Save the Children
Norway

A Quality Education for All.
A History of the Lao PDR Inclusive Education Project
1993-2009

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for Save the Children Norway in Lao PDR

Foreword from the Minister of Education

The Education for All National Plan of Action has long been the priority of Ministry of Education in Lao PDR. Our aim is to ensure that by the year 2015, all Lao children aged between six and 10 years of age are enrolled in primary school and will be given the chance to complete a basic education. The Lao Government has provided technical advice and resources to achieve this plan.

Inclusive Education (IE) is one way of ensuring education for all. This approach to education welcomes and caters for all children from different backgrounds and different abilities regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, social-economic situation, disability, or other conditions.

Save the children Norway in Lao PDR has supported IE with the aim of including children with disabilities in mainstream schools. This reflects the education policy and law in Lao PDR. Internationally, about 10 percent of people are disabled, out of which, 5 percent are children who have a special educational need.

The Inclusive Education Project has been on-going since 1992-93. Before the establishment of the special school for blind and deaf children in Vientiane, Lao PDR had no educational provision for disabled children. In order to address this, the Inclusive Education Project aimed to establish at least two or three IE schools per district. At present there are 539 such schools including 3 special schools in 141 districts and 17 provinces throughout the country. There are currently more than 3,000 disabled children being educated alongside their peers.

This is a significant step towards fulfilling the obligations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the United Nations World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons.

With support from, Sida, UNESCO and Save the Children Norway, the IE Project advocates for the fundamental rights of all learners with disabilities to have equal access to mainstream education. In order to achieve this the project has worked to support schools in developing child centred teaching practices which can ensure that all students are fully participating and achieving in school. This emphasis on universal quality education has helped Lao PDR work towards achieving its Education For All targets.

The lessons learnt from this project should be used in initiatives to facilitate more inclusive learning for other vulnerable groups, for example, children from ethnic families or children suffering from poverty

On the occasion of 15 year anniversary of the IE project, I would like to congratulate the Project Team and Save the Children Norway for their efforts and technical skill

in providing all Lao children with greater access to mainstream education. I hope that Save the Children Norway will continue providing support to the Ministry of Education in the future.

Prof. Dr. Somkot Mangnormek
Minister of Education

The Country Director's Foreword

Save the Children is concerned that all children should enjoy the rights accorded to them in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). Lao PDR was one of the first states to ratify the CRC, and the longstanding partnership between the Ministry of Education and Save the Children is evidence of a joint commitment to realising the rights of all Lao children to a quality education.

Globally, however, our experience is that certain groups of children consistently fall outside the system. These are most often children with disabilities, girls, children in difficult circumstances and children with a minority ethnic background. This is also the case in Lao PDR where providing a quality education to children with diverse backgrounds remain a major challenge.

The Inclusive Education Project, has played an important role in increasing the awareness and understanding among education officials, teachers and parents that quality schools need to cater for all children and thereby also create opportunities and space for marginalised groups of children. From its initial focus on facilitating the inclusion of children with disabilities, the project has shifted to supporting schools to address and accept students with diverse needs through identifying and remove all barriers to participation and achievement. The project has also shown that child centred and active learning approaches constitute the best way of including children with diverse needs through providing a quality education for all children in school.

Since the aim of this publication is to communicate practical experiences and lessons learned, we felt that the author should be thoroughly aware of the context and history of the project. Accordingly, the external consultant supporting the project since 2005, Mr. Peter Grimes of Canterbury Christchurch University in the UK was commissioned to coordinate an internal assessment and documentation process, together with the National Implementation Team.

Although the IE project formally ends in May 2009, the Ministry of Education is committed to ensuring that the principles of inclusion continue to underpin the provision of quality education to Lao children. The main purpose of this book is to act as a resource for practitioners wishing to encourage and support inclusive practices in the education system. In order to make the insights and lessons learned available to a wide audience in the Lao PDR as well as internationally, the book is published in both English and Lao versions. We hope that it will be an inspiration to others working in the field.

It is also appropriate to in this context to acknowledge the pioneering work of Save the Children UK in supporting the establishment and initial phases of the IE project. Also, thanks to SIDA which has not only been a donor, but has also been an active contributor towards the professional development of the project.

Julian Kramer
Country Director, Save the Children Norway

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Introduction

Introduction

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) Inclusive Education (IE) Project is one of the longest running projects of its kind internationally. In May 2009, funding for the project came to an end, bringing to a close a 16 year long journey, during which many challenges had been faced and lessons learned. The aim of this publication is to share some of those challenges and lessons with a wider audience.

The Lao Context

For a full history and understanding of the factors which have impacted upon the development of Lao PDR as a country, readers should refer to some of the excellent histories available, which give a far more detailed insight than is possible here (Jumsai, 2000; Stuart-Fox, 2007).

Lao PDR is a landlocked country in South East Asia, bordering onto Thailand and Myanmar in the west, Cambodia in the south, China in the north and Vietnam in the east. There are 17 provinces and 141 districts with 49 indigenous, ethno linguistic groups. Lao PDR is one of the poorest countries in the world and also has the distinction of being the most bombed country in history, as a result of the Vietnam War (Grimes, Sayarath, 2007). It is estimated that in excess of 266 million cluster bombs were dropped between 1967 and 1974 (UXO Lao, 2008). Of these, approximately 80 million remain unexploded.

At the time of the projects beginnings, in 1993, Lao PDR had a population of approximately 5 million people (Ministry of Education, 2008). Its per capita GDP was amongst the lowest in the world, ensuring it a place in the UN category 'Least Developed Countries'. At this time 80% of the population depended on subsistence agriculture and social indicators of human development were all very low: life expectancy of 54 for men, 60 for women; infant mortality of 93/1000; widespread under-nourishment (Holdsworth, 2003).

Following the revolution in 1975, approximately 30% of children were able to attend school. By the late 1990s, this had risen to over 70% (Ministry of Education, 2000). However, there are regional variations in enrolment and a number of factors impact on both enrolment and subsequent attendance at school including gender and accessibility. For example:

> 'Boys are more likely to go to school, but girls who go to school are more likely to be in the official age. Though improved, repetition and drop-out remain high with repetition becoming more of a boys' problem in the latter grades.' (Ministry of Education, 2008)

In remote districts, it is still the case that many children may have a significant journey to the nearest school. This is compounded by the problem that many remote primary schools are incomplete schools and may only cater for grades 1 – 3. The education system is grade based with a primary national curriculum which relies on set text books, although these are currently being re-written to make them more learner-centred. Children begin Primary School in Grade 1, at the age of 6 and complete at the end of Grade 5. A small proportion of children attend pre-school and a similar number go on to secondary school. The country currently has 867 Pre-Schools, 8,529 Primary Schools and 926 Secondary Schools. The teaching language medium in Lao PDR is the Lao language, but because many children are from ethnic backgrounds which have a different mother tongue they are vulnerable to experiencing language and understanding based barriers to participation and achievement in school. Consequently, nationally, these children are less likely to attend school and, when they do attend, more likely to drop out of school. For example, in the academic year 2002 - 03, over 75% of primary aged Lao -Tai children attended school, compared to less than 50% of Mon-Khmer and Hmong-Iu Mien children and only 33% of Sino-Tibet children (Save the Children Norway in Lao PDR, 2008).

A Note on Ethnic Groups in Lao PDR
For most of the life of the IE Project, the different ethnic groups in Lao PDR have been divided into three broad groupings:

- Lao Loum: lowland Lao

- Lao Theung: Upland Lao

- Lao Soong: Highland Lao

Because these groupings were familiar to schools and participants they were therefore used in the project evaluation which informs the second half of the book. However, ethnic classification in the Lao PDR is challenging (Messerli, et al, 2008) and there is a need for classification which better reflects the country's ethnic and cultural diversity. A new national classification based on ethno-linguistic families is being introduced consisting of:

- Lao-Tai

- Mon-Khmer

- Sino-Tibetan

- Hmong-Mien

This is broken down further into ethno-linguistic categories and then into 49 ethnic groups.

Lao Theung Women in Nong District, Savannakhet Province

The Inclusive Education Project

Up until the establishment in 1992 of a special school for children with visual and hearing impairments in the capital city of Vientiane, Lao PDR had no education provision for children with special needs. In order to address this, the Inclusive Education (IE) Project was introduced in the 1993-94 academic year. This was seen as a significant step towards fulfilling the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), as well as the United Nations World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons. With support from UNESCO and Save the Children UK, the project had expanded by 1995 -1996, to include 9 primary schools and 3 pre-schools. Each year since then, with SIDA becoming the major donor, expansion to new schools, provinces, and districts took place. In 2004, Save the Children Norway took over responsibility for the management of the project and in partnership with the Ministry of Education, supported the project's growth, to cover every district of the country.

Inclusive Education has itself been on a long journey and this is reflected in the way that the project has changed and grown over the years. An initiative which began in one school in the centre of Vientiane, aiming to provide access to a mainstream education for children with disabilities had, by 2009, expanded to 539 schools including 3 special schools in all 141 districts, in each of the 17 provinces throughout the country; ensuring that over 3,000 children with disabilities were being educated alongside their peers.

In reference to the language used in the book to describe disabled children, the term 'children with special needs' is commonly used in Lao PDR and in order to avoid confusion, in places, it has been retained within the book. However, this term is associated with the medical model of disability. Thus, wherever possible, the author has used the term 'children with disabilities' in reference to the children who are the target group for the Inclusive Education Project. However, it should be noted that the preferred term should be 'disabled children' which is associated with the social model of disability.

The project had not only grown in the number of schools and children it catered for. The understanding of the term 'Inclusive Education' had also changed and developed over the years. During the life span of the project 'Inclusion' has become a subject of debate internationally (Peters, 2003). The concept has become confused and lost its clarity, meaning different things to different people (Slee, 2004). For some, inclusion is still viewed as an attempt to move away from segregated provision for students with disabilities to creating mainstream placements for them. For others it is a broader concept concerned with identifying and removing barriers to participation and achievement for all students (Booth and Ainscow, 2002), therefore maximising the participation of all in mainstream schools (Allen, 2003) and demanding radical changes within schools (Barton, 1997). The growth of the project has seen it move towards this latter perspective. By 2009 it had become a project which focused

on the importance of ensuring that all students were fully participating and achieving in school. At the same time it continued to emphasise the rights of all learners with disabilities to equal access to education.

This has meant that, in addition to continuing to ensure mainstream access for students with disabilities, the project has focused on two key initiatives in its final phase.

1. Ensuring that all students are participating and achieving in school, but particularly those from groups which may be more vulnerable to experiencing exclusionary barriers. In Lao PDR, children with disabilities are just one of these groups. The list also includes

- Girls

- Children from economically disadvantaged families

- Children from ethnic groups where Lao is not their mother tongue

2. Ensuring that the education that all students receive is of a high quality. This has necessitated focusing on trying to change the dominant educational pedagogy from a teacher-centred to a child-centered one.

The IE Project has not been alone in Lao PDR, in focusing on these initiatives. The move to a new Educational Sector Development Framework (ESDF) in Lao is indicative of the way in which the Ministry of Education (MOE) is working together with donors and NGOs to formulate a coherent, strategic approach to developing quality education for all children in the country. Perhaps then, 2009 is an appropriate point for a separately funded Inclusion project to become subsumed into a country wide strategy which places the inclusion of all children at the centre of its strategic development. However, it is to be hoped that the individual needs of all students are kept paramount in any new systems which are introduced.

In this book, the reader is offered an insight into the development, achievements and some of the failings of the Lao PDR IE Project. In sharing these experiences, others concerned with the development of inclusive schools for all, may be able to reflect on some of the learning that has taken place in Lao PDR and perhaps consider this within their own contexts.

Finally, the work of Janet Holdsworth should be acknowledged. Janet wrote 'Seeking a fine balance: lessons from Inclusive Education in Lao PDR' for Save the Children UK. It was produced in 2003 and covers the years from 1993 to 2002 when the IE Project was establishing itself in Lao PDR. This current book does not seek to reproduce Janet's work, but Chapter 2 includes an overview of the Projects early years, based on her writing. Janet's work in Lao PDR was fundamental to the success of the project and this should not be forgotten.

Map of Lao PDR as situated in South East Asia

Map of Lao PDR and it's provinces

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The Development of the Inclusive Education Project

The Beginnings of the Inclusive Education Project

To understand the development of the IE Project in Lao PDR, it is important to reflect on the context that led to its beginning: the Lao country context, which was described in chapter 1, and, perhaps more fundamentally, the worldwide rights based educational context of the time.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child
The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UN, 1989) , was instrumental in changing the way that development educationalists could operate.

> '... before the CRC it was possible to feel successful by working on the small scale providing ... a quality service for a limited number of children. ...Nobody said you had to include everybody and nobody seriously tried to do that.' (Holdsworth, 2003)

The CRC changed this way of thinking on a fundamental level. The entitlements of children apply to all children. Therefore any project that sought to support a particular group of children, such as those with disabilities, had to ensure that it was concerned with all of those children, not just a small number in a particular area. Additionally it also needed to be concerned with the quality of education being offered to all children and not just this particular group. Where resources are limited, this can be a challenging goal and 'meeting one child's rights and needs at the expense of another child's cannot be the way forward' (Holdsworth, 2003). However, there is also no point in developing a project or service if it is not of a sufficiently high quality. This is part of the framework that led to the way in which the IE Project was set up:

IE Project Challenges

It had to work on several different levels at the same time so that all children would benefit as well as the group that were the main focus.

Although it wanted to benefit as many children as possible, with scarce resources the project had to find a balance between providing a high quality program and not spreading itself too thinly by trying to work with too large a group.

Expansion of the project had to be carefully thought through, so that it was not so fast that the quality of the project began to drop, nor so slow that large numbers of children were omitted altogether.

Because of this, Janet Holdsworth entitled her book about the project, **'Seeking a Fine Balance'** (Holdsworth, 2003); the development of the project was always a case of finding a balance between these competing factors.

Inclusive Education

In addition to the impact of CRC on educationalists and development workers, there was also the growing significance of Inclusive Education. As explained in the introduction to this publication, the development of the IE Project reflects the development of the widening definition of Inclusion from a disability rights based perspective to one concerned with responses to diversity and identifying and removing barriers to participation and achievement for all (Booth and Ainscow, 2002)

It is important to understand that, at the time the project started in 1993, the term inclusive was not used in relation to the project. At this point the project

was known as the 'Integrated Education Project'. The term 'Integration' has become problematic because it came to be seen as part of the medical model of disability. Historically provision for students with disabilities was based on the notion that these students would need specialized interventions and care or support which could not be provided in a mainstream school, only in a special school. Where a country was too poor to provide such specialized education, such as Lao, the impact of this thinking meant that most children with disabilities could not attend school. This way of thinking was rooted in the medical model of disability. Over time and by the early 1990s, the use of the term 'integration' was being used in relation to attempts to 'integrate' children with disabilities into mainstream settings. This was often very challenging for schools to embrace. It generally involved 'fitting' or 'placing' disabled children into schools, rather than adapting school systems and curricula around the needs of the child. The IE Project in Lao PDR was probably one of the first truly Inclusive Projects because it recognised from the start that for success the systems and curriculum would have to change.

By the mid 1990s, the term inclusion was becoming familiar, mostly because of the 'Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education' (UNESCO, 1994) The Salamanca statement articulated the tensions between the established medical 'integrationist' model and an emerging social model of disability. The problems that children with disabilities experienced in school were the result of inflexible policies and practices rather than located within the child themselves. The statement also supported the progress of professional understanding in relation to the most effective ways to attain Education for All. It advocated for the development of a child-centred pedagogy which would meet the needs of all students, including those with disabilities. In a country such as Lao PDR, with a largely teacher-centred pedagogy in most schools yet also with a wide range of children vulnerable to experiencing exclusionary barriers, this would be an opportunity for change and also a significant challenge.

