

RTIM 2023: Education and Sports Sector Working Group Report

SWG Name:

Education and Sports Sector Working Group (ESSWG). Annex 1 has a list of ESSWG Focal Groups)

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1. Main objectives and targets of Education and Sports Sector Working Group in 2023

The Education and Sports Sector Working Group, abbreviated to the "ESSWG" is a technical unit comprising development partners and Ministry officials. The ESSWG acts as a liaison to the government technical working groups, which the Ministry of Planning and Investment acts as the main focal point for studying and turning the Party's policy guidelines, strategies, plans, programs, projects of the government on education, science and sports into strategic plans, education, science and sports development plan periodically and effectively. ESSWG responsibilities include:

- Ensure the leadership and ownership of issues related to key strategies in the education and sports sector.
- Facilitate the integration of the overall policy and framework of various programs.
- Promote the harmonization and simplification of the education and sports sector.
- Facilitate joint responsibility for management for outcomes in the education and sports sector.
- Enhance the negotiations with the main stakeholders, including the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning and Investment on the investment on education, science, and sports.

2. What are the key results and impacts achieved within your sector in 2023 against the 2022 RTIM policy recommendations, and 9th NSEDP, SDGs and sector strategies?

(i) Improving the efficiency of resource management

Resource management includes financial and human resources, from both government and development partners. With limited budget allocation to the sector, the MoES has completed a Public Expenditure and Institutional Review (PEIR) with the aim to find efficiencies within the sector. Recommendations on the reform roadmap include **Reform Area 1** sets out activities aimed at addressing the inadequate volume of financing for education in Laos and involves stakeholders both within and outside the education sector. **Reform Area 2** identifies actions to improve the equity and overall balance of resource allocation within the education sector itself. **Reform Area 3** is concerned with improving the efficiency of resource allocation and management across four key input factors (teachers, school financing, teaching, and learning materials, and infrastructure) to improve the quality of education provision.

Apart from the Budget Support Program, there is no joint financing arrangement between MoES and development partners, although projects from development partners all align with ESSDP. The ESSWG and informal meetings of development partners continue to meet to discuss coordination of project work with ESSDP.

To improve management of government education resources, MoES has also followed the ESSDP recommendation to strengthen the Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC) and the Teacher Allocation Committee (TAC). The PBC comprises the Departments of Finance (Chair), Planning, Inspection, Organisation and Personnel, Inspection and Cabinet. Its mandate is to strengthen linkages between planning and financing. The PBC has met regularly since 2022 and has reported to ESSWG.

The TAC comprises the Departments of Organisation and Personnel (Chair), Planning, Finance, Teacher Education, Early Childhood Education, General Education, and Inspection. Its mandate includes cross-departmental discussion on teacher recruitment and allocation. The TAC has not yet met, and its mandate is implemented by the Department of Organisation and Personnel.

The MoES has also revised the school block grants scheme to improve school-level resource management. The Annual Costed Sector Plans have been implemented at provincial level and the ODA database has been further developed. The Prime Minister has issued a decree (#9) to address teacher shortages, and the MoES Decree on teachers (#2023) has been revised and endorsed.

(ii) Improving the quality of education

A revised curriculum with new teaching and learning resources has been developed supported by comprehensive in-service teacher training and a continuing professional development system for teachers being developed. The rollout of the revised curriculum started in September 2019 with grade one, and September 2023 with grade 5 being taught in all classrooms nationwide.

Development partners continue to support MoES to improve the quality of learning through targeted teacher training and supply of materials, together with pilot programs to provide reading readiness, and to support students who do not have Lao as their mother tongue. MoES does need additional non-wage recurrent funding to expand these pilot approaches throughout the country.

The 2023 Joint Sector Review Mission (JSRM) discussed issues for improving the quality of learning. While sub-national level perceived that student learning/ skills acquisition are adequate or sufficient for promotion to higher levels, they also believe key issues hindering education quality improvements are on weak teacher knowledge and skills, poor curriculum implementation, teachers not understanding the curriculum, lack of resources to support teaching and learning, insufficient teaching-learning materials, across all levels. Nevertheless, these perceptions are not consistent with low learning outcomes as evidenced in assessments such as Grade 3, Grade 5, and Grade 9.

The Department of Teacher Education (DTE) has begun a new approach for in-service teacher training in which DESB-based Pedagogical Advisers are abolished and replaced by Internal Pedagogical Support (IPS) who will implement continuing professional development (CPD). A

strengthened role for TTC staff is being implemented for in-service training with a role to train IPS and generally support CPD.

