

EDUCATION SECTION  
PROGRAMME DIVISION



# CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

## CASE STUDY:

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

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**SCHOOLS OF QUALITY: A CASE STUDY ON  
RIGHTS-BASED EDUCATION REFORM IN  
THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC**



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## ACRONYMS

CFS	child-friendly school
DPPE	Department of Primary and Pre-Primary Education
EFA	Education for All
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MOE	Ministry of Education
NER	net enrolment ratio
SDP	school development plan
SoQ	Schools of Quality
SSA	school self-assessment
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VEDC	Village Education Development Committee

## I. CONTEXT

The development of child-friendly schools in the Lao People's Democratic Republic – where they are known as Schools of Quality (SoQ) – is an initiative that addresses access and quality in basic education as the country strives to meet its commitments to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA). With a relatively limited resource base, UNICEF was able to support the Ministry of Education (MOE) in adopting a holistic and rights-based approach as the key strategy.

Integration of the SoQ concept in the national ministry's long-term plans, and the consequently high profile Schools of Quality has gained in development discourse between the Lao Government and partners, have been recognized as one of the region's success stories.<sup>1</sup> In a relatively short time, the initiative shifted from being a 'UNICEF project' to one fully owned by the Ministry of Education. The SoQ approach has been mainstreamed into the system through the Education Sector Development Framework 2009–2015 and further articulated through official implementation guidelines. The strategy is now slated for scaling up with sustained financing under the Education for All-Fast Track Initiative's Catalytic Fund.

In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, several themes become apparent through analysis of the process of introducing the child-friendly school (CFS) approach. First, the Lao approach is holistic, focusing on the school as more than the sum of its parts as well as assessing the detailed characteristics required for a quality school. This approach helped set clear expectations for students, educators and community members, and has made it easy to understand and work with Schools of Quality. Second, the simultaneous movement towards a sector-wide approach and harmonization between donors has created synergies that have enabled SoQ to gain a high profile. Third, the 'action-learning' approach towards implementation allowed for revision of methods and tools to better respond to realities on the ground – leading to a locally owned model and a flexible process adaptable to the many different contexts in which schools are located. The importance of continuity in this regard is equally apparent: The same core team of Ministry of Education and UNICEF staff worked together throughout the entire process, building trust and a unified frame of reference.

Five years after the SoQ approach was first piloted, it was firmly established in the Lao education reform narrative. Already enshrined in national policy as a strategy, training modules and other implementation tools are in development to ensure a harmonized approach to implementation. Many challenges remain, however, particularly with regard to further understanding how children learn and, more importantly, how the shift can be made from a textbook-centred learning environment into one that is truly child-centred. Along with this, entrenched systems of assessment and supervision that do not adequately respond to the learning needs of children or professional development for teachers will require further changes if schooling in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is to reflect the child rights principles that are the foundation of the approach.

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<sup>1</sup> Shaeffer, S., 'Rolling Out the Child-Friendly School Package in East Asia and the Pacific: Observations and recommendations for UNICEF's consideration', UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, Bangkok, 2009.

The next five years will be critical as the initiative is brought to scale and its impact on access and quality is further examined.

## Country overview

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is located in South-East Asia, with Myanmar to the west, China to the north, Viet Nam to the east, and Thailand and Cambodia to the south. Although the country is often referred to as 'landlocked', the Lao Government prefers to use the term 'land-linked'. In fact, as the South-East Asian region develops, the country is becoming a crossroads, a gateway to South-East Asia from China, a transit route between Thailand and Viet Nam. The Mekong River, the country's border with Thailand and the main waterway, is spanned by an increasing number of bridges, opening up trade routes, boosting the economy and bringing ever-increasing exposure to the outside world. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is also coming into its own as a full participant in regional affairs, and it stepped onto the regional stage as host of the 25th Southeast Asian Games, held in Vientiane, in 2009.

The Lao terrain is mountainous and sparsely populated, with a density of 24 people per square kilometre. Of the country's 6.4 million citizens,<sup>2</sup> more than 80 per cent live in rural areas, many of which are inaccessible by road and dominated largely by subsistence-oriented, smallholder farming households. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is culturally and linguistically diverse, with 49 officially recognized ethnic groups and more than 200 subgroups. The Lao-Tai ethnic 'family' makes up the majority of the population (66 per cent) and is the predominant sociocultural group, mostly inhabiting the lowlands and major urban areas. The Austro-Asiatic (21.5 per cent), Hmong-Mien (8.8 per cent) and Sino-Tibetan (3.1 per cent) mainly inhabit the rural and remote uplands. For these groups – representing more than one-third of the population – Lao, the national language, is not their mother tongue.

As the Lao economy gradually opened up, beginning with the early 1990s, the country experienced strong economic growth and a stable macroeconomic environment; gross domestic product during recent years has averaged above 7 per cent annually. The main engines of growth have been the hydropower and mining sectors, along with liberalization of the private sector and trade. This steady economic growth, and accompanying improved access to roads, markets and government services, has led to a sharp decrease in poverty rates: from 46 per cent in 1993 to 27 per cent in 2008.<sup>3</sup> But the overall reduction in poverty hides disparities across regions and ethnic groups.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is still one of the world's poorest nations; of 169 countries in the 2010 Human Development Index, it ranks 122nd.<sup>4</sup> Major causes of

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<sup>2</sup> UN DESA (2009d), 'World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision'. New York: Department for Economic and Social Affairs.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme, 'Employment and livelihoods, Lao PDR, 2009: The 4th National Human Development Report,' Ministry of Planning and Investment, and UNDP, Vientiane, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2010: The real wealth of nations – Pathways to human development*, UNDP, New York, 2010, pp. 137, 142.

poverty include lack of land and livestock ownership, limited access to credit, poor infrastructure, and inadequate delivery of such public services as health and education. Malnutrition among children under 5 years old and women of childbearing age has remained high, particularly in rural areas and among Sino-Tibetan and Austro-Asiatic ethnic groups. Nationwide, 37 per cent of all children under age 5 are underweight.<sup>5</sup>

Cultural and linguistic barriers present a major challenge to delivering health care and education. Women have lower literacy rates than men, and girls have lower school access and completion rates. These gender gaps are more pronounced in rural and remote areas, where poverty is highest.

The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy, developed in 2004, articulates the Lao Government's strategic framework for poverty reduction and outlines programmes needed to move out of "least-developed country" status by 2020. Four areas are identified as crucial to this development strategy: agriculture/forestry; education; health; and infrastructure, particularly rural roads.<sup>6</sup> The strategy is aligned with the Millennium Development Goals and forms a central part of the sixth National Socio-Economic Development Plan, 2006–2010.<sup>7</sup>

Geographically targeted programming is a key element of the Lao National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy and focuses on 72 districts identified as most disadvantaged among the country's 147 districts. Most of these priority districts are located in remote areas. Within individual districts, development zones comprising several villages have been mapped out to rationalize social services provision. This is combined with a policy of relocating remote communities closer to roads to facilitate service provision as well as to eradicate opium growing and traditional slash-and-burn agricultural practices.<sup>8</sup> The Government encourages donors to specify development aid, at the district and sub-district levels, in support of the strategy.

The Lao Government has also been active in reforming the public sector through institutional strengthening, especially in financial management and procurement. These efforts have led to improved capacities to ensure effective use of public resources. The Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness set in motion a process of aid harmonization that includes sector working groups, which bring development partners together under the leadership of various government ministries.

Revenues from a major hydropower facility that came online in 2010 will provide a substantial boost to government resources, particularly the social sectors, which have been given funding priority by the Lao Government.

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Statistics and United Nations Children's Fund, 'Lao PDR Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2006: Final report', Ministry of Planning and Investment, and UNICEF, Vientiane, September 2008, p. iii.

<sup>6</sup> Lao People's Democratic Republic, 'National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy,' Vientiane, 2004, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Committee for Planning and Investment, 'National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006–2010', Lao People's Democratic Republic, Vientiane, October 2006.

<sup>8</sup> This approach has been criticized for its potentially adverse effects on the social, economic and cultural traditions of relocated communities.

## Education system overview

The formal education system consists of general education, vocational and technical education, and higher education. General education includes preschool (childcare for children up to 2 years old and kindergarten for children aged 3–5) and 12 years of primary and secondary education combined – divided into primary (five years of schooling for children aged 6–10), lower secondary (four years for children aged 11–14) and upper secondary (three years for children aged 15–17).

Basic education is defined as primary and lower secondary school, and comprises nine years of education. Due to lack of infrastructure and an inadequate pool of qualified preschool teachers, many primary schools include a pre-primary class to prepare young entrants for Grade 1. Primary education is compulsory and free by statute.<sup>9</sup>

Vocational education programmes are available for students completing Grade 9 or Grade 12 and typically offer up to three years of study. This includes training for preschool through lower-secondary-school teachers, for which there are several paths. To become a preschool teacher, completion of upper-secondary school plus one year of teacher training is required. All teacher training institutes are under the authority of the Ministry of Education. Only one teacher training institute, located in Vientiane, provides preschool training.

To become a primary-school teacher, there are two main options: a three-year teacher training programme upon completion of lower-secondary school, or a one-year training programme upon completion of upper-secondary school.<sup>10</sup> Training is available at seven teacher training institutes located across the country.

Higher education is available for students completing upper-secondary school; courses of study range from four to seven years depending on the subject. For upper-secondary teachers, the course of study is four years. Private education has an increasingly important role in the education system, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels and in urban areas. But there is no private teacher training degree programme available. A non-formal education system provides literacy and continuing education for out-of-school children and adults as well as vocational training for adolescents and adults.

**Management and administration:** The education administrative structure consists of three levels: the central Ministry of Education, a provincial education service for each of the 17 provinces, and a district education bureau for each of the 143 districts. The district bureaus have direct responsibility for primary schools, whereas provincial education

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<sup>9</sup> Constitution of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Article 19, Constitution of the Lao People's Democratic Republic; and the Decree on Compulsory Primary Education in Lao PDR, Prime Minister's Office, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Teacher training programmes were not aligned with the education-cycle increase from 11 years to 12 years; completion of lower secondary was set at Grade 8, and completion of upper secondary at Grade 11. Changes are expected to be introduced in the 2011/12 academic year.

services are responsible for secondary schools. 'Pedagogical advisers', based in the district education bureaus and provincial education services hold primary responsibility for technical support and for supervision of teachers at primary and secondary schools, respectively.