Supporting teachers in developing child centred pedagogy has been one of the main aims of the IE Project.

1994 Salamanca Statement

'We believe and proclaim that:

- Every child has a fundamental right to education

- Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs

- Education systems should ... take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs

- Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centred pedagogy capable of meeting those needs

- Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover they can provide an effective education to the majority of children...

In the early 1990s, disability was a significant factor in trying to ensure a quality education for all students, because there was no policy for supporting the enrolment and placement of students with disabilities. At this time it was estimated that of the school age population, 62% of children would make progress under the existing school system. However, of the remaining 32% of children,

- 2.5% had severe disabilities with no access to school

- 7.5% had mild / moderate disabilities with little or no access to school

- 28% of other children were failing or likely to fail. (Holdsworth 2003)

Because of this, the eventual design of the IE Project tried to maximise its impact in terms of quality and the range of children whose needs could be met.

IE Project Design

IE Target Group:
- Children with disabilities including those with mild and moderate disabilities
- Children failing in school whether because of learning problems or because of other factors

Features of the Project Design
- Special help and concern for the whole target group
- Changes in teaching methodology so that diversity is catered for.
- Flexible approach to the curriculum and assessment.
- Extra help not available; group work and peer tutoring support techniques are used instead. Families are used to provide back up where needed and where possible.
- Children required to start at Grade 1 and follow the basic curriculum, with amendments as necessary.
- The needs of children with severe learning needs may not be met, particularly as they get older.
- The needs of children with profound and multiple disabilities may not be met because the standard curriculum may be unsuitable.

(Holdsworth 2003)

The Pilot Project

The project began in one mainstream primary school in Vientiane, in 1993. The Ministry of Education and the National Rehabilitation Centre had already begun to collaborate to develop a special school for children with visual and hearing disabilities. It was suggested that a pilot project could be started in a mainstream primary school that was already used as a demonstration school for students teachers as outlined above.

> 'For the pilot project ... the emphasis was on the teaching methods and the extension of those methods so that children with more difficult problems could attend' (Holdsworth, 2003)

The first year saw 12 children with disabilities enrolled in the school, the second year a further 17 joined. At the end of the first two years, the evaluation of the project was reasonably positive. 'Everyone was pleased with what was being accomplished. The children were doing alright and progress was being made' (Holdsworth, 2003). However, the staff at the school were clearly experiencing a wide range of challenges and tensions.

A Project management board had been established including senior staff at the

Ministry of Education, partly in order to provide strong leadership and support with decision-making. However, looking back at the early challenges for the project, one of the issues was clearly a lack of technical experience and expertise in establishing a project of this nature. There was clear evidence from the first two years that:

'... inexperienced teachers had been asked to do things that were too difficult for them at that time and with their current level of skill. They needed less theory and 'training' and more 'support' in a situation where the difficulty they faced was controlled and would not overwhelm them.' (Holdsworth, 2003)

Inclusive Education is not just about the 'placement' of children in mainstream classrooms - it demands that systems are reorganised to enable children to work alongside their peers

Teachers' difficulties in adapting to the new challenges were compounded by a series of fundamental flaws in the project design. It is not appropriate to be critical in retrospect – in many regards there simply was not enough understanding of the processes involved in establishing provision of this nature. The same challenges were experienced in many different contexts during this period (Grimes and Witoonchat, 2005) Where provision is created in a mainstream school for students with disabilities, there will be an additional number of students whose parents want them to have this provision but have nothing available in their area. The same phenomena occurs where one school in a district or cluster has a more 'inclusive orientation' (UNESCO 1994) and enrols students with disabilities or those who have previously been excluded by other schools. There will tend to be an increase in the number of similar students seeking to be enrolled and this can become unmanageable for the school.

Research in developing more inclusive practices in schools over the last 15 years indicates that the lessons learned from these initial flaws in the design of the IE Project in Lao have been similar elsewhere (Ainscow, 1999, Corbett, 2001; Grimes and Sayarath, 2007). Sharing expertise and experience through collaborative practice is crucial and where schools are isolated there is a limit to what can be achieved. This is closely linked to the development of a more child friendly learning environment. Teachers cannot be expected to change their practice over night or simply through attendance at training workshops. They need to see other practice, share it, discuss ideas and approaches and then adapt and experiment with their own practice from a position of security and support. The first IE Project school identified more training as integral to supporting the development of practice. In fact they received 60 days of training over the course of the first two years but this had relatively little impact on classroom practice. This is a pattern that seems to be repeated in many countries, where teachers and policy makers will tend to identify in-service training as being the most important initiative to support the inclusion of students with disabilities, yet, as in this case, training does not always have impact. It needs to be supported by a combination of other factors, which will be explored later in this book.

The challenge of raising teacher capacity is one which is central to improving the quality of education offered in Lao PDR. It was clear from the beginning of the IE project that in order to ensure that the students with disabilities were successfully included in mainstream settings, the teachers would need to change the way they taught. Enabling teachers to move away from traditional pedagogy and adopt more learner friendly approaches was to become one of the major challenges for the project in subsequent years.

IE Project Initial Design Flaws

• The school enrolled all students with disabilities who arrived at the school. This included some children from outside the catchment area and older children previously excluded from school. Most of these children found school very challenging. The school was faced with more disabled students than they could manage to provide for. The IE Project reasoned that in a developed IE service this would not occur because there would not be either a back-log of students of secondary age wanting to enter Grade 1, nor disabled students from outside the catchment area because these students would have gone to their local IE school.

• Because the school was the first of its kind, there was no opportunity for teachers to either share experiences or seek advice.

• The school was still in the early days of trying to develop a more child centred approach; teaching was still weak and reliant on traditional methodologies and there was poor understanding of child development.

• Parental partnership was undeveloped and the school had failed to enable parents and families to support their children's learning.

• The teachers did not have the capacity to make the necessary changes to the policies, practices and environment of the school to support students who were experiencing failure.

(Holdsworth 2003)

Rolling out – Phase 1 of the IE Project

At the end of the Pilot Phase, it was clear that the IE project had to expand. The Project board made a decision to increase the size of the project to 10 schools, including 2 Pre-schools. Including Pre-Schools meant that the project could begin to develop practice across a broader age range than just Primary. These schools would be in the vicinity of the Capital, Vientiane, to enable close monitoring but there was also a decision to establish a group of schools in a Southern Province. If the Project was to expand nationally it would need to establish experienced schools in different geographical areas.

The National Implementation Team

It was at this point that the Project Board decided to form the National Implementation Team (NIT) who became responsible for the implementation of the project and continued to have this role up to 2009. The aim in forming this team was to develop a group of professionals with the necessary skills to support all the

different areas that schools would require help with.
The team comprised

> Ministry of Education Officials in the General Education Department[1]

> Ministry of Education Officials in the Teacher training Department

> Ministry of Health officials from the National Rehabilitation Centre

> Staff from the IE Pilot School

The involvement of staff from the National Rehabilitation Centre was essential because much of the professional expertise in advising on disability was located there. This is still the case in 2009. In retrospect, it may have been strategically more effective to locate all the key staff within the Ministry of Education in order to avoid conflicts in role and also to encourage Disability to be viewed through a social model rather than a medical one.

The NIT would support the development of the project in new schools by providing short, practice-based training courses for Principals and Grade 1 / 2 teachers before the school joined the IE Project; Grade 3 – 5 teachers in the following year. They also tried to ensure that schools only recruited children of the appropriate age in Grade 1. The consequence of this decision was that children who had previously been excluded from schools would continue to be excluded. It also meant that it would take schools a full 5 years to be able to offer places to Primary aged children across all 5 grades. These were difficult decisions to make, but based on the experience of the Pilot School, the Project Board knew that they could not allow schools to take on an 'impossible workload' (Holdsworth, 2003, p28) as this could result in the failure of the roll-out. It is important to note that these decisions whilst strategic and necessary can also be painful and challenging.

Local Learning Networks

An important initiative was to introduce schools into the project in small groups. The importance of establishing local groups of schools who working on similar issues together, cannot be overemphasised (Balshaw, Grimes et al, 2005) Whilst the NIT could offer support and monitoring to schools, the benefits arising through schools working collaboratively together and offering mutual help could prove invaluable. This would be built on through an annual meeting of all the participants to review progress, share experiences and plan for the coming years.

Over the course of time, the IE Project has learnt a great deal about ensuring the success of local groups of schools working together, or local learning

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[1] The General Education Department was split in two in 2008 - the Department of Primary and Pre-school Education and department of Secondary Education.

networks (Stoll, 2001) as they are often referred to internationally . One crucial factor in their success is the role of local facilitators experienced in the context in which schools are working, who can bring schools together on a regular basis and set a clear focus for them to work on together. In several Districts in Lao PDR, District Advisors are currently working with schools and enabling them to support each other (this is described in more detail in Chapter 3 'Inclusive School Improvement' which describes the development of the Inclusive School Improvement Tool). However, in 1995, not enough was known within the project about the ways in which schools could be supported to work collaboratively together. Consequently, members of the NIT felt that this was an area of the project which remained underdeveloped for several years.

Teachers working together in 2005 in a local learning network discussing and sharing practice.

Learning networks can involve professionals working together in a range of different contexts. Here, in 2008, Provincial Implementation Teams are sharing and analysing school performance data.

Early Successes

Initially the Project expansion appeared to be successful. Monitoring of the schools showed

- An increase in the numbers of children with disabilities in the 10 schools

- All groups of children were making better progress due to improvements in teaching

- Grade passing was improving

- Local communities welcomed the project because they could see that all the children were benefitting from improved quality of education

- Neighbouring schools were actively seeking to become involved in the project expansion

As the project expanded to 4 provinces in 1997, Provincial Implementations Teams (PIT) were established, advisory officials who would be trained to take over local monitoring, support and training. In time these would be followed by the District Implementation teams (DIT). The project also produced guidelines for the schools and staff. It is useful to examine the content of these in more detail as they illustrate not only the key principles of the project but also details of the minimum service level expected in schools.

Learning from each other through discussion in groups is an important principle of Inclusive Education, which should also be applied to classrooms. Here, in 2008, children are set an activity where they need to discuss and problem solve together.

Extracts from IE Project Guidelines

a) Quality of Education

(the project) ... is an opportunity to improve the quality of education. It should not be at the expense of other children. (it) ... should bring benefits for each school and class through the improvement of teaching and management skills and a new attitude that stresses the teacher's responsibility to enable learning to take place

(for more details see Appendix A)

b) Full Integration

The education offered to children with special needs is based on the standard kindergarten and primary school curricula. Children are expected to take part in all normal school activities with the least amount of change or extra help that is possible. This is accomplished firstly by:

- Finding ways that children may take part in an activity that would otherwise not be possible ...

- Making small changes in activities that will enable a child to take part in an activity that would otherwise not be possible ...

If this is insufficient then by:

- Providing the child with the least amount and the least intrusive form of help that is needed.

And if this is insufficient, by:

- Planning and carrying out additional activities in school aimed at reducing the difficulties the child is facing

- Planning activities with the family so that additional training and help can be given.

c) Starting Young

Every year that a child with a disability is denied the chance to learn ... the task becomes more difficult. ... IE must use the kindergarten system wherever possible and admit children at 3 years of age. Where there is a shortage of kindergarten places, disabled children should be given priority.

(Holdsworth, 2003)

There was a clear emphasis within the project, on balancing the needs of all children in schools and trying to ensure that non disabled children did not receive a lower quality education because of the inclusion of children with disabilities. This approach very much reflects the context the project was working in and also wider international thinking at this time. Many professionals, working in different international settings, believed that in order to make a case for the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, it was vital to demonstrate that this could be done without lowering the quality of education on offer. It was acknowledged that this was a particular challenge when working in economically poorer countries, such as Lao PDR where teachers training and technical experience / expertise may be limited.

However, in hindsight we can also identify a tension between this way of thinking and attempts to develop a teaching pedagogy based on the rights of all children to a quality education. The IE project was actively working in schools to support the participation and achievement of all children through developing a learner friendly environment and child centred teaching pedagogy which reflected the needs of all students. By acknowledging the possibility that including students with disabilities may potentially disadvantage those without disabilities, attention may have been deflected away from the rights based philosophy that underpinned the project. This tension can still be seen in 2009 in some schools, where there are teachers who remain unconvinced that they can meet the needs of all their children together. However, this issue also needs to be seen in the context of developing a range of provision for certain groups of children with disabilities. This is discussed in greater detail later in this publication.

The Development of Special Schools

The Special School, the first of its kind in Lao PDR, which opened in Vientiane in 1993 was growing in size alongside the IE Project. By 1998, the school was offering provision for students with visual impairments (VI) and hearing impairments (HI) which could not be catered for within the current mainstream schools of the project. The strategy for children with VI was to teach them mobility skills and Braille at the special school and then to move them back to their local community IE school to complete their education. In economically developed countries children with HI can often be supported through the provision of hearing aids. However, in poorer countries, such as Lao PDR, these are too expensive to provide and maintain. Therefore it is imperative that children are taught sign language. Children needing to be taught sign language during the early years of the project had to come to the special school. The challenge with both of these strategies was that in order to move children from either group back to their community school, teachers would need training in Braille or sign language and this took time to provide. It is still the case, in 2009, that children with hearing impairments are taught almost exclusively in one of the three special schools in Vientiane, Savannakhet or Luang Prabang. Children using

braille are mostly located in schools close to the these three centres where they can access training and support.

Gradually, short courses were organised for both Braille and sign language These three centres have the potential to function both as training centres of expertise and also outreach resource centres which can support children in more remote areas.

One group of students with disabilities who have fallen outside the provision offered by both the IE Project schools and the special schools and centres is those children with more complex needs. Although there are students with, for example, Down syndrome and cerebral palsy in mainstream schools, few schools have been able to offer places to students with a combination of challenging and complex physical and learning needs. This is an area of provision that urgently needs to be addressed and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

National Expansion 2000 – 2009

By the beginning of 2000, the number of schools in the Project had grown to 78 in 22 districts. In Phase 2 of the Project, 2000 – 2005 and Phase 3, 200-2009, the IE Project increased the number of schools aiming to

- ensure at least 3 Primary IE schools in every district

- develop secondary IE provision,

- and establish a Quality Standard for Education in all IE schools (for details see Appendix 1)

Lower Secondary students at the Special School in Vientiane in 2009

Growth of Lao IE Project
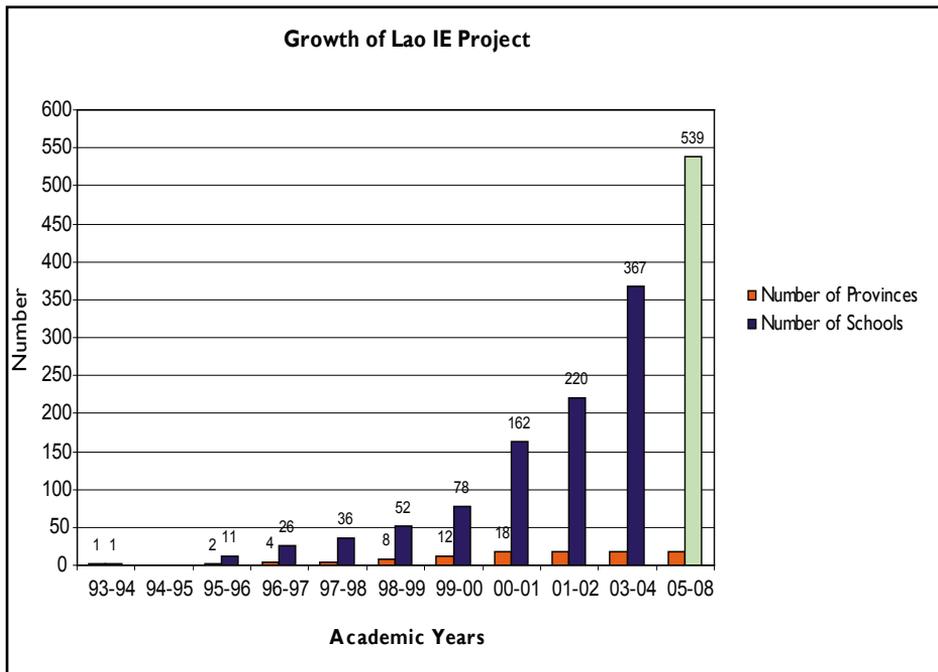
In order to support the national expansion, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) had become the main donor. The growth of the project in the following years was rapid. By the end of 2004, a further 289 schools joined the project, and between 2004 – 2007 another 172, creating a total of 539 schools.

