

Education

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in education

According to the United Nations, the Lao PDR has made steady progress towards universal primary education. The Ministry of Education and Sports reports that the national net enrolment rate for children attending primary school has now reached 96.3 percent.

While there continues to be significant gaps in education between children in rural and urban areas, Laos has reached an important milestone with 70 percent of girls and boys now completing Grade 5 education. This is a major improvement from the 48 percent reported in 1992.

Education is central to poverty eradication. It was identified as a key focus area

improved job and income earning opportunities; it also improves health and social well-being outcomes.

Tay Sonesyda, a nine-year-old primary school pupil living in central Laos, is eager to learn and go to school.

“Lao language is my favourite subject at school because I love reading,” says Tay. Her parents are rice and cassava farmers. In some years, they have a surplus to sell. In others, they don’t.

“I’m not good at maths and my dad has had to help me with homework many times,” adds the third grader. “And the second subject I like is environmental studies because I can learn more about many things about the environment.”

Every day, Tay wakes up

between. “It’s one kilometre from the school to my home,” Tay continues. “When I get home every day, I do my homework before helping my parents do the housework.”

Tay’s 42-year-old father, Phouthone Sonesyda, is a member of the village’s education committee. “A few years ago, we didn’t have good roads and the school wasn’t in good condition. It was built of wood with bamboo walls, a roof made of cogon grass and a muddy floor, especially during the rainy season,” he says.

“There was also a lack of hygiene and sanitation, as well as school furniture. Because of all those difficulties, children weren’t interested in studying and some parents didn’t want to send their children to school.”

in the Lao government’s National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy. World Vision emphasises the importance of educating children from a very young age and uses strategies to strengthen children’s learning abilities. Education is not only a powerful tool in providing

early so she won’t be late for school. “I go to school by bike with my friends,” she says. “At first, my parents took me to school, but now they don’t any more. I [choose to] go to school by myself.”

Tay’s classes start at 8am and continue until 4pm, with a two-hour lunch break in

His daughter adds, “Before, I had to walk along dusty roads, which would be muddy during the rainy season. My uniform and shoes always got dirty.”

From July 2013 to June 2014, World Vision Laos contributed to improvements in education at 660 schools across 25 districts in support



Tay (centre) enjoys playing with her friends at school.

of the United Nations’ second Millennium Development Goal of achieving universal primary education for children.

In 2003, Tay’s village received a new primary school building and school furniture, such as tables, chairs, blackboards, cabinets, latrines and clean water systems from World Vision Laos. All these materials aim to provide a

good facility for children in the school.

“Now in our village we have a good quality school,”

Phouthone says. “The new school building and school environment also inspire the children’s interest to go to school and encourage parents to understand and see the value of education for their children. I feel confident to send my children to school and believe that they will be safer than before. Now I can say that 100 percent of the children of their age are going to school in Thongwam village, Pakxan district, Borikhamxay province.”

“My dream is to see my children have a bright future and I do not want them to become like me, working hard in the farm,” Phouthone adds. “On behalf of the village education committee, I would like to encourage all parents to understand the value of education and also to support their children because education is very important part

for our nation. Our government focuses on education, especially foreign languages, so that we can improve our communication with them and prepare ourselves for the Asean Economic Community.”

According to World Vision’s fiscal year 2014 Annual Report Summary, an average of 85 percent of girls and boys in World Vision’s

target areas completed five years of primary school education, compared to the national average of 75 percent.

Five district programmes reported that all of the girls and boys completed Grade 5.

While World Vision Laos continues to improve the quality of data, available evidence suggests that World Vision Laos’ efforts are contributing towards higher enrolment rates. The annual report showed an average of 3 percent increase in Grade 1 enrolment across target districts, compared to the previous year.

World Vision Laos’ integrated approach for education includes campaigns to promote education, improve access and quality of schools, and food security. In the last fiscal year, World Vision Laos invested approximately US\$1.5 million in education programmes.

Many Lao parents have difficult choices to make, such as the choice to send their child to school or send them to

the woods to forage for food. Recognising these pressures, World Vision conducted educational promotions in 355 villages. As a result more parents appear to understand the value of education for their children. Based on a survey of 2,587 households, 78 percent of parents and caregivers expressed educational aspirations for their children.

Furthermore, consultations with 335 children, parents and Village Education Development Committee

(VEDC) members revealed that parents understood the potential of improved future income through education and they recognise that social, technological and economic circumstances are rapidly changing. Parents do not want their children to be left behind.

Between July 2013 and June 2014, World Vision Laos trained VEDCs from 131 schools as part of the initial process of developing and implementing a local education plan.

These committees play a key role in supporting the effective and sustainable use of school funds that are provided by the Ministry of Education and Sports, as well as donations from parents. World Vision Laos’ training enhanced the capacity of the committees to effectively manage village education funds.

--World Vision in Laos