

1 CONTEXT OF THE SAVE THE CHILDREN NORWAY EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN THE LAO PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (Lao PDR)

Section 1 gives some information about the country giving a context to children's lives and their educational opportunities in Lao PDR, in order to give some understanding of the challenges that face an education development programme.

1.1 THE CONTEXT OF LAO PDR

The Lao PDR has been a one-party state, governed by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party since 1975. The country is land-locked, bordering China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar. The population of 5.6 million is young and diverse with 50% from ethnic minority groups and 50% under 18 years of age. Despite regional economic integration; EU support to join the WTO; normalised trade relations with the US and a successful period as Chair of Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) (2004-2005), economic growth remains slow.

Trade is largely cross-border, dominated by imports from China, Vietnam and Thailand. Foreign direct investment is limited and mainly targeted at natural resource exploitation in hydropower, timber and precious metals. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has stated that the government needs to move quickly to implement reforms associated with the National Growth and Poverty Eradication. A major plank of these reforms is to raise government revenue (currently 11% of GDP) to meet the country's 'pressing development needs' (IMF, 2006). Lao is currently ranked 133 out of 175 countries according to the UN Human Development Index¹.

1.2 STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF SITUATION OF CHILDREN²

POPULATION	
Population	5,525,000
Children 0-18 years old	2,800,000
Ethnic minorities, % of total population	32% Lao Theung (upland); 22% Lao Soung (highland); ethnic Vietnamese/Chinese 1%
Population below PPP \$1 a day	26%
EDUCATION	
Pre-school enrolment	7.3%
Primary school enrolment	83%
Girls/boys enrolled	45.6% / 54.4 %
Cohort reaching grade 5	50%

¹ The Human Development Index (HDI) is a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education, and standard of living for countries worldwide. It is a standard means of measuring well-being, especially child welfare.

² See Annex 6 for a fuller picture Sources: MDGs Progress Report Lao PDR, January 2004 and SCNL Annual Report 2007 dated 14.02.07

Children with disability enrolled in project schools	2,754
Secondary school enrolment	229,023
Ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education	77

1.3 EDUCATION IN LAO PDR

In 1975 only 30% of Lao children had any access to basic education. Between 1975 and 1990 the main thrust of government education policy was to increase the percentage. The Ministry of Education (MoE) has focused in more recent years on both school enrolment and on the quality of education and there has been greater attention to extending services to disadvantaged children including girls, ethnic minority and disabled children.

The current net enrolment rate (NER) is in the region of 83% but a closer look at the figures reveals that ethnicity, isolation and gender all impact negatively on school attendance³. The figures give a country average, and, in fact, there are marked differences in urban and rural enrolment rates, between rich and poor and between Lao Loum and ethnic minorities. Only some 56% of children complete five years of primary schooling and repetition is common with a national grade 1 repetition rate of 38%, averaged from figures which range from 34% in Vientiane to over 50% in more isolated provinces. Late enrolment and repetition leads to numbers of overage children studying in primary schools. The figures attest to continuing problems with quality and internal efficiency, and indicate the difficulty many children have in reaching higher grades of schooling. There are also economic pressures on poor children to leave school after a year or so.

Lower Secondary schooling comprises a three-year course as does Upper Secondary. In line with the Education for All (EFA) Plan and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Government policy is to make schooling in grades 1-8 compulsory. The primary curriculum was revised in the mid-1990s and most of the teachers we met are generally happy with it. Most criticism was made of the pacing of the mathematics syllabus. The recent rash of private kindergartens serves mainly urban children, with very small government investment in this part of the education system. Most teachers train for 1 year following Upper Secondary (Grade 11) but more than 15% of teachers are unqualified, and, in remote areas, many teachers may only have primary education themselves. Salaries are low and may only arrive erratically. Nearly all teachers need a second source of income.

One of the greatest challenges to MoE and supporting donors agencies in multi-lingual and under-resourced Lao PDR is the development of strategies to support the 'non standard child', that is, non-Lao speaking children, ethnic minority children, poor and rural children, and children with special needs (CSN). Before 1992 there was no provision for children with special needs, but a growing awareness of the need for such a service, commitment to Child Rights and the Education for All plans has resulted in significant advances in this area and more generally in efforts to raise the quality of basic education.

³ For more detailed discussion see: [Seeking a Fine Balance: Lessons from Inclusive Education in Lao PDR](#) Holdsworth, J (2002) SCUK. London

The Lao Education for All Action Plan 2003-2015 seeks to accomplish three major tasks: *equitable access, improved quality and relevance, and a strengthening of educational management* and SCNL supports the Ministry of Education (MoE) to achieve these objectives. At the heart of all three education projects is the general aim of improving the quality of young learners' experience of schooling. Because SCNL works closely with the MoE, its work is in line with MoE policy. Throughout the document we suggest areas in which SCNL may act as advocate and support to MoE to improve certain aspects of implementation and to develop its own strategic focus to ensure the maximum impact of its input.

1.4 BACKGROUND TO PROJECTS

SCNL works in Lao PDR for two main reasons. Firstly, the country is one of the least developed in the world and human development indices are very low (See section 1.2 and Annex 6). Per capita average income is given as \$400 (2005) by the Government of Lao (GoL) and \$572 by the US Department of State with 26% of Laotians living on one dollar or less a day, with high levels of infant mortality and low levels of basic education. Secondly, despite high levels of development investment, it is widely held that children from ethnic minority groups, with disabilities or other social differences, find it difficult to benefit from the economic development process.

Amongst recent changes in leadership in Lao PDR a new Minister of Education, Dr Somkot Mangnomek, has been appointed and Madam Sengdeuane Lachanthaboun, former Director of the Teacher Training Department, has become the new Vice Minister of Education. The newly elected Prime Minister (Mr. Bouasone Bouphavahn) has indicated an interest in the development of the education sector. Sector reform is underway and will probably result in a restructuring of the MoE with a prioritising of issues related to improving the quality of teaching and management at all levels of the system, indicating an increasingly favourable climate for developments in the education system.

The government presented the Sixth National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010 (NSEDPlan) at the donor Roundtable Meeting in December 2006. At the Roundtable Meeting, the Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) Group presented a statement on various aspects of the new plan, including education. This was the first time that the NGO community in Lao PDR has come together to comment on government policy at this level. In December the National Assembly passed several new acts, including a law on the protection of the rights and interests of children. This important legislation outlines a legal framework for child protection. Challenges remain, however, concerning the government's ability to establish the proposed child protection bodies at various levels and to see that the provisions of the new law are implemented. Meanwhile a draft of the Lao PDR's second Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) report was distributed for comment by the National Commission for Mothers and Children (NCMC). Save the Children Norway in Lao PDR (SCNL) is hopeful that the leadership and legislative changes outlined above will result in a higher prioritisation of education and child protection issues.

2 MID-TERM EVALUATION

The team was asked to evaluate the education programme of SCNL which consists of three projects: Quality Education Project (QEP), Inclusive Education (IE) and Early Learning in

Primary Schools (ELPS). In the past the projects have been evaluated separately and ELPS underwent a thorough review in January 2007. In accordance with the Terms of Reference (ToR) (to be found in Annex 2) the evaluation team structured the investigation under the headings *General learning and impact*, *Project structure and implementation partners*, and *Linkages*. In these Sections generic issues to do with all projects are discussed. The review also looks at *Specific issues concerning each project* and *Cross cutting issues*. Under the heading *Future Directions* recommendations are offered for short and longer term developments.

In country field work took place between 29th April and 16th May 2007. The evaluation team consisted of two expatriate advisers, working with two officers from the MoE, Mrs Chanhom and Mrs Panid. One expatriate team member left on 14th May. To undertake the field work the team divided into two, the teams visiting selected areas in Vientiane, Champasak, Bolikhamsay and Luang Prabang. Some visits were also made in Vientiane Capital. The visit schedules of teams A and B are to be found in Annex 3.

A three page paper was produced to inform preliminary discussions with the Country Representative, by telephone, and discussion with SCNL implementation staff. A consultation workshop was held for some 60 government officials at Thalath, Vientiane Province. The workshop programme is to be found in Annex 7.

The approach to the final evaluation included the gathering and analysis of evidence from project documentation and data produced by the MoE, as well as interviews, and discussion with key stakeholders, who included MoE officials at central, provincial and district level, representatives of major donors, village dignitaries, members of pupil parents' associations, teachers and children. The review team followed the suggestions given in the ToR, with the exception of the use of questionnaires, feeling that it would not be possible in the short time available to write, translate, pilot, implement and analyse questionnaires. Although some analysis of school and Ministry held statistics was made, difficulties in finding accurate data was encountered. Issues to do with accurate monitoring are discussed in more depth in the sub-section of Section 4.1 which deals with Project Monitoring.

We visited 17 schools, as well as a Teacher Education Institute (TEI). A list of people met is to be found in Annex 4. There were, of course, some things that could not be seen in the time; in particular we saw no short term training courses in action. All discussions and interviews were guided by key questions agreed among the review team and respondents were encouraged to talk around topics and offer their own opinions. We felt that, in many cases, we achieved free and frank discussion.

