

Third Party Evaluation FY2008  
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

Evaluation of Japan's Assistance to the Education  
Sector in Laos  
(Third Party Evaluation: Joint Evaluation with NGOs)

-Summary-

March 2009

## Preface

This report is a summary of the “Evaluation of Japan’s assistance to the field of Basic Human Needs (BHN) in Asia ” (hereinafter the “study”) undertaken by the External Advisory Meeting on ODA Evaluation in cooperation with NGO representatives and upon request by the International Cooperation Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA).

Since its commencement in 1954, Japan’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) has contributed to the stability and development of developing countries, and solutions of international issues which vary with the times, as well as to the security and prosperity of Japan. Recently, there have been increased domestic and international calls for more effective and efficient implementation of ODA. MOFA, as a coordinating ministry for ODA, has been conducting ODA evaluation mainly at the policy level with two main objectives: to support implementation and management of ODA; and to ensure its accountability.

The study focuses on Japan’s assistance carried out between fiscal year 2000 and fiscal year 2007 in the field of Basic Education in Laos. It aims to extract recommendations for more effective and efficient assistance in the field above by Japan in the future and propose directions for ODA implementation including effective cooperation with NGOs.

The External Advisory Meeting on ODA Evaluation was formed as an informal advisory body of the Director-General of the International Cooperation Bureau of MOFA to improve objectivity in ODA evaluation. The Advisory Meeting is commissioned to design and conduct evaluations of ODA and feed back the results and recommendations of each evaluation to the International Cooperation Bureau of MOFA so that they could be reflected in the actual implementation of ODA for improvement.

ODA Evaluation, carried out so far in various ways, has issued many useful recommendations. However, this study is the first third party evaluation to be implemented by the External Advisory Meeting on ODA Evaluation in cooperation with NGO representatives. Kiyoko Ikegami, a member of the External Advisory Meeting on ODA Evaluation, and Kaori Kuroda, the Co-Director of CSO Network, and Toshihiro Yoneyama, the Director of (LIFE) Live with Friends on the Earth, took charge of the study. In addition, as an advisor, Assistant Professor Miki Inui of Osaka University Graduate School made an enormous contribution to the study.

Likewise, MOFA, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) including the former Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), and the ODA Taskforces also made invaluable contributions. We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to all those who were involved in this study. The ODA Evaluation Division of the International Cooperation Bureau of MOFA was in charge of coordinating all the involved associates. All other supportive works including information collection, analysis and report preparation were provided by IC Net Limited under the commission of MOFA and in cooperation with Ryoko Nishida, the research department director at Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP).

Finally, we wish to add that the opinions expressed in this report do not reflect the views or positions of the Government of Japan or any other institution.

March 2009

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## Evaluation of Japan's Assistance to the Education Sector in Laos (Third Party Evaluation: Joint Evaluation with NGOs) (Sector Evaluation)

1. <b>Theme:</b> Evaluation of Japan's assistance to the field of Basic Human Needs (BHN) in Asia	 <p style="text-align: center;">Takkao Primary school in Vientiane built with Grant Aid for General Projects</p>
2. <b>Country:</b> Lao People's Democratic Republic	
<b>3. Evaluators:</b> (1) Senior evaluator: Kiyoko Ikegami *(Director, UNFPA Tokyo Office) (2) Advisor: Miki Inui *(Assistant Professor, Osaka University Graduate School) (3) NGO representatives: Kaori Kuroda *(Co-Director, CSO Network), Toshihiro Yoneyama (Director, Live with Friends on the Earth (LIFE)) (4) Collaborator: Ryoko Nishida (Director, Research Department, Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP)) (5) Consultant: IC Net Limited* *= Members of the study in Laos	
<b>4. Period of Evaluation Survey:</b> August 2008 - March 2009	

### Outline of Evaluation

#### 1. Evaluation Results

##### (1) Relevance of policies

So far, Japan's assistance to the basic education sector in Laos has been implemented in a manner consistent with higher-level policies of the Japanese government and with development policies of the Lao government, as well as with international priority issues and development goals. A clear framework for the current Program for the Improvement of Basic Education is still in the process of being defined, through participation in aid coordination with the Lao Government and other donors, and in consultations on Sector Wide Approaches (SWAs).

