

## ■ Laos, “Supporting Community Initiatives for Primary Education Development in the Southern Provinces”

Inhabited by many ethnic minorities, the southern region of Laos has a high level of poverty and little development progress. The Government of Laos carries out activities in a variety of sectors to fundamentally solve the problem of poverty in this region, and identifies the expansion and improvement of education as one of its priorities.

To support the activities of the Government of Laos, Japan began extending cooperation for primary education in this region in 2007. The goal of the project is to improve primary school education with local residents’ participation in the management of schools. In this region where the school enrollment rate is lower than in other regions, the issues facing school education are addressed through the participation of the local community, including parents, guardians, and temples, with residents themselves brainstorming and proposing solutions. There are various reasons for which children cannot or continue to attend schools. Some reasons are attributable to schools, such as problems of shortage of and improper school buildings and classrooms, shortage of teachers, and quality of teachers, while some reasons are attributable to problems, such as a lack of understanding or poverty of families. This project demonstrated that in addition to the efforts by schools, the community’s mutual support has substantial impact on children’s school attendance and continuation, and shed light on which field activities are effective.

Japan, by means of dispatching experts and supplying equipment, among other activities, supported the project by encouraging schools and residents to participate. As a result, the average net school attendance rate for the relevant schools improved dramatically from about 73% to nearly 100%.

As a follow-up to Phase 1 of the project implemented from 2007, Phase 2 started in 2012. In assessing the different reasons by village and household and finding clues for resolving the problems, local governments, including districts and provinces, play a crucial role. Phase 2 intends to understand the situation of each school, and develop local government services to provide the necessary support to those schools in need of assistance. Schools, while receiving support from the community and local governments, strive to understand the problems they themselves face and make improvements so that they can make continuous enhancements on their own. Japan assists these efforts by dispatching experts and implementing trainings.

Japan’s cooperation is expected to improve access to education in the southern region of Laos and enhance the quality of education. At the same time, the strengthening of the capacities of the local community and the promotion of human resource development are expected to lead to poverty reduction and growth in this region.



Children in Laos learning at a classroom (Photo: JICA)