In the evaluation report, we have placed major recommendations for each section and some sub-section in a box at the start of a section. Further recommendations are added at the end, and areas for consideration arising from discussion in the text are underlined, so that their significance is not lost. It should be noted that this report was commissioned by and is directed to SCNL while many of the recommendations can only be implemented by MoE. SCNL may wish to advocate for some of the changes.

We would like to acknowledge the help and support SCNL gave to the mission, in terms of making staff available, planning the field visits and facilitating travel arrangements.

3 GENERAL LEARNING AND IMPACT

In this section, in an overview of all three projects, we look at the learning of children, project learning, with a review of the impact so far, and recommendations for the strengthening that impact.

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

Serious attention is given, through training and follow up on how to use the outcomes of assessment of children's learning to improve classroom pedagogy This can be particularly aimed at head teachers and pedagogic advisers (PA)

3.1 AT SCHOOL LEVEL

The following exchange took place during an interview with Vienkone aged 9 years at Boungphao Primary School, Tulakom District

Question: *'What do you like about your school?'*

Answer *'There's a chance to learn here'*.

Evidence from the classrooms visited, lessons observed, and from discussions with children such as Vienkone above indicate that Lao schools have come a long way since the older generation were schooled and indeed there are many *'chances to learn'* now: *'Teachers were volunteers in those days, they were never on time, many would beat us and we had to sit silently and listen to them.'* was said at a Focus Group at *Boungphao Primary School, Tulakom District*. The changes brought about by the projects are welcomed by parents and influential community members. *'The children enjoy coming to school now. We don't have to make them, they are ready and get here early'* was a parent's comment in *Hadkor School in Pak-ou District of Luang Prabang*.

There were marked differences in the state of the school building visited during the mid-term evaluation; buildings ranged from solid and well maintained to one which was in such poor repair that the children have to play outside on windy days, in case the building falls down.



However, all schools had made improvements to the learning environment, the least developed had introduced living plants to decorate the classroom and displayed test results whereas the most developed had children's work displayed on the walls and teaching materials available in the classroom or well stored in a resource centre. The school premises were generally clean, the grounds tended with some flowers growing, classrooms swept and litter picked up. The cleanliness and orderliness of the school was noted by children as an important factor in their enjoyment of school.

3.2 PEDAGOGY

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

Teacher education courses should give more attention to the teaching of basic classroom management skills

In this section we give an overview of pedagogy seen in the schools supported by the three programmes. There were variations in the teachers' abilities to use methods learned through training supported by SCNL and, as is to be expected, the schools with the longest history of support had made most progress in teaching methodology. However, even in schools in which teachers had been recently trained by the IE programme, improvements were noticeable. In the better schools teacher behaviour was characterised by a strong sense of professionalism e.g. well prepared lessons, a sense of purpose, an understanding of the scope and sequence of learning and teaching, and a good understanding of the centrality of the child in the learning process. Other examples of good pedagogic practice include encouragement of the children to participate, praise for doing so, and an effort to use *some* group activities during the lesson.

Weaknesses include a tendency for teachers to pay little regard to classroom organisation; in many the children sat in rows of pairs looking forward at the blackboard, a scenario indicative of a traditional teacher-centred approach. Teacher talk from the front predominates (during two complete lessons observed teacher-child talk was a ratio of approximately 80:10 respectively), and we saw few opportunities for children to take ownership of their own learning. There were some examples of interesting group work - in one school children worked collaboratively and were given a joint mark for the exercise - but generally there was little opportunity for children individually or in groups to *decide* a course of action or consider an alternative option. There also seems to be little chance for the teacher to veer from the official unit of teaching, to make curriculum links to other areas of work, or to relate what is being learned to the local context. We did see examples of children being encouraged to participate e.g. doing a worked example on the black board.



through pair or group work

Generally classroom pedagogy is characterised by:

- a didactic approach to teaching with a predominance of teacher over pupil talk and use of teacher 'call' and pupil 'response'
- children responding to questions rather than initiating them
- little evidence of work directed to developing of cognitive/thinking of children e.g. understanding of cause and effect, hypothesis testing
- children rarely asked to consider alternatives and reach a decision

- teachers tending not to vary the pace or sequence of tasks set down in the teacher's guide
- little evidence of one-to-one teaching
- a majority of activities involving copying from the blackboard or textbook, writing for accuracy rather than fluency, and little integration of subject areas or teaching directed to the local context.

Materials grants have made an important contribution to school life and there is evidence that they have been used to produce teaching aids. In some classrooms pictures and posters decorate the walls and we saw well established resource centers. Several schools had rooms set aside as school libraries and one school had produced 'reading baskets' of books suspended from trees for the children to use during breaks⁴.

In a number of schools women teachers tried to teach in the presence of their own young child, who could be very demanding of attention.



The PPA should help to support the teacher in making arrangements for child care.

The blackboard is the most used visual aid and teachers should be more aware of visibility problems for children sitting at the back the class, either because of the size of writing or the poor quality of contrast, e.g. the need to keep the board dust free. The PPA should maintain quality control of blackboards and replace them when they are damaged or the surface deteriorates. Not all children had their own or had access to shared textbooks. One

school had no text books at all.

However it should be noted that at all schools both parents and children noted .a more relaxed relationship between teacher and children, teachers coming to school more regularly and on time, and as a head of a PPA put it , '*The teachers pay more attention to children's learning now. And children are more ready to come to school. We think that there have been some important developments in teaching and learning*'.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO TRAINING PROGRAMMES

- all training programmes give stronger focus to simple classroom management techniques as these can bring immediate improvement to the learning environment: for example teachers should be made aware of such things as
 - the importance of positioning themselves in the classroom and moving around the room rather than always teaching from the front
 - using displays as teaching aids and changing them regularly
 - attaching posters to strings rather than pasting them directly onto walls

⁴ A practice introduced by another INGO.

- children’s work and posters displayed at children’s eye level and changed regularly
- folders (e.g. large envelopes suspended from string) for storing work not done in note books. The folder can be shared with parents
- more attention should be given to ways of rearranging the seating of children and their position in the class: having children in a semi-circle with the teacher in the centre is one possibility. Where furniture is fixed or too damaged to facilitate group work, sitting on mats or working outside could be considered
- teachers are given additional training on strategies for working with individual and small groups of children whilst the rest of the class are occupied: this has been developed for the multi-grade teaching component but is appropriate for use in standard or pre-school classrooms
- teachers with a responsibility for a particular curriculum area explore ways to build bridges with other curriculum areas and to include at least 20% of locally-directed work
- teachers, assisted by the PA and cluster meetings, explore ways to foster critical thinking skills, imagination and a sense of individual and group responsibility for learning
- MoE and the donor community pay more attention to simple classroom process indicators of quality⁵ and do not lose sight of the importance of play in learning for children of all ages. Such indicators might include pupil time-on-task; ratio of time spent by pupils in independent and group learning, leadership roles played by children in their day-to-day classroom learning

3.3 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

A lighter assessment load is consider, in particular for grade 1

MoE considers automatic promotion from grade 1 to grade 2

An effective school is an improving school and an essential component of improvement - at pupil, school and national levels - is the quality of its assessment. Generally this is an area that requires significant attention by MoE and SCNL. The MoE and SCNL have made great strides in placing the child closer to the centre of the learning process. While this is to be applauded, what is needed now is for greater attention to be placed upon the monitoring and assessment of that child’s learning, with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy.

There is a clear and organised assessment system in place – children are assessed through monthly tests. The IE Project Phase II Final Evaluation Report (2004) suggests new ways should be found to measure children’s progress⁶. The report suggests this might be through

⁵ Heneveld, W (1994) Planning and Monitoring the Quality of Education in sub-Saharan Africa. African Technical department Human Resources Technical Note 14. Washington DC: World Bank

⁶ EFA Performance since 1990 and Challenges for 2004-2015

Basic Education Attainments (p.21) lists 15 areas of improvement with no reference to children’s performance in key curriculum areas e.g. Lao language, Mathematics, and Science (World Around Us)

individual report books and in discussion with parents. This has been trialed and is generally welcomed by parents and should be extended. From evidence of school records and from discussions with teachers it appears many are marking within a range of 2 to 7 (5/10 being the pass mark). Generally children score between 5 and 7 with one or two slow learners receiving scores of 2 and 3/10.

A great deal of time appears to be devoted to revising for the monthly tests, doing them (teachers told us 50 minutes was allocated to each of the 13 subjects per month), and, for teachers, in drawing up score sheets and communicating the results to parents. Reducing testing, perhaps starting with grade 1, would allow greater focus on and attention to formative experiences, e.g. on reading and writing strategies, rather than summative exercises that can take up a great deal of time, result in unnecessary anxiety and produce inefficiency when grades are repeated.

Consideration should also be given to automatic promotion from grade 1 to 2.