##### (2) Effectiveness of results

Japan's assistance to basic education in Laos has been making a certain contributions to the sector. This includes contributions in providing better educational environment and enhancing access to education through school construction and facility improvement activities, accounting for over half of the assistance, and to the raise of education quality by fostering instructors of science and mathematics teachers. NGO projects funded by ODA play a definite role in raising basic education levels for socially vulnerable groups, making use of good practices to improve these groups' educational environment and access, and to mitigate factors hindering school attendance.

##### (3) Appropriateness of processes

While increased emphasis is being placed on policy consultations and strengthened cooperation as part of the move towards aid coordination and SWAs, Japan's experience and strength in assistance to the basic education sector is still not fully understood by other

donors. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare and share documents which can familiarize aid partners with Japan's experience, knowledge and achievements in the field. Initiatives are under way at present, including collaborative schemes which combine "hard" and "soft" components in a manner geared to local situations and needs, activities with a comprehensive approach to local governments and communities in the three less developed southern provinces, and assistance to socially vulnerable groups through partnerships with NGOs.

## **2. Recommendations**

- (1) Strengthening basic education assistance aimed at ensuring continuation and completion of primary education

Although primary school enrollment rates are improving, gaps persist, being necessary to extend coverage to the so-called "last 10% or so" in order to ensure universal access to primary education. Japan should use its accumulated experience and reinforce its support to the basic education sector.

- (2) Aid coordination, strategic reinforcement of partnerships with other donors, and proactive participation in SWAps

Japan needs to participate actively in the transition to SWAps, while shaping the strategies of its Program for the Improvement of Basic Education, and clearly specifying its assistance targets and realms of expertise.

- (3) Supporting attainment of universal access to primary education and enhancing assistance effects through reinforced partnerships

- 1) Identification of the possibilities of cooperation with other sectors will be included as a check item from the planning stage, and strengthened cooperation will be promoted in order to enable comprehensive approaches.
- 2) Partnerships among Japan's various assistance schemes will be promoted based on local needs.
- 3) In accordance with the principle of decentralization, assistance will be provided for strengthening management capacities for local education administration.
- 4) NGOs' experience and knowledge will be used in order to address the educational needs of the children comprising the so-called "last 10% or so" through partnerships with NGOs with close ties to local people and communities.

- (4) Sharing information, experience and good practices in Japan and Laos

Documentation of the experience, knowledge and good practices achieved as part of Japan's assistance to Laos will be undertaken as the leadership and adjustment functions in Japan and of the ODA taskforce are strengthened. Steps will be taken to secure places and opportunities for sharing information, ideas and knowledge with NGOs, the private sector and other assistance stakeholders.

(Note: The opinions expressed in this summary do not necessarily reflect the views and positions of the Government of Japan or any other institutions.)

## Summary

### 1. Background

MOFA has been striving to improve its ODA evaluations in order to contribute to a more effective and efficient implementation of Japan's ODA. Although evaluations conducted jointly with NGOs have been implemented before, this study is the first third-party evaluation to be carried out by the External Advisory Meeting on ODA Evaluation in cooperation with NGOs. It is based on an awareness of the importance of cooperation and partnerships with NGOs in ODA implementation, and aims to examine the contribution of Japan's ODA to development issues from a more objective and fair perspective, defining the future directions of ODA implementation in such a way as to include the cooperation and the partnerships mentioned above in a most efficient manner. The education sector in Laos, a country with a low gross national income, was selected as the target of the evaluation from the various basic human needs (BHN) sectors in Asia in which NGOs are actively involved.

Japan is a major ODA donor for Laos, one of the world's least development countries (LDCs). However, Laos has formulated national strategies for economic growth and poverty reduction and targeted to pull itself out of the LDC list by 2020. In conditions in which levels of fulfillment of basic human needs are still extremely low, there is a strong need for assistance to improve these levels as a precondition for sustainable economic growth.

From the entire education sector, the evaluation focus was narrowed down to basic education for the following reasons.

- (1) Basic education is defined as those “educational activities through which individuals acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for living”<sup>1</sup>, thus being the most suitable subsector for inclusion in a BHN evaluation.
- (2) The government of Laos regards the improvement of basic education as a priority area, aimed in particular at the alleviation of poverty in the northern mountainous region and the southern border region.
- (3) Although Japanese NGOs working in Laos offer assistance in a variety of areas, basic education remains one of their major fields of activity.