The Ministry of Education has reorganized for more efficient management of education services. The following points list departments with direct relevance to Schools of Quality implementation:

- Department of Primary and Pre-Primary Education, and Department of Secondary Education. These were created in 2008 to replace the Department of General Education and have direct responsibility for ensuring access to basic education.
- Inclusive Education Centre, and National Education Standards and Quality Assurance Center. The centres were established to provide a focus for policy development to ensure the education system responds to the needs of all learners – regardless of gender, ethnicity or learning ability – and to establish unified quality standards related to student learning outcomes as well as mechanisms for assuring these standards are met by all schools.
- National Research Institute for Educational Science. The institute is responsible for development of the general education curriculum along with textbooks and teacher guides. It shares responsibility with the National Education Standards and Quality Assurance Center for monitoring student learning outcomes through implementation of national assessments.
- Education, Statistics and Information Technology Center. This centre conducts an annual school census and manages the Education Management Information System.
- Department of Inspection. This department is responsible for coordinating the monitoring and evaluation network to measure progress on implementation of the Education Sector Development Framework and overall sector performance.
- Department of Teacher Training (Ministry of Education). Tasked with ensuring an adequate supply of qualified teachers, this department is responsible for the entire range of professional development programming – including both pre-service and in-service training – for teachers at all levels in the education system.
- Department of Personnel Administration. This department is responsible for promoting an adequate supply of school directors and other education managers as well as ensuring their professional development.

*Policy context:* The Education for All National Plan of Action 2003–2015 sets the overarching goals and actions to be taken to meet EFA commitments. The National Education System Reform Strategy 2006–2015 elaborates the systemic change required to enable the Ministry of Education to improve its effectiveness in reaching those commitments.

The Education Sector Development Framework 2009–2015 provides a unified sectoral approach to guide implementation of programming initiatives and identifies Schools of Quality as a key strategy for bringing about improvements that will ensure every child has access to a quality basic education. The framework states, “*Schools of Quality* piloted by UNICEF and subsequently adopted by the Ministry of Education as Government policy offer a sound model for increasing Grade 1 enrolment rates, reducing repetition in Grades 1–5, preventing drop-out and securing a general improvement in the quality of

teaching and learning.”<sup>11</sup>

The Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, calling for harmonization of support provided by development partners, is an important tool for ensuring a coordinated donor response that is fully aligned with government policy and programming priorities.

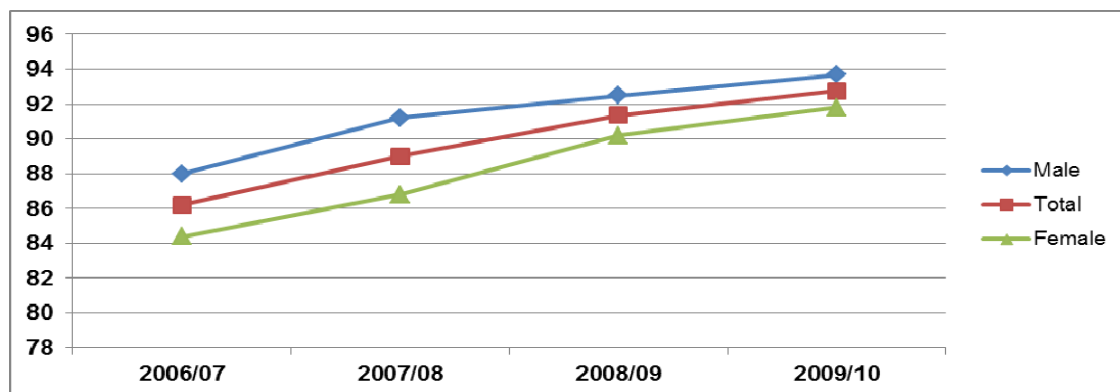
## Key education issues and challenges

Based on data for the 2009/10 academic year, there are 916,341 children – 47.2 per cent of them girls – enrolled in primary school, including 31,709 children in private schools. There are 8,968 primary schools in the country, with 31,648 primary classrooms and 1,421 classrooms allocated to pre-primary classes. Primary schools are staffed with 31,684 teachers, just more than half of them women, and include 2,211 volunteers or teachers working on a contract basis. In addition, there are 1,297 pre-primary teachers working in primary schools.

*Access and equity.* The net enrolment ratio (NER) was 92.7 per cent (91.7 per cent for girls and 93.7 per cent for boys) and the gross enrolment ratio was 121.4 per cent (117.1 per cent for girls and 125.4 per cent for boys). Of the total enrolments, 128,652 children, or 14 per cent, were repeating a grade.

Figure 1 shows NER trends over a period of four years. Significant progress has been made in increasing overall enrolment for both boys and girls, although girls' enrolment still lags. The pattern of gradual levelling off indicates the difficulties of enrolling the hardest-to-reach children. The trends also belie regional, gender and ethnic discrepancies: net enrolment ratios range from 99.0 per cent in the capital city (99.1 per cent for girls and 98.9 per cent for boys) to 85.4 per cent (81.5 per cent for girls and 89.2 per cent for girls) in Phôngsali Province, a remote location in the mountainous north, populated by numerous small ethnic groups.

Figure 1. Primary school NER trends (%)



<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Education, 'Education Sector Development Framework 2009–2015', Lao People's Democratic Republic, Vientiane, April 2009, p. 21 (English).

Data from the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey provide household-based data on net enrolment ratios. For the 2007/08 academic year, the NER for children aged 6–10 (primary-school age) in the country was only 81 per cent (80 per cent for girls, 82 per cent for boys). This compares to Education Management Information System figures for the same year of 89.2 per cent (87.0 per cent for girls, 91.4 per cent for boys), suggesting that official MOE figures significantly over-report enrolments.

The Expenditure and Consumption Survey also provides details on these rates for the four officially recognized ethno-linguistic groups that make up the majority of the country's population, indicating high enrolment disparities between groups. Whereas the NER for the majority Lao-Tai ethnic is reported at 90 per cent, comparable figures for the Mon-Khmer are only 69 per cent, and for the Sino-Tibetan ethnic group, only 49 per cent are enrolled in school.

Demand-side constraints to access are most prevalent in remote areas, where household poverty, cultural traditions that undervalue girls' education and a language of instruction that is not the mother tongue of most of the population deny children's right to education.

Supply-side constraints include insufficient numbers of schools and lack of infrastructure. Many of the 10,500 villages in the country are located in mountainous areas, and only 8,500 villages have primary schools. Of these, 42.8 per cent are 'incomplete' meaning they do not offer the full five primary grades. This creates a major challenge for children in completing their primary education because the nearest primary school with all five grades is, in many cases, located several hours' walking distance from their home village. Main strategies to address the situation include school construction focused on remote areas and promotion of multi-grade teaching to enable schools to provide education up to Grade 5.

Lack of qualified teachers is another barrier. Few children from remote areas attain the level of education required to enter the teaching profession. Qualified teachers are often reluctant to work in remote areas or are only willing to do so for a short period of time, leading to high turnover and sometimes long periods when no teacher is available. Various programmes have been implemented to recruit locally, with special teacher training courses designed for students who have only completed primary or lower-secondary education.

Government hiring quotas are a further constraint because there are not enough teaching positions in place to meet demand. At the central, provincial and local levels, provisions are made for hiring contract teachers employed on an annual basis, often without hope of attaining a permanent position.

*Quality:* Overall promotion rates for 2008–2009 were 79.0 per cent (80.3 per cent for girls, 77.9 per cent for boys). The repetition rate was 14.2 per cent (12.9 per cent for girls, 15.2 per cent for boys). The drop-out rate was 6.8 per cent (6.9 per cent for boys).

Although overall promotion rates are high and repetition rates are being reduced, Table 1 highlights particular problems faced in the lower grades, especially Grade 1, where more than one in four children fail to progress to Grade 2. Repetition rates vary by

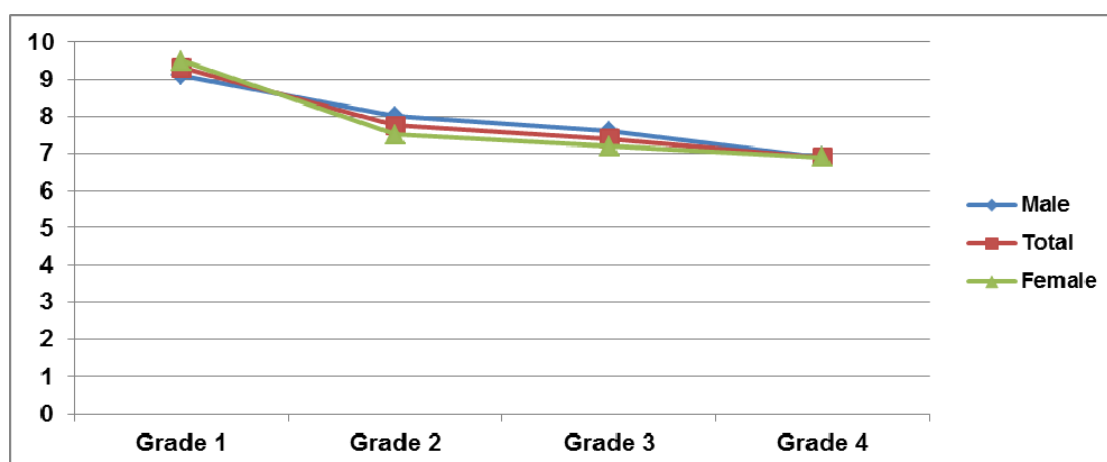
geographical location as well, with Grade 1 repetition rates as high as 47.1 per cent (44.8 per cent for girls, 49.2 per cent for boys) in Xékong Province, in the remote south.

**Table 1. Primary school repetition rate trends (%)**

Grade	2000–2001		2005–2006		2008–2009	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Grade 1	35.0	33.5	33.7	31.9	29.5	27.1
Grade 2	21.5	17.9	19.3	16.5	14.9	12.1
Grade 3	13.6	9.8	13.6	10.4	9.6	6.7
Grade 4	9.2	5.5	9.0	6.3	6.1	4.0
Grade 5	6.7	3.7	5.5	3.3	2.6	1.7

A similar pattern appears for drop-out rates. Overall decreases are fairly even between boys and girls but vary dramatically by location. Drop-out rates are lowest in the capital city of Vientiane, at 2.9 per cent (2.5 per cent for girls, 3.2 per cent for boys). But in ethnically diverse and remote Oudômxai Province, the overall drop-out rate is 12.2 per cent (12.8 per cent for girls, 11.6 per cent for boys) and for Grade 1, the drop-out rate is 23.0 per cent (22.9 per cent for girls, 23.2 per cent for boys).