The advantages in reducing the assessment burden include shifting the focus from summative to formative assessment, freeing the teacher for at least one week per term (when normally administering the test), to focus upon key curriculum work in literacy and numeracy and preparing children to progress to the next grade. Currently the MoE in England and Wales is reviewing its assessment policy with a recommendation that children be formally assessed from the age of 11 rather than earlier. A challenge will be to persuade teachers, the community and

possibly some in the MoE that a change in the assessment regime does not mean lowering standards. It would be for important teachers to develop alternative ways to assess children's work and other forms of communication between parent and teacher which could include monthly parent/teacher meetings. 'Lighter' assessment, based on activities drawn from children's day-to-day work would place a focus on *what really* needs to be monitored in terms of children's learning. Also we were told by education officials that Education Management Information System (EMIS) is not yet fully functioning, although is expected to a focus of development in the next years.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Support where appropriate may be given to the MoE to review and improve the assessment system. Such improvements might include:

- more time in training given in principles of summative and formative assessment, classroom application and their link to improved learning
- consideration given to reducing the amount of monthly testing particularly during grade 1
- consideration given to automatic promotion from grade 1 to 2

- children's monthly scores adjusted to reflect adverse influences upon their performance
- consideration given to the implementation of regular parent/teachers meeting
- teachers reward both children who score well and those who have *improved* significantly during the assessment period.
- attention is focused upon improving the EMIS in SCNL supported projects. This may well be an area in which the MoE seeks help from a short-term external consultant
- the MoE consider the production of a template for the recording of assessment scores

3.4 MONITORING OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

In training more emphasis is given to classroom management, with a strengthening of the roles and relationships of head teachers and pedagogic advisers (PA).

Generally, in all projects, there is not enough emphasis on the quality of children's learning in both the outcomes and processes. Evidence from elsewhere e.g. Indonesia shows that effective change at school level occurs when head-teachers play take an in-service training role as well as an administrative function within a school. With school clusters now functioning well, the time is opportune for head-teachers and PAs – working in tandem – to identify appropriate in-service curriculum development roles within schools and school clusters. Priorities might well flow from the school self evaluation action plans. PAs can play an important role facilitating the implementation of these plans and in particular the hands-on role they and the heads will play. We were impressed with the PAs that we met during the field work in their enthusiasm and commitment and felt that they are well placed to offer training and follow up support. They have the potential to provide and improve synergy between SCNL's 3 education programmes as they had grasped and internalised the principles in common to them. The implementation of the planned training of head teacher and teachers of grades 1 and 2 needs to be prioritised and included PA, in order to provide stronger support to early childhood development and education (ECDE) and support the links between pre-school, and grades 1 and 2.

Parents can play a stronger role in school improvement. More detailed recommendations on developments of the role of the PA and head teacher and other actors are to be found in Section 3.6.

The ToR asked for analysis of student enrolment, grade completion, learning outcomes, promotion rates, and student drop-out. We found it difficult to make definitive judgments on the impact of the projects. In the case of ELPS, we saw children who would not otherwise be in school, but in a number of schools, the project impact was obscured by dramatically falling rolls, or in one case, dramatically rising rolls. Birth spacing and urban drift were given as reasons for falling roles, and resettlement as the reason for a sudden expansion in the number of pupils. In the small class numbers, many with under 10 pupils, it is reasonable to expect higher pass rates, better grade completion and promotion rates because of greater

teacher attention. In all schools we were told that all children in the village were attending school. This did not always coincide with our observations, for example, of school age children working on market stalls. We were particularly concerned with the low ratio of girls to boys in some schools. In a number of villages we saw schools that have small ratio of girls to boys. As an example in 2 schools in Luang Prabang we saw typical classes of classes of 21 boys with 6 girls, and 23 boys with 8 girls. On exploring this with parents we were told, *'All the children are in school'*. This was confirmed by the children who told us all their friends come to school. The local explanation is, *'Lao people produce boys'*. There may be an issue here that deserves the attention of SCNL. The table below illustrates a typical situation of falling roles in Xieng Ngeun District, for the year 2006-2007

<i>Children attending the school by grade</i>	
<i>Grade 5</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Grade 4</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Grade 3</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Grade 2</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Grade 1</i>	<i>16</i>

In terms of repetition we found evidence that generally rates were falling. To illustrate this, the figures produced and displayed in one school are reproduced below. They contrast percentage repetition rates for two grades in the school over a period of 8 years.

<i>Repetition rates at a primary school: Bolikhamsay Province</i>		
<i>1998-2006</i>		
<i>Date</i>	<i>Grade 1 %</i>	<i>Grade 5 %</i>
<i>1998-1999</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>1999-2000</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>2000-2001</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>2001-2002</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>02</i>
<i>2002-2003</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>08</i>
<i>2003-2004</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>2004-2005</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>2005-2006</i>	<i>08</i>	<i>07</i>

Many schools reported very small repetition rates e.g. six children altogether in the year 2006, though records over the project period were often difficult to find and those available showed fluctuations from year to year. In discussion with teachers on the reasons why rates fluctuated, it was clear that causes usually related to problems outside the control of the pupils (e.g. staffing issues). There was no adjustment to the testing regime with a result that pupils 'failed' through no fault of their own, yet they had to repeat the year.

There was also a remarkable difference in repetition rates reported by different schools, differences not sufficiently explained by the head teacher or PPA. The situation could be investigated further.

3.5 SCHOOL SELF EVALUATION (SSE)

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

SSE can be a valuable tool in strengthening schools to take responsibility for their own development. It could be used to establish a model of whole school or whole school cluster development

SSE has been trialed in nine schools in three districts in three provinces. The initiative is part of the IE project but has potential for being integrated into all school development work. A good, an average and a weak school were selected in each district. We visited three schools which had taken part in the pilot programme, one of which we suspected was a weak school. It was difficult to judge the progress of the school on one visit, but the teachers told us of the process they had been through in some detail, with obvious pride. There was also enthusiastic feed back from the head of that District Education Bureau (DEB), who told us that three schools in his district had used the programme successfully and that all three schools had been motivated to work on the identified priorities. However, he had reservations about the amount of training needed to implement the model. SSE could be a valuable tool in strengthening schools to take responsibility for their own development. It could be a means of establishing a model of whole school development or whole school cluster development. SCN has worked closely with UNICEF on the development of School Self Assessment tool. Resource persons and materials have been shared. This is a good model of collaboration and should be maintained and extended.

3.6 EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY RESEARCH

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

SCNL may consider extending their support to MoE in the area of evidence based policy research

Ministry officials told us more than once of their need for an evidence base, in particular when in discussion over policy with major donors. It is also vital in deploying resources. Such an evidence base might consist of data concerned with key learning outcomes e.g. reading and numeracy scores, the use of the community in curriculum planning, examples of effective inclusion practices, and alternative assessment activities. The latter, for example, might focus upon grade 1 and involve pilot school clusters with data being collected by head-teachers and visiting PAs. This is an area that SCNL may consider extending as it can impact directly on the achievement of EFA goals.

3.7 ENHANCING AND SHARPENING ROLES IN MAINTAINING QUALITY IN SCHOOLS

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

MoE reviews roles of the PA in relation to the head teacher and strengthen the PA's role in provision of technical support

Pedagogic Advisors

The following was a question put to a PA.

Q: 'What are the key pedagogic issues within primary schools?'

PA: 'Some subjects teachers are not trained for, Art and Literature and Music. They teach singing instead and group work, now less than 50% of teachers do it and when they do group work the children must help each other, exchange experience and do more thinking activities.'

There are currently 144 PAs working in the Lao education system. Established as part of the late 1990s curricular reforms, and working from PES and DEB, their major function is to work with teachers and cluster schools in the implementation of the new curriculum (mid - 1990s) and to support the introduction of initiatives such as the self-evaluating tools for schools and the Child-friendly schools initiatives. Discussions with PA were instructive – a number had internalised the principles of child-centred education, principles underpinning QEP and child-friendly schools and IE and were aware of the synergies that exist and could be further developed between the IE, QEP, ELPS and Child-friendly school projects. Of benefit now would be SCNL support to the strategic planning of priorities for the next academic year in consultation with DEBs and school clusters.

The PA could play an enhanced key role linking activities between the Teacher Education Institute (TEI) DEB and school clusters. If, as proposed, TEI tutors are to spend time in schools acquiring recent and relevant experience, the PA could play an important bridging role between initial and in-service teacher education.

Head teachers

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

The role of the head teacher is crucial in driving up quality in schools, and training for head teachers should be intensified to support the role

The head of school or cluster can be the driving force in school development. This is supported by evidence from elsewhere⁷ which indicates the crucial role of the head teacher in raising quality in all areas of the school curriculum. Head teacher interviews indicated that they are concerned with a mix of social and educational issues, including developing good relations with the community, improving the physical facilities of the school environs and in bringing about improvement to teaching/learning in all curriculum areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING AND SHARPENING ROLES IN MAINTAINING QUALITY IN SCHOOLS

- PA and head teachers work with teacher education students to support the transition from college to first teaching appointment.