Type of IE School	No. of Schools
Special school	3
Primary	381
Pre primary	116
Primary/pre primary	28
Low and up secondary school	11
TOTAL	539

Because of the national emphasis on aiming to reach EFA Targets (UNESCO 2008) the majority of the schools in the project were Primary Schools. However, the emphasis on the importance of pre-school education had also seen a proportional increase in the number of Pre-Primary or Nursery / Kindergarten schools. Although some of these were attached to Primary schools, many are stand-alone pre-schools with their own Principal and teaching staff.

The criteria for the selection of new schools aimed to ensure that schools with the capacity to introduce IE were chosen. With the rapid expansion of the project a key strategy was to use more experienced schools to support the newer ones and, in

areas where they were located, using a school cluster system to disseminate the principles of Inclusive Education. This was linked to increasing local capacity at school and DIT level, where the strategy was to ensure that there were regular follow-up visits to new schools, following IE training. Where clusters of schools were already working together, the production of locally sourced materials should then take place through local networking.

Developing Secondary IE Schools

The growth of IE secondary schools was less successful with a relatively small number across the country. This was mostly because of the challenges in establishing Lower and Upper Secondary Schools in Lao PDR. By 2009 there were 11 IE Secondary Schools.   The school performance data from these schools, collected by the IE Project Evaluation team, for the years 2004 – 7, was impressive with high rates of grade passing and completion for students with disabilities and other vulnerable groups (see chapter 4). However, the number of students in IE schools moving from Primary to Secondary was still extremely low. By 2006, the number of students completing Primary and moving onto Inclusive Education Secondary Schools was still only 18%. The percentage of students with disabilities moving to secondary was slightly lower at 13%. However, once in Secondary school the data from 2004 – 7 indicated that 100% of students with disabilities completed higher secondary school. Nevertheless, the challenge of increasing the number of students who transfer to secondary school is one that remains and will need to be addressed at a national strategic level. A similar issue which needs to be considered is that of reviewing the secondary curriculum in order to develop vocational training opportunities for all students and also the need to offer support, through scholarships, for those students with disabilities who wish to continue to higher education.

A significant challenge for the IE Project was to support the development of learner centred pedagogy at secondary stages. There are different challenges involved in this in secondary schools, compared with primary schools. Whilst school performance data from IE secondary schools indicates that students are completing school, and achieving, more work needs to be done to consider ways in which teachers can actively support all students to reach their potential. The IE Project Evaluation 2008 (reported in chapter 4) found that, in some cases, students with specific individual needs, such as visually impaired and hearing impaired students, were becoming disengaged with school because of difficulties in accessing the curriculum. Whilst many of the important principles of the IE training courses can be transferred to secondary schools there is a need to develop subject specific approaches to the development of learner centred classrooms. The emphasis needs to move away from transmission of knowledge and skills to a consideration of how best students can be supported in actively experiencing and learning about these within school contexts.

Expansion and Project Management

The year on year expansion of the project can be clearly seen in the following table. The Project growth from 2000 onwards was described by the 2004 IE Project Evaluation report as 'massive' (SCUK, 2004) and this created a new set of challenges for the Project team.

The National Implementation Team working together with Save the Children project staff in 2005.

Year on Year Expansion by Number of Districts and Schools				
Year	Total Number of schools	Number of New Schools	Number of New Districts	Total Number of Districts
1993	1	1	1	1
1994	3	2	0	1
1995	14	11	4	5
1996	28	14	6	11
1997	38	10	3	14
1998	54	16	2	16
1999	67	13	6	22
2000	79	13	5	27
2001	166	87	17	44
2002	233	67	31	75
2003	269	36	7	82
2004	364	94	19	101
2005	449	85	29	130
2006	484	35	7	137
2007	539	55	4	141
Total	**539**	**539**	**141**	**141**

The National Implementation Team (NIT), needed to increase the devolution of some of their responsibilities to the provinces, districts and schools and also to modify the structure of the project management. By 2002, it was already impossible for the NIT to have a close involvement with every detail of the project's activities. Therefore, the Project gradually gave greater responsibility and accountability to the Provincial Implementation Teams (PITs) and modified the management system in order to identify which areas could be actioned by them without authorisation from the NIT. However, the greatest need was to raise the 'capacity of the District Implementation Teams (DITs), schools and clusters to take responsibility for disseminating project work and offering professional support including technical and health advice to teachers, parents and children' (SCUK, 2004).

In order to do this, the Project team developed existing systems and established new standards and quality indicators to try and ensure impact. These included clear guidelines for staffing and procedures at all levels so that the roles of the PITs and District Implementation Teams DITs were well defined. The DITs, schools and village leaders were encouraged to use guidelines and documentation in order to collect information which would be collated by the PITs and forwarded to the NIT.

One challenge concerned the retention of staff. At the provincial level, between 2000 - 2005, IE-trained staff generally remained stable, but in some districts there was a difficulty in retaining trained staff in the team due to regular role changes. This highlighted the importance not only of strategic planning but also of cross-departmental planning and co-operation at all levels of the Project. The strategy to accommodate these changes in personnel was to replace district officers who had left their posts, with, where possible, IE-trained teachers. There was an expectation that the Pedagogical Adviser on the DIT was largely responsible for offering technical support to teachers, and therefore this officer needed to be familiar with classroom pedagogy as well as the principles of the IE Project. However, this did not always prove possible, due to local factors. In these instances, the development of local schools could be considerably delayed.

Another challenge was the expectation that the DITs would monitor and offer regular support to schools and discuss IE issues with communities. As the project expanded, the national strategy was for the Ministry of Education to take on a significant percentage of the funding for this. National financial constraints prevented this happening everywhere as planned and from 2004 to 2009 DITs were unable to visit each IE school as regularly as they had been expected to. In some cases this meant that schools did not receive a visit for more than a year, which undoubtedly had a detrimental impact on school improvement.

By the end of 2008, the IE Project structure had developed as illustrated in Diagram 1. The clear linear systems of accountability and monitoring can be seen with the

Project Implementation team and the NIT are linked directly to PIT and DIT under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The role of the National rehabilitation Centre, under the Ministry of Health, appears to be a support and advisory role, in much the same way as the NGO and Donor, feeding into the Project Implementation team. However, this view masks some central strategic issues which need to be identified.

The example cited above, of the inability of the Ministry of Education to meet a commitment to fund monitoring visits, illustrates the fragile nature of project development within a country such as Lao PDR. The strategy was that as the Ministry developed capacity it would take greater responsibility for the management and administration of the Project. However, Save the Children Norway have maintained a key role in the management of the project continuing to support the National Implementation Team (NIT) in all areas of their work. This raises questions about the sustainability of the initiatives developed by the project once NGO support is no longer in place.

Consultant support and technical advice has always been an important requirement of the project. Training and advice to support the professional development of teachers and project staff has been provided by a number of consultants and organisations since 1993. However, with the expansion of the project there has also been a need for consultant advisory support to support specific target areas, such as the school improvement project, described in Chapter 3, the development of the IE project Exit Strategy and the final evaluation of the project. From 2005 - 2009, the author of this publication, a consultant from Canterbury Christchurch University in the UK, specialising in the development of inclusive school systems, has worked closely with the Project Programme Coordinator and NIT team leader to support and coordinate all aspects of the project.

Teachers and Advisors, Ministry officials and Save the Children Norway Project Staff working together in an IE Project workshop in 2006

Diagram 1. The Organisational Structure of the IE Project in 2008
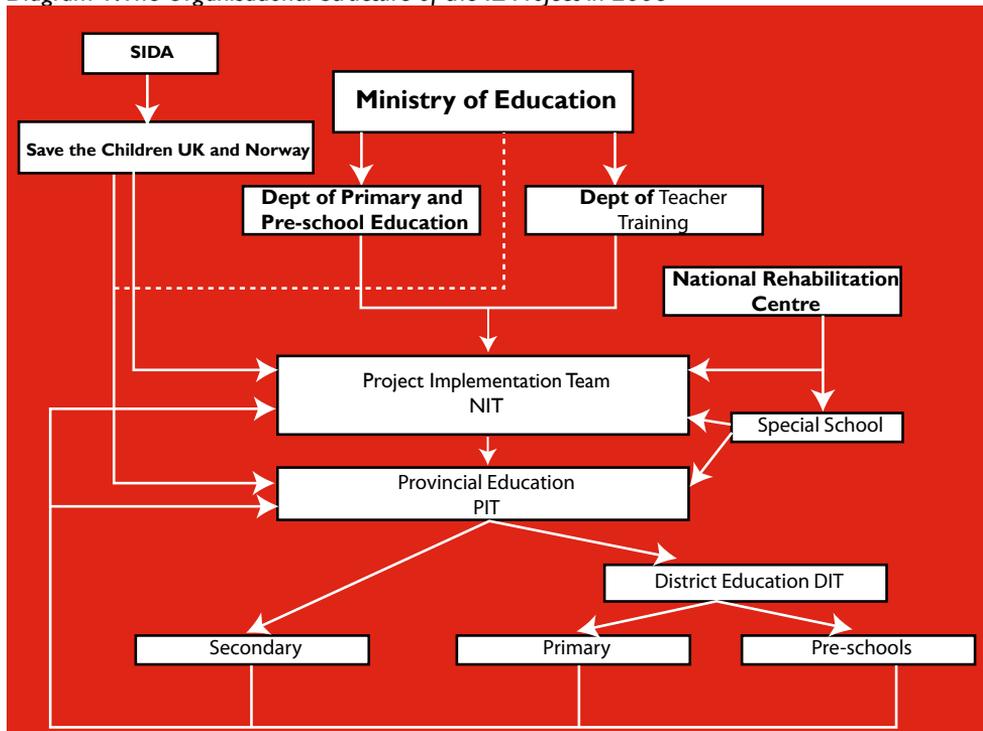
With the announcement of the end of the project's funding, an exit strategy was drawn up to facilitate the handover of the project management to the Ministry. Supporting the development of quality schools for all is the strategic aim for the Ministry of Education from 2009 onwards. However, it remains to be seen how much impact the new strategy will have on practice in schools and particularly on the challenge of ensuring that those groups supported specifically by the IE Project will maintain their high levels of participation and achievement (reported in more detail in Chapter 4).

Significant lessons learnt by the IE Project team in relation to the structure and management of the project include:

- The Ministry of Education must take on management and administration of any education project as early as possible to ensure sustainability, capacity building and dissemination of lessons learned.

- Projects concerned with the education of children, should be located within the Ministry of Education. Other Ministries may have supporting roles, working in partnership and collaborating to ensure appropriate expertise is in place, but they should not have management or coordinating responsibility for education projects or provisions.

This second lesson is related to the role of the Ministry of Health in the IE Project. The National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) in Vientiane has been closely associated with the IE Project since its inception. Key staff at the NRC have been valuable members of the Project team and the close reciprocal working arrangement has been an example of the ways in which multi-agency collaboration can support project development. However, the close involvement of the NRC has also meant that support for students with disabilities has sometimes been interpreted as requiring the expertise of medical personnel rather than educational personnel. There is always a need for a combination of medical and educational approaches and support strategies, particularly for those students with more complex needs. However, strategies for support should always be applied by educational personnel in a practical way so that teachers can understand and then apply methods themselves in the classroom. It may be that this has been a barrier to the Project defining itself and operating within a social model of disability rather than a medical model. In retrospect it would have been more supportive of the Project's development towards a National Quality Education Project if the expertise required from the NRC had actually been located within the Ministry of Education so that the Project was defined in purely educational terms.

The next chapters of the book will examine in detail the development of the IE School Improvement tool and the lessons learned from the final evaluation of the Project.

Teachers and Advisors, Ministry officials and Save the Children Norway Project Staff working together in an IE Project workshop in 2006

3

Inclusive School Improvement

Inclusive School Improvement

The mid term review of the Inclusive Education Project in May 2002, recommended the development of an assessment tool for use in schools which could also be used to improve the quality of educational provision. This suggestion led to the development of one of the most significant developments in the life of the project – the Inclusive Education School Improvement and Self Evaluation tool, or, as it has now become known, 'Developing Quality Schools for All – a school improvement and self evaluation process'.

The development of the tool needs to be understood in the context of growing understanding about the importance of school improvement processes in Lao. It had become clear to those working within the project that in order to bring about sustainable changes in the quality of education being provided, schools needed to take charge of the process. Only through motivated and engaged teachers would deep rooted changes in practice occur.

In 2003, The IE Project team and staff from Save the Children UK travelled to an Inclusion Conference at the Institute of Education in Hong Kong. Here they were able to meet colleagues working in the field of Inclusive Education from around the world. Listening to presentations on the development of inclusive initiatives internationally, taking part in discussions with colleagues and also sharing their reflections with other members of the project team, they came to two important conclusions:

1. The IE Project was not an Integration Project – but an Inclusive Education Project; one concerned with the participation and engagement of all students and which demanded that schools change their systems, structures, curriculum and values in order to respond to the diverse population in Lao schools. Only through the development of quality educational experiences for all students could schools be seen to be developing more inclusive practices.

2. All attempts to develop the quality of education needed to be embedded in a school improvement process which was based on inclusive school self evaluation.

Through discussions with Professor Mel Ainscow of Manchester University in the UK, it was decided that the IE Project would begin to develop a Lao School Improvement Tool. This would be based on the Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2002), as a tool to promote inclusive practices.

In 2004, it was decided that the most useful approach would be to develop quality indicators of inclusive practice in schools, so that the developments in school practice and the impact of the project could be measured. These could then be used as the basis for school self assessment and external assessment in order to set priorities

for future school improvement. A central co-ordination team was formed, comprising representatives of the Ministry of Education, Save the Children Norway, the NGO and Canterbury Christchurch University, UK, providing external consultant support and advice (the project management had been handed over to Save the Children Norway in 2004).

The following sections of this chapter include edited extracts from 'Developing Quality Schools for All', the Lao School Improvement tool.

How Does Self Evaluation Support School Improvement?

- It helps schools improve through critical self reflection

- Equips teachers with the skills to evaluate the quality of learning in their classroom so that they do not have to rely on external review and assessment

- Creates a common frame of reference for discussions about school improvement with external advisors. In Lao this would include the NIT, PIT and DIT.

Evaluation of schools needs to concentrate on how effective they are – do they achieve what they set out to do? This includes how well all students achieve but can also cover a wide range of other areas including important questions such as 'do all students enjoy coming to school?' and 'does the school work collaboratively with parents and the local community?' Many of the questions that need to be considered change over time and this means that school evaluation needs to be an ongoing process, something that happens throughout the school year. Research into effective schools tells us that teachers make many evaluative judgements during the course of one school day, but these can often be intuitive and informal.

Save the Children Program Staff working alongside a teacher in the classroom in 2006

Stage 1
Finding out About
the School - Using
the Lao School Improvement
tool with all
members of the
school community

Stage 5
Reviewing the
success of the
improvements

The 5 stages of inclusive school
improvement and
self evaluation

Stage 2
Identifying areas
which need to be
developed

Stage 4
Implementing the
priorities

Stage 3
Prioritising areas
to be developed

The following points have underpinned the development of the self evaluation tool. It is important to note that schools themselves are seen to be the 'owners' of the process. Effective self evaluation is driven by school communities themselves for the simple reason that they know their school best. Each school is unique, serving a different community, with unique individuals. Where self evaluation works best, there is a partnership between local advisors and school communities.