**Figure 2. Primary school drop-out rate trends (%)**



One factor associated with high repetition and drop-out rates during the early grades is the lack of school readiness, especially for children whose first language is not the language of instruction. The dearth of early childhood education is significant. Preschools are predominantly limited to urban and semi-urban areas, with almost half of the 1,284 preschools located in three provinces with the country's largest cities: Vientiane, Savannakhet and Champasak. The Ministry of Education's main strategy to address the issue is its policy to establish pre-primary classes within existing primary schools.

Food insecurity and malnutrition are persistent problems related to poor education outcomes. Chronic and acute malnutrition affect a very high proportion of children in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, particularly in the poorest and most remote areas.

The school feeding programme supported by the World Food Programme is a major education-sector intervention to alleviate children's short-term hunger and increase their attention span in the classroom.

Another factor is the lack of fully qualified teachers, particularly in rural and remote areas, many teachers have limited general education and little or no training for teaching. In addition, classrooms are often substandard and lack even the most basic supplies or teaching and learning materials. This leads to an education of limited quality that does not meet the learning needs of students.

The combined lack of teachers and classrooms has created a situation in which multi-grade teaching is required in a large number of classrooms. Of the 31,868 primary-school classrooms, 27.2 per cent are multi-grade. The impact of high repetition and drop-out rates results in an overall primary-school survival rate of 67.6 per cent (68.2 per cent for girls, 67.0 per cent for boys). For students who complete primary school, the transition rate to secondary school was 80.9 per cent in 2006–2007 (78.7 per cent for girls, 82.7 per cent for boys). For Grade 5 students who pass the exit exam, the transition rate was 86.9 per cent (83.9 per cent for girls, 89.4 per cent for boys).

## II. SCHOOLS OF QUALITY: THE LAO APPROACH TO CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

### Programme overview

Schools of Quality (SoQ) is the rights-based, child-friendly approach to improving the quality of education in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The underlying principle is that school systems should be based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the country made a legal commitment to in 1991. The SoQ approach aims to ensure all children realize their right to a basic education of good quality that prepares them with the life skills required to be healthy, productive members of society, prepared to face the challenges of a fast-changing world. It strives to guarantee that schools are well-managed, safe and protective environments that are conducive to learning and promote well-being and self-confidence. SoQ classrooms are supplied with relevant teaching and learning materials, and teachers are motivated, professional and skilled in organizing learning to meet the individual needs of students.

Schools of Quality work closely with communities to ensure that all children enrol, attend school regularly and complete their primary education; that families support learning in the home and village; and that community aspirations for children's education are met by the school.

The recently developed Guidelines for Implementation of Schools of Quality highlight two key characteristics for a School of Quality:

- (1) It is a 'child-seeking' school, actively identifying excluded children so they can be enrolled in school and included in learning. Children are treated as individuals with rights and the Ministry of Education as a duty bearer with the obligation to fulfil these rights – demonstrating, promoting and helping to monitor the rights and well-being of all children in the community.
- (2) It is a child-centred school, acting in the best interests of the child and leading to realization of the child's full potential. A School of Quality is concerned both about the 'whole' child (including health, nutritional status and well-being) and about what happens to children in their families and communities, before they enter school and after they leave it.

These statements represent a fundamental shift in the way schooling is perceived in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, from a traditional world view emphasizing the interests of the education system, to one focusing on the child and on the obligation to ensure the rights of each and every child.

The implementation guidelines define six dimensions of the SoQ framework, establishing that a School of Quality:

- (1) *Is inclusive of all children.* These schools are child-seeking, taking steps to ensure that all children in the community have access to education and responding to

diversity by addressing children's varied needs based on gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity and levels of ability.

(2) *Supports effective education that is relevant to children's lives.* SoQ teachers relate curriculum content to the local context and build on the knowledge and experience of students. They employ a life-skills approach and make use of a variety of teaching methods to strengthen participatory learning.

(3) *Has a clean, healthy, safe and protective environment.* All stakeholders are involved in developing and maintaining a healthy, safe, supportive and protective environment for students and teachers, including provision of clean water supplies and an adequate number of toilet facilities for girls and boys. SoQ teachers incorporate health education into the curriculum, emphasizing locally relevant issues.

(4) *Promotes gender balance.* Schools of Quality recognize the particular needs of girls and ensure teaching practices are gender sensitive and promote positive images of girls. Schools provide equal opportunities for boys and girls to participate in learning and social activities at the school.

(5) *Actively encourages community members to participate in school development as well as teaching and learning.* A close working relationship is maintained with the community, primarily through the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC), to ensure universal enrolment and support for quality teaching and learning. Teachers communicate with parents in support of their child's learning.

(6) *Has good management and administration.* The school director provides leadership and support for teachers and students and takes a lead role in promoting education in the community. The VEDC provides guidance in school planning and management activities, ensuring the school improvement plan is implemented.

These dimensions are adapted from the model of child-friendly schools and are further elaborated through SoQ minimum standards developed by the Ministry of Education over the course of several years. These minimum standards detail the characteristics of the six dimensions. Each characteristic, or standard, is accompanied by associated indicators to assist schools, communities and education authorities in assessing school quality and identifying areas for improvement. The list of standards and indicators is included as Annex 1. All schools are expected to achieve these standards. At the same time, the standards are expected to evolve over time as the level of quality that can realistically be expected of schools changes.

Among the key inputs and processes established by the implementation guidelines to support the SoQ strategy:

(1) Orientation for provincial and district administrators is a crucial step in mobilizing support. Provincial and district governors as well as education officials are introduced to SoQ concepts and the necessary actions for implementation. This is especially important to ensure both education and local governance bodies understand the approach and provide adequate financing of activities to support Schools of Quality.

(2) Building provincial and district teams to serve as advocates and trainers is the next step in the process of introducing the SoQ approach. Relevant line departments from the central Ministry of Education participate in training for provincial education services and district education bureau teams.

(3) Orientation workshops for schools and the Village Education Development Committee together provide school staff and community members with an opportunity to discuss SoQ concepts – and the roles of the school, community and family in ensuring children's rights are realized. This is considered to be an essential step towards common understanding between stakeholders, encouraging them to provide full support for the school-development process.

(4) In-service training for teachers – focusing on practical teaching and learning techniques that can be put into immediate use in the classroom – presents the School of Quality in a holistic manner, recognizing the inherent interconnectedness of SoQ dimensions, rather than presenting them as separate topics.

(5) Training for directors in management and leadership is provided to ensure these key stakeholders have a clear understanding of SoQ concepts and the skills needed to manage the activities involved in implementing the SoQ approach, both within the school and in the wider community. Officials from the district education bureaus are included in these training sessions to ensure common understanding is developed and to build their capacity to provide ongoing support for school directors.

(6) Training for members of Village Education Development Committees involves defining their role in the process of managing school improvement and conducting child-seeking activities to ensure all children in the community complete their primary education. Training also focuses on the broader role of the VEDC in developing a comprehensive education plan for the community.

(7) Implementation of a school self-assessment (SSA) based on SoQ minimum standards and associated indicators is jointly conducted by school staff, community members and students. The SSA forms the basis of the school improvement plan, which identifies actions to be taken to improve performance against SoQ indicators.

(8) Implementation of child-seeking activities, in which schools map out their catchment area, is used to identify out-of-school children and develop strategies to ensure all are enrolled in and complete primary education.

(9) Improvement of the school campus is focused on no- or low-cost enhancements that can be implemented by schools and communities. It often involves external support for renovation or construction of classrooms and latrines as well as installation of a clean water supply.

(10) Teaching and learning materials are provided for each classroom, including basic instructional materials, storybooks and supplies that are essential to creating a rich learning environment.

(11) Implementation of monitoring and support mechanisms occurs at all levels in the education system. District education bureaus monitor schools on a monthly basis; provincial education service officials monitor district education bureaus each semester; and MOE officials conduct annual monitoring visits. Internal monitoring at the school level is an important component of the overall system, jointly conducted by school directors and Village Education Development Committees.

A reporting system has been established in which schools report regularly to the district education bureaus, which in turn provide monthly reports to the provincial education service. Each semester, the provincial education service provides reports to the national Ministry of Education.

## Origins and evolution

The genesis of the SoQ approach in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is one of many examples of the effectiveness of national capacity building, in this case, through a strong regional network of educators periodically joining together to share experiences, learn about innovations and provide mutual support. The Ministry of Education, as well as UNICEF staff, were first introduced to the concept of child-friendly schools at a regional workshop during the early 2000s. The idea took hold at a UNICEF-supported regional conference, where Lao participants had the opportunity to discuss the development of child-friendly schools in Thailand with the Thai CFS team. This led to the Lao Ministry of Education's decision to begin a small CFS pilot for the 2005/06 school year in three schools supported by UNICEF and two by Save the Children Norway.

Coinciding with initial piloting of child-friendly schools, a re-evaluation of the cluster school approach – which was popular in the region and in the Lao People's Democratic Republic – was under way. The findings of an independent study conducted by the Faculty of Education, National University of Laos, in 2004, pointed to weak evidence on school quality in the cluster school approach and questioned its relevance in the Lao context, considering the mountainous terrain and long distances between schools.<sup>12</sup> The report recommended greater emphasis on the school, or *muad* (a group consisting of one complete school and up to several incomplete schools under the management of one school director). A report commissioned by UNICEF was also critical of the approach, citing the tendency to concentrate resources at the core school and not taking into account the *muad*<sup>13</sup> and providing further support for the CFS approach.

The pilot was supported by exposure visits to Cambodia and Thailand by a wide range of stakeholders, from Lao central- and provincial-level officials to school directors and community leaders as well as UNICEF staff. The enthusiastic reaction to the pilot and to

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<sup>12</sup> Faculty of Education, National University of Laos, 'School Clusters: Management, professional development and classroom teaching', Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Ministry of Education, Department of Teacher Training, Vientiane, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Bredenberg, K., 'Final Report: Consultancy for developing a participatory planning framework for school clusters', United Nations Children's Fund, Vientiane, 2004.