⁷ Hawes, H & Stephens, D (1990) Questions of Quality: Primary Education and Development. Harlow: Longman.
Alexander, R (2000) Culture and Pedagogy: international comparisons in primary education. Oxford: Blackwell

- attention is paid to the development of a cooperative approach between the PA and head teacher
- PAs are guided in the focus of their work in relation to areas of synergy between projects and the development of strategic plans.

Pupil/parents Associations (PPA), parents and community

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

A stronger role in monitoring classroom standards could be assigned to the PPA, linked to advocacy for the role of parents as the first educators, in order to affirm the parental role in education achievement.

In many countries community organisations such as the PPA have a strong role in raising standards. We met parents and community leaders in every school visited. Many had a strong commitment to the role they play in encouraging children to attend school, checking that teachers attend school and come on time, support to the repair of school buildings, including beautifying the school compound by the planting of flowers and trees and the production of learning materials. However, there was still a tendency for the PPA to play the traditional role of support to facilities, with little understanding of the importance of parents in the educational process: in one school the parents reflected on their role, '*Our job is to make sure the children get to school, so we come to the school gate. It is then the teachers' role*'. A stronger role in monitoring classroom standards could be assigned to the PPA, and linked to advocacy for the role of the parent as the first educator of the child, in order to affirm the importance of the parental role in children's education and supporting them to take ownership of their children's learning.

A number of PPA members expressed a wish for advocacy training. Suggestions ranged from strategies to encourage poorer families to enroll children in school to ideas for improved community fund-raising to support improvements to the physical environment of the school.

3.8 QUALITY OF TEACHER EDUCATION

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

A detailed review of training programmes should take place in the next few months in order to identify SCNL's strengths and priorities in quality education. It is important for SCNL to gain a strategic oversight of all the training across courses, identifying synergies, overlaps, and gaps.

In this section we look at the quality of teacher education, in particular the colleges' ability to support the new module on IE and the 30 week preschool teacher training course. Further discussion of the 30 week pre-school training course is to be found in Section 6.2. The teacher training system has been reformed with the assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank (WB). WB funds have gone into erecting new modern college buildings, decreasing the number of colleges and maintaining the personnel with the

best qualities within the system. At present about 45% of the staff have a bachelor's degree from the National University of Laos. To become a primary teacher those with 8 years of education train for 3 years (8+3) and those with 11 years train for one year (11+1), the latter gradually becoming the norm. The annual output from the new Teacher Education Institutes (TEI) is approximately 3,000 as against 6,000 in the former system. Currently the MoE estimates that 15.4% of teachers working within the system are untrained. The national Teacher Education Strategy 2006-2015 and Action Plan 2006-2010 lists the following identified eleven 'issues and challenges' in the preparation of teachers:

- shortage of primary and lower secondary teachers
- number of female teachers from ethnic groups
- teachers for remote areas
- basic physical facilities for teaching and learning are inadequate
- inefficient administration and management systems in teacher education institutions
- the pre-service teacher education curriculum is not relevant to current needs
- no quality assurance system for teacher education
- many unqualified and untrained teachers
- a weak connection between pre-service and in-service training
- insufficient budget has been allocated for teacher education

The MoE are aware of the need to revise the pre-service teacher education curriculum to bring it into line with current school needs, particularly with regard to multi-grade teaching, inclusive education and ELPS. In teacher training there is a continuing mismatch between the nature and purpose of initial teacher education and in-service provision. In discussion with teachers currently at the early stage of their teaching career it was clear that they arrive in the classroom with quite a lot of theoretical knowledge but are unprepared for the practical and classroom management aspects of teaching and with little understanding of key pedagogic principles associated with child-centred methodologies. A lack of synergy between pre-service teacher education and classroom realities was evidenced from discussions with head teachers and teachers who had worked with teaching students on teaching practice. *'they don't know how to teach', 'they only know theories', 'I had to teach them everything'*. We should note that this is a common and world wide dichotomy between teachers and teacher educators. From discussion with officials of the Teacher Training Department, it was clear that colleges are aware of the importance of closing the theory-practice divide, and are equally aware that the mismatch was exacerbated by the department's lack of involvement in the 1990s MoE school curriculum reforms. Senior staff within the Teacher Training and General Education Departments within the MoE are aware of the value in working closely together particularly in areas of common interest e.g. where projects overlap. In assisting the departments to strengthen working synergies SCNL could help to identify key points in the projects' histories of projects – at which representatives of both departments can work and learn together.

In terms of the IE module developed with the support of SCNL and the 30 ELPS curriculum there are many important strengths that can be built transferred to the teacher education sector. The curricula have been carefully developed with stakeholders so that there is a strong sense of ownership. From visits to TEIs we found that the trainers have deployed considerable skill and creativity in working with large and small groups of trainees, and in the ELPS course in particular in the production of teaching materials and methods appropriate

to the young child. The greatest danger we see is for course delivery in the IE module and ELPS 30 week course to become routine. To counteract this we reiterate previous recommendation for PAs to play an bridging role between TEI and school, giving TEI tutors the opportunity spend more time in schools, acquiring recent and relevant experience, and so learning ways to tailor their courses more closely to the reality of the classroom situation.

SCNL supported training programmes

A great deal of training is currently supported by SCNL. It makes up approximately 50% of the budget with only some 11% devoted to monitoring of implementation and outputs/outcomes. A detailed review of training programmes should take place in the next few months in order to identify SCNL's strengths and priorities in quality education. It is important for SCNL to gain a strategic oversight of all the training across courses, identifying synergies, overlaps, and gaps. A particular focus might be the ways bridges might be built between grade 0 (pre-primary) and grades 1 and 2. We see training in multi-grade teaching as essential for reaching EFA targets.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

- in the long term TEIs incorporate key principles of IE, QEP and ELPS into the initial training curriculum both from a theoretical and practical perspective
- SCNL may consider a focus upon the training of unqualified teachers in non-project areas. Clearly a move by SCNL into this area would require a collaborative, focused and measured strategy with a clear view of what is possible, particularly in terms of cost and expertise. In the short-term we would recommend an initial discussion with MoE partners to identify an 'out-reach' area in which a reasonably accessible group of unqualified teachers are to be found, and new models of teacher education piloted, in particular SCNL might consider a school based model. Such an area – which might well include teachers from ethnic minorities – would need to be regarded as a pilot initiative involving the teachers and community leaders in both awareness-raising of the issues and in the design and implementation of a strategy to provide effective teaching.
- in the near future, SCNL undertakes a programme wide review of training to gain a strategic oversight of training within existing courses, identifying synergies, overlaps and gaps.

4. PROJECT STRUCTURE AND IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

In this section we discuss the internal structure of the education projects of SCNL, the roles of implementation partners, with recommendations for strengthening internal and external linkages.

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

SCNL with MoE reviews the possibility of incorporating the three education projects into a single programme, maintaining the excellent work in the three areas, but within a programmatic structure, which provides clearer links between the differing aspects of the work in basic education and offers a more coherent model to MoE, PES and DEB.

SCNL currently supports three basic education projects: Inclusive Education, (IE) which has national coverage; Early Learning in Primary Schools (ELPS) which is piloted in Louang Prabang and a Quality Education Project (QEP) implemented in Louang Prabang and Bolikhamxay, with some work in Vientiane and Xieng Khouang Provinces (the former Saysomboun special zone). The QEP is a combination of three smaller sub-projects: multi-grade teaching, cluster school improvement and upgrading of teachers, projects that were integrated in 2006. The documentation reveals the influence of separate planning processes. A useful exercise could be undertaken by key stakeholders to identify common interests and overlaps, and to select a common language and format for planning.

The three project structure is reflected at all levels of implementation: each has a Project Officer in the SCNL management structure and there are three National Implementation Committees, three Province Implementation Teams and three District Implementation Teams (NIT, PIT and DIT). When District officers were asked how they coped with this complexity, the standard answer was '*We divide the work. Everybody knows their own work*'. The implementation model discourages integration of services and also puts a heavy management burden on MoE, PES and DEB alike. The model also discourages implementers from finding and maximising synergies between the programmes. A more integrated approach by SCNL would encourage greater cross fertilisation and learning.

At District level a similar implementation approach was taken to projects of differing donors, that is, division of work between different officials. The current implementation model weakens opportunities for integration and cross project learning. Only one head of a DEB told us of their awareness of disseminating learning within the district: he told us that he had '*put it in the annual plan.*' Although SCNL has included the activity of schools teaching other schools in the annual plan, the concept is not yet embedded at District level and the challenge will be to address the structures which prevent cross fertilization from one project (supported by SCNL or by other donor) to another.

It is worth mentioning that the MoE would welcome a clearer technical and geographic focus. The current widespread programme places strain on SCNL and partners alike. We noted, however, that at some levels integration is already taking place: for example, the NIT for IE has two members who are important figures in Preschool education, one from MoE and the other from Dong Dok model kindergarten.