### 2. Evaluation objective

The evaluation seeks to undertake a comprehensive assessment of Japan's ODA activities in the basic education sector as a whole, and to make recommendations which can contribute to the efficiency of future assistance, while outlining directions for ODA implementation that includes effective cooperation and partnerships with NGOs. At the same time, publicizing the results of this evaluation promotes accountability to taxpayers and understanding of Japan's ODA.

### 3. Evaluation target

The evaluation focuses on assistance to basic education in Laos, which has been implemented under “Improvement of Basic Education”, one of the six priority areas

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<sup>1</sup> According to JICA's Approaches for Systematic Planning of Development Projects. Based on the World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in 1990 by the World Conference on Education for All, “basic education” is defined as including early childhood development, primary education, lower secondary education, non-formal education (religious, community, adult, literacy education, etc.)

determined by the Country Assistance Program for Laos (September 2006), as implemented during the eight years between fiscal year 2000 and fiscal year 2007 (April 1, 2000 - March 31, 2008). However, for projects launched between fiscal year 2000 and fiscal year 2007 which were still ongoing at the time when the field research was carried out in October 2008, output up to October 2008 was used as reference information. Also, for the move towards aid coordination, information obtained as of October 2008 was considered the latest available.

#### **4. Research method**

The evaluation study was carried out in four steps: (1) setting the evaluation design, (2) study in Japan, (3) study in Laos, and (4) analysis of collected data and information as well as the report formulation process, and report formulation.

- (1) The evaluation framework was formulated in consultation with the External Advisory Meeting on ODA Evaluation, MOFA, the implementing agencies and other related bodies. ODA projects in the education sector in Laos were organized systematically, goals and issues were charted, and the scope of the evaluation was clearly defined.
- (2) Based on the literature review, interviews were conducted with related bodies in Japan (MOFA, JICA, NGOs), using a question guide which streamlined the interview items.
- (3) Field research was implemented in accordance with the evaluation framework and the results of the domestic study. Interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in the projects targeted by the evaluation, including relevant Japanese institutions (the Embassy of Japan in Laos, JICA Laos Office), as well as Lao institutions (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Lao Women's Union, Provincial Education Service, District Education Bureau), other donors (UNICEF, AusAID, ADB, WB) and NGOs (IV-Japan, Shanti International Volunteer Association, Action with Lao Children). In addition, information was collected through visits to some of the project sites, and through group discussions with the beneficiaries and the agencies in charge.
- (4) The collected data was organized and analyzed according to the viewpoints of the evaluation, and the ensuing results and recommendations were incorporated into the final report.

#### **5. Evaluation method**

In keeping with MOFA's ODA Evaluation Guidelines Fourth Edition (May 2008), the evaluation study was carried out from the analytical perspectives of (1) relevance of policies, (2) effectiveness of results, and (3) appropriateness of processes.

- (1) Relevance of policies  
The projects under evaluation were examined from the viewpoint of policy adequacy.
- (2) Effectiveness of results  
The projects were examined in terms of their input and output achievements. Concrete effects of major projects and their contribution to development issues in Laos's basic education were also explored.
- (3) Appropriateness of processes  
The study scrutinized the appropriateness of the implementation process of Japan's assistance to the basic education sector.

## 6. Trends in basic education assistance for Laos

### (1) Outline of Japan's assistance

From the viewpoint of its overall assistance to Laos, Japan has been the country's largest bilateral aid donor since 1991. For fiscal year 2000, Japan's ODA accounted for 33.8% of the Lao government expenditure, and for 40.8% of the total amount of ODA. Although figures for fiscal year 2007 were about 29% lower compared to fiscal year 2000, as a result of reductions in the ODA budget, it still represented 20.6% of the total amount of ODA. Thus, Japan's assistance plays an important role in the finance and economy of Laos. Japan's ODA accounted for 26.8% of total ODA to education and human resource development<sup>2</sup> at its highest level in 2004, and for 10.2% at its lowest in 2005. In 2001, 2003 and 2004 Japan was the largest donor to the education and human resource development sectors.