In June 2023, the Minister of Education and Sports signed a Continuous Professional Development Plan for Early Childhood and Primary Education Teachers 2024-2025. Objectives include provide training to teachers to improve their teaching skill at ECE and primary schools, including strengthening of teacher education institutions to be Teacher Professional Development Centres. Funding for further teacher training continues to be the major impediment to improved teaching and therefore improved learning. The new approach for in-service training of teachers includes a stronger role for TTC but many TTC staff have limited or no experience of classroom teaching experience.

A national teacher policy analysis has been conducted (PM Decree 202 on Teachers dated May 2023) and this addresses issues related to quality of learning outcomes and provides suggestion for improvements. However, no source of funding has been identified to implement the considerable costs of implementation of the new policy.

MoES is developing a Partnership Compact through the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). The compact is a road map to transformation within the education sector to improve learning outcomes. This compact will facilitate the work of both government and development partners to improve the quality of education.

The MoES has also revised the school block grants scheme to improve school-level resource management. The Annual Costed Sector Plans have been implemented and provincial level and the ODA database has been further developed.

(iii) Improve School Readiness - accelerate efforts to increase ECE access and improve ECE quality.

Enrolments in all sub-sectors decreased as a result of the economic crisis and COVID but ECE has rebounded better than others, both in public and private schools. With the support of development partners, MoES has developed a number of interventions to improve readiness for primary schooling. The reading readiness program was developed to build children's competency in early literacy - a key foundational skill that allows children to be adequately prepared for grade 1. The program was developed in the official Lao-Tai language with the objective to improve Lao-Tai reading readiness for all children. To date, 142 classrooms have received specialized kits of instructional materials to implement the reading readiness program and 183 teachers have been trained by coaches and master coaches on applying the reading readiness approach. The learning environment in the target schools now promotes a culture of reading and have led to better learning outcomes.

There are also some targeted Community-based School Readiness (CBSR) centre to help children aged 4 to 5 in educationally disadvantaged communities to be more prepared to enter formal primary school. Technical training for village facilitators is provided, along with a series of monitoring and coaching by District Education and Sports Bureau (DESB). The programme also

provides teaching-learning tools to help prepare children for primary school. Some INGOs also provide similar support, including child literacy development (CLD) models where sets of pedagogical tools are constructed to assess reading readiness and early literacy sub-skills tailored to the science of how children learn each language and that are accompanied by targeted remediation methodologies to strengthen children's literacy skills. Engaging families and PTAs to assist children with reading at home through training plus simple materials is also involved.

(iv) Increase investment in TVET.

Current funding by six major development partners provides USD 108 million over the period 2019 to 2027: an average of about USD 19.6 million per year. Future projects so far by three development partners for 2023 to 2027 will provide USD 26 million with other projects from other development partners still to be confirmed. There are also investments in TVET from China, including USD 40 million for the construction of the new TVET railway college and on-going support for training and training materials. There is other support from neighboring countries.

On 19 April 2023, the Government of Lao PDR issued a decree (194/GoL) on a Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development Fund. This decree defines the principles and regulations on the governance, application, and monitoring and inspection of the TVET Development Fund aiming at mobilizing and accumulating sufficient and sustainable funds for the development of TVET and vocational training operation.

The Budget Support program for 2021 to 2025 also has a focus on TVET. The total budget support is Euro 30 million for the Ministry of Finance, of which a milestone is for LAK 4.5 billion to be allocated for in-service training of TVET teachers, together with LAK 4 billion for upgrading vocational training equipment through the TVET Development Fund.

3.a Building on the recommendations of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the 9th NSEDP, what are the SWG's key priorities for 2024?

During 2023, a Joint Sector Review Mission (JSRM) was conducted by ESSWG. This mission interviewed education staff at 23 DESBs and seven regional TVET institutions. A Mid-Term Review (MTR) of ESSDP 2023-25 was also conducted.

Improved access to education

The ESSDP MTR recommended a disaggregated analysis of learning inputs, with an emphasis on the quality of teachers: their content knowledge, their training, whether those teaching multi-grade classrooms have dedicated training for that, their numbers, classroom presence, and the equitability of their deployment throughout the country. Other inputs, such as books, buildings, teaching and learning materials, classroom time, etc. should also be considered.

On-going opportunities for teachers' professional development embedded in a continuing professional development system will be required to improve the quality of teaching leading to improved student learning outcomes.

Quality of learning outcomes

In the period 2021-2023, annual budgets allocated to the education sector failed to meet the expectations of ESSDP. Thus, accumulating considerable financing gaps. This translated into sizeable cuts in key quality programs such as in-service teacher training, pedagogical support, textbook replenishment and school block grants. The MTR called for a strategic, yet moderate, increase in the non-wage recurrent budget of the education sector, to compensate for the loss of staff by offering better trained teachers with adequate pedagogical support and improved equipment.