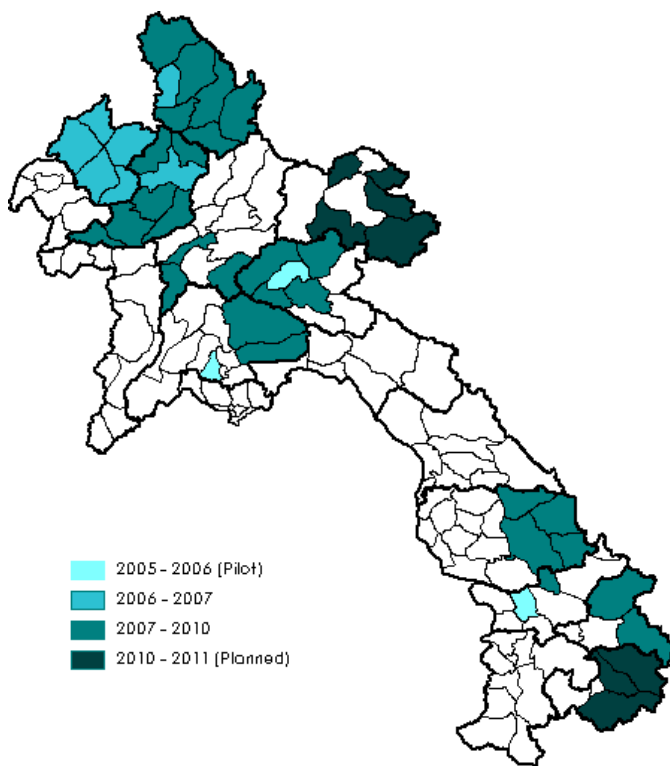
the positive impact the approach was having, led to expansion for the 2006/07 school year. Table 2 and Figure 3 show the expansion of the strategy from the initial pilot through plans for 2011.

**Table 2. Cumulative number of schools implementing the SoQ approach, 2005–2011\***

School year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Schools	3	37	455	770	1,178	1,687
Districts	3	10	38	38	38	46
Provinces	3	7	9	9	9	11

\* Numbers include only UNICEF-supported schools.

**Figure 3. SoQ expansion, 2005–2011<sup>14</sup>**



A major expansion occurred in 2007, when the number of SoQ districts almost quadrupled and 418 schools joined the strategy. By 2009, 1,178 Lao schools were participating in this child-friendly movement. For the 2010/11 school year, the strategy is being expanded into eight additional districts in two new provinces, at which point approximately 20 per cent of all primary schools in the Lao People's Democratic Republic will be implementing the SoQ approach.

### Costing

A detailed estimate of the costs of rolling out Schools of Quality nationwide has not been conducted due to the inherent challenges of costing what is essentially the

comprehensive range of support provided by the education system. The basic package of physical inputs at the school level is approximately US\$10,000. This is broken down into: renovations (US\$4,000); installation of water supply and sanitation facilities (US\$3,000); and provision of training and instructional materials (US\$3,000). The cost of instructional materials per classroom is approximately US\$300 plus US\$40 per year for replenishment of consumables. (See Annex 2 for a costed list of materials and supplies.)

### Working structure and stakeholders

<sup>14</sup> Geographical coverage refers only to UNICEF-supported schools; complete data on other schools implementing the SoQ approach were not available.

Because the SoQ approach to date focuses on pre-primary and primary schooling, the Department of Primary and Pre-Primary Education (DPPE), within the Ministry of Education, is responsible for SoQ implementation. Within the DPPE, a core working group has been formed to manage implementation. Responsibilities of the working group include planning activities; training, supervision and monitoring; development of technical materials, guidelines and other policy-related documents; liaison with UNICEF; and coordination between departments within the Ministry of Education as well as with provincial education services and district education bureaus.

At the school level, school directors have a leadership role in working with teachers, students and community members to assess school quality and develop and implement school improvement plans. At the community level, The Village Education Development Committee is responsible for mobilizing community members to engage in school management.

The members of the Education Sector Working Group are key stakeholders with regard to overall policy formulation. With regard to technical aspects, Save the Children Norway has been an important collaborator with the Ministry of Education. The Japan International Cooperation Agency has been actively involved in improving the SoQ standards and also implements the approach in the areas and districts that they support, and Plan International was involved in developing the SoQ training modules.

*Building on existing structures for sustainability:* From the outset, the SoQ approach has explicitly worked to build on existing structures at the central, provincial, district, school and community levels. The core SoQ team is located within the Department of Primary and Pre-Primary Education, which also serves as the budget management centre for SoQ implementation. At the provincial level, capacity building focuses on those provincial education service staff who are already responsible for training and for supervision of schools. At the district level, pedagogical advisers are the key source of technical support for schools and have been key actors in SoQ implementation within the districts. At the school/community level, the officially mandated Village Education Development Committees have been responsible for managing implementation.

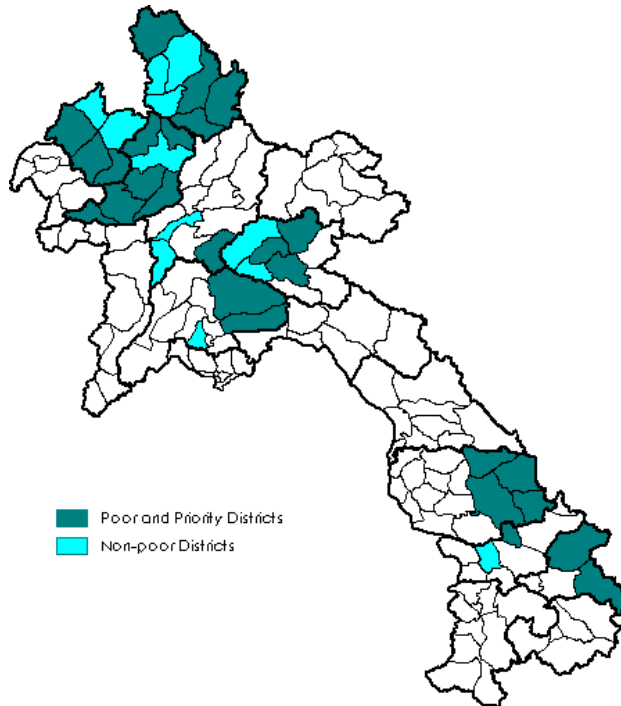
## **Enrolling girls and other disadvantaged children**

The Schools of Quality programme uses three main strategies to ensure that all children have access to a quality education. The first is related to 'targeting', concentrating the majority of programme resources in areas with disproportionately high poverty rates. This is in line with the Lao Government's poverty reduction strategy of focusing development aid on 72 impoverished and priority districts.

Figure 4 shows the congruence between SoQ targeting and poverty incidence. Twenty-six of the 38 target districts are priority districts. Many of the non-poor target districts were selected during early stages of the intervention, mainly to ensure the initial pilot phase would take place in a relatively high-capacity environment. As the programme expanded, most of the additional districts had higher poverty rates. These are also districts with high

numbers of disadvantaged children, particularly among ethnic groups that do not access social services due to traditional cultural practices and limited infrastructure. It is also among these groups that one finds the greatest gender inequality.

**Figure 4. SoQ coverage, by poor and priority vs. non-poor districts,<sup>15</sup> 2009–2010**



The second strategy is the promotion of child-seeking schools, in particular, mapping to identify children who are not in school and making efforts to enrol them. By definition, this prioritizes reaching out to girls and other children who are disadvantaged.

Finally, gender sensitivity is mainstreamed and integrated throughout the SoQ programme, raising awareness of the particular needs of girls and issues related to ensuring they are able to exercise their right to education. Activities to promote inclusion seek to reach out-of-school girls; training on classroom management and teaching techniques emphasize equal participation of boys

and girls; and water and sanitation improvements are geared towards providing appropriate facilities for girls.

Although communities report greater awareness of the importance of girls' education, girls are still less likely to enrol and stay in school than boys. This is particularly true in many remote communities populated by diverse ethnic groups, which often have a strong social and cultural bias against girls attending school.

There is some evidence of a positive bias towards girls reflected in the encouraging changes in key education indicators, particularly in schools participating in the school feeding programme, which allocates higher levels of support for girls in the provision of take-home rations. However, many of the gains may reflect the emphasis of the overall education system in the promotion of girls' education rather than specific effects from Schools of Quality.

<sup>15</sup> District categories and coverage refer only to UNICEF-supported schools; complete data on other schools implementing the SoQ approach were not available.

### III. OUTCOMES

Outcomes of the SoQ initiative have mainly been in the realm of qualitative change: policies that are more relevant and inclusive; better-trained managers and teachers, more-involved communities, appropriate standards of school quality; and practical skills and actions that result in children fully engaged in learning through more child-centred, gender-responsive and activity-oriented methods in a conducive physical learning environment. The combined changes brought about at the national, provincial, district, school and community levels in terms of creating the conditions to support the development of quality schools have been a major outcome of the endeavour.

The outcomes presented here are, for the most part, based on UNICEF's 2009 report evaluating Lao Schools of Quality as well as discussions held with education officials and development partners throughout 2010. They cover highlights of the changes that take place in a school engaged with the SoQ process.

#### Inclusion

Inclusion refers most basically to the right of all children to have access to learning in school. To fulfil this right, schools need to be child-seeking as well as child-friendly. Schools that are implementing the SoQ approach engage in community mapping to identify children who are not enrolled or not attending school, and develop strategies to seek them out and remove barriers to access. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, inclusion focuses on all children who are out of school, whether due to poverty, cultural or linguistic barriers, disability or lack of parental support. At the school level, the child-seeking activities conducted by Schools of Quality are reported as being a key factor in improved enrolment and attendance rates.<sup>16</sup>

Inclusion also refers to school and community actions that promote a child-friendly learning environment – both inside and outside the classroom – and encourage teaching practices that respond to children's individual needs. Children feel included when they are part of the process of school improvement. In Schools of Quality, they help improve the schoolyard, are encouraged to post their artwork and tell stories to enliven the classroom. UNICEF's 2009 evaluation quotes one student as saying: "We like the decorations in our classroom which we made ourselves. We also love to see our artwork on display."<sup>17</sup> Here, inclusion is more than being 'in' school: it is feeling 'part' of the school. Parents and community members have commented on how SoQ improvements led to children being more enthusiastic about coming to school regularly and on time.<sup>18</sup>

Results have also been seen in fostering readiness to learn. This has been achieved by providing support for pre-primary education within primary schools in areas where no

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<sup>16</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Schools of Quality in Lao PDR: An evaluation', UNICEF, Vientiane, 2009, p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

preschools exist, which includes the vast majority of communities. Resources have also been channelled to the newly institutionalized preparatory year for young students who have not yet developed the skills needed to fully participate in the Grade 1 curriculum.