The Key Features of Effective Self Evaluation

- A continuous process driven by the needs of the school

- Schools are accountable to their school community – the teachers, children, parents and local community

- Schools must provide convincing evidence of their success

- Schools must provide a clear plan of action to demonstrate how further improvements will be made

- Participation and Achievement of all children – the standards that they reach and their progress - is at the heart of self evaluation

Key Questions for Effective Self Evaluation

- What are our strengths?

- What are the areas of our performance where we need to do better?

- What is the evidence on which we base these judgements?

- What are we doing to improve our performance in the light of our self evaluation?

Why Self Evaluation?

- External assessment alone doesn't work

- The unique nature of schools

- Developing a critical sustainable relationship between external evaluation and internal evaluation

The following table illustrates how complex it is to choose an appropriate person or group of people to be solely responsible for evaluating the school.   Each different group brings strengths and weaknesses to the evaluation process. This is why it is more effective for all of these groups to be involved in a collaborative process.

Who evaluates the school?	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
The Advisor • Expert knowledge • Training • Experience • Authority	• Lack of time • Not enough knowledge of the school context
The Principal • Good knowledge of the school context • Understands the individual school systems	• Lack of time • Limited experience in evaluation • Interest in school appearing 'good'
Teachers • Detailed knowledge of school context including teaching and learning • Self-knowledge • Familiarity with students as individuals • Knowledge of parents and families • Class based time	• Familiarity – too close to be objective • Protection of own professional 'reputation' • Limited expertise in evaluation
Students • Self knowledge of own school experience • Familiarity with other students • Time • Self motivation	• Lack of expertise in evaluation • Familiarity with the classroom

Parents • Potential knowledge of own children's school experience • Familiarity with own and other parents experiences of interacting with school	• Lack of expertise and experience in evaluation • Not enough knowledge of wider school context
Community • Potential knowledge of wider community's experience of interacting with the school • Potential knowledge of history of school development	• Lack of expertise and experience in evaluation • Not enough knowledge of wider school context

(Adapted from a model by John MacBeath (1999)

Teachers and advisors working together to develop the Lao school improvement tool in 2005

Designing the Lao PDR School Improvement Tool

The original aim of the project was to design materials that could be used in schools within the IE Project, to measure the quality and impact of the project. However, it soon became clear that the concept of Inclusive Education needed to be developed, as described above, and that the tool should reflect the ongoing work in Lao PDR on Education for All (Ministry of Education, 2008).
Therefore, the aims of the programme were:

- To produce materials, relevant to the Lao context which could be used by schools as a self-evaluation tool for assessing the quality of their provision for all students.

- To develop school improvement action plans in each school with priorities based on analysis of consultation with all stakeholders in the school community.

- To develop the capacity of district advisory teams to support and monitor the school improvement process.

- To develop the capacity of clusters of schools to work collaboratively to support the development of more inclusive practices and quality educational provision in their respective schools.

One of the central issues that shaped the development of these aims was capacity building at local level, developing expertise and collaborative working practices at Ministry, Provincial and District Advisory level, as well as in schools. The benefits of developing collaborative networking practices (also described in Chapter 2) are well noted in school improvement literature (Stoll and Fink, 1989, Durrant and Holden, 2006). The Ministry of Education In Lao PDR had already introduced the idea of clusters of schools working together and this was incorporated into the school improvement project. The idea was that the 3 schools in each district would be able to collaborate together throughout the piloting process, supporting each other and perhaps beginning to work as 'critical friends' – challenging and also supporting each other in order to refine and develop practice (MacBeath, 1998). This also relates to the development of the role of the district advisors. The school improvement project was an opportunity to shift the advisory role from one of monitoring local schools to one based on collaborative working partnerships and 'critical friendship'.

The materials were to be developed with the aim of rolling them out through a staged process to schools across the country. The teachers, principals and advisors who were invited to be a part of the development process were seen as full partners in the writing of the materials. Their role was crucial to the project's success. If

the materials were to be credible and applicable in Lao schools they needed to be developed by practitioners who understood the practical context within which they would be used. Therefore, once the piloting process began, there were two evaluations taking place: the self evaluation process in the schools and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the materials.

The three districts in three provinces chosen were Kham in Xiengkhouang, Thoulakhom in Vientiane and Phonthong in Champasack province. The provinces were chosen to provide a broad sample of the geographical regions of Lao: Kham in the North East, more mountainous with a diversity of ethnic groups and rural communities; in the middle of the country close to the Capital city Vientiane, with a local community comprising business people as well as rural farmers; Phonthong in the south close to the Thai and Cambodian borders, a community made up of rural, business people and also government workers. Each district was asked to choose three IE schools with the criteria that there should be a 'stronger, a weaker and an average' school. It was left to the District team to select the schools and they interpreted the criteria in different ways. In one district, weaker meant a school with weak practice, poor leadership from the principal and a low rate of grade passing. In another district, weak was interpreted as a school in the economically poorest area of the district with few community resources to support the school. In the third district, weak was interpreted as a school that was new to the Inclusive education project. In retrospect, this variation in the way the criteria for selection was interpreted, gave the project a particular strength, in that the 9 schools chosen had many different features which allowed for greater depth to the evaluation of the project materials in practice.

Each school had created a coordinating team who attended the workshops and were able to coordinate the work in school. In most schools this team comprised the principal and two teachers. The school coordinating team were supported by two district education advisors and two provincial education service advisors who also attended the workshops. By engaging with this process of self evaluation in schools, advisors would be able to:

- develop their understanding of the role of a critical friend in order to support their monitoring and advisory work in schools

- use their experience in supporting the development of collaborative networking between the three schools as a basis to develop similar approaches with other clusters within the district.

Indicators Of Inclusive Development

Indicators are statements of aspiration against which existing practice in the school can be compared in order to set priorities for school development. Each indicator reflects an important aspect of the school community and is clarified by a set of questions which help to define its meaning. Engaging in discussion about the meaning of each indicator and how it relates to current practice in the school is a very valuable aspect of the self evaluation process. It is during discussions with teachers, students and parents that the coordinating team will begin to think about the priorities for school development.

The Lao Indicators were developed over several months with a wider team than those who took part in the detailed design of the tool. In order to incorporate the perspectives of as wide a group as possible, advisors from all 17 provinces in Lao attended workshops in July and September 2004 to begin work on creating the indicators – before the pilot schools and advisors became involved in January 2005. Readers familiar with the Index for Inclusion will note the similarities between many of the indicators and the originals in the Index. It may be asked why the decision was not taken to simply translate the Index for Inclusion into Lao and use this as the basis for the Lao tool. This has been the case in several other countries. However, as noted above, one aim was to produce a tool that was relevant to the Lao context whilst another was to produce a tool that was practical and usable in this context. The Index for Inclusion was originally produced for use in British schools, operating in a particular context, much of which is not applicable to Lao PDR. Booth has argued that this must be recognised when adapting the Index for use in different cultures and country contexts (Booth and Black-Hawkins, 2001, 2005). The indicators that were finally developed, after much discussion, were written in the Lao language, without the original Index indicators being used as a model, and then translated back into English. From this perspective it is interesting to note again the similarities between the two sets. It would seem to indicate that teachers in different cultural contexts have some similar notions regarding the challenges that face them in developing more inclusive practice in their classrooms.

Introducing the tool to parents and community in Kham District, Xiengkhouang

Province, 2005

The 17 indicators

1. All pupils feel welcome in the school

2. All students support each other in their learning

3. All students are well supported by school staff

4. Teachers and parents cooperate well.

5. All students are treated equally as valued members of the school

6. All students feel that their opinions and views are valued.

7. All students can access learning in all lessons.

8. All students can access all parts of the school building.

9. All students attend school every day.

10. All students enjoy lessons

11. All students are engaged in all lesson activities.

12. All students achieve their learning in all subjects according to their individual ability

13. All students learn together.

14. All students have access to appropriate health services as necessary.

15. School ensure that the all students enter the school

16. All vulnerable children are successful in their learning

17. School creates a school environment which supports all students' learning

In order to help clarify and understand the meaning of the indicators, each one has a series of questions which are designed to stimulate discussion and offer guidance. These can be seen in Appendix B. It is very important to think of the self evaluation tool as an ongoing process and to see discussion and sharing of ideas as a vital part of that process. It is only through the open sharing of thoughts, perspectives and questions that participants can begin to identify their own views and to share, honestly, their own experiences.

The 5 Stages of Self Evaluation and School Improvement

In the tool, the 5 stages of Self Evaluation and School Development are described in detail.

Stage 1: Finding Out About The School

A School Coordination Team responsible for undertaking the school self evaluation and school development process is formed, comprising:

- The principal or deputy principal

- 1 or more teachers (if 2 or more ensure that at least 1 is relatively new to the school)

- 1 or more parents

- 1 community representative

- If appropriate, 1 or more older student (this could be an older student if it is a secondary / high school OR in a primary school, an older ex-student of the school)

The tool contains a range of data collection methods, including questionnaires, interviews, discussion groups, which can be used to collect the views of different members of the school community about the areas of success in the school and also those which need to be developed.

The coordination team discusses the different activities suggested in the tool. At this point they will be guided by a District Advisor and may also seek the advice of schools who are experienced in the self evaluation process.

Student consultation during Stage 1

Examples of students views on the positive and negative aspects of the school, collected during Stage 1

Stage 2: Identifying areas which need to be developed
Once the school coordination team have collected information from the different members of the school community, they will be able to analyse it. The pilot schools found that it was best to analyse the data as it was collected and use the analysis to inform decisions about the next data collection activities to be used, or decisions about which groups should be worked with next. A pattern of evidence will begin to emerge. Gradually the team will be able to identify a series of areas where the school appears to be doing well and others where it needs to improve.

After data has been analysed the school team may have identified areas where there is success and areas that need improvement

Case Study 1, draws together the experiences of several schools in the pilot project, and is a constructed case, written from the perspective of a school coordination team

We found the best way of analysing the information we collected was to concentrate on particular questions and compare the answers from different groups. For example, if 95% of the teachers said they thought the students enjoyed school, but only 75% of students and 80% of parents thought this was true, we knew that there was an area here we needed to explore in more detail. This helped us to decide what sort of activity to work on next. In this case, we decided to talk to a group of students from each year and separately, also a group of parents. We then wrote a list of questions about enjoying school that we wanted to discuss with them so see if we could find out which children weren't enjoying school and why. We found out that it was a group of children in the older classes who were not enjoying their work because they found it too hard and they felt they did not get enough support. The meeting with the parents also confirmed this and we found out from them that they found it difficult to help their children with their homework.

From this we decided to do three things:

1. *We worked together as teachers to try and make lessons more enjoyable and interesting, plan for a range of different activities, including working outside the classroom with different resources. We made sure that the teachers identified children who needed extra help and monitored what was written in the lesson plans for these students. We also visited the older classes on a regular basis so that we could observe that the changes were being made.*

2. *The second change was that we decided to concentrate on supporting homework in the villages where children seemed to be having a problem. We organised older children, perhaps ones who had left school, and made sure that they worked with a group of students each night to help with their homework.*

3. *We also started using the 'student suggestion box' from the toolkit, where students could write notes anonymously to let us know if they weren't enjoying school to help us monitor developments.*

Stage 3: Prioritising areas to be developed
In case study 1 one can see that the analysis of data collected helped the school to decide what further activities needed to be undertaken. Gradually as the school coordination team identifies areas to be developed it will become clear that some are of a higher priority than others. In case study 1 it was decided that something had

to be done about student enjoyment. This is because enjoyment is closely linked to attendance and achievement at school. Students who do not enjoy school are more likely develop a poor pattern of attendance or perhaps not concentrate at school. Both can affect their overall achievement.

It is suggested that school coordination teams try to identify 3 or more priorities for development (although we suggest no more than 5 or 6) and that at least one of these should be linked to teaching and learning; one to the development of the school environment and a third which can be open to the school to choose. This is illustrated in case study 2.

Case Study 2

Priorities

1. *To improve teachers lesson planning by ensuring that teachers set out clearly the different range of activities and resources, groupings and questioning styles that would be included in each lesson. (Teaching and Learning Priority)*

2. *To improve the school play area by working with the local community to raise funds to buy and plant trees for shade, buy play equipment to be used before and after school, a well as at lunchtime. (Developing the school environment priority)*

3. *To improve communication with parents and the local community by having monthly open meetings with parents and community where anybody could attend for open discussion; ensuring that teachers communicate immediately with parents and community if a student is absent for more than 2 days. (Open priority chosen by school)*

Parent consultation during Stage 1

Stage 4: Implementing Priorities

- Planning for implementation;

- Keep all the groups concerned informed of the plan;

- The school implements the plan;

- Periodically monitor the implementation of the plan.

After identifying the priorities, schools then need to begin implementation. It is not always easy at this stage to be clear about 'how' to go about making changes. It may be clear that a change needs to take place but often schools need support in planning what they will do. At this stage schools usually find it helpful to draw up an action plan which provides details of:

1. The priority chosen – the change that needs to take place

2. Which indicators it is linked to

3. Action the school needs to take – what changes need to be made?

4. Who will be responsible for implementation?

5. Who will be responsible for monitoring?

6. How long it will take?

7. How it will be evaluated / success criteria – how do we know the change has been successful

It is important that teachers recognise the importance at this stage of:

- Reflecting on their own practice. Teachers must think honestly about their own practice in the classroom and try to identify areas where they are successful and where they can improve.

- Sharing practice with colleagues. By discussing and sharing successes as well as challenges teachers can learn from each other. It is important to make time to plan together and to observe each other teaching not only in their own school but also with colleagues in the local cluster schools.

Case Study 3 is an example of one school from the pilot project which attempted to improve lesson planning and used the action plan to help them do this. They have clearly set out in the action plan what they wanted to achieve and how they intended to do it. They also set clear criteria for success so they would be able to measure whether or not they had achieved their priority.

Case Study 3 – An example of one priority from a School Action Plan

Priority Chosen	Indica- tor	Action	Who is responsible for implemen- tation	Who is responsible for monitoring	Time Scale	Success Cri- teria
To improve teachers lesson planning	3 7 10 11 12 16	Teachers set out clearly in lesson plans: 1. Activities 2. Resources 3. Student groupings 4. Questioning styles 5. Relevance to real life or learners own experiences that would be included in each lesson. Teachers to ensure that lesson plans make clear the <u>different</u> provision that is being made for students who need extra support. To meet regularly once a month, with other schools in the local cluster and share ideas. Teachers to meet together once a week after school to plan lessons together, make resources and share the progress made and challenges met so far.	Class Teachers Principal DIT	Principal and School Coordination Team will monitor all lesson plans weekly and observe each teachers lessons at least once a week.	Through out the school year	Lesson plans show clear evidence of planning for the 5 areas identified. Teachers meet at least once a week. There is joint planning and discussion of progress and challenges. Lesson plans show clear <u>different</u> provision for students who need extra support. There are regular meetings at least once a month, with teachers from local cluster schools. Ideas are shared and lessons learned.

Stage 5: review the success of the process
By setting clear criteria for success for each priority, the school coordination team is able to make a clear judgement about how successful it has been in meeting its priorities. These judgements can then be shared with the wider school community through discussions with teachers, with students in classrooms and with parents in review meetings. It may be that different members of the school community have varying perspectives on whether priorities have been achieved or not. The experience of most schools in the pilot project was that some priorities are easier to meet than others. For example, the priorities from case study 2:

Priority	Review of Success	Next step?
1. To improve teachers lesson planning by ensuring that teachers set out clearly the different range of activities and resources, groupings and questioning styles that would be included in each lesson. (Teaching and Learning Priority)	Teachers lesson planning has improved and there is clear evidence that all 5 areas identified in case study 3 are beginning to be included in lesson plans.

However, teachers are not meeting with each other frequently and there needs to be more joint lesson planning and classroom observations.