We recommend that SCNL and its MoE partners adopt a programmatic approach to SCNL's input. The strengths and priorities of SCNL are currently well matched to the overall needs and aims of the basic education sector in Lao PDR. In particular the concern for the 'non standard child', is inline with the National EFA Plan and the MDGs, as is its support for increased school attendance and reduction of repetition rates. However, a relatively small organisation must identify its specific and particular strengths and identify a real strategic focus. A valuable exercise – perhaps an 'away-day' or workshop - with partners could be to identify the areas in which SCNL is best able to contribute, within the overall mandate of the organisation and the Save the Children Alliance. We would argue that a first step at such a meeting might be for the focus to be put, not on the project, but on the principles that underpin SCNL's work e.g. child-centred learning and to look at the successes and challenges that exist within existing projects and programmes. This would encourage the development of strategic focus in a complex and changing education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECT STRUCTURE AND IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

SCNL works towards

- developing a programmatic approach
- developing a common planning format
- supporting DEBs in cross programme learning at District level
- SCNL and partners work together to identify a strategic focus, which builds on SCNL's considerable strengths.

4.1 PROJECT MONITORING

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

We suggest a simpler and more manageable system of monitoring which relies on realistic indicators. Indicators could adopt the simple SMART approach: that is they should be specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic and time-bound

This is a weak area of both SCNL and MoE with evidence that both institutions prioritise inputs but give less attention to monitoring outputs; e.g. a strong focus on training is not matched by its impact on pupil learning outputs or to project and MoE education outcomes.

Because of time constraint it was not possible to see monitoring activities in action during our visits to project schools. This is an important area for project development, and the findings in this report are based on discussion with MoE, PES and DEB officials, as well as PAs and head teachers. The system is maintained by visits from MoE, PES and District teams, supported by checklists, which we did not see, but our impression after talking to PAs and District officials is that they are implemented in a rather mechanical way and that the monitoring is at best subjective. Much reliance is placed upon school figures and the rather impressionistic outcomes of rather rushed visits. In this circumstance, the project finds it hard to gain hard evidence of its impact. We are aware of the difficulty in collecting facts and figures. The ELPS baseline studies have been hard to bring to fruition. In all three projects, project inputs are phrased in terms of input/activities rather than outcomes and results and indicators set by SCNL tend to be over ambitious. For example if we take an indicators/expected outcomes from QEP project: *1,120 (70%) trained teachers are able to use child centered teaching and able to produce and use teaching materials*. It is an outcome unlikely to be achieved and difficult to measure, as it covers a number of areas of expertise. A simpler indicator: e.g. *70 % of trained teachers use teaching materials at least twice a week* would give a much more realistic and measurable target.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECT MONITORING

- SCN/MoE should consider the introduction of sample monitoring exercise, possibly linked to SSE and based on case study methods/sampling which would offer in depth understanding of the processes of change in selected schools, providing evidence for advocacy for the methods adopted.

5. LINKAGES

In this section we review existing and possible external linkages, with recommendations for strengthening and developing them.

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

The Country Representative should immediately enter into discussion with MoE and other donors, to find where best to place the skills and knowledge built up over the past years, to have maximum impact within the new sector wide approach (SWAp).

At a time of decentralisation and move towards SWAp, WB and ADB will be supporting teacher training and school management, EQIP II and TTEST continue to work in primary education, UNICEF's CFS model, has been adopted. WB and UNICEF are interested to start work in ECDE. In this circumstance SCNL should review its position and make strategic alliances that will allow it to maximise its impact. The Country Representative should immediately enter into discussion with MoE and other donors, to find where best to place the skills and knowledge built up to have maximum impact within the new Sector wide approach.

We noted that a school may have up a number of projects supporting it. As an example a school in Xieng Ngeun district of Louang Prabang is supported by ICS Asia, EQIP II, PESL (Project English as a Second Language), JICA, and UNICEF. In another district one school in a cluster was supported by the SCNL projects and another by UNICEF, the teachers undertaking different trainings from the different organisations. We discussed with DEB any confusion or conflict the experienced between the projects and the answer was '*No the objectives are the same though the activities are different*'. However, the management strategy is to keep the projects as separate as possible. We feel a valuable exercise could be undertaken in mapping the support given by projects possibly through the MoE led Education Donor Working Group (EDWG).

6. SPECIFIC ISSUES CONCERNING THE THREE PROJECTS

In this section we look at specific issues in the three projects to be reviewed, with recommendations. These sections should be read in conjunction with Section 3, in which most comments and recommendations apply to all three projects.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION

There is a great deal in common in the programmes both in the approach and expected outcomes and there is a need for greater strategic oversight across the three projects

6.1 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

In this section we consider the issues and recommendations identified by the final Phase II evaluation and evaluate their subsequent implementation and impact.

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

SCNL/MoE should agree an exit strategy, to ensure continuing development after the hand over to MoE

SCNL/MoE should now consider the ways the experience and learning of the project is integrated into the ongoing work of MoE, towards a holistic approach to school /school cluster development

6.1.1 REVIEW OF ASPECTS OF THE IE PROGRAMME

The evaluation team was asked to assess the contribution of non-core project components such as newsletters, material grants and exchange visits and evaluate the extent to which they justify their inclusion.

Newsletters have not been published regularly. It is the responsibility of the National Implementation Team (NIT), people who have many responsibilities. Although this is an important means of contact between teachers, it does seem unlikely that this can be sustained in isolation as an IE activity. SCN/MoE should consider supporting a general education newsletter, published by MoE, informing teachers of issues of wider general educational interest.

We agree with the recommendation for **greater children's participation in advocacy and monitoring** made by the 2004 report but saw little progress towards a greater part played by children in advocacy and project monitoring. A specific strategy for increasing child participation and advocacy could be developed for implementation in 2008.

Special children's access to **higher education** remains very limited. On a visit to the Rehabilitation Centre in Vientiane we observed a number of blind and profoundly deaf teachers working with children with similar disabilities. Pupils at the Centre expressed an interest in following a teaching career. However the number of special children making their way to higher education is very small and the employment prospects for most CSN are unclear. In the long term the programme could develop links with vocational education and micro finance projects.

We, like the 2004 evaluation team, found there was still an outstanding need for **accurate diagnosis of children's disabilities**. There is a need for greater integration of health expertise to give better diagnosis and offer ongoing support to special children and their families. The 2004 evaluation team recommended a health specialist to be included in District teams. The area remains weak, with many children not receiving a doctor's diagnosis of the disability. We would also recommend that SCNL establishes linkages with medical charities who can offer clear diagnosis and advice to parents. Two British non profit making charitable organisations *Sight Savers* and the Oxford-based *Adaptive Eye Care Limited* come to mind.



The 2004 evaluation report also suggests that other a number of donor agencies are **engaged in support for active learning** and that other projects could offer support in the area. We agree with this and recommend pursuing linkage but would also stress that SCNL should also share expertise between its own projects – this a further example of the added value that could be brought about by programmatic planning.

The **exchange visits** between schools have been highlighted to us as extremely successful and valuable. Learning from each other is an important principle to build on and was stressed to us a number of times as of particular value in the project. A head teacher, responding to the question whether he would be able to sustain the work when the project withdrew, gave an illuminating answer: *'Of course we will go on. We have been trained and we will do our best, however the project gives us access to new ideas and what other people do. This is what we will miss most'*. SCNL may consider ways to maintain the exchange of ideas and experience after hand over the MoE.

From our discussions with **community groups and parents** we found community involvement, as we have previously discussed, follows a traditional pattern of responsibility for the school building and fund raising but little responsibility for what goes on inside a school. An enhanced role for parents and the community organisations is fundamental to the sustainability of the projects and would recommend an investment in community management training for parents and PPA, possibly in conjunction with UNICEF and Sida. This should be included in the planning for 2008.

The 2004 evaluation team recommended **advocacy training** for head teachers, in order to mobilise the community. We see the role of the head teacher as pivotal in all the education focused work of SCNL and would link the need for advocacy strategies to training which develops a much stronger role for head teachers which includes a much greater and wider responsibility for in-service training in monitoring and evaluation, curriculum localisation, and development of teaching/learning methodology.

The **materials grants** have had a powerful impact. Our impression is that they have been used well and have had an important impact on teachers' attitudes to teaching/learning. The grant 700,000 kip (72 USD) for the first year, reducing to 400,000 (42 USD) seems to have a psychological as well as practical impact allowing a school to make decisions and take ownership of change. This is a very cost-effective support to developing teaching/learning practice.

6.1.2 ASSESSMENT OF PHASE III PROPOSAL

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

SCNL and its key stakeholders should strengthen their planning skills. We recommend they obtain the services of a highly qualified education planner to support effective planning and to upgrade key stakeholders skills in the principles and practices of effective planning.

SCNL/MoE should develop a strategy for disseminating *lessons learned* from the IE project to the national and international community.

