

Country Report on School-based Management in Lao P.D.R

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Executive Summary

Background

With a vision to promote the ownership and responsibility of schools and villages, District Education Bureau and District Authority as well as Provincial Education Service and Provincial Government, a series of the Resolution of the Political Bureau of the Popular Revolutionary Party of Lao PDR, the Prime Minister Decree, and Minister of Education Decrees relative to Deconcentration of planning and budgeting as well as education and based-management which were made in the past and those currently being tried out. Planning and budget management, personnel, property and materials management, academic and technical management functions are delegated to provinces, districts and villages under the current deconcentration strategy. Responsibilities identifies under each of these functions have been specified, but in some cases the interrelationships between various responsibilities have yet to be clarified.

The responsibilities of Provincial Education Services include:

- Planning and budget management: (i) establishment and closure of schools; (ii) school building construction; (iii) education management information, including budget information; and (iv) design and management of school mapping.
- Personnel management : (i) replacement and reassignment of teachers; (ii) teacher recruitment for expansion; (iii) regular promotion and examination for promotion; (v) appointment of staff to various administrative positions; (v) decision making and control of personnel payments; and training of teachers, staff and trainers.
- Academic and technical management: (i) adaptation of curriculum, textbooks and teacher guides to local conditions; (ii) adaptation of the school calendar to local conditions; and expansion of multi-grade teaching.
- Property and materials management is concerned with management and administration of MOE property and effects.

The responsibilities of the District Education Bureaus include:

- Planning and budget management : (i) implement government policies and guidelines, and MOE and PES regulations and report to district authorities and PES; (ii) keep record of statistics and information on teachers, students and population by age group; (iii) make education map and analyze the statistic and information, to serve as directions in managing, developing and improving education in the district; (iv) plan the expansion and improvement of education

in the district, (v) implement the expansion and improvement plans as well as monitor, control and evaluate the work undertaken with villages; and (vi) accurately set budgets and expenditures according to given budget guidelines.

- Personnel management: (i) manage primary teachers in the district (recruitment, promotion, discipline, praise, upgrading, training, etc.) and their record in districts; (ii) set educational supervision for teachers, as well as evaluate and test them.
- Academic management : (i) supervise the teaching-learning of teachers and students, aiming at effectively applying the curriculum as targeted; (ii) mobilize people's contribution to education development and motivate parents to send their children to schools; (iii) assist in managing educational institutions of the district; and (iv) liaise and collaborate on education matters with concerned parties in the district.
- Property and materials management: (i) collaborate with community and authority to determine the catchment area of each school; and (ii) manage and maintain the school building, and provide furniture, textbooks and other teaching / learning materials to district schools.
- The major constraints of deconcentration persist in PES and DEB as in MOE are : unreadiness of organizational context for deconcentration, education finance, personnel and human resources management, academic management and facilities and procurement.
- The issues to be addressed to overcome these constraints are essential related to the unclear regulatory framework, low capacity building, untimely information, inadequate coordination mechanism, administrative process and shortages of financial and material resources.
- To overcome these issues, eight training modules have been drafted and developed to address capacity building in close collaboration with ADB, WB, SIDA and French assistance as well as others currently assisting the MOE.

I. Introduction

The overall development goal of the Lao P.D.R in the first part of the new millennium is to graduate from least developed country status to developing country status by 2020. This ultimate goal could be achieved by reducing poverty, having sustainable management of resources and equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth, and safeguarding social, cultural and political identity. Education is one of the four priority sectors included in the poverty alleviation strategy. Equitable access and quality delivery of education services at all levels and strengthening decentralized education management are important, necessary and decisive for the educational development.

In view of realizing the Decree 01/PM of the Prime Minister on the strengthening of provinces into strategic units, districts into planning and budget units and villages into implementing units, the sector of education has developed its action plan for the deconcentration of education.

Deconcentration of the management of the education system offers the potential for local needs to become more influential in determining both the content and method of instruction. Because the management of the education system under deconcentration is still under the authority of the extended MOE, the deconcentration reform does not change the governance of the system, only the management. The reform can nevertheless have the effect of making the system, especially the primary and lower secondary levels and non-formal education, more responsive to the needs of the local communities because of the local awareness of the technical and policy making levels of management in the DEBs and PES.

II. The concept and framework for deconcentration

II.1 Concept of deconcentration and decentralization

Concept of Deconcentration: under deconcentration, authority is devolved to administrative levels closer to the institutional operations but administratively under the authority of the central organization.