The teachers in the local cluster have been able to meet together but not every month and this needs to be more frequent. | The school needs to continue working on this priority next year and draw up a new detailed action plan for this priority. Organise further training on lesson planning; Visit other schools where teachers are introducing different approaches and strategies. |
| 2. To improve the school play area by working with the local community to raise funds to buy and plant trees for shade, buy play equipment to be used before and after school, a well as at lunchtime. (Developing the school environment priority) | All aspects of this priority have been achieved.

There has been good collaboration to raise funds, trees have been planted and are growing well. Local neighbours of the school ensure that the trees are watered regularly and that children using the play area after school do not damage them.

The community have raised $50 for play equipment which is being used well by all children. Parents have built a wooden store cupboard for the play equipment and take it in turns to supervise its use each day after school. | The school needs to set a new priority in this area, as well as ensuring that it continues to monitor the ongoing progress of the existing one.

Evaluation of this priority indicates that more activities and play opportunities need to be developed for older children - this could be the priority for next year. |
| 3. To improve communication with parents and the local community by having monthly open meetings with parents and community where anybody could attend for open discussion; ensuring that teachers communicate immediately with parents and community if a student is absent for more than 2 days. (Open priority chosen by school) | This priority has been partly met.

There are monthly meetings and there is good attendance and open discussion.

Teachers have not yet developed an effective system for communicating efficiently with parents about student absence. This needs to be improved next year. | Monitor the monthly parent, school and community meetings to ensure they continue positively.

Focus this priority area on teacher / parent communication and developing more effective systems and procedures. |

In most cases school will achieve some priorities and continue to work on others. Where priorities have been achieved, the school needs to continue monitoring these areas and choose new priorities to take their place. In this way the self evaluation and school development process begins its second year and a new cycle but it should also be evident that it is an ongoing process. The school does not stop evaluating itself or trying to improve but continues on a never ending journey of development.

At the end of the school year, after a full cycle of self evaluation, the school should prepare a report on their successes and areas for continued development. This should be shared with the whole school community and the local district advisor. Sharing findings with all stakeholders in the school is a fundamental part of the self evaluation process. All teachers, parents and children need to be involved in a dialogue about the success of the school improvement process, discussing the findings of the report and deciding as a school community how to try and improve further in the coming year.

The local district advisor will also be able to use the schools self evaluation as a framework for assessing how successful the school has been. The experience of the advisors in the pilot project was that they were able to have a deeper and more analytical discussion with the pilot schools because of the self evaluation and school development process. This was also supported by improved data collection and analysis of student performance statistics, attendance rates, dropout rates and grade repeat rates in the pilot schools.

Findings and Discussion – The Experience of the Pilot Schools

In relation to the practicalities of working in Lao schools, the IE Project Team found that there are professional development and cultural challenges when introducing concepts such as 'self evaluation', 'school improvement' and complex materials such as the tool, to teachers who may have had little initial training. The original Index for Inclusion has 44 indicators – the Lao version has 17. In the original Index, each indicator has between 8 and 17 clarifying questions to support their use and stimulate discussion and enquiry – the Lao version has between 6 and 8 questions for each indicator. The teachers and advisors felt it was important that the tool that was produced was 'manageable'. It had to be diverse enough that it covered the issues relevant in Lao schools but compact enough for schools to feel that they could manage it. The concepts behind the tool had to be clear enough that their meaning transferred across cultures. Also the participants being introduced to the materials in their schools had to be clear about the purpose of the evaluation (Ebbutt, 1998): this was a self evaluation and not an external one. The project team, all 57 advisors and teachers, made these decisions about the adaptation of the Index and the development of the tool together. As one participant said:

'We can only do our best - we work together on this and that makes it strong. Sure we will make some mistakes but we hope it is going to work in the schools.'

Although the materials were designed to support the inclusion of all students, the project team was aware of the diverse groups of students in Lao PDR who are particularly vulnerable to experiencing barriers to participation and learning, as noted in chapter 1 of this book. National data indicates that some districts experience very high drop out rates, above average levels of grade repeating, low enrolment rates and low take up of secondary places. Ministry of Education, 2008). A metaphor developed during the course of the project whereby the participants began to refer to the process of self evaluation as 'looking below the surface of the lake'. This referred to teachers and advisors' growing realisation that in order to investigate the reasons for this data, they needed to focus on the vulnerable groups of students and ask searching questions about their experiences of school and home life. This was more evident during the action planning and development stages of the project than during the initial data collection as the participants became more familiar with the process. The results of this collaborative enquiry based approach can be seen in the positive outcomes outlined below which were collated by members of the NIT and Save the Children Norway during visits to the 9 schools in November 2006.

- All 9 schools had action plans in place with 3 clear priorities for development, each of which was clearly related to indicators from the self evaluation tool.

- In each school, at least one of the priorities related to teachers classroom practice and the quality of teaching and learning.

- There was clear evidence in all schools that they had been working to improve their practice in the priority areas. The greatest improvements occurred in schools where there had been close collaboration between the school coordination team and the rest of the staff, so that a sense of ownership of the school improvement process had developed. In most schools this was supported by local district pedagogical advisors working closely along side the teachers. The greatest improvement occurred in the school which was originally identified as the weakest school in the project. The project had acted as a lever for change in the school enabling stronger more experienced staff to focus on developing more effective classroom practice throughout the school by supporting weaker or less experienced colleagues.

- In the strongest schools there was clear evidence that the school coordination team had engaged in detailed analysis of data such as grade results, drop out rates, enrolment, etc and had used this to identify those students most vulnerable to underachievement. The schools had then strategically planned interventions in order to counteract the identified barriers to participation.

For example, in one school where achievement in grade 3 was a cause for concern, detailed data analysis indicated that a substantial number of those performing at levels below average, came from a particular village. A strategic plan was drawn up with the local community to pilot the development of study groups at home supported by local teachers and community members. This pilot has led to improved performance by all students taking part and the school has extended the scheme to other villages.

Children from Long Mat Tay Primary School, Kham District, Xiengkhouang Province, attending a homework Study Group supported by secondary school students

- Where schools had aimed to improve aspects of their relationship with the local community, the greatest improvements occurred where school staff worked in collaboration with local community groups and parent representatives.

- In several schools the self evaluation project had acted as a tool to coordinate and maximize the impact from a variety of different projects or types of support which the school had been receiving.

- In 3 schools the project had led to teachers developing their practice through peer observations on a monthly or twice monthly basis.

- In all 9 schools there was clear evidence that staff were focusing their attention on the participation and achievement of all students rather than specific groups.

The Xiengkhouang Inclusive School Improvement Team (left to right):
Ms Chamsouk Phonthavong, Kham District DIT Technical Advisor
Ms. Douangsaphone Soudavanh, Xienghouang Provincial Education Service, Technical Advisor
Mr Singnaveng Phanlakham, Kham District Chief of Education Service and Head of DIT
Mr Souliphy Phimmakhone, Principal Long Mat Tay Primary School

- There was variation in the extent to which district teams had worked to support the schools. In 2 of the 3 districts the support was good or excellent, whilst in the 3rd district the the quality of the support for schools had reduced. An important factor in this was the experience and quality of the district advisors. Because of illness a key member of the 3rd district team had been absent from the project for much of 2006, clearly impacting on the quality of support for the schools. In two of the 3 districts, the tool had also been introduced to other schools including some outside the IE Project.

The process of data collection in schools and consultation with the local community and students is an area that needs further development. Most schools collected data methodically using the prepared questionnaires. There was some evidence of further discussion to clarify views and perspectives but most participants lacked confidence in this aspect of the self evaluation process. However, as the school teams engaged with the work of improving their priority areas, they developed greater confidence in consultation and collaboration with teachers, students and community.

'Developing Quality Schools for All – a school improvement and self evaluation process' is an approach to school improvement which is designed to support the development of child friendly schools and as such, it can be used to support the achievement of the Ministry of Education's Quality School Standards. It is too early to predict how it may develop but initial indicators would suggest that a self evaluation process can be used effectively to support inclusive school improvement in a country that has as many social and economic challenges as Lao PDR. The commitment of the participants in the pilot project at school and advisory level to trying to make the project 'work' at a practical and also a theoretical level was an important factor in ensuring that schools did improve. Where participants see the value to a new initiative it is always more likely to be implemented successfully. Perhaps it is best to conclude this chapter with the words of one of the participants, a deputy principal:

> 'We had to acknowledge in our school that there were some things we had to improve. We knew things weren't perfect – some things we can't change, like the buildings; but we could think about our teaching and how we worked with the children and the parents. We haven't always tried to include everybody in discussions about the school and that's not good enough. As we look back on our achievements in the last year, we can see that we have really made a difference – the school is a different place; a better place for children and teachers to learn in together.'

Note: Readers interested in obtaining a full copy of 'Improving the Quality of Schools for All In Lao PDR: A School Improvement and Self Evaluation Process' should contact Save the Children Norway, or the author.

4

Lessons from the IE Project

Lessons From the IE Project

This chapter of the book draws from the lessons learned during a year long internal evaluation of the IE Project in 2008. With the close of the project due in May 2009, it was important to examine the IE Projects' successes but to also consider the challenges faced, in order to enable the Project evaluation team to share learning about the implementation of a national Inclusion Project. The problematic nature of evaluating the IE project is also explored through an overview of the evaluation methodology which summarises the considerable challenges faced in collecting reliable data about school performance in a country such as Lao PDR and provides important lessons learnt for improving the monitoring and evaluation of inclusive practices in the future. Conclusions are drawn concerning the performance and achievements of the project, based on an analysis of both quantitative data collected from all schools in the project, and a wide range of qualitative data gathered during observations from visits to 26 schools,. In addition a series of case studies are provided in Chapter 5, which illustrate, in greater depth, key aspects of the project.

Collecting Data

Background to data collection within the IE Project

One of the lessons learned by programme staff and Ministry of Education officials working on the IE project as they reviewed its development since 1993, was that there could have been a more systematic and strategic approach to the collection of data related to the impact of the project on the educational experiences of children with disabilities. The Project was very successful in collecting data concerning the numbers of disabled students in school as advocated by key writers in the field of disability such as Ilagen (2000, p120) and throughout the 2000s, there was an emphasis on introducing software systems and trained staff to enable the detailed recording of types of disabilities in different provinces throughout the country. This enabled Project staff to provide answers to key questions:

- How many children with disabilities are in Mainstream schools?

- How many children with disabilities are in Special Schools?

- How many IE schools are there:

  ♦ In the country?

  ♦ In each province?

  ♦ In each District?

As the project developed, it was possible to ask more sophisticated questions:

- What types of disability are being identified in schools?

- What are the numbers of each disability:

    ♦ In the country?

    ♦ In each province?

    ♦ In each District?

    ♦ In each School?

This data enables an evaluation of the project's success in establishing schools which are able to admit children with disabilities. It provides some indication of the range of children with disabilities in school at any given time. However, it does not provide data of a high enough quality to be able to answer analytical questions concerning the impact of the project. Some examples of the questions that could have been asked are:

- How many children with disabilities, who are admitted into Grade 1, complete Grade 5?

- How many children with disabilities transfer to Secondary School?

- How many children with disabilities drop out of school?

- How many children with disabilities repeat grades?

Unless these types of questions are answered, it is not possible to be clear whether the project has had any real impact on the quality of education being provided for children with disabilities.

The project did not systematically collect data around these sorts of questions because these questions were not being overtly asked, either within the project or by external consultants involved in establishing and developing it. An analysis of successive evaluation reports undertaken for the Project, show a failure to suggest a more systematic and analytical approach. However, this is not surprising because until recently, there has been a lack of rigour internationally to link the collection of impact / school performance data with provision for children with disabilities (Gross and White 2003). For many, the challenge has been to increase the number of children with disabilities who are enrolled in mainstream schools. Clearly the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994) has been a positive force in encouraging governments to aspire to changes in schools systems which enable children with

disabilities to have access to '... regular schools with ...(an) inclusive orientation' (UNESCO 1994). However, it has become apparent that in order to effectively evaluate the success of initiatives such as the IE Project, the same rigorous process that is used to judge school effectiveness for all children would need to be applied. It needs to be clear whether children with disabilities are making good progress in school so that the question asked of the project changes from 'How many children with disabilities are accessing IE schools?' to 'Are all children receiving a high quality educational experience, including those with disabilities?'

Therefore, when it came to designing a set of activities which would evaluate the impact of the project, both the Ministry of Education and Save the Children Norway were aware that it was necessary to try and collect some meaningful school performance data. It was also noted that this would be challenging given the country context. It was decided to collect data through two methods: a quantitative approach which would collate statistical indicators of project impact; and a qualitative approach which would gather data through case study visits to a selection of schools.

The Project Evaluation Team (PET)

The evaluation of the IE Project was designed as an internal evaluation because it was decided that it should be as detailed as possible and conducted over the course of a year. The members of the team were drawn from the Ministry of Education Inclusive Education National Implementation Team and Save the Children Education Program staff. The team was led by the IE Project consultant to try and ensure a balance between external expertise and independence and internal knowledge of the project.

Methodology

Quantitative Data Collection

The Project Evaluation Team began the design of the quantitative data collection at the beginning of 2008. The main factor affecting the design was that the IE project only had 17 months of funding left. Therefore, there was a very slim window of time available in which to collect meaningful data. Although the team's preferred choice would have been to consult widely on design and then establish training at Local, District and Provincial level to enable as reliable a data collection process as possible, this was not considered viable. It should also be noted that there was only a very limited budget available.

It was also decided to focus on the last 3 academic years of the project for which school data would be available:
2004 – 2005
2005 – 2006

2006 – 2007

It was more likely that schools would have records over this period. It would also be possible to request data from Phase 3 schools which joined the project from 2004 onwards.

A series of questionnaires for pre-schools, primary and secondary IE schools were produced which aimed to gather statistics on enrolment, retention, grade completion, school completion and transfer rates for all students. The questionnaires also requested separate data for different vulnerable groups:

- Children with special needs and disabilities

- Girls

- Children from poor families

- Children from different ethno-linguistic groups

Excel spreadsheets were designed so that data could be extracted by grade, school, district, province or by IE Project phase. These variations were important because the PET wanted to be able to make judgements not only about the effectiveness of schools in different areas of the country but also about the sustainability of the project over time. If the IE project had been successful in developing the capacity of schools to improve the quality of education they were able to offer, it might be expected that schools from Phase 1 and 2 of the project were demonstrating better results than newer project schools from Phase 3. However, it was also noted that some of the schools who entered the project during Phase 1 may have not experienced training during the last 8 – 10 years. This would mean that they had not had such up to date training on developing learner friendly classroom environments. In these cases it would be important to attempt to evaluate how effective the District Pedagogical Advisors had been in supporting the development of more inclusive practices.

It was acknowledged that there were some prospective flaws in the design of the data collection:

Time
It was considered to be important to aim to collect data from schools before the end of the academic year 2008 in May. Lao schools break for a long vacation between the end of May and the beginning of September each year. May is also a busy time for schools, because of end of year examinations. Because of this, the Project team only had 3 months for the production of questionnaires, liaison with PITs, distribution and collection of questionnaires. This was far from ideal, but the alternative would have been to continue the data collection into the new school year and this would have had a negative impact on the qualitative school evaluation visits planned to take place in November and December 2008.

Training and support
With limited budget and time constraints there was no possibility of designing and putting in place a training programme for any of the Principals or District / Provincial Implementation Teams involved. However, it was decided that the NIT would travel to each Province to offer some support and guidance and this took place in April 2008.

Capacity
It was acknowledged that there were considerable concerns about the technical capacity of School Principals to be able to collect and enter the data into the questionnaires. There was considerable variation in experience, skill and motivation amongst the Principals. Even if the data was entered and submitted, there was uncertainty about the degree of it's reliability.