According to UNICEF's evaluation, schools using an SoQ approach, as a whole, have increased enrolment and attendance, and improved student completion and retention rates as well as reduced repetition. Particularly positive impacts were noted with regard to girls, especially in terms of lower repetition rates. Enrolment rates in pre-primary classes and Grade 1 have seen above-average increases.

The SoQ approach has therefore led to increased inclusion – both in terms of getting more children into school and helping them to stay in school. Tables 3 and 4 illustrate the changes in enrolment and repetition rates in schools implementing the SoQ approach in Oudômxai Province as compared to all schools in the province.

**Table 3. Enrolment and repetition rates for schools implementing Schools of Quality in Oudômxai Province, 2006–2007 vs. 2007–2008**

Rates (%)	2006–2007		2007–2008		Change	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Enrolment, 6 years old	85.8	81.9	88.9	86.0	3.1	4.2
Enrolment, Grades 1–5	81.0	80.7	85.4	85.9	4.4	5.1
Repetition, Grade 1–5	19.0	19.4	15.6	14.5	-3.4	-4.8
Repetition, Grade 1 & 2	30.5	31.6	25.7	21.9	-4.9	-9.7
Preschool enrolment	4.5	4.7	20.5	22.3	15.5	17.8

Source: 'Schools of Quality in Lao PDR: An Evaluation', UNICEF, Vientiane, 2009.

**Table 4. Enrolment and repetition rates for all schools in Oudômxai Province, 2006–2007 vs. 2007–2008**

Rates (per cent)	2006–2007		2007–2008		Change	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Enrolment, 6 years old	63.5	64.1	61.3	59.5	-2.5	-4.6
Enrolment, Grades 1–5	67.9	64.8	70.4	68.5	2.6	3.7
Repetition, Grade 1–5	21.7	21.9	18.7	19.4	3.0	2.5
Repetition, Grade 1 & 2	18.3	18.3	32.5	33.2	-0.2	-1.4
Preschool enrolment	5.8	6.0	15.6	15.2	9.8	9.2

Source: 'Schools of Quality in Lao PDR: An Evaluation', UNICEF, Vientiane, 2009.

## Improved quality of teaching and learning

Improving the quality of teaching and learning is a major focus for Schools of Quality, as seen by the attention paid to developing training courses based on practical, hands-on teaching and classroom-management methods. Training for teachers is based on relevant methods and techniques that respond to teachers' needs, and a wealth of practical materials and supplies is provided for each classroom.

An excellent example of how the classroom learning environment has been made more relevant to children's lives is the introduction of slates that serve as noticeboards on which news and other information is written in chalk. Information displayed ranges from the current price of food in the market to local and international news the teacher and students have heard on the radio to the daily weather report. Such innovations serve to change teacher-student interaction in fundamental ways through introducing 'real life' into the classroom. Teachers notice the change, see positive results in students' engagement and become more motivated to introduce innovations that increase interactive teaching and learning methods. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, this is a first: Teachers are not only provided with practical training in modern teaching methods, they also receive materials and supplies, which are accessible rather than locked away in a cabinet, in sufficient quantities to help them to put these methods into action.

Significant changes in teaching practices have been reported, leading to improved learning outcomes. Teachers report being more motivated to teach; are recognizing the value of children learning independently and in groups; are producing their own teaching materials; are maintaining a colourful, stimulating learning environment; and feel they can better respond to the varied learning needs of their students.

Activity-based hygiene education, including lesson guides and interactive materials, has been introduced into schools. This complements infrastructure support for construction of latrines and water-supply systems, and addresses such key health issues as the importance of drinking clean water and proper hand washing for prevention of common diseases. One child noted that the materials "teach us that we must wash our hands with soap and water after using the toilet. We also learn about the importance of eating the different types of food shown in the food pyramid and sleeping under a mosquito net to prevent malaria. We now understand we must boil water before drinking it."<sup>19</sup>

Students are perceived to be performing better and staying in school longer. In the words of one school director: "Students' learning results have improved as they now use their free time to read and they come to school early because they like the school environment and obtain learning materials ... I know this because the children are tested monthly. The students used to be silent in class but now they are more active in learning activities and their participation is noticeably different."<sup>20</sup>

## **Clean, healthy, safe and protective**

Upon entering a school, one notices immediately if it is implementing the SoQ strategy: The schoolyard is clean, planted with flowers and trees, and often has gazebos for children to relax, read and talk with friends protected from the harsh tropical sun. Upon entering a School of Quality classroom there's an explosion of colour – walls are adorned with educational posters; children's drawings are displayed on strings across the room; boys and girls are sitting together in learning groups.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

An improved physical environment has generally been the first outcome after a school implements the SoQ approach. In most cases, improvements are low-cost and able to be implemented by the school, with or without community support. As such, it represents a tangible first step in the direction of creating a child-friendly environment that is concrete and for which the results are easily achieved. Planting shade trees and flower gardens, building thatch gazebos and carefully placing trash bins are simple yet effective ways to make the school campus more attractive to students and to the community as a whole. The entire school campus is turned into an interactive learning environment. School gardens provide learning opportunities; gazebos serve as shaded reading areas; trash bins promote positive behaviour change with regard to environmental sanitation. Improvements to the school environment are among the main positive changes reported by school staff, students and community members alike.

Although improved sanitation often requires external support for construction of latrines and water-supply systems, it is also the result of improved school management. It takes a dedicated school director to establish ways to ensure that teachers, students and community members contribute to maintaining a safe, clean school campus. This is linked with hygiene education, which has had an important impact on children's personal hygiene and parents' increased awareness of the importance of proper hand washing.

Examples of what children say they like about their school include:

- Our school has a clean environment with many shady trees and flowers beds.
- There is a library and many interesting storybooks.
- The classroom is clean, with many games, toys and learning materials.
- Students learn in groups.
- The school building has been repaired and is nicely decorated.
- There are shade huts for relaxing, a large schoolyard and a school fence.
- There is a pre-primary classroom.<sup>21</sup>

## **Community participation and school management**

Communities in the Lao People's Democratic Republic have a long history of supporting schooling through financial or in-kind contributions. They typically provide village land for the school, construct or assist in construction of school buildings, offer accommodations and food supplies to teachers, and in some cases, recruit community members to serve as teachers when no government-provided teachers are available.

The SoQ approach is transforming community interaction with schools in fundamental ways. Child-seeking activities, for example, have raised awareness of community obligations to ensure access to education for all children and have encouraged joint responsibility for creating conditions that enable this to be achieved.

Another key mechanism that leads to positive change is the school self-assessment (SSA). School self-assessment involves school staff, students and community members,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

represented by the Village Education Development Committee. Community members are engaged in a sophisticated assessment of their school against the SoQ dimensions and standards, using the indicators as a guide, and become more aware of what quality schooling should look like. For many, it represents the first time they have discussed education with school staff in such detail. Throughout the lengthy process, staff and community members grapple with concepts and their application to the realities of their lives. Because the self-assessment requires consensus, it builds common understanding of the state of their school – identifying aspects in which it excels, aspects in which it lags behind expectations and priorities for improvement.

The school self-assessment leads to creation of the school development plan (SDP), which sets out the medium-term (three to four years) plan for each school. From the development plan, an annual school improvement plan is elaborated. As with self-assessment, planning is a joint activity of the school and the community. The school improvement plan sets out specific objectives, activities and a timeline for joint school-community action based on priorities identified through the SSA process and the medium-term goals established in the school development plan.

Although schools have long engaged in developing annual plans – often in consultation with community leaders – anecdotal evidence suggests such planning was generally superficial, focusing on such needs as repairs and fencing. One school director commented that this was the first time he had made a “real” plan; previous plans had been perfunctory, done in order to satisfy administrative requirements rather than as a tool for quality improvement.

The increased engagement of communities in school management detailed above is an indication of increased management capacity on the part of school directors. Likewise, the improvements seen in the school environment would not be possible without strong school leadership.

UNICEF's 2009 evaluation included interviews with school directors, which reflect a clear understanding of SoQ concepts as well as their responsibilities with respect to coordination of implementation activities. School self-assessment and improvement planning were highlighted by the school directors as important ways to develop strategies for working with teachers and community members to improve school quality.

## **Tangible benefits for stakeholders**

The changes brought about through introducing Schools of Quality have had a positive impact on stakeholders at all levels. First and foremost, more than 200,000 boys and girls are enjoying a stimulating, child-friendly learning environment in which they have access to a variety of learning materials and activities both inside and outside the classroom. Children are learning critical life skills that will enable them to maintain their health and well-being. And they are increasingly taking responsibility for their own learning and gaining confidence in their ability to succeed.

Parents and the wider community are benefiting from the improved education for their

children, a crucial human resource for future social and economic development. Communities are enjoying a greater understanding of what a quality education can look like and express increased pride in the quality of their schools. Village Education Development Committees benefit as they develop a clearer understanding of their role in the management of education.

Teachers benefit through improved working conditions, including access to teaching materials and supplies that allow them to fulfil their job with greater professionalism. School directors benefit through increased skills in managing their schools and mobilizing community resources to support education. They take pride in the improvements they have made and are full of ideas for further activities to make their schools even better.

Education officials at the district, provincial and national levels also benefit from the SoQ approach through their increased capacity to formulate policies and design and implement programmes that respond to the diverse needs of schools and communities across the country.

## **Policy and national standards**

One of the great accomplishments during the past five years has been the integration of the SoQ approach into the nascent education-reform process. Schools of Quality has become national policy. The Education Sector Development Framework includes Schools of Quality as a key strategy for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All. The SoQ minimum standards have been officially adopted as policy – and as a basis for school accreditation – along with the Schools of Quality Guidelines for Implementation in Primary Schools, of which they form an integral part.

Training programmes to be included in the SoQ implementation package are under development and will be incorporated into the overall professional development framework being established by the Ministry of Education. Extensive efforts to include all stakeholders in the process of developing Schools of Quality has laid the groundwork for further policy development in line with rights-based principles.

## IV. ANALYSIS

The SoQ approach was introduced in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in response to issues of access and quality. It provides a holistic framework that is comprehensive and adaptable to local perspectives and priorities. Whereas many prior interventions in the education sector focused narrowly on specific aspects of schooling, the SoQ approach is broad in focus and provides a useful lens through which to look at school quality. It thus promotes policy harmonization and integrated programming for the whole school.