As requested by the ToR we make an assessment of the proposal for Phase III of the IE project. The project proposal is made jointly by MoE and SCNL. After recommendations of the final review of Phase II, the project is re-targeted to include those who suffer exclusion from education because of difference, although this is does not figure highly in project documentation. Project outcomes indicate the inclusion of three thousand ethnic minority children out of a total of 97,000 children reached. Outcomes are much more clearly focused on CSN children than other excluded children. The proposal contains no clear strategy for inclusion of ethnic minority and other excluded children.

The documentation for the Phase III proposal is unnecessarily complicated. Phase III has 4 outputs, 20 key activities and 26 expected results. The outcomes in the table (pp 9 -11) do not match the 'expected outcomes in the text (pp 10 -17) and the Means of Verification (MoV) do not match the indicators of success in the text. The documentation also does not make a clear distinction between means and outcomes. The first output *Quality of Education in schools for CSN is improved* would be sufficient, while outputs 2-4 could be considered as a means to achieve high quality education in CSN schools. Lack of precise outcomes is making the project extremely difficult to monitor. As discussed previously, an in-depth review of a small number of schools would supplement existing information. Case studies can provide an important information base to support advocacy and for dissemination of the excellent work going on in IE in Lao PDR within the country and worldwide.

The National Rehabilitation Centre currently caters for 28 blind and 58 deaf children through a 3 year teaching programme (Braille and signing). They gave figures showing that in rural villages of some 600-700 people there will be 6-7 people will be with special needs, suggesting that there are large numbers of children not yet touched, and emphasising that IE strategies should be mainstreamed in all schools.

6.1.3 SUSTAINABILITY AND HAND OVER TO MOE

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

The experience should be collated and disseminated, before SCN support is withdrawn
In the near future a clear exit strategy is devised and agreed by all concerned

The project will be handed over to the Government in 2008. The ToR asked for an assessment of the level of sustainability of IE in Lao PDR, including the level at which IE is incorporated into government structures at central and local levels and how firmly IE is embedded in schools and communities. We found this difficult to assess. The National Implementation Committee (NIT) comprised a highly skilled qualified and enthusiastic group but there is a marked difference in Provinces' abilities to implement the training schedules and at DEB had very heavy work loads, often resulting in diluted input as effort is stretched between a number of commitments. We saw some excellent practice and as reported in the IE Phase II Final Evaluation, we met teachers, schools and parents who are positive about the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream classrooms. The programme has brought about a cultural change in the acceptance of 'different' children. In a village not touched by the IE programme we saw a special child being taunted by adults and children. In villages that have been exposed to the IE programme special children were accepted.

Children told us that they helped special children, with an obvious sense of pride. In a pupil focus group consisting of 5 pupils aged 15 -17 years (with one blind child) the children told us of their willingness to help; they tend to take turns in being the 'friend' which might involve assisting learning at 6 hour stretches. Teachers acknowledged the extra work the special children bring, *'We have to prepare our lessons and questions twice, once for the normal children and once for the special children'*, but also articulated a feeling of achievement. The focus of the schools is on children with physical disabilities, slow learners, and children with behaviour difficulties. Those managing the project both in SCNL and DEB acknowledge that the project is not reaching the more remote schools, where the poorer and ethnic minority children live.

We found evidence that teachers trained in IE were paying closer attention to the pace of work in the classroom, made special questions and lowered the monthly test pass marks so that all children could pass. However the teachers seemed to have little experience of working 1- to -1 with children or with adjusting levels of work for children with special needs (and this includes children of above-average ability). CSN were often put in lower classes, sometimes in the preschool class. In other schools they were working on the same tasks as their peers at a slower rate, with help from another child.

The strengths of the IE project were described by head of the DEB of Sisattanak district: *'Now that all teachers in the IE schools have been trained, non-CSN children now have an understanding of differences. CSN are doing well and provide a good role model to other children of what can be achieved'*. However the weaknesses identified by a number of DEOs were: training not given to new teachers entering schools, irregularity of training activities, irregular monitoring by SCNL and lack of learning aids particularly designed to meet the needs of special children.

The evaluation team was also asked to evaluate the existing strategic plan for the handover of responsibility of the IE project to the MoE in 2008. The proposal for Phase III cites management strengthening as the main means to ensure the continued efficacy of the project. However, it also recognises that changes in Government personnel dilute the effectiveness of training provided. SCNL/SCUK has supported the project since 1993, and it is imperative that a clear exit strategy is devised and agreed by all concerned. Work on this should start immediately. We would suggest that the plan incorporates:

- a strategy for the inclusion of the skills and understandings developed through this project into the work of SCNL, MoE and major donors
- an advocacy campaign giving information about special children
- an plan to disseminate the experience of the project country and world wide- this could have the particular benefit of acknowledging the leadership of MoE of Lao PDR in an area of basic education
- strategies to allow schools to share experience and access up to date information

6.1.4 PARENTS RESPONSES

Parents with children with special needs value the support given by the school to their children. This is just one story we gathered:

Na, a highland farmer, who is Lao Teung, has four children, two of whom have trouble in walking. His wife died 4 months ago and he is the sole support to the family. Because he can send the children to school with the help of his friends who carry them there, he can get to his fields everyday and work to provide food for the family.

Discussion with parents made us aware that there are still many myths surrounding special children. For example at two parents' meetings, the reasons why children are born with handicaps were discussed, participants reasoning that attempts at abortion have been made or that the mother had taken 'medicine'. Both these explanations place blame on the mother and a greater understanding of genetic, and other reasons for defects, if linked to practical strategies for support, could motivate parents to maintain support for special children and the changes brought about by schools supported by the IE project. This is an ongoing activity that could be included in the 2008 plan.

OVERALL COMMENTS: We have been impressed by the impact of the IE programme and the changes that can be brought about in schools at relatively low cost. The experience should be collated and disseminated, before SCNL support is withdrawn. The work could be undertaken by a national consultant.

SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IE

- in the months before the programme is handed to government SCNL should review its provision for 'non-standard' children, other than CSN, and strategise ways reach out to children in more remote places. A possible approach could be through school clusters, which link semi urban schools with more remote villages.
- SCNL considers supporting MoE to develop a networking strategy which covers all schools touched by their basic education project
- SCNL advocates to MoE for the development of a whole school/ whole cluster model which attends to the holistic development of children, including that of special children
- SCNL invests in community management training for parents and PPA in 2008
- a specific strategy for increasing child participation and advocacy should be developed for implementation in 2008

LONGER TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- key IE specialists are developed in cluster schools on the same basis as curriculum specialists. Again this argues for an integrated approach to IE with policies towards poor, disabled and otherwise excluded children developed as whole cluster policies
- SCNL works with the Department of Teacher Training (TTD) at the MoE in efforts to reform the TEI curriculum to include multi-grade teaching, IE and ELPS principles and practices. In the short-term the TTD at MoE be invited to participate in the 8 day IE training course.
- in the longer term, SCNL develops links with vocational education and micro finance projects

6.2 THE QUALITY EDUCATION PROJECT (QEP)

For the discussion of QEP, we have identified some areas of importance: school clusters and resource persons; the Child-friendly schools and UNICEF strategy; and the non core components. Monitoring and training have been thoroughly covered in Section 3.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

SCNL with MoE to review the balance between training and monitoring

SCNL/MoE to prioritise training to reflect programme priorities e.g. focus upon grades 0-2, school clusters etc.

Brief overview of QEP

Project period is 2006-2008 and its aim is 'to improve the quality of learning outcomes among primary school children, especially in poor districts'.

The expected project outputs are:

- improved quality of teaching by primary school teachers in project districts
- child-friendly pilot schools established in two districts of Bolikhamxay province
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and HIV prevention information integrated into teaching and community learning materials
- greater involvement of parents and community representatives in primary schools
- effective system for monitoring results and providing technical support established
- to share project learning with public and other developmental partners

Several projects, teacher upgrading, multi-grade teaching, development of school clusters were merged at the end of 2005 to form this project. It is currently operating in 3 provinces though mainly focused in Bolikhamxay and Louang Prabang. Teacher Upgrading is only working in the 3rd province, the former Xaysomboun.

The project documentation indicates a much input driven project with insufficient measurable outputs for children and teachers – greater focus should be put on outputs and their relationship to outcomes (see *SMART* criteria in Section 4).

6.2.1. SCHOOL CLUSTERS AND RESOURCE PERSONS

School clusters are clearly an efficient way of organising improvements in quality. The designation of core school, resource centre and resource person released from teaching has potential for impact. Evidence from elsewhere (e.g. Indonesia British Council/World Bank Active Learning in Primary Schools Project ALPS) indicates value in developing competency of key resource person concentrating upon foundation curriculum areas (Lao, Maths, and World around Us). In 2008 no budget funds are allocated to the support of resource centres (RC). If future funding is to be considered some monitoring should be undertaken to assess the use made by teachers of RCs. Evidence from elsewhere (e.g. Kenya, Indonesia) show that at best resource centres can support teacher lesson planning but at worst can become attractive-looking places but unused by teachers.

