

Early Childhood Care and Education in Lao PDR

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I. Situation on ECCE:

The Early Childhood Care and Education is one sub sector of the education system. It is considered as part of Basic Education. It admits children under 6 years of age and fits the physical conditions laid down by the Ministry of Education. The ECCE is devised into two group of age: Nursery take care of children from three months to two years old, and Kindergarten for children from three to five years old.

In 2005, there are 168 ECCE pedagogy staffs all female(This data include central, provincial and district staff), 2,702 preschool teachers 2,688 female, and 45,328 children including 22,773 girls. The number of Nurseries and Kindergartens are 969 and 1,864 classrooms including 136 private Kindergarten. The enrollment rate is 8.2 per cent. Therefore, Pre-school classes in primary school have been increased by 20 in 2003 to 40 in 2005. There are pilot project to enroll 5-years old children for early learning before entering in primary school G1. These projects are supported by external donors and implement jointing by educational bureaus, communities, and donors (IO, INGOs)

II. Policies on ECCE:

In the Educational Strategy Plan for 2001-2020, Ministry of Education policies on ECCE are :

- Increase state budget to establish model Creches and Kindergartens in provincial and district capital cities.
- Develop and improve the Quality of ECCE, and increase access to Nurseries and Kindergartens
- Promote the private sector to open and run Creches and Kindergartens where possible .
- Prepare children for early learning before going to primary school
- Reduce the rate of repetition in grade 1 and 2
- Improve the quality of Basic Education
- Develop ECCE through the community based project supported by UNICEF and international NGOs

III. ECCE in EFA National Plan of Action:

1. Early Childhood Care and Development:

The EFA NPA targets seek to:

- Reach an enrollment rate of 11 % 3- and 4 years- olds in 2010, and 17 % in 2015.
- Reach an enrollment rate of 30 % 5 years- olds in 2010, and 55 % in 2015.
- Attain a share of enrollment of 20 % in community Kindergarten in 2010, and 30 % in 2015.
- Attain a share of enrollment of 25 % in private Kindergarten in 2010, and 30 % in 2015.

This requires targeted and additional resources to give these children opportunities for early childhood care and development activities. The NPA promote access of five year olds children to pre-school education by establishing a special primary school class to prepare 5-

year-olds for grade 1, particularly targeting ethnic groups, girls and children from the poorest families. Priority has been given to the development of pre-schools over Creches, and to pre-school admissions for children age 5 years over younger children.

In order to alleviate some of the costs to the state budget, the option of promoting community pre-school with some of MOE assistance has been considered to be based on enrollment rates in Creches and Pre-school,; and the share of public and community institutions as compared with private institutions.

2. ECCE and ECD Programmes:

- **Programs supported by UNICEF are:**

There are 8 provinces, 30 districts and 189 communities to involve in implementing the Community Based on Early Childhood Development project, and have two sub projects such as:

1) Community Based Early Childhood Development Project . The purpose of this project is to orient parent about to prepare the early learning for their children by the daily activities.

2) School Based Early Childhood Development Project. The purpose of this project is to insert the gap between Kindergarten 3 and primary school grade 1. There is to develop teaching skill for kindergarten/pre-school teachers and primary school grade one teachers.

- **Early Childhood Development Project supported by SCN (Save Children Norway):**

The purpose of the project is to improve the whole child development and established 30 child care centres in villages.

- **Pre-literacy for early childhood children in the families project was supported by UNESCO.**

- **Early Learning in Primary School supported by SC,UK**

This project has been piloted in 3 district in Louangprabang province. There are 40 preschools where have been attached in primary school. Those classrooms served 5 year olds children. The purpose of project is to prepare for the early learning for children before going to primary school grade 1.

IV. Problems and Issues of ECCE:

The implement of Early Childhood Care and Education depends very much on the quality of the training pre-school teachers, to access to kindergarten the relevance of the curriculum and pre-school teacher's guide books and teaching environment, teaching methodologies, kindergarten management, and to develop the system of data collection on ECCE.

Investment in ECCE is still very low and most of projects are supported by international organizations mainly UNICEF, SCUK, SCN, UNESCO and some NGOs.

In order to improve access to Kindergarten it is necessary to establish more pre-school (one year) attached to primary school, especially in poorest rural and remote areas. Train provincial and district personnel in data collection .

V. Challenges and Issues for ECCE:

Access:

1. ECCE institutions, creches and kindergartens are limited and mainly concentrated in big cities and economically developed communities. Most ECCE institutions are privately owned.
2. ECCE programme coverage is very low in rural and remote areas, especially in ethnic group and poor areas.
3. The direct cost of ECCD to parents is high and beyond the financial means of low income families.

Quality:

4. There is a severe shortage of pre-school teachers in terms of quality. The quality of ECCD is constrained by the low number of qualified teachers. Most teachers have limited or no professional training, and receive the lowest of teacher salaries.
5. There is a severe shortage of ECCE facilities, as well as play and learning materials.

Management:

6. An inadequate funding base makes it impossible to cover the expansion of service to rural and remote areas.
7. The ECCE division the General Education Department lacks staff. Those it has are mostly overloaded with bilateral/multilateral projects.
8. Clear policies and implementation strategies are needed to put emphasis on ECCE as a means to reduce the repetition rates in the early years of primary school, especially in grade 1.
9. Technical staff at the local level (PES/DEB) need support to plan, manage and implement ECCE programmes.
10. Clear policies and strategies are need to motivate community participation and encourage private investment in ECCE programmes at the grassroots level.

VI. Improving Access and Participation in ECCE:

The purpose of the programme is to increase access to ECCE, targeting especially girls, minority and disadvantaged children. MOE strategy is to progressively increase participation in Kindergarten (KG) in order to improve pupils' integration into and achievement in primary education. A grade 0 might be established in the future, based on MOE revised ECCD policy and long-term strategy, and depending on the result of a feasibility study.