With these limitations in mind, the question might be asked 'Why proceed?' The simple answer is that in economically poor countries such as Lao PDR, it has to be accepted that projects often have to work with limited budgets and low technical capacity amongst local staff. The PET had to make a judgement about whether to go ahead, given that there were considerable constraints. It was decided that although data may not be returned from all schools, 'some data' would be better than none at all. However, it was also acknowledged that in order to make meaningful use of whatever data was collected, the team needed to be able to make a judgement about its reliability. The qualitative evaluation visits to 26 IE schools to take place in November / December 2008, were partly designed to enable this assessment of data reliability. In planning these visits, a specific role for one member of the evaluation team visiting each school, was created to examine the school's records of data kept on the areas which were being asked about. The purpose of this would be to compare the school's data kept in the school with that submitted for the data collection. The evaluator would examine the schools systems for collecting, categorising and storing data to establish the reliability of the schools submitted data.

Collecting the Quantitative Data

The PET organised a workshop in July 2008, which was attended by Provincial Implementation Teams (PITs), where the initial results of the data collection were shared. The PITs also discussed their perspectives on the data collection and the challenges they had faced. There was a 100% return on the questionnaires by the end of June 2008. It had been anticipated that there would be problems in collecting all the questionnaires and the expectation had been a figure of approximately 60% returns. There was also a provisional plan in place to support Provincial teams who had not submitted their schools data in September 2008. This did not prove to be necessary. However, it should also be noted that the PET had concerns about the quality of the data that had been submitted. Some team members commented that the 100% return was an indicator that the professionals involved took the process seriously and wanted to do their best to provide what was required. However, it probably also meant that the process in some areas had been rushed through without cross-checking of data at local level. Therefore it was expected that there might be some errors in calculations.

During the workshop, the data was sampled by examining questionnaires submitted by 43 schools out of a total of 539 schools that had returned the questionnaires. For almost all the members of the PITs and the NIT, this was the first time they had been introduced to data analysis. Therefore although training was provided by the IE Project consultant and members of Save the Children's education staff, the initial examination of data was conducted as a learning experience. It was useful for the PITs and NIT to explore the data from individual schools and they were able to identify some of the reliability issues that are discussed below. They were also introduced to the concept of identifying trends and from the sample of school data that they were worked with were able to make some comments about the possible achievements of the IE Project over the three years of data collected. For example, they were able to identify the fact that from the data they were examining, it appeared that dropout rates across most IE schools were lower than they had expected them to be.

Challenges Experienced by Provinces in Collecting Reliable Data
The Provincial teams were also asked to identify challenges that they and schools had faced during the data collection process. The following comments are edited extracts from the discussions of the PITs:

- 'The time allocated for the data collection was very short but there was a lot of data that needed to be collected. Access to some districts was difficult – roads were flooded or completely inaccessible; in some cases it took a long time to get the data collection forms to the schools – it was then challenging to provide support to the schools in filling in the forms. This often had to be done by telephone.'

- 'There were insufficient instructions supplied on how to use the forms – this meant that some people could become easily confused. Additionally, Principals had not been trained in data collection or how to summarise their findings. This may have resulted in not examining their entries to cross check for accuracy. The school may not have previously collected data in some of the areas which were asked about e.g. poor families – this may have caused confusion in some schools because of the way in which definitions may be used. There is a central Ministry definition of poor, but often local communities will contextualise this to mean 'poorer' than other families in the area, even though they may all meet the central definition of poor. In some cases, schools in economically poor regions entered no data at all for poor children.'

- 'Some schools may have very unstructured / disorganised systems for collecting and maintaining data. There may be insufficient information stored, it may be inaccurate or there may not be any information at all. Some principals may believe that data collection is not their responsibility and that it should be the job of someone in a higher position. In some cases the principal of the school may be absent and the form has been filled in by a member of staff who does not have access to the necessary data or understand the complexity of the data required. It is possible that where Principals are unsure of how to fill in the form correctly, that some data may have been 'invented' – therefore it is not all reliable.'

- 'The forms that schools and villages use to collect and store data are very different from the data collection form used in this exercise. Therefore, some schools will experience difficulty in transferring data to our form because they do not understand the complexity of it. The forms are new and unfamiliar to most people. Data collection took place at the end of the school year when schools were pre-occupied in preparing for exams and the end of semester. This meant that they may not have been able to give the process of data collection as much attention as was necessary. There was little time available to explain the forms to the districts and to the school; Ministry support was given to Province and then advice cascaded down through district and school. There was insufficient budget to support district and schools effectively.'

Qualitative Data Collection

During November and December 2008, members of the PET made a series of visits to evaluate the impact of the IE Project on schools. Team members were given the brief that the visits were to ascertain how successful the project had been in developing quality provision for disadvantaged children with particular emphasis on children with disabilities. Members of the PET, divided into teams of 3, visited 26 schools, including pre-school, primary and secondary schools, in 16 Districts and 9 Provinces.

Schools were chosen to represent each phase of the expansion of the project – 1995 – 1999, 2000 – 2004, 2005 – 2008. They also represented a range of economic and geographical locations across the country including urban areas, semi-urban, rural and semi-remote areas. The only areas not covered were those which were designated as remote areas where schools may be several hours walk from an accessible road or track. This is because the expansion of the IE Project had only included semi-remote areas, those accessible by road, after 2005. It had not yet been possible to include completely remote schools in the project up to this point. Schools chosen also included those likely to have large class sizes and schools with a significant percentage of children from different ethnic-linguistic groups.

The evaluation visits aimed to:

- Evaluate the quality of quantitative school based performance data

- Evaluate the Impact of the Project on Teaching and Learning

Each team comprised three members with at least one from the Ministry of Education and one Programme coordinator from Save the Children. Teams had clear responsibilities and roles, decided upon before each school visit, so that one member of the team was responsible for one of the following tasks:

1. Evaluating the quality of the schools performance data and comparing it with the data which was submitted for the data collection in April / May 2008.

2. Observing and evaluating lessons

3. Collecting qualitative data from students, parents, teachers.

Additionally each team was accompanied by members of the local District Advisory Implementation team (DIT) and Provincial Advisory Implementation Team (PIT) who had been involved in supporting schools in the project. Where possible, they also visited Teacher Training Institutions around the country to assess the quality of the training being given to pre-service teachers.

Guidance notes were produced to cover every aspect of the evaluation visit to try and ensure that there was consistency in the collection of data and to reduce the likelihood of collecting unreliable data. Lessons had been learnt from school evaluation visits, in relation to the development of school improvement tool (see Chapter 3). It had been noted that unless teams had clear guidelines for what data to collect and how to collect it, it was likely that each team would collect sets of data which could not be compared or collated. This also necessitated that each team had a team leader to ensure that these guidelines were being followed.

The guidance for teams made it clear that the overall aim was to assess the impact that the IE Project had on the District and on the school. Therefore, the main focus was on children with disabilities. However, team members were also asked to note wherever possible, the impact the project had had on other disadvantaged and vulnerable groups:

- Children from poor families

- Girls

- Children from different ethnic-linguistic groups

The team were also required to be alert to evidence that the Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) were being met in the school, noting any evidence of

- Inappropriate punishments and discipline

- Discrimination against children or groups of children, by teachers or other children

- Negative attitudes towards any disadvantaged or vulnerable groups

The guidance stated that it was the responsibility of the team leader to ensure that quality data was being collected throughout the visit that would enable a comprehensive report to be written (report templates were provided for this purpose). The team leader was advised to liaise with colleagues throughout the day to monitor whether the data being collected was of sufficient quality and met the requirements. The team was encouraged to operate flexibly throughout the school day, making strategic decisions about different activities that may need to take place

in order to meet the requirements of the report templates.

Evaluating the quality of quantitative school based performance data

It was important to try and assess the reliability of the data that had been submitted for the quantitative data collection by each school. In this way it might be possible to develop an overall view of the quality of the data that was received. Evaluators were required to discuss the data collection and storage systems in the school with the School Principal, District and Provincial Advisors and answer a series of questions including:

- Is there school data matching the questions asked in the data collection for each of the 3 years?

- In the school's data is it clear which of the 3 main ethnic groups children belong to?

- Do you think the data the school submitted for ethnic groups was reliable? (this was repeated for gender, disability and poverty). Why do you think this is?

Most of the evaluators had experienced the school improvement project described in Chapter 3 and had some understanding of the importance of collecting clear and relevant evidence. They were therefore also asked to make a summary of the issues that may have affected reliability of data in each school and also to make a judgement of the overall reliability of data collected from each school.

Evaluating the Impact of the Project on Teaching and Learning

The IE 5 Point Star

During the visits, at least one member of the team would begin by observing lessons. The purpose of these lesson observations was to assess how much impact the IE project had had on the school, teachers, children with special needs and disabilities, and other disadvantaged and vulnerable children. Was there any evidence that the training provided by the IE project had supported the development of a more child-centred teaching and school / classroom environment? Therefore, evaluators needed to be particularly aware of the Inclusive Education 5 Point Star, a core component of the IE training. There should have been evidence in teachers planning and in the delivery of the lessons of the five aspects of this, characterised in the following examples.

1. A range of different activities should take place during the lesson. Ideally the teacher should introduce the lesson either by connecting it with children's previous learning OR asking the children what they already know about the subject for the lesson. This should be followed by an introductory activity, perhaps making use of resources to engage and stimulate the children OR a participatory activity such as role-play, singing, discussion;

The teachers' main input for the lesson should be next – the teaching of the skills / knowledge that has been planned for. There should be indications of a move away from teacher centred pedagogy - rote learning, copying from the board or the teacher asking questions and pupils putting their hands up. Evaluators were asked to try and answer key questions:

- • How effective is this part of the lesson?

- • Is there 'real' learning for ALL children taking place.

- • How is the teacher ensuring that ALL children are participating and learning – particularly children with special needs?

Often in Lao classrooms the teacher will organise the children into groups for the next part of the lesson. Where this was taking place, evaluators were trying to ascertain if there was a clear purpose? Did the children understand what they had to do? Was the group organised so that all students were involved or were 1 or 2 students dominating the activity? What was the teacher doing during this time? Was she engaging with students, discussing activities with them, assessing if they needed support or clearer instructions? Was she using this time to work alongside children with disabilities? OR was she sitting at her desk or just watching the children and not 'teaching' them. Other questions asked included: Is there differentiated work for different abilities or are all children expected to do the same work? How are children of different abilities and with different special needs supported by the teacher?

The lesson should conclude with some sharing of the learning that has taken place and / or a summary from the teacher of the main learning points. The teacher should be aiming to assess what the children have learnt during the lesson. If there is homework set from the lesson, it should be purposeful and linked to the lesson and also achievable for all students.

2. Use of Resources. The teacher should have a range of attractive and supportive resources available to support the learning taking place. Evaluators were encouraged to ask: What resources is the teacher using? Are they clearly linked to the lesson aims? Does she use a range of different resources for different purposes? Are ALL children able to access these resources either by being able to see them clearly or actually touch / use them themselves?

Are there specific resources available to support the learning of children with special needs and different abilities?

3. Student groupings. The PET expected to see a range of groupings and classroom arrangements in use. In the more developed classrooms there should have been examples of practice including the following:

- The teacher arranges the classroom furniture in a variety of styles to suit the particular lesson; sometimes in a U shape, sometimes in groups, sometimes working outside, sometimes faced towards the blackboard.

- The teachers mixes student groupings up – sometimes children of similar ability work together, sometimes in mixed ability groups, sometimes in pairs, sometimes in 3 or more. Students should also be asked to work on their own at times. Is there any indication that the teacher is using the students to support each other's (and thus their own) learning – for example, more able sometimes (not always) working with children with disabilities?

- Where the children are working in groups is it evident that

    ♦ They are clear about the purpose of the activity and it is linked to the learning objectives for the lesson

    ♦ The teacher is ensuring that all children are participating and learning

    ♦ Children with disabilities are being supported with their learning

4. Questioning styles. There should have been evidence that teachers used a range of questioning styles. In the most inclusive classrooms, the teacher will ask general questions, inviting responses from all children, some examples could be questions addressed to specific children, linked to their ability and understanding:

- Questions which will extend the learning of more able students

- Questions which will support and learning for less able students

- Questions which give the children time to think or discuss in pairs / threes

- Open-ended questions

- Questions which encourage discussion

- Questions with specific answers

- Questions which require one or more students to come and demonstrate answers / responses to the rest of the class

The PET also looked for evidence that all children were involved in questions and discussion and were encouraged by the teacher to participate. How is the teacher demonstrating that she has thought about how to engage and support the children with disabilities?

5. Relevance to real life or learners own experiences. The teacher should be able to demonstrate that she has an awareness of child centred learning. All learning should be linked to children's own experiences and / or real life in order to enable all students to understand the learning concepts. E.g.

- Is the lesson presented to the children so that they connect the learning with their own experiences?

- Or with real life events and routines?

- Is there evidence that confirms that the children sometimes have lessons outside the classroom in order to connect learning with real life?

Interviews with Stakeholders

One member of the team concentrated on gathering information from different stakeholders. As noted above, it had been learnt (Grimes, Sayarath and Outhaithany, 2007) that it was important to designate a member of the evaluation team to take responsibility for this area and to attempt to ensure that they covered the same range of questions as other evaluation teams. Questions needed to be phrased carefully in order to elicit truthful responses, particularly from children. Evaluators were encouraged to use a range of questioning styles and to interview respondents in different settings. For example, it was unlikely that children would give honest answers to questions about corporal punishment if they were asked this in the classroom in front of their teacher. However, some children might be too shy or vulnerable to interview outside the classroom away from their friends. Therefore, evaluators had to use their discretion, judgement and experience to decide on the best approach.

Parents
The school were asked to arrange for a range of parents, including those with disabled children to come to the school at 8am for group and / or (if appropriate) individual interviews. Advice to evaluators asked them to be aware that some parents prefer to talk individually; if a parent is quiet during a group interview, ask them if you can talk to them on their own afterwards. Some parents prefer to be in a group and are supported by the presence of other parents.

Questions for Parents included:

Does your child enjoy coming to school? Why do you think this is?

What does s/he enjoy?

What does s/he not enjoy?

What subjects / lessons is s/he good at?

What subjects / lessons does s/he find difficult? Why do you think this is?

What is her / his special need / difficulty and how does it affect them at home? How does it affect them in the classroom?

How do you think the school are trying to support your child with their difficulty?

Does your child receive different work from other children?

Does your child bring home homework – if they do is it too hard, too easy or just right for their ability?

Are they being successful at school? How do you know?

Do the school punish your child – how do they do this? How do you feel about this?

Evaluators aimed to gather evidence of how the parents felt the project had had an impact on themselves, their children, the school and the community.

__Interviews With Parents__

Number of parents interviewed: approximately 250

Number of parents interviewed in groups: approx. 200

Number of parents interviewed individually : approx. 50

Number of parents of children with disabilities / special needs interviewed: approx. 200

Number of parents of other children interviewed: approx 50

Students

Questions were provided which evaluators could draw upon to ask children during classroom observations and / or in separate interviews with groups of children. Evaluators were reminded that they had an ethical duty not to upset or distress children; also to make sure they assured children of confidentiality if they were asking delicate questions about themselves or their teachers. If they seemed upset or anxious, evaluators should stop the interview and begin again with other children.

Questions that evaluators might ask children:

Do you enjoy coming to school?

What do you enjoy?

What don't you enjoy?

What subjects / lessons are you good at?

What subjects / lessons do you find difficult? Why do you think this is?

If it was felt appropriate they might also ask:

What is your special need / difficulty - and how does it affect you at home? How does it affect you in the classroom?

How do you think the school are trying to help / support you with your difficulty?

Are they being successful in helping you?

Do you have work that is the same as other children? How do you feel about this? Is it too hard, too easy, just right?

Do you have friends at school? Who are they? What games do you play with them?

Are other children unkind to you sometimes? What do they do? If they are , do you tell a teacher – what does the teacher do if you tell them?