Japan's assistance is carried out based on priority areas, development issues and cooperation programs<sup>3</sup>. The development issues included under "Improvement of Basic Education," the priority area addressed in this evaluation, are: the improvement of the educational environment and access, the mitigation of factors inhibiting school attendance, and the raise of education quality. The Program for the Improvement of Basic Education is a cooperation program which aims to make contributions to these three development issues. Although not mentioned under the priority area "Improvement of Basic Education," the reinforcement of education administration and management is also one of the issues highlighted by the JICA Country Program (2007).

### (2) Japan's achievements in assistance to basic education

The evaluation study focused on a total of 152 projects, corresponding to a total aid amount of about JPY 2.426 billion (of which ODA 85%, NGO projects funded by ODA 15%). The breakdown by development issue shows that the improvement of the educational environment and access account for about JPY 1.456 billion (60%), the mitigation of factors inhibiting school attendance for about JPY 480 million (20%), the raise of education quality for about JPY 270 million (11%), and the reinforcement of education administration and management for JPY 220 million (9%). In terms of performance by scheme, Grant Aid for General Projects (31%) and Grant Aid for Grassroots Human Security Projects (25%) account together for almost 60% of the whole. A large part of funding was dedicated to the construction of school buildings and the facility upgrading. Primary education was the subsector with the largest input percentage at 64%, followed by teacher training (12%), non-formal education (10%), Education administration and management (9%), vocational education (3%) and lower secondary education (2%).

Looking at trends in Japan's ODA to basic education after fiscal year 2000, activities implemented at an initial stage included NGO project subsidies, grant aid for partnerships with Japanese NGOs, grant aid for grassroots and human security projects, and small-scale projects for the improvement of libraries and construction of school

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<sup>2</sup> In the reports of the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Planning and Investment, "Basic Education" is not treated as an independent category, being included instead under "Education and Human Resource Development".

<sup>3</sup> Cooperation programs are defined as "strategic frameworks for supporting the attainment of developing countries' mid- and long-term development goals (cooperation goals and adequate scenarios for attaining them)". JICA (2007e)



buildings, carried out through volunteer dispatch schemes. Large-scale school construction projects were undertaken with general project grants in 2003 and 2004. With funding being provided to UNICEF through the Japan Fund, figures of ODA to basic education doubled during this period. Despite the temporary decline that followed, assistance has been increasing again since 2006, including collaborative initiatives with NGOs launched in continuation of some of the grassroots partner projects implemented between 2002 and 2004, as well as new technical cooperation projects in the southern areas.

(3) Assistance trends among other donors

According to the Foreign Aid Report FY2005/2006 of the Lao government<sup>4</sup>, the total amount of ODA to Laos in fiscal year 2005 was USD 468.39 million, of which 10.96% was allocated to education and human resource development. Of the total ODA in fiscal year 2005 for this sector, 66% was bilateral aid, while 34% was undertaken through international organizations. The bilateral aid donors were, listed in order of amount, Vietnam, Japan, Australia, Sweden, South Korea and France. Assistance through international organizations included, in order of amount, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Development Association (IDA) of the World Bank, the European Union (EU), the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF.

According to the Directory of NGOs<sup>5</sup>, a website which shares information on the activities of international NGOs in Laos, there are 42 NGOs currently working in Laos, and 84 projects under implementation as of 2008. Of these NGOs, which operate in a wide range of sectors and on various scales, several focus on assistance to basic and non-formal education, including Save the Children Norway, Big Brother Mouse, Oxfam Australia and Room to Read. Thus, NGOs are an important category of donors to the education sector and can also be expected to function as a source of funding, complementing education programs.

## 7. Evaluation results

(1) Relevance of policies

So far, Japan's assistance to the basic education sector in Laos has placed emphasis on the improvement of the educational environment and access (60%), while also providing support for the mitigation of factors inhibiting school attendance, the raise of education quality and the reinforcement of education administration and management. It has been implemented in a manner consistent with Japan's higher-level policies, with the development policies of Laos, as well as with international priorities and development goals. A framework for future assistance activities in this sector is currently being worked out in parallel with participation in the negotiation processes of aid coordination with the Lao government and other donors, and of SWAps-related initiatives. However, the current cooperation program (the Program for the Improvement of Basic Education) is a loosely-formulated undertaking which puts together a number of individual projects, lacking a clearly formulated framework. One of the reasons for such state of the Program may be that Japan's experience and strengths in the basic education sector are not yet sufficiently understood by other donors involved in the process of aid coordination. It is therefore important to prepare documents for the

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006), Foreign Aid Report 2005/2006

<sup>5</sup> Internet Directory of Non-Government Organization (NGOs) in the Lao PDR

presentation and sharing of the experience, knowledge and good practices achieved as part of Japan's assistance to Laos by ODA, NGOs and the private sector.