Suggestions from the 2023 JSRM consultations included:

- More teacher development.
- Increased teaching and learning materials.
- Improved student assessment.
- Specific themes for TVET included:
 - Increased private sector engagement, including increased use of Dual Cooperative Training.
 - Entrepreneurship advocacy increased.
- Review the number of subjects in primary and secondary education.
- Promote more private sector involvement through public-private partnerships.

Improve School Readiness - accelerate efforts to increase ECE access and improve ECE quality.

The JSRM noted a need for greater parental advocacy; more teacher development; increased teaching and learning materials; improved student assessment; and increased number of internal PA. These needs are very strong across communities where Lao is not their mother tongue. An increase in the proportion of the one-year pre-primary classes is needed to expand the scope of access to ECE.

Increased investment in TVET

TVET senior managers noted that an increase in operational budgets was needed but economic factors beyond the control of MoES may be the major factor in reducing enrolments. The Budget Support program incentivises the operationalisation of the TVET Development Fund. The decree was signed in April 2023 and is expected to become functional in 2024. Other development partners have expressed interest in using this development fund as a channel for supporting TVET, although this would currently be out of existing funding allocations.

3.b Building on the recommendations of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the 9th NSEDP, what are the SWG's key priorities for the conceptualization of the 10th NSEDP? The full list of ESSDP MTR recommendations is in Annex 2

- 1) Increase prioritization to education in terms of resource allocation, by gradually increasing its share in total public spending, working with wider Government including MoF.
- 2) Develop a medium-term national school staffing strategy to improve equity and efficiency teacher deployment, to support effective teaching and learning.

- 3) Ensure sustainable, strategic and equitable investment in teacher development at all levels.
- 4) Accelerate the operationalisation of primary education Fundamental Quality Standards (FQS), and development of ECE and secondary education FQS. Institutionalise systems for use of FQS reporting in education planning and resource allocation at central and subnational levels. Disseminate FQS data/results through LESMIS.
- 5) Strengthen TVET policy making, governance and quality assurance through more strategic and systematic engagement between MoES and industry.
- 6) Increased production of skilled workers.

4. What are the key lessons learned for the SWG, including from the MTR of the 9th NSEDP?

- 1) Various assessments of learning outcomes demonstrate that participation in ECE is critical for improved outcomes, therefore MoES is considering how to improve the cost-effectiveness of providing ECE, particularly in more rural areas. Additional support programs are needed for children who do not have Lao as their mother tongue.
- 2) MoES acknowledges that the DESB-based Pedagogical Advisor approach is not effective and has moved to implement Internal Pedagogical Support within schools. However, additional funding will be needed to implement this on a national scale.
- 3) The JSRM indicated that TVET instruction has an imbalance between theory and practice. As a result, and with the support of development partners, MoES is moving to implement a 'Dual Cooperation Training' approach whereby instruction is shared between TVET institutions and the private sector.
- 4) ESSWG and Focal Group meetings need to have a stronger focus on policy dialogue and improving sector harmonization. At the executive-level ESSWG, dialogue should also set directions for future sector priorities.
- 5) Quality improvements in the sector will be limited while government funding continues to be well below the legislated 18 percent of the national budget,

Annex 1: Focal Groups of ESSWG

Focal Group 1: Early Childhood Education

1. Director General of Early Childhood Education Department Chair
2. UNICEF Co-Chair
3. Save the Children International Co-Chair
4. Deputy Director General of Early Childhood Education Department Vice Chair

Focal Group 2: General Education

1. Director Genral of Department of General Education Chair
2. Director General of Department of Non-Formal Education Co-Chair
3. UNICEF Co-Chair
4. Save the Children International Co-Chair
5. Deputy Director General of Department of General Education Vice Chair
6. Deputy Director General of Department of Non-Formal Education Vice Chair

Focal Group 3: Teacher Education Focal Group

1. Director General of Teacher Education Department Chair
2. UNESCO Co-Chair
3. Australia Co-Chair
4. Deputy Director General of Department of Teacher Education Vice Chair

Focal Group 4: Post-Secondary Education

1. Director General of Department of Higher Education Chair
2. Director General of Department of Technical and Vocational Education Co-Chair
3. Asian Development Bank Co-Chair
4. Luxembourg Agency for Development Cooperation Co-Chair
5. Representative from UNFPA Co-Chair
6. Deputy Director General of Higher Education Vice Chair
7. Director General of Technical and Vocational Education Department Vice Chair

Focal Group 5 Administration and Management of Education and Sports

1. Director General of Inspection Department Chair
2. Director General of Finance Department Co-Chair
3. Director General of Organisation and Personnel Co-Chair
4. Delegation of the European Union to Lao PDR Co-Chair
5. JICA Co-Chair
6. Deputy Director General of Planning Department Vice Chair
7. Deputy Director General of Finance Department Vice Chair
8. Deputy Director General of Organisation and Personnel Department Vice Chair