Is your teacher ever unkind to you with words or punishments?

Is your teacher ever unkind to other children with words or punishments?

Are there any areas of the school that you find it difficult to access or make use of?

Interviews With Children

Number of children interviewed: approximately 500

Number of children interviewed in groups: approx. 450

Number of children interviewed individually or in pairs: approx. 50

Number of children with disabilities / special needs interviewed: approx. 120

It is important to note that asking parents and children searching questions about the quality of the education experienced in a developing country such as Lao PDR is complex. The experience of staff within the IE Project has been that when asked, most children report that they enjoy going to school, even if lessons appear boring and dull. As one elderly grandmother replied in a previous school evaluation visit (Grimes, Sayarath and Outhaithany, 2007) on being asked why her grandchildren enjoyed school 'Well its better than catching frogs isn't it?' For some children in this particular district, if they didn't go to school they would be sent into the fields to work or catch food – in this instance, frogs. School, in the sense that it involves learning, being with other children and playing together at lunchtimes and after school, is by contrast much more enjoyable.

Previous evaluations (Grimes, Sayarath et al, 2007) had found that children in Laos would often reply in the affirmative when asked if they enjoyed school. However, because they often do not have other school experiences to compare it to, it is not a very reliable response. It is much more challenging to get them to reflect on the parts they enjoy more than others and to think about why this is and, in particular, what it is that their teacher does that enables them to participate and learn effectively. Where schools are moving away from teacher centred pedagogy and rote-learning it is more likely that students are beginning to develop more advanced thinking skills and to be prepared to discuss their learning in school.

Interviews with Principals, Teachers and District / Provincial Implementation Teams
During the time spent in each school, the evaluation team also interviewed Principals, teachers and members of the various District and Provincial Implementation Teams that were present. These interviews mostly took the form of informal conversations designed to develop an understanding of the respondents' perspective on the impact of the IE Project on themselves and schools.

> Number of Principals interviewed: 26
>
> Number of Teachers interviewed: 130
>
> Number of District Implementation Team members interviewed: 40
>
> Number of Provincial Implementation Team members interviewed: 14

Evaluators were asked to try and help respondents to feel relaxed when interviewing them. In order to develop an accurate picture of schools and the extent to which the project had impacted on individuals' professional development, respondents needed to be encouraged to be open and honest, not to feel judged or 'on trial'. It was anticipated that some schools would be excited by the visit and would celebrate the arrival of the evaluation teams; in other schools, respondents might be nervous and anxious to make a good impression. In all cases, the evaluation teams needed to try and encourage 'normal conversation' by asking general questions to put respondents at ease. Where more searching questions needed to be asked, these needed to be asked supportively in such a way as to encourage reflection.

Lessons Learned: How has the Inclusive Education Project impacted on Schools in Lao PDR?

Reliability of the Data Collected

Data collected during the evaluation of the Inclusive Education Project varied in reliability. Some of the data collected through quantitative methods was reliable although it is difficult to be precise about exactly how much. It seems probable, based on the judgements of the evaluators' visits to schools that most of the data relating to enrolment, grade passing, drop outs / retention and gender is accurate. Inaccuracy started to occur when schools were asked to relate data to specific groups. The data for disabled students appears to be more reliable than the data for ethnic groups or children from poor families. The data collected through qualitative methods was more reliable but there were still specific issues relating to consistency of collection and the conclusions that different evaluation teams drew from observations and interviews. This has implications for the extent to which the PET can generalise about the impact of the IE Project on schools. It is probably not reasonable, based on the evidence collected, to make definite claims about the success of the project across all schools. The data is used therefore, to generate impressions about the quality of the project and the lessons that have been learned.

Reliability of Quantitative Data

In regard to the quality of the data which was received and analysed, there seems little doubt that it was not 100% reliable. The lack of any tangible systems in schools for collecting and storing data, together with the fact that there was no real training or support at school level for data entry, means that it is inevitable that there were some errors, omissions and mis-entries. Analysis of the data indicated a range of concerns about reliability. There were examples where the data in different columns did not add up., confusion around terminology used and, in some cases, data on certain groups was missing.

The implications of this for the IE Project data collection were that there needed to be a close check on reliability of school data in the 26 schools that were visited. As described above, for the purposes of this, a data inspection template / checklist was drawn up, to enable members of the Project Evaluation Team (PET) to analyse reliability in a uniform way. It was then planned to use the findings from this checking exercise to make wider judgements about the reliability of the data submitted nationally.   Making a final judgement in the form of a percentage caused some difficulty for evaluators. It would have been helpful had there been clearer criteria aligning aspects of the data collected to a percentage scale. Because of this, it was decided to omit reporting an overall percentage assessment of the reliability of the data collection.

Although the quality and consistency of the data collected during these inspections

of the school based data was generally better than expected, evaluators through their observations and discussions with school Principals, summarised that the collection of reliable data was potentially affected by three key factors:

Time: the data was collected during a 3 month period before the end of school year 2008. This was a time when school shad many other demands on their time and it is likely that in some schools, the data entry was rushed leading to inaccuracy and omissions.

Training and Support: there was only a set of guidance notes and telephone advice to support Principals in the completion of the forms. Principals and District Implementation teams had received no training, and therefore had to do the best that they could with an activity which is demanding even for those experienced in data collection. Although guidance provided offered step by step instructions and definitions of the different groups for which data was required, there was clearly some confusion in certain areas, detailed below.

Capacity: there were concerns that schools may have insufficient experience and ineffective systems in place to collect and store data. However, in the 26 schools visited, the PET found that the data submitted was mostly reliable in that it usually matched data held within schools. Some schools had good systems for data storage following recommendations from the IE training. In these cases, teachers would collect data in their classrooms and transfer it to the Principal who recorded it in a series of books. In schools where this was the practice, Principals and school staff appeared to take the process of data collection and storage very seriously. In other schools there were examples of data not being fully recorded in books, or there being no record of certain areas of the data pertaining to different groups. When asked how they had filled in the questionnaires for the data collection, without data to refer to, Principals replied that they had asked the teacher who had kept a record in their classroom. In a minority of cases, the Principal replied that they had 'remembered' the data. This may not be as unreliable as it appears, in that in very small schools, the Principal might be able to remember how many students had dropped out of a particular grade, or moved onto secondary school.

Analysis of the Quantitative data collected, combined with the judgements of the evaluators visiting schools, led the PET to conclude that the main areas of inaccuracy related to:

Definitions of Disability. Schools interpreted definitions in different ways. In one school nearly 20% of the children were identified as having a disability; in another less than 5%. Schools were sometimes confused about the appropriate way to categorise students with multiple or complex needs; in one case study (Nina, in Chapter 5) a profoundly deaf student was listed as having physical disabilities because she had limited mobility, but clearly her primary need was her hearing impairment. There

was also confusion relating to what constitutes a slow learner. Sometimes schools will identify children as slow learners when in fact they come from economically poor farming families and have low attendance at school. Whilst this impacts on their learning it does not constitute a learning difficulty.

Classification of Poor families. Schools and communities were often confused about what constituted a poor family. They were supposed to use Ministry definitions but often applied their own variations on this to make judgements about 'families poorer than the average in the community' rather than 'poorer than a verage in the country as a whole'. This meant that some areas, designated amongst the poorest Districts in Lao, reported low numbers of poor families. It was also the case that in areas where there was poor collaboration and communication between school and local community the data on poor families was often not submitted because schools could not access the information they needed.

Complete / Incomplete Schools. In Lao PDR many schools are incomplete – that is to say they have only Grades 1 and 2 or possibly 3. They will be administered by a complete school. In some cases where the IE school also administered / supported incomplete schools, Principals were confused about which data they should be including. In one school visited, this meant that the data entered included incomplete schools not in the IE Project.

Ethnicity. In areas where there are complex combinations of ethnic groups, Principals sometimes found it difficult to calculate the numbers of students in the three main categories. This has had the effect of making the overall data for ethnicity unreliable.

Reliability of Qualitative Data

Whilst the qualitative data was more reliable than the quantitative data, there were still some concerns about its overall consistency and reliability. One example has already been explored in relation to evaluators making a judgement about the consistency of the quantitative data collected by schools. The observations of the Project consultant during the school evaluation visits where he led the team, was that despite using the same report template and asking the same questions of Principals, evaluators drew different conclusions about the percentage of the data in a school which was reliable. In one case a school which appeared to have very reliable data was judged at 80%; in another case a school which appeared to have poor systems for data storage and collection was judged to be 85% reliable. On this basis it is not possible to make an overall judgement about the percentage of the data that is reliable.

The challenges experienced in the example above can be applied to the other qualitative data collection methods. A substantial number of participants were

interviewed, for example over 250 parents, 500 students, 26 Principals, 150 teachers. There was clear guidance for the kinds of questions which were suggested for use with different groups as has been described in the methodology section above. There was not however, a fixed interview schedule which was used with the different groups and which would enable a direct comparison between the views of stakeholders in different schools. The observations of the Project consultant in the schools he visited, indicated that different evaluators approached the interviews in different ways. Some were more skilled and subtle in encouraging students to speak openly than others, for example. This affects the extent to which claims can be made about the views of students.

The feedback from the Evaluation teams visiting different schools varied in quality. Some teams were able to give very detailed descriptions of lessons observed and summaries of the views of different stakeholder groups. Others gave less detailed descriptions and summaries of their findings. Therefore it would seem reasonable to conclude that there is some variability in the extent to which the qualitative data collected could be said to be reliable. It is important that qualitative research allows respondents to speak for themselves and that they are represented accurately by researchers (Sherman and Webb, 1988). Since there are some concerns about the extent to which the findings from different evaluation teams accurately represents respondents true perspectives, the lessons drawn from the qualitative data should also be seen as impressions in the same way as those drawn from the quantitative data.

The lessons learned which are presented and discussed in the next section of this chapter are those which the Project Evaluation Team interpreted as significant and generally representative of schools within the project. In some cases lessons are presented which may only refer to a minority of schools and where this is the case, this is made explicit. The final chapter will reflect on the wider strategic implications for the development of educational policy and provision in Lao PDR, including any future data collection initiatives.

Lessons Learned

The first set of data to be shared is drawn from the quantitative data collection. In the tables, CSN refers to Children with Special Needs (Children with Disabilities).

Enrolment

Total Number of Children in Primary IE Schools

Primary	Total Children			Total CSN			Total CSN %		
Year	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Total	101,311	103,410	107,493	3,312	3,825	3,933	3%	4%	4%

Total Number of Children in Primary IE Schools by province

	Primary	Total Children			Total CSN			Total CSN %		
		2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
02	Phongsaly	3,428	3,220	3,772	194	171	334	6%	5%	9%
03	Luang Namtha	2,683	3,235	3,591	61	84	159	2%	3%	4%
04	Udomxai	6,028	6,020	5,991	294	315	270	5%	5%	5%
05	Bokeo	5,630	5,568	5,676	335	320	298	6%	6%	5%
06	Luang Prabang	7,602	8,426	8,676	157	235	249	2%	3%	3%
07	Huaphanh	3,555	5,792	6,733	108	277	133	3%	5%	2%
08	Xayabuly	6,399	6,013	5,711	193	213	162	3%	4%	3%
09	Xiengkhouang	8,455	7,833	7,930	194	301	277	2%	4%	3%
10	Vientiane Prov.	8,161	7,785	7,929	285	288	333	3%	4%	4%
11	Bolikhamxay	4,226	4,135	7,029	106	120	172	3%	3%	2%
12	Khammouan	7,531	7,631	7,835	174	164	150	2%	2%	2%
13	Savanakhet	11,397	11,083	10,063	174	284	249	2%	3%	2%
14	Saravanh	5,725	5,984	6,347	219	261	324	4%	4%	5%
15	Sekong	4,907	4,116	3,990	251	199	173	5%	5%	4%
16	Champasack	4,174	5,397	5,313	78	173	215	2%	3%	4%
17	Attapu	4,109	4,284	4,378	194	138	114	5%	3%	3%
18	Vientiane Municipality	7,328	6,888	6,529	295	282	321	4%	4%	5%
		101,311	103,410	107,493	3,312	3,825	3,933	3%	4%	4%

As the IE project expanded during Phase 3, increasing size to its current total of 539 schools, it is possible to see from this table that the number of children with special needs and disabilities covered by the project had increased across the country, from 3,312 in 2004/5, to 3,933 in 2006/7. It is also interesting to note that although the number of children attending IE schools has also risen, there are now proportionately more children with special needs and disabilities in IE schools, rising from 3% to 4%. During visits to the 26 schools, evaluators discussed enrolment with Principals, District Implementation Teams and members of the local community. Based on their responses, the Project Evaluation Team judges that during the period 2004 – 7, enrolment in the 26 schools was above 99% of the local school aged population.

Total Number of Children in Secondary IE Schools

Secondary	Total Children			Total CSN			Total CSN %		
Year	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Vientiane Province	668	756	837	23	24	15	3.44%	3.17%	1.79%
Khammouan	1,883	2,763	1,947	24	27	21	1.27%	0.98%	1.08%
Savanakhet	2,277	2,435	2,532	19	14	24	0.83%	0.57%	0.95%
Champasack	586	536	469	10	10	8	1.71%	1.87%	1.71%
Vientiane Municipality	2,201	2,062	1,930	35	37	28	1.59%	1.79%	1.45%
TOTAL	7,615	8,552	7,715	111	112	96	1.46%	1.31%	1.24%

There were only 5 provinces which had Secondary IE schools in 2004 – 2007. The numbers are so low that they are not statistically viable. However, it is interesting to note that there is in fact a decrease in numbers of children with special needs attending secondary in four of the five provinces. Even with a small number of schools, it would be expected that there would be a gradual increase in numbers. This may be a statistical anomaly or indicative of the need to further develop these existing IE secondary school's capacity for including a diverse range of children.

Grade Passing

Primary Grade Passing

Pri-mary	Total Grade Passing			Total Grade Passing %			Total Grade Passing CSN			Total Grade Passing CSN %		
Year	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Total	83714	87814	92902	83%	85%	86%	2418	2642	3052	73%	69%	78%

Primary Grade Passing by province

	Primary	Total Grade Passing			Total Grade Passing %			Total Grade Passing CSN			Total Grade Passing CSN%		
		2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
02	Phongsaly	2600	2614	2931	76%	81%	78%	89	70	128	46%	41%	38%
03	Luang Namtha	2218	2751	3104	83%	85%	86%	53	75	159	87%	89	Over 100%
04	Udomxai	4692	4706	4675	78%	78%	78%	150	187	270	51%	59	Over 100%
05	Bokeo	4229	4282	4214	75%	77%	74%	93	102	107	28%	32%	36%
06	Luang Prabang	6520	7087	7343	86%	84%	85%	157	194	220	Over 100%	83%	88%
07	Huaphanh	2917	4384	5870	82%	76%	87%	95	79	133	88%	29%	Over 100%
08	Xayabuly	5409	5410	5026	85%	90%	88%	160	144	133	83%	68%	82%
09	Xiengkhouang	6633	6381	6483	78%	81%	82%	180	224	262	93%	74%	95%
10	Vientiane Province	6902	6650	7227	85%	85%	91%	228	254	302	80%	88%	91%
11	Bolikhamxay	3554	3760	6030	84%	91%	86%	88	108	157	83%	90%	91%
12	Khammouan	6582	6727	6995	87%	88%	89%	160	148	144	92%	90%	96%
13	Savanakhet	9234	9271	8957	81%	84%	89%	167	209	185	96%	74%	74%
14	Saravanh	4903	5014	5461	86%	84%	86%	176	210	223	80%	80%	69%
15	Sekong	3897	3344	3209	79%	81%	80%	194	152	147	77%	76%	85%
16	Champasack	3398	5601	5798	82%	104%	109%	55	160	162	71%	92%	75%
17	Attapu	3573	3631	3749	87%	85%	86%	165	112	99	85%	81%	87%
18	Vientiane Municipality	6453	6201	5830	88%	90%	89%	208	214	221	71%	76%	69%
	TOTAL	83714	87814	92902	83%	85%	86%	2418	2642	3052	73%	69%	78%

The data for the number of students passing grades in IE schools, shows an increase over the three years with a total grade pass rate in 2006 of 86%. The data for children with special needs and disabilities also shows an increase from 2418 in 2005, to 3052 in 2007. However, it is important to note that the percentage of children with special needs passing grades is lower than the percentage figure for other children – 78% compared to 86% in 2007. Despite an increase in the number of students with special needs and disabilities passing grades in 2005 – 6, from 2418 to 2642, when expressed as a percentage of the number of children in school with disabilities, there is in fact a drop of 4% from 73% to 69%.