Through providing a conceptually accessible framework, Schools of Quality aims to raise awareness of every child's right to a basic education and assists educators and community members in developing coherent and effective strategies to ensure that all children go to school. As one MOE official related to the 2009 evaluation team, "Coherence is what is really needed to make a difference to the quality of schools and the SoQ approach is the first time that the various elements have been brought together."<sup>22</sup>

Schools of Quality also aims to create conditions, both inside and outside the classroom, that are conducive to children's learning. And at the macro level, it strives to embed a rights-based approach in the Ministry of Education's policies and programming. Therefore, the introduction focuses on two levels: ground-level implementation as a laboratory for developing concepts, strategies and techniques; and policy action based on the experiences and lessons learned through application of concepts in the field.

Capacity development is at the core of the approach, specifically, the capacity to bring about systemic educational change that reflects the principles of child rights. This dual-level approach thus serves to directly assist schools in improving quality and becoming more child-friendly and inclusive, while simultaneously supporting an institutional and policy environment that provides an enabling environment for change.

The action-learning approach used throughout the development and expansion of the SoQ initiative models a fundamental principle: the concept of quality as a process of change, progressively redefined and adapted to evolving understanding and contexts. It also helped build ownership at all levels in the Ministry of Education. From school and community to district, province and central ministry, all stakeholders have engaged in a continual process of implementation and reflection, incorporating lessons learned, emerging issues and evolving concepts into actions.<sup>23</sup>

### **Operational challenges in leadership roles**

One of the key factors that provide fertile ground for seeds of change is leadership by high-level officials within the Ministry of Education, backed by support from the highest levels of the Lao Government as the country strives to meet its EFA and the MDG

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

objectives. The time frame for the introduction of the SoQ approach coincided with system-wide reform to bring the education system in line with international standards. This development is supported by the commitment to the Vientiane Declaration, in which the Lao Government and development partners resolved to work together in support of common goals. Establishing the Education Sector Development Framework has been a major milestone in this process; it provides a framework for education-sector development that guides development partners as well the Ministry of Education, enabling a more comprehensive approach to support that is aligned with MOE priority policies and strategies.

At the implementation level, the SoQ initiative has been managed by the Department of Primary and Pre-Primary Education (DPPE), which is responsible for preschools and primary schools. The DPPE holds main responsibility for the SoQ targeting strategy; development of inputs, processes and guidelines for implementation; and coordination of activities. Throughout all stages of development and implementation of the approach, the DPPE worked closely with relevant line departments in the Ministry of Education as well as with provincial education services and district education bureaus. As Schools of Quality became increasingly embedded in MOE policies and programming, the role of various ministry departments became more pronounced and is expected to grow as the programme increases in scale.

Ownership of Schools of Quality is strong within the Department of Primary and Pre-Primary Education but has been slow to develop within other line departments; this is largely related to funding mechanisms, in which SoQ financing has been channelled predominantly through the DPPE. At the same time, it is clear that a broader sense of ownership over the SoQ approach is slowly evolving. The National Education Standards and Quality Assurance Center has already adopted SoQ minimum standards as the basis for quality assurance. The Center for Inclusive Education has worked with DPPE to strengthen the elements regarding inclusive education in implementation package training modules. Taking the lead in development of relevant aspects of the training package are the Department of Personnel and the Department of Teacher Training, which are responsible for staff development for school directors and teachers, respectively.

## **Modifying the CFS model**

Three main modifications to the CFS model have been made during implementation of the Schools of Quality programme in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The first is primarily related to ownership, while the other two are related to the local context.

The most obvious change is the move from the term child-friendly schools to Schools of Quality. This name was chosen by local educators, who had already become familiar with the CFS approach, to make it clear that the model is not externally imposed but is an approach adopted for – and adapted to – the realities of the local context. Alongside the change in name was a reformulation of the way in which child-friendly dimensions were articulated, reflecting national priorities suited to the local context and therefore accessible to both educators and communities. This local adaptation of the CFS model is common among countries that have introduced child-friendly schools and well represents

the beauty of its design.

A more substantive change was in the level at which the characteristics and indicators were pitched. As standards, they were considered to be idealistic but not realistic for the Lao context. As originally articulated, only a small percentage of schools in the country could hope to achieve child-friendliness. Over several years and several iterations, the characteristics and indicators were modified into the minimum standards of quality that all schools can be expected to achieve and are thus realistic goals for schools and communities to work towards.

Finally, a change was made to the school self-assessment process. Because it tended to focus attention on what was wrong and who was responsible, there was a shift from the problem-analysis approach. To avoid a 'blame game' and focus attention on working together for change, a simpler rating system was developed with which to assess school progress on a scale of 1–4 in relation to the SoQ criteria. This established a mode of goal-based planning.

### **Addressing the challenge of teacher quality**

UNICEF's evaluation in 2009 found that "significant changes have taken place in teaching practices where a school has adopted the SoQ approach."<sup>24</sup> A great deal of attention has been paid to improving the quality of teaching and learning in Schools of Quality, and a conscious effort has been made to render training for teachers as practical as possible – in sharp contrast to the predominantly theoretical approach of many teacher training programmes. This emphasis on the practical is supported by the provision of basic classroom supplies in quantities that meet actual needs. With minimal initial training, teachers immediately transform their classrooms into a stimulating, interactive environment.

At the same time, many challenges remain to lifting the standard of teaching to desired levels. A major constraint is over-reliance on the textbook syllabus, which promotes textbook-centred rather than student-centred teaching. A lack of training in effective use of textbooks adds to the problem, as noted by the evaluation.

For many teachers in Schools of Quality, language is a key issue; with approximately one-third of all children growing up with a language other than Lao – the language of instruction – appropriate teaching techniques are critical. Yet the issue of teaching the national language to non-Lao speakers has received limited attention, in part, due to the complexity of working with children from such a variety of linguistic backgrounds, including many who speak languages that have no written form.

The quality of the pre-service programme is another major constraint. A study carried out by the Faculty of Education, National University of Laos, noted that teaching in pre-service programmes relied primarily on rote learning, with minimal opportunities for

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

meaningful interaction and application of theory.<sup>25</sup> The Ministry of Education has since taken measures to improve the pre-service curriculum and upgrade the qualifications of staff at teacher training institutes. But further improvements are needed to fully address teacher quality. Incorporation of the SoQ approach in the pre-service curriculum, initiated in 2009, is a positive step towards aligning the pre-service curriculum with child-friendly dimensions and standards.

Finally, systems for continued professional development are weak and rely primarily on the network of district-based pedagogical advisers. Although the SoQ programme has emphasized capacity building for pedagogical advisers, the low qualifications of many advisers often makes it difficult to provide teachers with the level of support they require. An additional constraining factor is poor access to transportation for the pedagogical advisers, which limits the degree to which they can provide on-site professional development support for teachers.

### **Strengths of organizational collaboration**

Leadership provided by the Ministry of Education has been a key factor in promoting a more unified, cohesive response from development partners. This is reinforced by the inclusive manner in which the SoQ approach has been developed. United Nations organizations, bilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations have been involved in every step of the process, thereby developing ownership and unity of purpose that is often lacking in the development context.

Furthermore, clear implementation structures, or mechanisms, have been defined by the Ministry of Education through which to channel support to schools. Examples include the system of district-level pedagogical advisers, who are designated as the key source of direct support to schools and the Village Education Development Committees, the official local bodies responsible for mobilizing support for schooling at the village level. Rather than creating parallel project-based structures, development partners are focusing capacity-building support towards these key stakeholders.

Various initiatives – including the Lao Inclusive Education Project, promoted primarily through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Save the Children Norway; school health promotion, with the Japan International Cooperation Agency being a major supporter; school feeding, supported by the World Food Programme; and Schools of Quality, primarily sponsored by UNICEF – have harmonized their support mechanisms within the SoQ framework.

*Need for continuing advocacy:* Although Schools of Quality is increasingly embedded in MOE policies and programming, implementation of this comprehensive approach to improving school quality is still in the beginning stages. Major policies and strategy

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<sup>25</sup> Teacher and Education Administrator Development Centre, National University of Laos, 'TTEST Operational Study 1: Teaching performance in Lao primary schools and its relation to teacher training background', Ministry of Education, Vientiane, February 2004, <[www.temis-moe.gov.la/doc/OperationalStudy/ope1.htm](http://www.temis-moe.gov.la/doc/OperationalStudy/ope1.htm)>, accessed 1 February 2011.

statements mention Schools of Quality as a key strategy for reaching MDG and EFA objectives, but the SoQ approach has yet to be fully integrated into an overarching, holistic, system-wide approach that responds to the needs of all learners.

Of particular note are issues related to curriculum design and implementation, bringing the curriculum into line with the whole-school emphasis of SoQ – not only in terms of curriculum content and textbooks but also at the conceptual level. To enable school directors and classroom teachers to provide a truly child-centred teaching and learning environment, an expanded conceptual framework for the curriculum that includes all aspects of the school programme will be needed – above and beyond establishing the content and sequence of topics and methods to deliver curriculum content. In a culturally and linguistically diverse nation such as the Laos People's Democratic Republic, strategies for addressing the needs of learners for whom Lao, the language of classroom instruction, is their second language will be a crucial dimension of curriculum reform.

## **Lessons learned from implementation**

The 2009 evaluation of the Lao approach<sup>26</sup> identified five main themes that underpin SoQ success:

- (1) Inclusion of Schools of Quality within a broader programme of education-sector support.
- (2) Interconnectedness of dimensions within the SoQ approach.
- (3) Alignment of Schools of Quality with Ministry of Education priorities.
- (4) Flexibility of the approach with regard to implementation.
- (5) An appropriate approach to capacity development.

### *Lesson 1. Embed Schools of Quality within a broader programme of sector support.*

A sectoral approach to implementation is a key component of the SoQ effort to provide a coherent programme of support to schools and has served to encourage greater collaboration between development partners. The success of efforts to mainstream Schools of Quality depends on balancing standardization from the top down with a school-based, customized approach. It has therefore been necessary to promote SoQ at multiple levels, creating a broad base of understanding of the concept and its practical implementation at the school, district, provincial and national levels simultaneously.

### *Lesson 2. Emphasize the interconnectedness of SoQ dimensions.*

The 2009 evaluation referred to a consistency between the holism of the approach and the coordination of multiple inputs in a coherent framework. An important aspect of the process was the decision to reflect the interconnectedness of SoQ dimensions in the structure and content of training and implementation. School directors, teachers, community members and, sometimes, children came together during training sessions, school self-assessments and child-seeking activities. Training content integrates the six SoQ dimensions rather than treating them as separate modules. Consolidation of the SoQ experience – including agreement on a common definition, a set of standards and indicators, and implementation guidelines on how to implement Schools of Quality –

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 'Schools of Quality in Lao PDR: An evaluation', UNICEF, Vientiane, 2009.

provides the basic tools to ensure that schools work towards child-friendliness. A widely consultative process that places continued emphasis on a holistic approach has ensured that policy and programming responses are interlinked.