Concept of Decentralization: under decentralization, authority is devolved to administrative levels closer to the institutional operations administratively but with a high degree of autonomy in relation to the authority of the central organization.

The process currently under way in Lao People's Democratic Republic (LAO PRD) is **deconcentration**, not decentralization. Authority is devolved to appointed bodies (PES, DEBs) in the overall Ministry of Education organizational structure.

II.2 Framework for Deconcentration

The Resolution of the political Bureau of the Popular Revolutionary Party of Laos, No. 21 of 8 May 1993 "On the Principles of Sectoral Administration", and the Prime Minister's Decree No. 01/PM of 11 March 2000 "On Deconcentration" outline the long term objectives of deconcentration. These objectives involve:

1. Strengthening the rights and developing the responsibilities of communities in (i) using their potential and capacity for socio-economic development in the spirit of "self-mastery, self-reliance, self-strengthening" to decrease dependence on higher levels, and (ii) upgrading the capacity of the local and grassroots level in administration and micro-planning and management.
2. Support for continuous socio-economic development of localities and regions. Create economic structures by combining agriculture/forestry, industries and the service sector for expanded production of goods in different regions of the country for internal consumption and export. Upgrade the standard of living of the population and gradually alleviating poverty among the population, specifically those living in rural and remote areas. Promote division of labor and coordination between localities and regions in support of steady development.
3. Bring Party directives and Government Policy to organizations at the grassroots level, as well as "bottom-up" planning and budgeting methods. Encourage productive individuals and families to participate actively in the process of preparation and implementation of plans and budgets. This is the best way to have suitable and realistic plans and budgets and to use existing capacities and potential.

The Prime Minister Decree also outlines new roles and responsibilities for provinces, districts and villages as follows:

The province as the Strategic Unit for Development: This means that the province will be capable of supervising and leading management in all areas. The province will prepare long (10 years) medium (5 years) and short (one year) socio-economic development plans with two main sections: -an overall report on the socio-economic development plans, and -an investment plan (list of investment projects).

The District as a planning and Budgeting Unit: the district will prepare plans and projects, monitor and evaluate their implementation, and report to the concerned service at the provincial level. The district development plan will specify the targets for each sector in terms of production services, and socio-cultural activities. State investment, private investment and investment from the community will be taken into account. Five year and one year plans will be prepare.

The Village as the Basic Implementation Unit: The village will prepare a developement plan reflecting party policy and resolutions, village guidelines activities and targets to be achieved. Activities will aim at expanding production and services, improving the quality of life, and eradicating poverty.

At the same time, the ministries retain an important role: the ministries and central agencies are to be transformed into macro-level management units responsible for policy, national planning and monitoring and evaluation. Regulations and the legal framework will be streamlined.

II.3 Deconcentration objectives for Education

Deconcentration in the education sector now means that:

The center retains policy authority, national curriculum and standards, supervision and control, post-secondary education, personnel management, and allocation of resources.

Provincial education services (PES) are responsible for strategy development, medium and long term planning, and secondary general and vocational education.

District education bureaus are responsible for annual planning and budgeting, collection of statistics, pre-primary, primary and non-formal education.

Schools are responsible for implementations. Village Education Development Coomittee (VEDC) as well as Pupil Parent- Associations is established and promoted at all levels of schooling VEDC is composed of village head, school pricipal, Pupil Parent-Association Chairman, with representative from National front for Construction Lao Women Union, Lao Youth Union and Temple etc.

Deconcentration in education is a continuing process which must form part of the overall deconcentration process and be achieved over a long time period. A part from changes in the legal and regulatory framework, devolutions of roles and functions must be accompanied by parallel transfers of resources and capacity building.

II. Overview of the deconcentration process

II.1 Capacity Development of Education Planning, Administration and Management.

In Lao PDR, education decision making and planning have fluctutated between centralized and decentralized approaches. Since mid 1990s the term deconcentration has

been used to designate the national planning and decision model, a model which is the provinces and districts have specified authority and responsibility.

At the grassroots level, the MoE in association with the foreign organizations deeply involve in capacity building, particularly carrying out projects to strengthen community capacity to manage primary education and to develop non-formal education delivery systems. In particular, UNICEF is helping to develop the school cluster model by assisting local educators and communities to design school clusters and develop capabilities to manage and evaluate them. Moreover, UNICEF is currently engaged in a multi-province village level project to establish the organizational framework for planning and to train villagers to engage in local planning.

