrepreneurship has been introduced into the upper secondary and TVET curricula and the concept on dual cooperative training (DCT) has been endorsed by MoES. The Lao National Qualifications Framework (LNQF) will be endorsed by all stakeholders and occupational standards for all new TVET courses will be developed and endorsed.

The private sector requires better quality entrants to TVET programs since inadequate learning outcomes at primary level have flow-on effects to TVET. With regard to TVET, the private sector is encouraged to play a prominent role by contributing financially and substantively to technical and vocational skills development. In particular, by providing opportunities for dual cooperative training, on the job training, internships and by employing successful TVET graduates. The ESSDP 2021-25 will ensure regular meetings of the TVET technical WG meetings and support the creation of a joint Technical Working Group (MoES, MoLSW, MAF, private sector and development partners) under the Post-Secondary Focal Group to identify a realignment of roles and responsibilities for TVET provision based on the new TVET Law.

A minimum set of competencies that include literacy and numeracy standards will be developed as the prerequisite for entry into TVET programmes, taking into account students with special needs. TVET programmes should also be more inclusive so that everyone regardless of gender, ethnicity and disability can benefit from the programme.

TVET teachers have been trained in the learner-centred approach and have gradually shifted to more competency-based learning, thus more activity-based and skills-based modalities are in place. Internship programs through partnerships with private companies or dual training needs to be continued to ensure delivery of a more responsive TVET curricula.

#### 5. RTM: *“A holistic and strategic approach needed to the development of the education profession:”*

##### Action by education sector to respond to RTM recommendation

ESWG has discussed a draft Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Strategy in Lao PDR (Lifelong learning in the Teaching Profession) in August 2021 and Development Partners are supporting the Department of Teacher Education to finalize the plan but its implementation will require an increased education budget from GoL.

Development Partners are supporting the Department of Teacher Education to develop a comprehensive teacher policy.

##### **Required actions to address the identified challenges**

The required actions to mitigate the risk to universal primary education and to improve primary school learning outcomes are under the responsibility of those outside the education sector. The Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for the quota of new positions and the Ministry of Finance controls the share of the non-wage recurrent budget. However, failure to mitigate the risk and improve learning outcomes will impact on broader GoL objectives, both inside and outside of the education sector.

#### **B. Communication and outreach activities with the sector and across Sector Working Groups**

MoES actively encourages attendance and participation at ESWG meetings also from MoF, MPI, Ministry of Home Affairs and members of the Social and Cultural Committee of the National Assembly.

Six Focal Groups have been established under ESWG to facilitate greater technical discussion across the various sub-sectors. ESSDP 2021-25 is supporting creation of a Joint Technical Working Group (MoES, MoLSW, MAF, private sector and development partners) to identify a realignment of roles and responsibilities for TVET provision based on the new TVET Law. A similar Joint Technical Group with MoH and MoLSW would support better planning for support to children with disabilities, particularly given the impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

There is little communication with other sector working groups, but this may be something that the RTM Secretariat of MPI can facilitate.

### **C. Cross-sectoral thematic areas applied to all SWGs**

#### *1. Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (relevant to education sector)*

- i. Greater aligning and tailoring development finance to the national development agenda and context through results-based planning practices

All Development Partners have endorsed ESSDP 2021-25 as the framework for all financing to align with the identified sector priorities. DP supported interventions are prepared on the basis of evidence provided by the MoES Statistical Centre, DoI, RIES and LEQA and results-based approach is implemented. The reduced GoL financing to the education sector means that the ESSDP is being reviewed to identify targets that may no longer be achieved.

- ii. Strengthening linkages between national budget and national planning processes  
Planning within the education sector is challenging due to uncertainties about the size and share of the civil service quota through to 2025. The MTFP does not include subchapters such as “wages” making it challenging for ESSDP to estimate teacher numbers through to 2025. There is an urgent need for the Ministry of Home Affairs, in conjunction with the Ministry of Finance to develop a medium-term staffing framework to enable the education sector to plan future teacher numbers.

- iii. Within the national regulatory framework, strengthening country systems which are used by providers of development cooperation to extent possible: budget execution, financial reporting, audit, and procurement.

Development Partners are supporting further analytical work into medium term budgeting reforms, public expenditure and institutional review and financial management analysis (debottlenecking) in the education sector.

- iv. Adopting Programme-Based Approaches (PBAs) and Sector Wide Approaches (SWAp) to support the implementation of the NSEDPs including SDGs

Development Partners involved in supporting ECE and primary education programs are aligned with a new project supported by the Global Partnership for education that will be implemented through to 2026.

- v. Under Government leadership, providers of development cooperation coordinate their strategies and actions, simplify procedures vis-à-vis the Government and enhance collaboration to avoid duplication.

The Informal Education Donor Working Group (IEDWG) meets to facilitate coordination of Development Partner funded interventions and IEDWG is now mapping their interventions against ESSDP 2021-25 to identify any overlap and gaps.

- vi. Ensuring availability and public accessibility of information on development cooperation and other development resources (commitments, actual disbursements, and results)

IEDWG and ESWG Focal Group meetings provide an opportunity for Development Partners to outline how their work is supporting MoES. The Project Management Division of the Department of Planning maintains an ODA database and this data is used in MoES Annual reports.