*Lesson 3. Ensure alignment with Ministry of Education policy priorities.*

Management of support for the development of Schools of Quality has placed a strong emphasis on working through existing MOE structures while building on existing knowledge and experiences rather than imposing a system from the outside. The SoQ approach provides a platform for policies on school health and inclusive education to be implemented at the school level. There is a conscious effort to harmonize the work of development partners in alignment with MOE policy priorities. The process is inclusive, involving educators at all levels in the system in a continual process of implementation, reflection and incorporation of lessons learned into new ways of moving forward. At the village level, Schools of Quality has focused on support for Village Education Development Committees, for which capacity building is a priority for the Ministry of Education.

*Lesson 4. Maintain flexibility in the approach during implementation.*

Schools of Quality was not introduced as a one-size-fits-all model with a prescribed framework, standards and indicators. Instead, it was introduced as a flexible model to be adapted to the local context. A key aspect of this flexibility has been the iterative nature of the process of developing SoQ dimensions, standards, indicators, guidelines, and material and training inputs. Over a period of several years, the various concepts, inputs and activities were field-tested and revised to consolidate experiences during implementation. The result is an approach that allows schools and communities the freedom to determine where they stand in terms of achieving quality standards and what they choose to do to further progress along the continuum.

*Lesson 5. Take a long-term approach to capacity development.*

Schools of Quality was introduced in the Lao People's Democratic Republic with a pilot for the 2005/06 school year in five schools. From the outset, it was acknowledged that development and application was a long-term effort, requiring sustained capacity-building support for stakeholders from MOE decision makers to VEDC members. It has been a joint learning process between the Ministry of Education and development partners, neither entering the process with preordained ideas of what SoQ implementation would look like. As with Lesson 4, the action-learning approach engaged stakeholders in sustained work towards understanding and agreeing on what it means to reform the education system through a rights-based approach.

## **V. FUTURE DIRECTION**

### **Expansion, mainstreaming and capacity building**

The Schools of Quality approach underlies a major component of the Access and Quality for Pre-Primary and Primary Education Levels programme, applied for as part of the Education for All-Fast Track Initiative Catalytic Fund, with a projected budget of US\$21.9 million. The proposed programme would support rolling out Schools of Quality in 56 priority districts, identified by the Lao Ministry of Education as having net enrolment rates for girls that are lower than the national average.

As the approach is rolled out to new areas of the country, provincial- and district-level capacity building will be a major focus. Elaboration of the implementation guidelines, tailored to the needs of different stakeholders, will support this process. The development of a mentoring system, along with a regular schedule of exchange visits, is envisaged as an additional mechanism to further strengthen capacities of those already implementing Schools of Quality as well as those new to the approach. Thus, the action-learning cycle will continue, with those experienced with implementation engaging in a process that will lead to deepening of their own understandings and further internalizing of SoQ concepts as they, in turn, lead others down the path of reform.

At the request of the Department of Secondary Education, the Ministry of Education has agreed to extend implementation of the SoQ approach to secondary schools. In early 2010, standards for secondary schools were drafted. The Department of Secondary Education planned to initiate Schools of Quality in 12 secondary schools, in four provinces, by year-end 2010. Based on lessons learned, relevant line departments within the Ministry of Education will be included in the process from the outset. The expansion will follow the action-learning approach that has proved to be effective in helping educators focus on the long-term, iterative nature of education reform. Implementation will also involve close collaboration with teacher training institutes to identify implications for the pre-service training curriculum; this will enable a streamlined approach to integration of SoQ principles into the pre-service programme.

At the policy level, a main focus will be the review of ministerial decrees and other policies related to primary education to ensure they are harmonized with the SoQ approach. This will include working with the various departments, centres and institutes with responsibility for development of standards – both for schools and student learning outcomes – and systems for quality assurance.

### **Finalizing the SoQ implementation package**

A major focus during 2011 will be the development of an implementation package, consolidating lessons learned into a comprehensive platform for training, self-access learning, and improved monitoring tools and systems to enhance the effectiveness of implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The implementation package will include a set of training modules, which are already in development. A thorough training needs analysis informed training-module design and included a survey of implementers at the school and community levels, combined with a mapping exercise of required skills among key stakeholders conducted during an inter-departmental workshop. The implementation-package training component will include:

- SoQ orientation (one-day module).
- School-management training for school directors (five-day module).
- Classroom-management training for primary-level schoolteachers (two five-day modules).
- Training for Village Education Development Committees (two-day module).
- Training for pre-primary-level schoolteachers (two five-day modules).

The training modules will focus on integration of various training initiatives, including health and nutrition education, strengthening of the life-skills approach, child protection, and HIV and AIDS awareness. As further training needs are identified, the modules will be revised and additional modules added to the package. The Ministry of Education intends to develop, for example, a strategy for promoting advanced literacy skills and creative writing through introduction of the 'process writing' method for the higher primary grades. Initial efforts will focus on the storytelling genre.

In recognition of the limitations of relying solely on face-to-face training for in-service teacher training, the Department of Primary and Pre-Primary Education plans to develop a series of self-learning cards to serve as a learning resource for teachers. The cards will focus on various aspects of the teaching and learning process and provide teachers with opportunities for self-directed learning in areas of individual interest. The content of the cards will build on approaches introduced through the SoQ implementation package of training. The cards will be designed to introduce a new concept or technique and provide steps for application and reflection.

Schools of Quality emphasizes self-assessment as a key strategy for developing skills among school staff, students and community members as well as ownership of the development process. Monitoring tools used to date are considered to be too complicated for use at the local level. In 2011, the Ministry of Education will develop new, user-friendly monitoring tools to assist schools and communities in tracking their own progress as they work together to improve school quality. The ministry is also moving towards monitoring learning outcomes through national assessment of student learning outcomes.

## Vignette: A new classroom feeds Lao schoolchildren's hunger to learn



**Photos (above):** L: Seemon in her new school. R: The school where Seemon attended grades one to four. © UNICEF/Lao PDR

### **A new classroom feeds Lao schoolchildren's hunger to learn**

By Simon Ingram, UNICEF

Ban Phonsavang, Luang Prabang Province, LAO PDR, May 2009 – The short walk to school is one that 10-year old Seemon knows well. Early each morning, she puts on the white blouse, red neckerchief and blue skirt that is the standard uniform for schoolgirls across Lao PDR, and sets off along the path that leads to the primary school on the outskirts of the village.

Ban Phonsavang is a forty minute drive from the attractions of Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage town rich in culture and atmosphere. But the influx of visitors and tourist investment has left little trace in this village of 680 inhabitants.

Seemon, her parents and two sisters live in a tiny single-room house with rattan walls and a thatch roof. A thin curtain is all that separates the family's sleeping area from the rest of their home. Her father is a day-labourer in the rice fields that provide the main income for this mountainous region.

Before the three girls leave for school, there are chores to be done: the house must be swept and the chickens fed. Then, they set off, the walk taking them past a lemon orchard and up a dusty track towards the flat grassy clearing where the primary school stands.

It's at this point that things start to look a bit different. The school where Seemon attended grades one to four still stands where it was – a flimsy wooden hut with a tin roof with no doors or windows, its low bamboo wall and bare earth floor offering no protection against either the heat of summer or the chill of winter.

But diagonally opposite, a brand new school building sits proudly, with freshly-painted concrete walls and wooden shuttered windows. It was in March 2009 that this new school was inaugurated, the latest achievement of a UNICEF project – using funds provided by the AEON Company Group of Japan – which has so far constructed over sixty primary schools in remote areas of Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang provinces.

Barely two months after construction was completed, the new building is already transforming lives.

Seemon is in grade 5 together with some 20 other boys and girls who are the responsibility of their teacher, Mr. Vilaphong Ketsongkham, one of seven teachers at the school.

31-year old Mr. Vilaphong has wasted no time in using the much-improved surroundings of his new classroom to implement the revised teaching methods which the Ministry of Education – with UNICEF support – is introducing in primary schools across the country. Known as the Schools of Quality policy, it is designed to ensure that all children receive a primary education which is engaging and relevant to their lives.

What that means in practice can be easily seen in Seemon's classroom. The larger space means the desks (also newly acquired) can be rearranged to allow more student group work, while the whitewashed walls are covered with colourful posters and displays. Tables with teaching materials for mathematics, language and other subjects have been set up in each corner of the room.

The school's physical transformation is not confined to the classroom. The School of Quality "package" includes the provision of piped clean drinking water and separate toilets for girls and boys. A committee including staff, the education authority and members of the local community is the final ingredient, ensuring the school is well-maintained and that any issues are promptly dealt with.

For children like Seemon, the changes in her surroundings have given school-life a new meaning. "The new school is beautiful, and going each day is so much more fun," she says. The experience has confirmed her ambition to become a teacher when she grows up.

"I'm so happy," says Mr Vilaphong. "The children have a much better place to study in, and there are so many more activities they can do in class."

He says that while the whole class has benefited, bright children like Seemon (she regularly scores top marks in class, especially in Lao language) the extra motivation provided by the new school has been self-evident.

Meanwhile, Seemon's mother, Mrs. Sengthong, is already looking to the future.

"In my day, we never had a school like this," she says. "It's wonderful that my children have the chance to go there, and if Seemon and her sisters can go on to secondary school, so much the better. We may be a poor family but we will do all we can to help her fulfil their dreams."

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## Annex 1. Schools of Quality dimensions, standards and indicators

### Dimension 1: School is inclusive and receives all children

Standard 1: Every child regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or physical and economic status is enrolled in school.

- Indicators:
1. School has a list of school-aged children enrolled and non-enrolled in school disaggregated by sex, ethnicity and special needs for each year.
  2. School has a Child-Seeking School Map, showing where each child lives.
  3. School, in collaboration with the community, encourages all students to enrol and attend classes each year.
  4. The net enrolment rate is at least 98% for both boys and girls.
  5. No student is absent more than 30 days per year without having specific reasons.
  6. School is free of any kind of discrimination.

### Dimension 2: Effective teaching and learning that is relevant to children's lives

Standard 2: School uses curriculum that is appropriate to the local situation.