Since resources are limited, the MOE will promote the development of Kindergarten community centres based on subsidies, inputs and technical assistance in the following way:

- Subsidies might be in the form of limited contributions to community staff salaries
- Inputs might be teaching materials and pre-fabricated materials, such as roofs windows for community built classrooms
- technical assistance would be provided for classroom construction and teaching.

MOE assistance would be on the contract between District Educational Bureau (DEB) or Provincial Educational Section (PES) and community. MOE contribution might be based on a matching fund scheme, whereby both the MOE and the community would agree on their respective contribution, while MOE's contribution would be higher for poorer and remote communities, according to specific targeting criteria.

Priority assistance will be granted to communities with a high percentage of ethnic groups and/or located in the poorest districts. Girls' participation will be specifically targeted, and campaigns will be conducted to promote girls' access to community KG. In case of limited capacity, priority will be given to 5-year-olds.

The MOE will be also promote private sector development by designing a legal and regulatory framework aimed at clarifying the conditions for opening private ECCE centres, simplifying procedures, and eventually exempting private centres from paying import and/or VAT taxes on goods and services used for centre operation.

The targets:

- Reach an enrollment rate of 11 % 3- and 4 years- olds in 2010, and 17 % in 2015.
- Reach an enrollment rate of 30 % 5 years- olds in 2010, and 55 % in 2015.
- Reach a 20 % share of enrollment in community Kindergarten in 2010, and 30 % in 2015.
- Reach a 25 % share of enrollment in private Kindergarten in 2010, and 30 % in 2015.

In order to achieve such targets, the following resources should be mobilized:

- Annual recruit 500 – 700 (2004/05 – 2010/11) and 700 – 1000 (2011/12 – 2015/16) for government and community KG centres.
- Annual build 200 – 300 new classrooms in public and community KG.

Table 1: ECCE TARGET – enrollment Rate in Creches, Kindergartens and Pre-schools

Targets	2005/06	2010/11	2015/16
Creches: Enrollment, aged 0-2 yrs	7,097	15,439	23,046
Kindergarten: Enrollment, aged 3-4 yrs	9%	11%	17%
Pre-school: Enrollment, aged 5 yrs	17%	30%	55%

Table 2: ECCE TARGET – Share of Enrollment

Organizations	2005/06	2010/11	2015/16
Public Institutions	70.4 %	55 %	40 %
Private Institutions	21.1 %	25 %	30 %
Community Institution	7.5 %	20 %	30 %

Table 1: ECCE TARGET – Recruitment of Teachers/Staff and Classroom construction

School Year	Number of teachers	Number of classroom
2004/05	590	256

2005/06	607	241
2006/07	621	225
2007/08	708	253
2008/09	743	246
2009/10	719	204
2010/11	692	163
2011/12	904	264
2012/13	1,004	287
2013/14	1,021	261
2014/15	1,037	235
2015/16	1,050	209

Objectives:

Objective 1: Plan the Development of early childhood care and education

Activities:

1. Develop MOE policy on ECCE and design a long-term low-cost and sustainable ECCE strategy, including the promotion and establishment of both community and private creches and KGs.
2. Conduct a feasibility study on the establishment of a Grade 0.
3. Design the medium- term ECCE action plan.
4. Build capacity at PES, DEB and village levels for planning, managing and administering ECCE programmes and projects.
5. Issue a regulatory framework for the assistance of MOE/PES/DEB to communities willing to establish a community KG centre and strengthen MOE, PES and DEB units in charge of assisting and controlling private ECCE centers.

Objective 2: Build new Kindergarten and improve existing ones

Activities:

1. Based on promotion campaigns and consultations with village representatives to access demand conditions, identify communities with a high percentage of ethnic groups and/or located poorest districts where fully supported, government KG might be established (criteria to include also number of households and children aged 1 to 5 years)
2. Build or rehabilitate ECCE centers with facilities (including water supply, separate toilets for girls .
3. Commit resources in the Education Medium-term Expenditure Framework and annual PES and DEB budgets for the construction, rehabilitation and improvement of government KG facilities.

Objective 3: Train, recruit and develop pre-school teachers to meet increased demand

Activities:

1. Increase the capacity of pre-school teacher training institutions according to project needs, taking into account expected dropout rates during and the end of studies.
2. Allocate scholarships to students-teachers agreeing to sign a contract with the government for teaching in a government or community KG centre for a minimum duration of 3 years.
3. Increase pre-school teacher salaries to 2 times GDP per capita by 2010/11.

4. Commit resources in the Education Medium-term Expenditure Framework and annual PES and DEB budgets for the construction of the requested number of pre-school teachers for each district and province

Objective 4: Mobilize communities in favor of ECCD and pre-school education and promote the development of kindergarten and pre-school community centers.

Activities:

1. Based on promotion campaigns and consultations with village representatives to assess demand and conditions, identify communities located in poor and non-poor districts where community KG might be establish based on contractual agreement with PES and/or DEB.
2. Have the DEB conduct a simple feasibility study and sign a contract under PES supervision with the community.
3. Plan and conduct construction and/or rehabilitation work based on the same procedures as for community primary schools.
4. Commit resources in the Education Medium-term Expenditure Framework and annual PES and DEB budgets for assistance to community KG centers for each district and province.

VII. Conclusion:

The early childhood care and education in Lao PDR is very important role in the development of human resource. Therefore, MOE has identified to be one of priority for developing a quality of basic education, but the ECCE investment still low, and it has not been widely cooperated with MOH and MOSW, and others partner/stakeholders. However, Lao PDR can learn from the other countries about improving ECCE.