9. Deputy Director General of Inspection Department Vice Chair

Focal Group 6: Education and Science Research

1. Director General of Research Institute for Educational Sciences Chair
2. Director General of Research Institute for Education and Innovation Co-Chair
3. World Bank in Lao PDR Co-Chair
4. Plan International Laos Co-Chair
5. Deputy Director General of Research Institute for Educational Sciences Vice Chair
6. Deputy Director General of Institute for Education Science and innovation Vice Chair

Focal Group 7 Sports

1. Director General of Department of Elite Sports Chair
2. Director General of Department of Sport for All, Physical and Art Education Co-Chair
3. Child Fund Co-Chair
4. Director of Sports Institution Vice Chair

Annex 2: Key recommendations from the 2023 Mid-Term Review of ESSDP 2021-25

1. Undertake analysis on the reasons for declining enrolments (ECE to secondary education) including identification of demand and supply side factors. Analysis should be disaggregated, geographically and also related to equity.
2. Organize advocacy campaigns to engage with children, parents and the community, including development of early warning systems and messaging for out-of-school children, to promote the importance and value of education.
3. Promote ECE participation through expansion of cost-effective ECE models, e.g., Community Based School Readiness, mobile ECE, and analysis of the one-year pre-primary program, where feasible prioritizing five-year olds.
4. Undertake analysis on the feasibility of expanding the provision of scholarships for disadvantaged students, including those from low-income families, students living in rural/remote areas, non-Lao Tai ethnic students, children with disabilities. Analysis should include targeting and selection systems, level of funding and cost-feasibility.
5. Expand provision of Lao language support and learning materials to non-Lao-Tai children in ECE and early grades of primary education.
6. At primary level, reorient instruction towards strengthening Lao language and Mathematics and consider increasing the number of instructional hours. Strengthen enforcement of 45-minute lesson duration (not 90 minutes).
7. Institutionalize formative assessment in teaching and learning practices, including systems to regularly monitor whether students are learning and to identify students that are lagging behind. Use formative assessment to design and target remedial/ catch-up support.
8. Provide systematic in-service training/CPD for ECE and primary teachers including emphasis on Lao language and mathematics content and pedagogy, multi-grade teaching skills and formative assessment.
9. Ensure sustainable, strategic and equitable investment in teacher development, prioritizing in-service training/CPD, establish a permanent MoES budget line.
10. Develop school principals' capacity as educational leaders, ensuring time for instructional leadership activities and learning from practices used in highly effective schools.
11. Finalise primary teaching standards and accelerate the development/revision of ECE and secondary standards. Ensure standards are fully disseminated and (i) used to inform teacher development and (ii) applied to teacher performance assessment tools and processes.
12. Strengthen TVET policy making, governance and quality assurance through more strategic and systematic engagement between MoES and industry, including in developing occupational standards and designing curriculum. The operations of the National Training Council and Trade Working Groups should be strengthened to facilitate this.
13. Ensure that TVET course design and delivery includes sufficient practical training components to ensure job-focused pedagogies for students to acquire labor-market relevant skills.

14. Increase MoES investment in in-service professional development for TVET trainers, ensuring that training is focused on the increasingly diverse course provision and on practical training pedagogies.
15. Increase prioritization to education in terms of resource allocation, by gradually increasing its share in total public spending, working with wider Government including MoF.
16. Specifically, in the short-term, secure moderate increases in 2024 and 2025 in the non-wage recurrent budgets to fund critical education quality related inputs (SBGs, in-service teacher training, textbooks) as outlined in the revised ESSDP Financing Plan scenarios.
17. Improve the rules and process for SBG fund releases to ensure their timeliness.
18. Assess the feasibility of mobile money solutions to enable direct SBG transfers to schools (with appropriate safeguards).
19. Operationalise the Teacher Allocation Committee to facilitate inter-departmental consultations and decision-making, and with a strengthened central role in allocating new and replacement teachers, to improve teacher deployment to areas of greatest need.
20. Develop a medium-term national school staffing strategy to improve equity and efficiency teacher deployment, to support effective teaching and learning.
21. Develop and introduce a contract teacher system to provide greater flexibility in teacher deployment including addressing short term imbalances (PM Decree No.9).
22. Accelerate the operationalisation of primary education FQS, and development of ECE and secondary education FQS. Institutionalise systems for use of FQS reporting in education planning and resource allocation at central and subnational levels. Disseminate FQS data/results through LESMIS.
23. Strengthen the role of the VEDC in school management including monitoring the implementation of the school development plan, use of SBGs, and teacher attendance.