6.2.2. CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOL AND UNICEF

The relationship between SCNL and UNICEF is an important one. The MoE and UNICEF have agreed a 5 year action plan in which the CFS will become the 'model' for Lao primary schools. Currently SCNL has two pilot schools in Bolikhamxay province supported by a technical officer at the MoE. Plainly MoE should host discussion and review links and synergies between the two interventions. An issue to be addressed by MoE and donor

agencies appears to be lack of clarity in CFS. Is it a *concept* or *set of organising principles* or at worst, *just a rhetorical idea*? As a potentially national programme (under which other smaller projects such as IE might be subsumed) SCNL has two possible ways forward. The first is that SCNL avoids involvement in the CFS 'roll out'; and the second that MoE recognises CFS as an umbrella concept under which SCNL makes specific contributions e.g. IE support, early years/grade 0-2 focus, child rights training.



6.2.3 NON-CORE PROJECT COMPONENTS

Some aspects of training, especially storytelling, curriculum localisation and participatory action research are not yet impacting on the schools. These areas are important to the development of quality in schools, but the current model of training gives a 'flat' approach, that is, all aspects are given equal weight and are taught at the same time. We feel that, if resources allow, the implementation of a spiral model, in which teachers are incrementally introduced to new ideas, would prove more valuable. For example, teachers who have learned to run a learner centred classroom are likely to use participatory research approaches (PAR) more effectively than those still trying out their basic teaching skills.

Multi grade teaching

We would like to pick out multi-grade teaching as an effective component and important to the achievement of the EFA goals. Classes we visited were generally smaller than we expected ranging from as little as 5 children. Statistics from the MoE General Education Department (GED) show that from around 10,000 villages, approximately 2,000 villages have less than 30 school-age children. There is also evidence that many recently graduated teachers are shying away from working in poorer rural areas. It was reported by heads of DEB in Bolikhamxay and Luang Prabang that by training teachers in multi-grade teaching methods, they could move away from the *one teacher to one class* model, allowing them to redeploy teachers and open new classes in remoter areas. We were told that some 3 to 4 teachers were redeployed per district. If replicated throughout all the districts of the project, it is making a considerable impact on the schooling of children in remote villages. We saw an example of multi-grade teaching. Although the teaching was traditional, teacher talk from the front, the teacher effectively engaged two cohorts of children by alternatively setting a teacher lead and self study activity. We suggest that SCNL try to gain figures for the impact of this component.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS FOR QEP

- SCNL to work with MoE and UNICEF identify the relationship between the two CFS projects
- SCNL to identify SMART indicators to improve monitoring

LONGER-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- enhance the competency of key resource person (focusing upon foundation curriculum areas Lao, Maths, and World Around Us) and review allocation of budget funds for supporting resource centres after evaluation of their use

- if resources allow, SCNL considers developing a ‘spiral curriculum’, in which teachers are introduced to new concepts in a cumulative manner
- specific efforts are main to introduced the techniques of multi grade teaching into all aspects of the programme

6.3 EARLY LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS (ELPS)

The ToR requires the evaluators to review the capacity of the TEIs to take responsibility for 30 week training for new preschool teachers and identify advocacy tools that can influence policy makers on acceptance of SCNL’S model as national model. We also make a number of suggestions for the improvement of the ELPS training course and SCNL’s work with stakeholders.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

SCNL extends discussions with MoE and UNICEF to ensure that MOE is offered coherent and most efficient and effective means to support to their ECDE developments. SCNL gives support in the process of MOE/ ECDE policy making on EDCE.

This is the second phase of the programme. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed with MoE in March 2006 and implementation began in April 2006. It builds on lessons learned from the first phase of the programme. A thorough review was carried out in January 2007. The project aims to improve achievement and retention rates by adding a pre-school year and supporting improved management and teaching/learning methodology for grades 1 and 2 with training for parents to understand the importance of the early years of education. There is a particular expectation that the non Lao speaking children will benefit by exposure to a year in which the teacher, who knows the local language, can support the acquisition of the Lao language.

The review found that the ELPS is innovative, focused and well-managed, with possibilities for wide spread expansion. We agree with this analysis. Our visits to preschool classes showed attractive environments with lively, active children.



6.3.1 THE 30 WEEKS INITIAL TRAINING COURSE AND OTHER TRAINING

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

In initial training and follow up training SCNL/MoE strengthen participants understanding on the use of the local environment as a learning resource

An important intervention is the 30 week training course, for young single women who have completed grade 11, who live in remote and rural villages and speak local languages.

Teachers trained by the course were generally very enthusiastic, however one teacher told us that she found it difficult to evaluate the experience because '*nothing like that has happened to me before*'. The review earlier this year indicated some developments to be made to the 30 week training course and we agree with them. However, the course is accepted as effective by MoE and our visits to preschool classrooms showed teachers who had created well decorated classrooms with considerable amounts of play materials available. In particular there was a high level of interaction between teacher and children, and an atmosphere of enjoyment. The Lao language, numbers etc, were taught in attractive and accessible ways through pictures and materials. The impact on grades 1 and 2 is not yet so easily discernable, as for many, training has not yet happened and the classroom methodology that we saw was still largely traditional. The impact was greater in schools which had received other support from SCNL, for example, schools which had had support from the IE or QEP projects. This suggests a more integrated model of support will be effective in bringing about sustained change.

The review undertaken earlier this year makes a major recommendation that project training be '*aligned with classroom realities and challenges*'. From observations of in-school practice and discussion with pre-school teachers, our main recommendation for training courses is a much greater focus on use of the local environment, which includes school grounds. We would endorse the recommendation of the ELPS-SCNL consultancy report that more emphasis be given to use of the environment. Enfants du Camboges developed an environment-based approach to early learning, in which community members play an active part in storytelling and share their expertise in the classroom and children make organised visits to local craftspeople and local sites such as the market and the temple. The approach has proved effective in low resource environments. As well as offering exciting learning opportunities, in a multiethnic community, the method has an important function in supporting understanding of and respect for different life styles. Currently pre-school teachers focus on practice within the classroom, while the environment can provide many learning opportunities to children of all ages. In many countries pedagogic use of the environment has been developed initially in preschool classes and spread to higher grades. Nearly all schools in Lao PDR have extensive grounds. Training courses should also focus on playgrounds as a source of early learning experiences. UNICEF has considerable experience of developing simple community playgrounds which develop children's physical and imaginative skills. The outside areas can also be used as an extended classroom, with particular opportunities for early scientific experiments. The awarenesses developed will support efforts to localise the curriculum and can bridge the gap between pre-school and the curriculum in grades 1 and 2. A deeper understanding of the relationship between play and learning is needed. Learning is still very teacher lead and play considered only as something for relaxation and enjoyment. Teachers need more understanding of the ways children develop important concepts through first hand experience. Two more ways forward for SCNL in the short-term may be to involve selected staff from TEIs in ELPS classroom-focused training and to feed ELPS documentation and 'models of good practice' into reforms at TEIs. The suggestion given here are in line with intentions outlined in the MoE Teacher Education Strategy 2006-2015 and Action Plan 2006-2010 and the EFA Action Plan.

An 11+1 training course for preschool teachers is being developed by the Teacher Training Department (TTD) of the MoE. SCNL is discussing with the TTD the new course's relationship to the 30 week course. We recommend the Ministry adopts some of the content

and training practices piloted through the EPLS 30 week course. The Ministry sees no conflict maintaining 2 courses, the 11+1 course recruiting regular students, while the 30 week course would recruit the rural candidate, who has perhaps only finished Grade 8 or 9. It is generally understood that there is difficulty in finding women who have completed grade 11 in the more remote areas and amongst ethnic minority communities. In a two tier model there is a possibility that the 30 week course will be seen as second class training. We suggest a model of credit accumulation and transfer, by which a teacher completing the 30 week course can undertake a shortened course to achieve a qualification equivalent to the 11+1 training. In the documentation there is a condition that only to single women can be considered. We understand that this condition is not enforced, and that culturally young men are not likely to apply. However, we would like to see the conditionality dropped and married women and young men considered on the same footing as young women.

After the 30 week training, the teacher returns to a class, has to set up the classroom and to function as a teacher. A number of teachers identified this as a difficult time because in many schools it is an entirely new venture for children, parents and teachers alike and there is no-one in the school to can offer advice and support. A volunteer from the local community could offer practical help to ease the initial period of children's adjustment to school life. At a later date, SCNL/MoE may consider recruiting volunteers from the local community to support pre-school classrooms. It has been found that the added attention young children receive can greatly increase their achievement in basic learning. Short training in the principles and practice of early childhood education is needed for prospective volunteers.