Based on the National Education System Reform Strategy approved in 2007, the Lao government aims to make lower secondary education compulsory by 2020<sup>6</sup>. Such a reform of the educational system has a possibility to change the needs of education development, including school construction, curriculum development, distribution of textbooks and teaching materials, teacher training, etc.

The field research showed that the concentration of assistance in the sector of primary education since 1990 has created an insufficiency in the intake capacity of lower secondary education<sup>7</sup> and that technical schools are planned to be built in all provinces by 2010<sup>8</sup>. There is a high probability that such transformations will bring about a change in needs, increasing the importance of coordination between the various donors, including Japan, in order to provide assistance that meets the country's real needs in the new context.

In Laos, advancements are being made towards aid coordination and SWApS based on ESDF in order to achieve Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In response to the ongoing reform of the education system, which aims to raise the overall level of basic education, including lower secondary education, in order to ensure continued enrollment and completion of primary schooling, Japan needs to strengthen the strategies of its Program for the Improvement of Basic Education and to formulate clear directions, areas and contents for its assistance to Laos. In addition, there is also an increasing need for initiatives addressing the "last 10% or so", in other words socially vulnerable groups (remote, underdeveloped mountainous areas and villages, the poor, women, minorities, etc.) as a core issue of EFA.

## (2) Effectiveness of results

While being program/sector evaluation, it also examines input and output at project level, the extent to which goals have been met, influences on outcomes and qualitative and quantitative effects that can be expected in the future. The rationale for this is that the evaluation of the contribution of sector assistance to development issues in Laos is complicated by two factors. First, while enrollment rates and other outcomes pursued in the education sector can only be expressed in the long run, many of the projects targeted in this evaluation are either just completed or still under implementation, making the use of outcome indicators problematic. Second, since outcome indicators are affected by external circumstances such as social and economic factors and the cooperation of other donors, it is difficult to extract only the contribution of Japan's assistance and to clarify causal relationships.

Looking at the input of Japan's assistance to each development issue in the basic education sector, the highest percentage (60%) was allocated to the improvement of the educational environment and of access, followed by the mitigation of factors inhibiting school attendance (20%), and the raise of education quality and the reinforcement of education administration and management (10% each). Although the exact effects on

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<sup>6</sup> Ueno (2008a), p.146. The reform will add one more year of lower secondary education (to be a 4-year period). At present, compulsory education consists of 5 years of primary school.

<sup>7</sup> Oral communication from ADB

<sup>8</sup> Oral communication from the Ministry of Education

enrollment rates of Japan's assistance for the improvement of the educational environment and access through the construction of schools and the furnishing of educational facilities are difficult to express quantitatively, a certain positive influence can be identified through the number of improved schools and the increase in the total number of schools in target areas.

From the viewpoint of the raise of education quality, positive effects were observed in terms of teaching methodology and the creation of teaching materials, as a result of the training of instructors of mathematics and science teachers through SMATT. These achievements are expected to contribute to the raise of education quality in the long run.

A large number of NGO projects funded by ODA are characterized by an emphasis on socially vulnerable groups, including the poor, women and disabled people, in relation to the improvement of the educational environment and access, and to the mitigation of factors inhibiting school attendance. Furthermore, these projects make use of their own networks and close cooperation with local communities and local people in the implementation process. As a result, the assistance to school education, the diffusion of books and reading, promotion of cultural activities, vocational training for women and the disabled are being carried out in close connection with the local communities, contributing to the improvement of basic education.