At present, two large international funded projects are in the stages of implementation that include attention to planning, administration and management. The joint ADB and AusAID Basic Education Girls Project offered in-service training programs for teachers, teacher trainers and school principals. Additionally, this project assist in the development of a national EMIS system and focus on raising the technical capabilities of departments in Ministry of Education. Moreover, through the Second Education Development Project (EDP II) the development of the national administration and management training centre is being considered.

Other main task of the Ministry of Education in matter of control may also be implemented through national examinations and school-level supervision. The examinations in grades 1 through 5 are set by the District Education Bureaus and by teachers, however, the ministry of education and the provincial education services are responsible for the examinations in lower and upper secondary schools. Ministry of Education has authority for establishing or abolishing grassroots educational organizations, defining the organization and role of PES and DEB, appointing and discharging education officers at all levels, and issuing, as necessary, various educational decisions, rules, orders, regulations and notices.

PES and DEB have operational responsibility for implementing primary secondary education. In some cases, responsibilities may be shared, such as school building initiatives, and vocational and technical education. With guidelines from the State Planning Committee and its provincial unit, PES participates in national annual and multi-year planning. Although, the PES is an arm to the MOE, PES reports to the governor, the governor (equivalent to a minister in rank) is involved in establishing inter-sectoral priorities and appointments of PES personnel. Moreover, provincial governors have discretionary funds that may be allocated to education. DEB is the lowest branch of the national educational administration. DEB assists schools and communities in their planning of primary and pre-primary education and prepares a district plan for each academic year and each school term.

III: Key constraints to deconcentration

Many constraints persist in PES and DEB as in MoE are: limited planning capabilities; shortage of technical skills; inadequate communication across divisions; difficult in prioritizing projects and programmes; insufficient training for staff; and limited monitoring and evaluation programs and projects.

Major constraints both in the process of education deconcentration and in the effective functioning of a deconcentrated education system are: organizational context for deconcentration, planning, education finance, personnel and Human resources management, academic management and facilities and procurement.

Under the deconcentration framework, the current legislation for budget formulation, budget execution and financial management within MOE is composed of several laws, decrees, and regulations. These legislations introduce new administrative and financial arrangements which extended financial responsibilities to provinces and districts, which districts will become budgeting centres. This involves increased responsibilities for CPC and MOF in the provinces and districts. The MOF District office will gain increased responsibility for revenue collection, and districts will establish a budget office. Districts will oversee the implementation of plans for their villages, with a particular focus on revenue collection.

IV: Issues to be addressed to overcome these constraints

The deconcentration strategy must address a variety of issues arising in the five areas covered under Asian Development Bank (ADB) technical assistance (TA) project. There are planning, budget and finance, personnel, academic management, and facilities and procurement. Issues identified are essential those that represent major constraints both in the process of education deconcentration and, eventually, in the effective functioning of a deconcentrated education system. They are essentially related to:

- The Regulatory Framework- unclear, insufficient detailed, inadequately disseminated;
- Capacity Building – both qualitative (staff educational background, training, and professional experience) and quantitative constraints (staff shortages and staffing mismatches; equipment);
- Information – deficiencies in availability, accuracy, relevance, and timeliness of required information for decision-making;
- Coordination – the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms, both vertically (within MOE) and horizontally (between MOE and other central and local government institutions) leaves much to be desired;
- Administrative Processes – cumbersome, time-consuming, or inadequate;
- Resources – shortages of financial and material resources, inappropriate use of available resources both financial and material.

IV.1 Organizational Context for Deconcentration

A number of structural and organizational issues have to be addressed within the framework of deconcentration if it is to be successful. The main issues are summarized as below.

IV.1.1 Inter-Ministerial Relations

Adequate mechanisms are lacking for pro-active MOE involvement in educational development. More effective coordination is needed between MOE and the Committee for Planning and Cooperation (CPC) in the area of capital and between MOE and Ministry of Finance (MOF) in the area of recurrent expenditure. MOE does not have the authority and the means to oversee the education sector budget, even though

it is formally accountable to the Government and National Assembly . There is a clear need to strengthen coherence between MOE and CPC and MOF.

IV.1.2 Vertical and Horizontal Relations

In principle, the MOE has retains authority for overall sector policy and regulations, planning of core programmes, education information management, overall financing, monitoring and evaluation of system achievements. However, *practically* MOE is losing control over key elements such as overall budget preparation and expenditure management, and monitoring and evaluation of public education. There is due to conflicting lines of authority between the PES and DEB and the provincial and district administration.