6.3.2. PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

In the medium term SCNL moves away from *informing* parents to *involving* them in educational activities

Our discussion of parental and community involvement in Section 3.6 is especially relevant to ELPS, in particular the models of parental involvement with their children's education. As discussed previously we feel a strong focus on the parent as the first and most important educator of the child can make parents more confident to involve themselves in a child's schooling. In the short term there is need for greater exposure to the principles of ECDE, taking a holistic approach to child development and including discussion of simple health issues. The existing contribution parents and community make to a pre-school should be noted: all materials and furniture and sometimes the building have to be provided by the local community. In the medium term, the stress should move from *informing* parents and community members to *involving* them education focused activities, through local environment based activities such as those mentioned in the previous sub section or perhaps through community based schemes, an example of which is offered by the parent/child reading scheme developed by Save the Children, United States of America (SCUSA) in rural Bangladesh.

6.3.3 ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS

The situation is very favourable to the development of early years' education at the present time, with support from the Prime Minister, the MoE setting up a pre-school department from next year, UNICEF and UNESCO planning to extend their work in early childhood education. We see little need for SNCL to mount an advocacy campaign for the adoption of its model as a national model as it is already seen as a leader in this area. MoE is interested in expanding the model now being piloted in Luang Prabang to other provinces. UNICEF expects to be a major player in the field and we recommend that, in the interests of the children of Lao PDR, discussion takes place now between concerned donors and MoE on the most effective ways to support MoE in its new venture in ECDE. In particular, SCNL could make an important contribution to the facilitation of MoE's policy development.

Parents and community members were generally very pleased with training and advocacy events they had experienced. A number of areas of advocacy were suggested by our meetings with teachers, parents and children, in particular more information on the rights of children to good health and education. In the short term advocacy aimed at the highest levels of policy making in Lao PDR may ensure the adoption of a child focused, integrated and child rights driven model of ECDE.

6.3.4. TRAINING FOR DEB PERSONNEL HEAD TEACHERS AND GRADE 1 AND 2 TEACHERS

Since ECDE is a new venture for many communities, it is important that the basic principles are disseminated to stakeholders. We understand that training for many head teachers and teachers of grades 1 and 2 has been delayed and this is noticeable in schools, in particular in the confidence of newly trained teachers. There should be a particular focus on developing the awareness of DEB staff and head teachers. Exposure trips for Ministry, Provincial and District officials were held in Thailand. We were told that these had less impact than was hoped, because the participants had not yet gained understanding of early childhood practice and principals, leaving participants without the tools to analyse what they saw. There is a need for stronger support to DEB staff and head teachers, which could include visits to schools where good ECDE practice has been established and where teachers can articulate the basis of their practice. The training is of course vital, in the short term, for head teachers and teachers of grades 1 and 2, both, to give the pre-school teacher the support of other, more confident professionals and to ensure that the principles of ECDE are strongly embedded in a school or cluster. In the medium term added emphasis can be given to training for DEB staff, to ensure the district, school and cluster work together and provide a district focused support network

6.3.4. KEY STAKEHOLDERS

As the MoE has decided to make pre-school education a full Department, SCNL should consider, undertaking with key stakeholders, an exercise in identifying a child's minimum entitlement. This is an important tool to create awareness of the minimum quality of experience a child can expect from attending pre-school. The concept of *minimal entitlement* is closely linked to that of children's rights, setting out what a child is entitled to receive through schooling. In the early years this may be such things as the proportion of academic learning to play, special needs support, and ratio of adults to children. Once such entitlements are established, it is then possible to put in place appropriate base-line indicators to evaluate achievement and the conditions needed to enable them. There is considerable experience to be drawn on from within the Save the Children Alliance.

Another useful tool is the Global Information Monitoring (GIM) system developed and used in a number of countries by members of the Save the Children Alliance (SCA). It can be used to enable reflection on the purposes and outcomes of ECDE by involving key stakeholders in an exercise to identify appropriate monitoring indicators.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SHORT TERM

- as soon as is possible training takes place for all for head teachers and teachers of Grades 1 and 2
- SCNL /MoE plan ways that SCNL's experience can be fed into the country wide development in pre-schooling
- SCNL offer support to MoE in developing their policy for pre-school education
- advocacy is aimed to ensure MoE adopts a child focused, integrated and child rights driven model. This will be more effective if undertaken with other agencies working in ECDE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LONGER TERM

- in initial and follow up training more emphasis is put on developing learning from the environment and in developing understanding of the relationship between first hand experience and learning
- TEI staff are involved in SCNL supported follow up courses and pre-school classroom training
- SCNL develops strategies to *involve* parents and community members in children's learning activities

7 CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

7.1 HIV/AIDS

All core project training has a component of HIV Aids prevention and this is a strategic objective of the overall SCNL programme. Government officials saw this as something required by donors. Although we saw very little evidence of awareness raising e.g. one poster in one school, parents were universally content that their children should be made aware of the dangers and ways to protect themselves; one father told us, '*We want to know ourselves and we want our children to know as much as possible*'. In the field visits we saw very little evidence of advocacy with regards to HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

7.2 CHILD RIGHTS

Child rights is also taught through core project training courses. The courses are well received although the impact is not very visible. We asked children about corporal punishment in schools. Although teachers invariably said no corporal punishment was used, children said, that, although they had not been smacked or beaten, their classmates had.

For both child rights and HIV/AIDS information, a higher profile is given to advocacy in these areas.

7.3 GENDER

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

SCNL documentation reflects the emphasis given to gender issues and the impact of education on the rights of girls and women

There is an intrinsic understanding that support for women and girls is important to the three programmes and it is considered extensively in training on children's rights. Curiously there is little reference to gender in its description of project aims or outcomes. Given the country's poor gender indicators (see Section One); gender issues could be highlighted to a greater extent in all documentation, to ensure that awareness permeates all activity.

8 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This section focuses on the main recommendations arising from the report. We would like to reiterate the importance of the education work done by SCNL and the numerous achievements. In particular we would stress the value of SCNL recording the *lessons learned* from their work.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SHORT TERM

WORK TOWARDS PROGRAMME RESTRUCTURING

SCNL should begin a process of project review, to identify a clear strategic focus, finding ways to maximize impact and achieve a more technically focused and coherent programme. SCNL can build on the considerable respect it has built up with the MoE and the donor community in Lao PDR. We offer a number of models for discussion, as a means to start a debate. Any of these models would be effective in supporting the national EFA Plan of Action.

A SCNL could refocus its attention upon the first 3 years of formal education – grades 0, 1 and 2. This would be in line with the Ministry perception that SCNL can offer leadership in the early years of schooling. Inclusive education, quality education, child rights, and multi grade teaching would feed into the first three years of schooling. There is a strong pedagogical argument for focus on the first three years of schooling, including the notion that a sound learning of basic skills gives children a flying start to all their learning. Internationally it has been found that a more interactive approach in the first years of education spreads upwards, as children and parents demand a more enjoyable and participatory classroom.

B Another choice would be to focus on the cluster school, to ensure that quality education is available to all children in the cluster. We regard quality education as encompassing a good start to education through high quality preschool education with the integration of children excluded for whatever reason. The advantage of developing cluster schools is that, in the more rural areas, ethnic minority and poor children can be reached through the outlying cluster schools

C A third model, which was proposed by key stakeholders at the workshop in Thalat, SCNL should focus on a smaller number of districts, but to work in-depth with all the schools in that cluster.

DISSEMINATION

SCNL should develop a plan for disseminating *lessons learned* from implementation in particular the practice of IE and ECDE in low-resource environments nationally and internationally. It will depend on the project's ability to produce hard evidence of effectiveness. The work may be supported by a national consultant.

PPA, PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

SCNL consider including community management training in their 2008 plan, possibly in conjunction with Sida and UNICEF

IE

SCNL works with MoE to develop a detailed exit strategy for IE, which includes ways of maintaining an IE perspective all of SCNL's work, and advocacy for including IE in all basic education projects

QEP

SCNL works with MoE and UNICEF to plan the future of CFS

ELPS

SCNL extends discussions with MoE and UNICEF to ensure that MOE is offered coherent and most efficient and effective means to support to their ECDE developments.

SCNL gives support in the process of MOE/ ECDE policy making on EDCE.

Training, initial and follow up, place more emphasis on the environment as a learning resource and the value of first hand experience to young children's learning

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MEDIUM AND LONG TERM

A clearer strategic focus for the development of SCNL education could involve a move from a project approach to a programme approach – with a strong link to advocacy for policy development and facilitation of development of evidence-based policy in the Lao education sector. Such a move would require:

- review of existing **planning and planning strategies**, possibly with the help of a skilled external planner
- development of **monitoring strategies**. More hard evidence of impact is needed to support project review and development. SCNL should review the current monitoring scheme and design a realistic programme wide monitoring plan which may depend on case studies and sampling. Expected outputs should be small and achievable (SMART). For example, it is unlikely that a child-centred approach will be achieved. The programme should develop indicators of *moves towards* a more child friendly approach, e.g. use of teaching materials three times a week, or teacher's engagement with individual children.

- SCNL with key stakeholders to review all **training programmes** with a view to gaining greater strategic oversight and identify and respond to synergies, overlaps and holes. A closer relationship with TEIs may come from such a review.

PPA, PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

In the longer term, SCNL works with communities on schemes which *involve* parents in their children's education: examples include parent/child reading schemes.