- Indicators:
7. Teachers adapt their teaching to the level of students and the local situation.
  8. Teachers use local knowledge and experiences in the teaching and learning process.

Standard 3: School promotes pre-primary learning opportunities to improve developmental readiness (physical, emotional, social and intellectual) to ease transition to Grade 1.

- Indicators:
9. At least 50% of Grade 1 students receive early learning preparedness through pre-primary class or play groups where formal kindergarten is not available.

Standard 4: Teachers have appropriate qualifications.

- Indicators:
10. Teachers have graduated from a teacher training college or completed an in-service upgrading programme (certificate or above).
  11. Teachers receive in-service training (for approximately 10 days) at least once every three years.

Standard 5: Teachers are committed to do their job and show responsibility for their work.

- Indicators:
12. Teachers come to school every day, follow the timetable and regularly receive professional support from pedagogical advisers.
  13. Teachers follow the curriculum according to the lesson syllabus.
  14. Teachers prepare their lesson plans routinely.
  15. Teachers participate in school activities according to their roles and responsibilities.

Standard 6: School supports teachers to use different kinds of teaching and learning methods.

- Indicators:
16. Teachers use techniques that promote students' participation and stimulate their thinking, decision-making and problem solving skills.
  17. Teachers organize learning activities for students to learn new knowledge and practise their skills.

Standard 7: Teachers understand the individual needs of students with special needs.

- Indicators:
18. Teachers have information on children with special needs and have a plan to help them learn.
  19. School organizes activities to promote talented or well-performing students.
  20. School organizes specific remedial actions to support slow learners.

Standard 8: School has enough teaching and learning materials.

- Indicators:
21. Teachers use teaching and learning materials produced from local materials for all subjects.
  22. School has enough learning materials, such as textbooks and supplementary reading materials, in the learning corners.
  23. Teachers have teaching materials, including textbooks and teachers' guides for all subjects, a lesson plan book, student record and attendance book.
  24. Students have learning materials, including a set of textbooks, a notebook, pen and pencil per student (and a writing slate for each Grade 1 student).
  25. Teachers organize an appropriate classroom learning environment, adapting it according to the learning content and using it in the day-to-day teaching and learning process.

Standard 9: All teachers use tools to measure and assess students' achievements.

- Indicators:
- 26. Teachers assess their students' learning progress and use this information to strengthen their teaching and students' learning as well as to help individual student make progress.
  - 27. Students' monthly, semester and annual learning achievements meet the set targets.
  - 28. Promotion rate is not less than 90%.
  - 29. Drop-out rate is less than 3%.
  - 30. Repetition rate is less than 7%.

Standard 10: Students are responsible and active in learning and extra-curricular activities.

- Indicators:
- 31. Students actively participate in learning activities.
  - 32. Students actively participate in extra-curricular activities, such as cultural events and sports.

Standard 11: School building is strong, safe and comfortable for teaching and learning.

- Indicators:
- 33. School building meets the Ministry of Education minimum standards (for semi-permanent buildings): cement floor (or earth compacted floor where cement is not possible), reinforced concrete structure, steel or hardwood structure for the roof, galvanized roofing, half-brick and half-wood walls, plywood or woven bamboo ceiling. Building has a life expectancy of 10-20 years.
  - 34. School has a strong fence and gate, school signboard, flag pole, playground, decorative and shade trees, vegetable garden, information board and parking area if necessary.
  - 35. School meets MOE minimum standards regarding classroom size: 6m x 7m.
  - 36. School has enough tables and benches for students, a teacher's desk, blackboard (one per grade for multi-grade classes) and cupboard, which meet MOE standards
  - 37. School has not more than 36 students for 6m x 7m classroom or 40 students for 7m x 8m classroom.

**Dimension 3: School has a clean, healthy, safe and protective environment**

Standard 12: School has a clean environment.

- Indicators:
- 38. School has garbage disposal system including garbage bins and waste dumping.
  - 39. School and community provide clean water throughout the year.
  - 40. School has an adequate number of clean, hygienic latrines for both boys and girls, which are accessible for disabled children.

Standard 13: School organizes activities to promote health of students.

- Indicators:
- 41. Students have been fully immunized against the six main diseases (diphtheria, measles, pertussis, polio, tetanus, tuberculosis).
  - 42. Students receive deworming medicines once or twice a year.
  - 43. Students' weight and height are measured and their eyesight is checked at least once a year.

Standard 14: School promotes personal hygiene of students.

- Indicators:
- 44. Teachers provide students with knowledge about personal hygiene and help them learn healthy practices.
  - 45. Students have clean hair and nails, and wear clean clothes to school.

Standard 15: School promotes life-skills education to help students protect themselves from disease and avoid the use of drugs.

- Indicators:
- 46. Teachers provide students with knowledge about seasonal epidemics, and HIV and AIDS, and help them learn healthy skills to protect themselves.
  - 47. Teachers provide students with knowledge and help them develop skills to protection themselves against violence, drug use and other social problems.

Standard 16: School promotes solidarity and protection from physical and emotional harm.

- Indicators:
- 48. School encourages students to help each other in their learning and extra-curricular activities as well as outside school.
  - 49. Students are protected from physical and emotional punishment (beating, verbal harassment, bullying).

**Dimension 4: School promotes gender balance**

Standard 17: School promotes gender balance.

- Indicators: 50. Boys and girls equally participate in activities both inside and outside the classroom.  
51. Boys and girls are equally represented in classroom administration systems as well as decision making and problem solving at both classroom and school level.

**Dimension 5: School actively encourages community members to participate in school development activities and teaching and learning**

Standard 18: School actively encourages community members to participate in school development and teaching and learning activities.

- Indicators: 52. School has an active parent-teacher association, which performs according to its duties and responsibilities.  
53. Every village has an active Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) which fulfils its duties and responsibilities.  
54. School involves communities in school maintenance and encourages them to support teachers' living conditions.  
55. School encourages community members to participate in students' learning and school development.  
56. School encourages students to participate in school development through allowing them to express their opinions and participate in problem solving.  
57. School encourages children to register for and actively participate in the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union Young Pioneers and Juveniles organization.

**Dimension 6: School has good management administration**

Standard 19: School director is committed to performing management tasks as an active community member.

- Indicators: 58. School director is registered as a member of one of the mass organizations.  
59. School director has knowledge of the rules and regulations of pre-primary and primary education.

Standard 20: School director shows strong leadership.

- Indicators: 60. School director promotes and implements decrees and regulations from education authorities.  
61. School rewards well-performing staff.

Standard 21: School director has appropriate qualifications.

- Indicators: 62. School director has graduated from a teacher training college (certificate or above) and has at least three years of teaching experience.  
63. School director is trained for at least a week on school management including the seven core management tasks.

Standard 22: School promotes teacher professional development.

- Indicators: 64. School director systematically carries out internal supervision.  
65. School director has developed a plan for classroom teachers, which includes participation in in-service training and sharing experiences internally or externally.

Standard 23: School has School Management Information System (SMIS).

- Indicators: 66. School has basic data on students' learning achievement, teacher and student numbers, school facilities and has a good filing system.

Standard 24: School manages school assets transparently.

- Indicators: 67. School has a committee responsible for finance and school assets.  
68. School director keeps clear records, in collaboration with the VEDC, of school income and expenditures and regularly disseminates this information to concerned stakeholders.

Standard 2: School has a school development plan (SDP) based on data from the school self-assessment (SSA).

- Indicators: 69. School and community members conduct a SSA and develop a SDP every three to four years.  
70. School has annual school improvement plan based on the SDP and implements, monitors, reviews and reports on progress to relevant stakeholders.

**Annex 2. Instructional materials and supplies provided per classroom**

Description	Amount	Unit	Initial cost	Annual replenishment cost (US\$)
A4 paper (80 grams/square metre weight)	1	Ream	3.20	3.20
Colour paper A4 (pink)	1	Pack	1.30	1.30
Colour paper A4 (yellow)	1	Pack	1.30	1.30
Colour paper A4 (blue)	1	Pack	1.30	1.30
Colour paper A4 (green)	1	Pack	1.30	1.30
Plastic sheet (3m x 1.22m)	1	Sheet	1.30	1.30
Masking tape (21 yards)	1	Roll	1.00	1.00
Plastic tape (30 yards)	1	Roll	0.50	0.50
Permanent marker, blue (box of 12)	1	Box	3.00	3.00
Permanent marker, black (box of 12)	1	Box	3.00	3.00
Crayons (12)	1	Dozen	3.00	3.00
Latex glue (4 ounces)	4	Can	1.60	1.60
Staples (No. 3-1M 24 boxes of 1,000 staples)	1	Pack	8.00	8.00
Paper clips (50 pieces/box)	1	Pack	2.00	2.00
Coloured chalk (80 pieces/box)	3	Box	2.70	2.70
Plastic water scoop	1	Each	0.40	0.40
Soap (65 grams)	6	Each	1.80	1.80
Flipchart paper (85cm x 60cm, 80 grams/square metre weight)	6	Sheet	1.20	1.20
Carbon paper (A4 50 sheet/pack)	1	Pack	1.70	1.70
Cardboard paper (55cm x 75cm)	3	Sheet	0.90	–
Scissors (5-inch)	6	Each	6.00	–
Scissors (8-inch)	1	Each	1.30	–
Rope (PVC plastic 35m)	1	Roll	0.50	–
Concrete nails (4.5cm, 100 pieces)	1	Box	1.00	–
Stapler (HD-50)	1	EA	7.00	–
Thermometer (-40 *F -120 *F or -40*C -50*C)	1	EA	1.00	–
Lao alphabet poster (50cm x 75cm)	1	Sheet	0.40	–
Lao map (50cm x 75cm)	1	Sheet	1.00	–
World map (60cm x 80cm)	1	Sheet	1.30	–
Water bucket	1	Each	1.20	–
Weighing scale (10–120 kilograms)	1	Each	9.00	–
Slate with frame (4mm thick, 40cm size)	9	Sheet	22.50	–
Measuring tape (1.5m)	6	Each	7.80	–
Mathematics set (triangle rulers, protractor, compass, eraser)	6	Set	10.20	–
Large wooden 60-degree triangle ruler	1	Each	1.00	–
Large wooden 180-degree protractor	1	Each	1.60	–
Cardboard cutter	1	Each	0.50	–
Storybooks (40 titles)	1	Set	110.00	–
Galvanized-steel box (for storage of materials)	1	Box	70.00	–
<b>Total</b>			<b>293.80</b>	<b>39.60</b>

Note: Transportation cost per boxed set = US\$8.