- vii. To the extent possible, ensuring adequate mobilization of government revenues which is required for leveraging development cooperation funds for investments in various development activities

One of the conditions to receiving grant funding from the Global Partnership for Education relates to the volume of domestic financing allocated to the education sector. The general criteria of the Budget Support provided to GoL pertains to the credibility of the sectoral policy requiring the commitment of the Government to support and maintain its budget commitment to the Education sector

- viii. Improving engagement of private sector in national and provincial development planning and coordination, including the implementation, reporting and oversight of development results and outcomes through a proper analytical framework/mechanism.

The private sector in school-based education is expanding beyond Vientiane Capital and is now active in provincial capitals and in some larger district capitals.

ESSDP proposes to have a framework developed for cooperation between TVET institutions and private sector business units. A joint Technical Working Group (MoES, MoLSW, MAF, private sector and development partners) is being established.

## 2. *Innovation and technology*

The MoES digital teaching and learning platform Khang Panya Lao has been set-up with support of Development Partners for use in digital and blended learning. This was a response to school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic with plans to expand the platform use for teacher training and as a supplementary learning resource covering pre-primary, primary and secondary education with potential to expand to non-formal education programmes. However, TVET requires practical hands-on learning and thus online learning is not suitable.

Several Development Partners are introducing digital tablets to assist DESB staff to monitor performance in schools.

## 3. *Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment and accelerating the adoption and implementation of the National Youth Policy*

All programs in the sector have gender equality as an objective and all indicators collected by the MoES Statistics Centre disaggregate data by sex. More boys are dropping out and repeating in primary and secondary education, with boys also lagging behind in learning outcomes. Reasons behind this reverse gender gap needs to be fully understood and addressed before the gap becomes insurmountable.

There is a better understanding of the intersection between ethnicity and gender by MoES and Development Partners and this is being addressed in DP projects and in the identification of target districts (such as the MoES 40 priority districts) for enhanced support.

## 4. *Other emerging issues such as impact of COVID-19 and response*

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused schools to be closed during the lockdowns, and some schools are being used as quarantine and testing centres. Additional resources will be needed to reopen schools in compliance with COVID protocols with greater investment in infrastructure required for distance (on-line) learning.

The frequent closures and recent increases in COVID-19 cases will impact on the ability of teachers to complete the full curricula in school year 2021/22 and thus, MoES with support from

Development Partners is providing advice and materials to teachers on how to mitigate the risks of an incomplete curricula being provided. Prolonged school closures will result in greater learning loss and further deteriorating learning outcomes; further cuts in the budget will then further impact the overall quality of education.

The longer schools are closed, the greater the risk of long-term health issues and developmental challenges, especially for the youngest as well as increased mental health and well-being challenges, especially for the most vulnerable children, including children with disabilities and girls. The socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 will likely push more families to poverty resulting in increased dropouts, particularly for secondary education. This will require expansion and improved quality non-formal education programs for dropouts, including short-term skills training.

Lack of access to the Internet and smart devices (because of poverty) means that not all children can access on-line learning, and this is creating further inequalities highlighting the need for MoES to work with the Ministry of Telecommunications and with the private sector. Students with disabilities are also further disadvantaged by lack of inclusive learning materials. Poverty also means that in some families, parents are unable to spend time supporting their children to study at home.

### **Priorities for 2022 RTM**

- Consequences of quota restrictions on universal primary education.
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education human capital development and broader economic development.
- Impact of reduced non-wage recurrent budget on teacher training.
- Findings from the Public Expenditure Review focusing on medium-term budgeting reforms, public expenditure and institutional review, and financial management analysis (debottlenecking) in the education sector.

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### **End Notes**

<sup>i</sup> Prolonged school closures due to the pandemic could result in further worsening of already low learning outcomes of Lao children and young people. If not mitigated it is expected to lead to irreversible learning loss which will reduce the future productivity and lifetime earnings of affected students. According to the ADB, the present value of these losses is estimated at US\$1.25 trillion for developing Asia (including Lao PDR), equivalent to 5.4% of the region's 2020 gross domestic product (GDP). The World Bank also estimated a loss of US\$10 trillion in earnings over time for this generation of students whose learning has been disrupted by the pandemic. Source: [www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/692111/ado2021-special-topic.pdf](http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/692111/ado2021-special-topic.pdf)

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/18/covid-19-could-lead-to-permanent-loss-in-learning-and-trillions-of-dollars-in-lost-earnings>

<sup>ii</sup> Since 2015/16, the number of civil service primary teachers has decreased from 31,548 to 28,255 (a decline of 10.4%). The number of volunteer primary teachers has decreased from a peak of 4,236 in 2012/13 to 2,877 in 2020/21 (a decline of 32%). Over the past year alone, there is a decline of 1.5% of civil service primary teachers (3% or more in five provinces) and 15% of volunteer primary teachers (20% or more in five provinces). Across smaller primary schools (three or less teachers), 1,440 schools lost one or more teachers in the last year. In 2019/20, ten provinces, 10% or more primary teachers were volunteers, thus UPE relies heavily on volunteer teachers since the majority of volunteer primary teachers work in rural and remote areas in schools where it is difficult to deploy civil service teachers.

<sup>iii</sup> During the period 2014/15 to 2017/18, the annual quota for education was about 1,900 new positions. In 2021, the education quota allocation was only 535.

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<sup>iv</sup> The education share of the GoL non-wage recurrent budget has decreased from 8.4% in 2019 to 4.7% in 2021. Over the same time, the education share of the GoL wage recurrent budget has increased from 21.6% to 22.4%.