On the other hand, while focusing on socially vulnerable groups, so-called "last 10% or so" who need to be reached in order to achieve universal access to primary education, the current input of NGO projects funded by ODA is limited in terms of project scale and geographic area. For this reason, although such projects may be effective individually, they have limited spillover effects at the national level. By encouraging the strategic positioning of partnerships with NGOs, it is possible to enhance assistance for the achievement of universal access to primary education as part of overall ODA.

Japan's assistance to the reinforcement of education administration and management is centered on policy support to the Ministry of Education through dispatches of education experts. Capacity development for education officials at local governments has just started as a technical cooperation project in the three southern provinces, being therefore still difficult to assess its concrete output. Nevertheless, in keeping with the rapid move towards aid coordination, it is believed that Japan has been promoting policy dialogue and information gathering in the education sector, particularly as part of its Program for the Improvement of Basic Education, through the dispatch of policy advisor.

(3) Process appropriateness

The evaluation confirmed that the various schemes of Japan's ODA were selected and linked effectively so as to suit local circumstances and needs. For example, grant aid to "hard" aspects, including school construction and improvement of the educational environment, is combined with assistance provided through technical projects and partnerships with NGOs to the improvement of school management and other "soft" aspects. A technical cooperation project in the three less developed southern provinces, which aims to improve school management capacities of local governments and communities through cooperation with international NGOs characterized by a strong presence at the local level, is expected to produce significant results in the future.

The Japanese NGOs evaluated on this occasion include groups with a record of nearly

20 years of experience in Laos, who gear their activities to local needs, while building relationships of trust with the respective local governments and communities. Although acting on a small scale, Japanese NGOs are making a definite contribution to the improvement of the educational environment and access, as well as to the mitigation of factors inhibiting school attendance, with a particular focus on socially vulnerable groups, through the promotion of book reading, arts and craft, and traditional dance for children, vocational training for people with low incomes, support to disabled women, development of teaching materials for minorities, etc. The use of such NGO strengths and good practices within ODA is worth considering. In the future, a more strategic positioning of partnerships with NGOs within overall ODA has the potential to enhance assistance aimed at the realization of universal access to primary education.

At the same time, it is expected that Japanese NGOs will increasingly implement their activities within a system of strategic partnership with donors as well, based on their awareness of the goals of ESDF. Cooperation with other donors and international NGOs within a new assistance framework is desirable not only for the promotion of aid effects, but also for the improvement of their capacities as implementers in the medium and long run, through the accumulation of experience which will form the basis of future strategic ODA partnerships.

As the environment of the education sector in Laos is changing, Japan should provide assistance suited to those transformations. The most significant transformation of the education sector in Laos is the advance in the formulation of ESDF as a new framework through aid coordination between 2009 and 2015, with a view to attaining the goals of EFA and MDGs. The fact that previous assistance has been carried out largely under donor leadership and without sufficient coordination has led to assistance duplication, placing constraints on the opportunities for developing Lao government's capacity for policy formulation and program management. It is important that, from now on, the Ministry of Education assumes leadership and ownership in defining the priority order of projects and in coordinating among donors. It can be anticipated that this will entail a series of capacity-related difficulties for the Ministry of Education, which has so far tended to depend on assistance. Under these circumstances, UNICEF, Australia, ADB and Sweden have already launched initiatives to provide indispensable policy support to the Ministry.

Thus, a reform of the educational system is under way, aiming to use the ESDF as a basis for raising the levels of basic education as a whole through aid coordination and SWAp in the sector. In line with this general orientation, the Japanese government should strengthen the strategies of its Program for the Improvement of Basic Education, which seeks to increase enrollment and completion rates in primary education, while at the same time formulating clear directions, areas and contents for its assistance. In addition to further strengthening policy support at all levels based on the dispatches of policy advisors undertaken so far, it is crucial to use approaches that link the development issues of basic education: the improvement of the educational environment and of access, the mitigation of factors inhibiting school attendance, the raise of education quality, and the reinforcement of education administration and management. Japan can further strengthen its assistance to basic education, a shared concern of the international community, by using partnerships with NGOs in order to attain the EFA goal of making education accessible to the "last 10% or so," including socially vulnerable groups (less developed mountainous areas and villages, the poor,

women, minorities, etc.), as well as by drawing on its experience in school construction, work with local communities and residents, and training programs for science and mathematics instructors.