IV.1.3 MOE Structure and Operations

Although new regulations on organization, functions and working procedures of MOE , PES and DEB have been prepared, different departments are still compartmentalized and their activities are not coordinated. Some important functions are not clearly defined. These include issuing rules and regulations on the administration of education system, maintenance of an operational EMIS, in-service training of teaching and non-teaching staff, monitoring the education system, and supervision of teachers.

There is a lack of clarity between PES and DEB regarding the responsibility for secondary education. The principles of deconcentration have not yet been translated into regulations for general education. The intent of granting more autonomy to technical schools and training institutes remains to be accomplished. This and other similar situations must be addressed through clear and appropriate delegation of responsibilities and required authority.

IV.1.4 Recruitment and Retention of staff

Directors in DEB and especially PES can choose the best from the cadre of teachers available and would tend to do so. PES directors have stated that they prefer to bring in academic staff and train them in technical skills rather than hire technically trained staff.

The quota system for teacher recruitment is not directly a constraint to deconcentration but it is an important implication with which the PES and DEB must cope. Provincial quotas for recruitment of new regular teachers are set each year under the direct authority of the Prime Minister's office. These quotas are well below the number of teachers need .

To overcome the problem, contract teachers must be hired by PES and DEB or unqualified teachers recruited and paid by communities.

IV.1.5 Academic management

Schools are in session five days per week, sometimes only in the morning. The actual duration of instruction is much shorter than the official norm. The school calendar has not been adapted to fit to the local farmers' production schedule even though PES, DEB and schools are entitled to do so. In addition, they may produce their own additional or supplementary instructional materials, with the aim of improving the quality of those teaching and learning activities they directly fund. However, they are not in a position to do so since they have not been trained for such tasks. High pupil absenteeism in some provinces affects their achievement.

IV.1.6 In-service training and the curriculum

The general education curriculum and the organization and management of teachers' in-service training are in need of rationalization. As mentioned earlier, most in-service training programs do not lead to certification or promotion purposes, except for locally recruited voluntary teachers without professional qualifications. Curricula, textbooks, and teachers guides are not available in sufficient number at district and school level. In their teaching activity, teachers only refer to textbooks, not to the curriculum.

IV.1.7 Facilities and Procurement

Although MOE has progressively delegated to PES, DEB and villages the powers to proceed with school building construction, there are still problems. PES and DEB get financial allocations, not money, and the 50 million kip equivalent to US\$ 5000 ceiling for provincial bids is extremely low and does not allow them to do much.

V. Future trends and plans

A successful education deconcentration strategy must be realistic. It must take into account the wide variation in backgrounds and skills levels of education managers. It must allow for its own monitoring and evaluation, as well as for flexible implementation as required. It also must take into account the real constraints to education system improvement. It will be essential for constraints to be overcome or at least alleviated, if the deconcentration strategy is to be successful.

The view of education officials at MOE, PES, DEB and school level have informed the development of this deconcentration strategy. With the auspice of ADB and UNESCO Asia and Pacific Region Bureau, Bangkok, local forums have been conducted in all provinces and districts with representatives of local administration, PES, DEB, schools, mass organizations and parents associations to gather further comments.

The deconcentration strategy is organized into five main categories: planning and information, budget and finance management, personnel management, academic management, and facilities and procurement. Actions within each of these categories relate to changes in the regulatory framework, information, capacity building, administrative procedures, coordination, and resource allocation.

V.1 Outline of future actions

Not all of these elements can be developed and delivered quickly. The deconcentration strategy covers a ten years period, although a twenty year period would be more realistic.

Actions to accomplish in the short, medium and long term have been proposed. Decisions will have to be made on priorities and a step-by-step. Priorities may vary in each province. The process may be slower or quicker depending on initial conditions, especially regarding staff level of education. Each DEB with PES, and each PES with MOE should make decision on their own priorities and approach. To promote ownership, PES and DEB may decide to conduct a situation analysis to identify areas of weakness and where initial focus should lie in their deconcentration approach.

To overcome these action plans, the TA has drafted a capacity building plan and developed eight training modules. A map of donor assistance for the deconcentration strategy has been prepared by the TA. This map identifies aspects of the deconcentration strategy of interest for donors. In these efforts the MOE will coordinate closely with the

SIDA, World Bank, ADB and French Priority Solidarity Fund and others currently assisting the MOE.

ABREVIATIONS

ADB: Asian Development Bank

CPC: Committee for Planning and Cooperation

DEB: District Education Bureau

MOE: Ministry of Education

MOF: Ministry of Finance

PES: Provincial Education Service

SIDA: Swedish International Development Agency

TA: Technical Assistance

WB: World Bank

UNESCO: United Nations Educational , Scientific and Cultural Organization