## **8. Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1: Strengthening basic education assistance aimed at ensuring continuation and completion of primary education**

With expansion and improvement of basic education being stressed by the Lao government as one of its priorities for poverty reduction, recent initiatives have successfully managed to increase enrollment rates in primary education. However, attainment of EFA and MDGs by 2015 is still doubtful. This is because, while enrollment rates reached 89% in 2007, the fact that almost 40% of children do not complete primary education remains almost unchanged<sup>9</sup>. The main reasons behind this situation include poverty and the fact that some of the schools only offer the lower grades of primary school, causing children to discontinue their education. Furthermore, disparities exist in terms of the expansion and improvement of basic education between the various regions and ethnic groups, as well as between boys and girls. The important issue of low enrollment and completion rates among people in less developed mountainous areas and villages, the poor, women and minorities is still to be addressed. In order to ensure universal access to primary education, efforts need to be made for assistance to reach the children comprising the “last 10% or so.”

Against this background, the Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF) is currently being formulated through aid coordination in Laos. In its effort to raise overall levels of basic education, including lower secondary education, the Lao government is advancing plans to reform the education system and to extend compulsory education from primary to lower secondary school. This calls for the strategic continuation and reinforcement of the Program for the Improvement of Basic Education with its focus on increasing enrollment and completion rates in primary education. The program is expected to use an approach that links assistance to the core development issues of basic education: the improvement of the educational environment and of access, the mitigation of factors inhibiting school attendance, the raise of education quality, and the reinforcement of education administration and management. This means that Japan should continue to strengthen its assistance to the basic education sector, as a shared concern of the international community, making use of its accumulated experience in school construction, assistance to local communities and residents, training of science and mathematics instructors, etc.

### **Recommendation 2: Aid coordination, strategic reinforcement of partnerships with other donors, and proactive participation in SWApS**

At present, rapid advances are being made towards aid coordination and SWApS in the education sector in Laos. As the government's concrete plan for sectoral development is formulated in ESDF, it is highly probable that SWApS will make further progress. Therefore, it is recommended that Japan participate actively in this move and strategically shape its Program for the Improvement of Basic Education. This will require Japan to clearly define its assistance targets and the sub-sectors and issues where its strengths are most valuable. An analysis of Japan's record of assistance to primary education shows that its areas of expertise

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<sup>9</sup> See Ministry of Education (2008a), Chapter 3.

include the improvement of the educational environment and access (primary school construction and renovation), the raise of education quality (training of instructors of science and mathematics teachers), and the mitigation of factors inhibiting school attendance by working with communities in cooperation with NGOs (promotion for reading, community enlightenment, etc.).

Japan has been dispatching policy advisors to the Ministry of Education to provide assistance for education administration and management. With the move towards SWAs, such policy advisors can act as an important medium for promoting policy dialogue and aid coordination with the Lao government and other donors. Assistance for the reinforcement of education administration and management should continue in the future. Furthermore, strategic partnerships with other donors can be reinforced by making use of policy advisors in order to share the knowledge and experience learned from linkages between top-level assistance (to central government and policy) with grassroots assistance to local communities, as implemented through the technical cooperation project in the three southern provinces.

### **Recommendation 3: Supporting attainment of universal access to primary education and enhancing assistance effects through reinforced partnerships**

#### **(1) Reinforcing partnerships in order to ensure comprehensive approaches**

Initiatives for the development of basic education, undertaken as part of a larger effort aiming to reduce poverty, require comprehensive approaches which are not limited to the education sector, but focus on region-wide linkages with other sectors in order to improve the educational environment as a whole. While education plays an important role in poverty reduction, comprehensive approaches need to be taken at a variety of levels. Therefore, it is recommended that, in the formulation stage of programs and projects for the education sector, attention be given to linkages with infrastructure development and the health sector, as well as to regional economic development. Similarly, in the planning stage, it is recommended that processes and tools (check items) be set in place for identifying possibilities for partnerships with other sectors. Such processes can be used to ensure that synergy effects are generated through assistance.

#### **(2) Promoting linkages between Japan's various assistance schemes**

As efforts continue to be made towards the goal of EFA, it is essential to select and link schemes adequately, and to coordinate cooperation, including NGOs and the private sector in the process. To this end, it is becoming increasingly important to select assistance schemes and to determine the scale, period and activity of projects according to the particular needs of each local area and beneficiary. This includes creating synergies by addressing the "hard" and "soft" dimensions of the needs simultaneously. For example, while using grant aid for "hard" infrastructure development, such as school construction and improvement of the educational environment, technical cooperation projects and projects conducted in partnership with NGOs can focus on "soft" aspects such as school management and education project administration. Such endeavors are already under way in the three southern provinces, and should be expanded in the future.

#### **(3) Strengthening capacities of local governments**

With the advance of decentralization, improvements in education services cannot be achieved without strengthening capacity for education administration not only at the level of the central government, but also of local governments. Improving the managerial capacity of local

education administration is one more aspect which needs to be incorporated into a comprehensive approach. In particular, a major issue in the basic education sector is improving the administrative and managerial capacity of Provincial Educational Services (PES) and District Education Bureaus (DEB), which are in charge of the administration and management of institutions for pre-school, primary, lower secondary and non-formal education. Assistance is needed to strengthen the necessary capacity of PES and DEB for promoting and maintaining basic education projects at the local level, with special attention to local particularities and needs, as well as to the mobilization and empowerment of local resources through the participation of communities and people.

#### **(4) Collaborating with NGOs and other groups with close connections to local people and communities**

Through partnerships with NGOs and other groups (Japanese and international NGOs, mass organizations and regional institutions) with close connections to local people and communities, it is possible to address issues specific to a certain area, even in areas where access is difficult and which are faced with complicated problems. There are Japanese NGOs with rich experience in activities focusing on regions with difficult access to education, and on minorities and socially vulnerable groups. Therefore, linkages between ODA and NGOs should be enhanced, ensuring that the NGOs' experience and networks at the local level are best used in order to effectively reach groups comprising the "last 10% or so."

The above four recommendations share an emphasis on a comprehensive approach, bringing to the foreground the need to strengthen partnerships not only between various ODA schemes, but also with NGOs and other donors and aid organizations. In advancing collaboration, it is important both to provide for information exchanges, review and consultation with NGOs and other stakeholders from the planning stage, and to follow the example of other donors in ensuring the smooth implementation of activities through simple and coordinated means.

#### **Recommendation 4: Sharing information, expertise and good practices in Japan and Laos**

In the future, in line with the move towards SWApS, Japan will need to get actively involved in the decision-making process, increasing its presence and providing assistance in an efficient and effective manner. For that purpose, further steps remain to be taken to prepare text materials that present the experience, knowledge, good practices (success stories and good examples) and results along with the accompanying background analysis, evidence and data, not only for Japan's ODA but also for the assistance activities of NGOs and the private sector, and to ensure that they are appropriately publicized and shared.

Such documentation of experience, knowledge and good practices, along with the synthesis of evidence and data, should be undertaken under the leadership of the ODA taskforce. In addition, the sharing of the information, ideas and knowledge possessed by NGOs, the private sector and other local stakeholders can be effective in: (1) the consideration of concrete cooperation projects, (2) the selection of and concentration on the sub-sectors and issues where Japan's strengths can be of value, and (3) the identification of good practices applicable from the planning stage. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the coordination functions of the ODA taskforce and to secure a forum for the exchange of opinion and information on a continuous, cross-sectoral basis.



## Map of Lao People's Democratic Republic



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## Field research pictures



Interview at JICA Laos Office



Interview at Laos's Ministry of Planning and Investment



Interview at the Resident Mission Office of the Asian Development Bank in Laos



The Provincial Educational Service of Louangphabang



Interview at ALC's Center for the Development of Educational Activities for Children



Foldable library bookshelf (ALC)  
Grassroots Technical Cooperation Project



Renovated public library in Louangphabang (SVA)  
Grassroots Technical Cooperation Project



Dormitory of IV-Japan Vocational Training Center  
Grant Aid for Japanese NGO Projects



New primary school building in Songpak  
Grant Aid for Grassroots Human Security Projects



Dormitory of minority school in Suanluang  
Grant Aid for Grassroots Human Security Projects



Teaching aid developed in a project for fostering  
science and mathematics teachers  
Technical Cooperation Project



Primary classroom for CIED Projects (Salavan  
Province)  
Technical Cooperation Project