Where boxes are highlighted yellow, it indicates that the data submitted for children with special needs was more than 100% of the number of students which the school / province had identified as having special needs, emphasising the need to be cautious in analysis. Whilst, this data may not be completely reliable it indicates that there may still be challenges in ensuring that students with disabilities are supported in achieving in school. It also raises some important questions. Given the fact that some children with special needs will experience challenges in learning and have perhaps not developed as rapidly as some of their peers (categorised in Lao as a slow learner), is it reasonable to expect all children with special needs to pass the grade examination? Additionally international research indicates that Visually Impaired and Hearing Impaired children, although expected to make normal rates of progress when viewed over the course of their school career, may, particularly at the early primary stage, be as much as 2 years behind their peers. Clearly if the grade examination is to have any value it should be a measure of what children have learnt and their academic development across the school year. The current grade passing system which only measures a very narrow definition of achievement is not satisfactory, as it highlights the one dimensional nature of learning and assessment in Lao classrooms. If schools are to develop summative as well as formative forms of assessment there is a clear need to address two issues:

- The development of in-class assessment strategies which will demonstrate children's progress based upon their starting points or clear base-line achievement data. These strategies should also reflect children's' overall development including social and emotional as well as academic.

- The development of teachers' capacity to carry out a range of assessments which can feed into the planning of lessons designed to meet children's specific learning needs.

When the data on grade passing was analysed on a provincial level, certain trends emerge. In provinces such as Phongsaly and Bokeo, the percentage of children with special needs passing grades is significantly lower than the rate of other children. In 2007, this figure in Phongslay was 38% of students with special needs passing grades, compared to 78% of other students. In Bokeo, the statistics showed that 36% of students with special needs passed grade exams, compared to 74% of other

students. This is in contrast to provinces such as Xiengkhouang, Vientiane Province, Bolikhamxay, Khammouan, Sekong and Attapu where the rate for children with special needs was equal to or higher than that for other children.

In analysing this data, the Project Evaluation team raised a number of questions about the reason for the low figures in Phongsaly and Bokeo. Is it because:

- Phongsaly and Bokeo are relatively remote compared to other provinces?

- Their IE schools are newer to the project?

- There is less capacity within the system to support schools in these areas?

These are two provinces where many of the IE schools are in Phase 3 of the project and are less accessible within the province itself. This means these are schools that are less likely to have trained teachers, more likely to have large class sizes, incomplete schools and a large percentage of children from economically poor families. These are factors which would make it more challenging to raise the capacity of the school to a reasonable quality of education. The remoteness of the schools might also create extra challenges in providing regular advisory support to new IE schools and in supporting in-service IE training attendance. This view is confirmed by The Provincial Education Office in Bokeo, which recently, in October 2008, publically announced that the reasons for its generally low level of performance were due to a lack of teachers in schools, low numbers of trained teachers, low levels of resources in schools and inaccessibility of many schools in the Province.

Secondary Grade Passing

Second-ary	Total Children			Grade Passing			Grade Passing %			Grade Passing SCN			Grade Passing CSN%		
Year	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07
Vientiane Province	668	756	837	638	695	791	96%	92%	95%	21	19	14	91%	79%	93%
Khammouan	1,883	2,763	1,947	1,821	1,723	1,772	97%	62%	91%	23	20	20	96%	74%	95%
Savanakhet	2,277	2,435	2,532	2,099	1,966	2,359	92%	81%	93%	14	13	18	74%	93%	75%
Champasack	586	536	469	535	492	439	91%	92%	94%	10	10	8	100%	100%	100%
Vientiane Municipality	2,201	2,062	1,930	2,113	1,927	1,717	96%	93%	89%	34	25	24	97%	68%	86%
TOTAL	7,615	8,552	7,715	7,206	6,803	7,078	95%	80%	92%	102	87	84	92%	78%	88%

The data at secondary level is less viable because the cohorts are so small. However, generally students with special needs and disabilities have a reasonably high grade pass rate which, at national level, sits just below the rate for other students. For example, the rate for other students in 2005 was 95% compared to 92% for students with special needs. The rate in 2007 for other students was 92% and 88% for students with special needs. The changes in level over the 3 years of statistics cannot be generalised as a trend as numbers are so small. However, it is interesting to note

that in the middle year, numbers of students attending the IE schools in 4 of the 5 province actually dropped. This statistic was also mirrored by students with special needs.

Repetition Rates

Primary Repetition

Pri-mary	Total Repetition			Total Repetition %			Total Repetition CSN			Total Repetition CSN %		
Year	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Total	14868	14569	14935	15%	14%	14%	364	401	416	11%	10%	11%

Primary Repetition by province

	Primary	Total Repetition			Total Repetition %			Total CSN			Total Repetition CSN			Total Repetition CSN%		
		04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07
02	Phongsaly	652	539	676	19%	17%	18%	194	171	334	14	20	11	7%	12%	3%
03	Luang Namtha	396	349	493	15%	11%	14%	61	84	159	1	14	38	2%	17%	24%
04	Udomxay	963	1219	888	16%	20%	15%	294	315	270	42	10	18	14%	3%	7%
05	Bokeo	1084	1041	1261	19%	19%	22%	335	320	298	25	37	36	7%	12%	12%
06	Luang Prabang	888	913	1104	12%	11%	13%	157	235	249	13	10	8	8%	4%	3%
07	Huaphanh	590	814	920	17%	14%	14%	108	277	133	14	21	12	13%	8%	9%
08	Xayabuly	839	762	714	13%	13%	13%	193	213	162	17	19	20	9%	9%	12%
09	Xieng-khouang	922	899	1018	11%	11%	13%	194	301	277	23	20	23	12%	7%	8%
10	Vientiane Province	1039	1012	964	13%	13%	12%	285	288	333	36	35	35	13%	12%	11%
11	Bolikhamxay	670	688	1042	16%	17%	15%	106	120	172	19	15	15	18%	13%	9%
12	Khammouan	909	1047	822	12%	14%	10%	174	164	150	10	7	5	6%	4%	3%
13	Savanakhet	2138	1892	1573	19%	17%	16%	174	284	249	31	55	39	18%	19%	16%
14	Saravanh	762	690	877	13%	12%	14%	219	261	324	19	53	46	9%	20%	14%
15	Sekong	849	676	703	17%	16%	18%	251	199	173	13	16	16	5%	8%	9%
16	Champasack	386	548	561	9%	10%	11%	78	173	215	4	24	38	5%	14%	18%
17	Attapu	861	665	589	21%	16%	13%	194	138	114	41	17	17	21%	12%	15%
18	Vientiane Municipality	920	815	730	13%	12%	11%	295	282	321	42	28	39	14%	10%	12%
	TOTAL	14868	14569	14935	15%	14%	14%	3312	3825	3933	364	401	416	11%	10%	11%

Data for repetition rates at primary level indicates that fewer students with special needs and disabilities repeat grades than other students. This implies that the guidance given to IE schools   by the Ministry of Education National Implementation team, that students with special needs should not be made to repeat grades, is starting to have an impact. Although the number of students with special needs repeating increased over the years 2004 – 7, this can be attributed to the growth

in the project over this time. With significant numbers of new schools joining the project, it was expected that there would be a period of time where teachers new to the principles of the project adjusted to new ways of working.

Secondary Repetition

Secondary	Total Repetition			Total Repetition %			Total Repetition CSN			Total Repetition CSN %		
	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07
Vientiane Province	56	34	27	8%	4%	3%	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%
Khammouan	81	107	69	4%	4%	4%	0	1	0	0%	4%	0%
Savanakhet	71	72	68	3%	3%	3%	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%
Champasack	30	27	9	5%	5%	2%	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%
Vientiane Municipality	102	64	70	5%	3%	4%	0	1	0	0%	3%	0%
	340	304	243	4%	4%	3%	0	2	0	0%	2%	0%

Secondary repetition amongst students with special needs was very rare. In fact, only two students repeated between 2004 – 7. However, as cohorts were so small, these figures are insignificant. National data trends indicate that repetition should decrease as students pass through the grades. Currently relatively few students with special needs transfer from primary to secondary school. As this number increases, there will be a greater to challenge to ensure that they do not repeat grades.

Drop Out Rates

Primary Drop Out

Primary	Total Drop Out			Total Drop Out %			Total Drop Out CSN			Total Drop Out CSN %		
	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05- 06	06- 07
	1277	1439	1311	1%	1%	1%	42	33	34	1%	1%	1%

Primary Drop Out by province

	Primary	Total Drop Out			Total Drop Out %			Total CSN			Total Drop Out CSN			Total Drop Out CSN %		
		04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07
02	Phongsaly	33	58	68	1%	2%	2%	194	171	334	0	0	1	0%	0%	0%
03	Luang Namtha	26	22	26	1%	1%	1%	61	84	159	0	0	2	0%	0%	1%
04	Udomxay	124	90	81	2%	1%	1%	294	315	270	6	0	3	2%	0%	1%
05	Bokeo	149	99	101	3%	2%	2%	335	320	298	2	3	1	1%	1%	0%
06	Luang Prabang	79	143	103	1%	2%	1%	157	235	249	1	2	0	1%	1%	0%
07	Huaphanh	16	49	19	0%	1%	0%	108	277	133	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%
08	Xayabuly	7	9	10	0%	0%	0%	193	213	162	1	3	1	1%	1%	1%

	Primary	Total Drop Out			Total Drop Out %			Total CSN			Total Drop Out CSN			Total Drop Out CSN %		
09	Xieng-khouang	76	93	80	1%	1%	1%	194	301	277	3	2	0	2%	1%	0%
10	Vientiane Province	17	26	39	0%	0%	0%	285	288	333	1	0	1	0%	0%	0%
11	Bolikhamxay	1	2	58	0%	0%	1%	106	120	172	1	0	1	1%	0%	1%
12	Khammouan	87	132	73	1%	2%	1%	174	164	150	1	3	0	1%	2%	0%
13	Savanakhet	162	134	187	1%	1%	2%	174	284	249	0	1	9	0%	0%	4%
14	Saravanh	90	120	104	2%	2%	2%	219	261	324	6	1	6	3%	0%	2%
15	Sekong	90	102	57	2%	2%	1%	251	199	173	1	3	3	0%	2%	2%
16	Champasack	17	28	25	0%	1%	0%	78	173	215	0	0	1	0%	0%	0%
17	Attapu	226	274	218	6%	6%	5%	194	138	114	12	10	3	6%	7%	3%
18	Vientiane Municipality	77	58	62	1%	1%	1%	295	282	321	7	5	2	2%	2%	1%
	TOTAL	1277	1439	1311	1%	1%	1%	3312	3825	3933	42	33	34	1%	1%	1%

Dropout rates across the IE project were very low over the 3 years of the data collection, averaging 1% for students with special needs and also for other children. Viewed by province there are few variations on these statistics – which tends to support the interpretation that they are likely to be reliable.

Secondary Drop Out

Secondary	Drop Outs			Drop Outs %			Drop Outs CSN			Drop Outs CSN %		
	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07	04-05	05-06	06-07
Vientiane Province	32	31	18	5%	4%	2	0	0	1	0%	0%	7%
Khammouan	56	74	103	3%	3%	5	0	1	1	0%	4%	5%
Savanakhet	159	120	160	7%	5%	6	1	0	2	5%	0%	8%
Champasack	21	17	21	4%	3%	4	0	0	1	0%	0%	13%
Vientiane Municipality	61	133	63	3%	6%	3	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL	329	375	365	4%	4%	5	1	1	5	1%	1%	5%

Drop out rates at secondary level for the period, were also very low but statistically not viable. The increase in the percentage of students with special needs dropping out from 1% in 2005 – 6, to 5% in 2006 – 7 seems to be a large increase, but when the actual number of students dropping out only increased from 1 to 5 and this was across 4 of the 5 provinces.

Impressions Drawn From Qualitative and Quantitative Data

A summary of the impact of the IE Project on school performance would seem to indicate that there are positive outcomes for students attending IE schools, particularly those students with disabilities and special needs. This publication does not present a detailed comparison with national data sets on the performance of all schools across the country.   However, it seems clear that many IE schools are presenting data indicating a high level of performance, which can be seen to be significant in a country which is trying to improve grade passing, retention and primary completion rates. The evaluation visits to schools explored the context for these positive outcomes. It was the view of the evaluation team, that where schools were being successful this could be attributed to a number of number of important factors. These factors were linked to the strategic expansion of the IE Project and the ways in which schools were supported through key initiatives:

- Strategic training covering key areas of teaching and school management designed to develop school quality.

- Monitoring and support through Phase 1 and 2 of the Project was regular, ensuring that every school received 4 visits a year from DIT, who in turn received 2 visits a year from PIT.

- It is also important to recognise that the schools chosen for the expansion of the project tended to be located in or near to towns, or close to roads to enable access to training and support. This meant that most project schools found it relatively easy to attract teachers to work in them. Additionally, as the Project did not engage with schools in very remote or inaccessible areas, it did not face more significant challenges to enrolment and completion of Primary School.

- During the evaluation visits to schools, over 100 lessons were observed. The judgements of the evaluation team indicated that most of the teachers observed working in IE schools, were motivated and enthusiastic about their work. They were found to be genuinely engaged in trying to support children with disabilities and they reported that the IE project had had a very significant and positive impact on their practice, the school and the community as a whole. The evidence from classroom observations indicates that many teachers were actively trying to move from a teacher centred pedagogy to a child centred approach. There was evidence of teachers experiencing success with initiatives such as the use of resources to support lessons, organising the students in groups and encouraging discussion, relating lessons to students own experiences and the real world. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section on the use of the 5 Point Star. However there is still a need

for more specific support and training. These needs are discussed in more detail later in this publication.

The Use of the 5 Point Star

The 5 Point star has been a significant component in IE training and reflects the aim of the Project to support the participation and achievement of all students through the introduction of child centred teaching methods. The observations of evaluators indicates that most teachers in the 26 schools are adopting elements of the 5 Point star, but only in a minority of cases are they adopting all 5 elements successfully. Even where all 5 elements are being adopted, schools still need to continue focusing on the development of more inclusive practices.

1. A range of different activities should take place during the lesson.
Most lessons observed were clearly planned to link with previous lessons and in some lessons teachers asked the students what they already knew about a subject. Some teachers began lessons with a song or movement activity, but most began by talking to the students. Most teachers began the lesson with the students sitting in rows and then moved to a group activity where the students turned to those in front or behind to form a group of 6 or 8 students. Often the purpose of this part of the lesson was not clearly linked to the grouping arrangements. For example, in a Lao language lesson it was not uncommon to see students sitting in a group reading the same piece of text repetitively. In a minority of lessons where teachers had either received training on group activities or they were reflective practitioners who had developed an activity based approach to group work for themselves, children were engaged in discussion and sharing, problem solving or an activity which was purposeful and supported by the group format.

Evaluators judged that in some lessons teaching was not stimulating or effective and that teachers were not actively seeking to engage all the learners in the lesson. However, in most lessons observed teachers were seen to pay particular attention to those who needed additional support or encouragement and when asked about their planning for the lesson were able to demonstrate that they were trying to think of different strategies that would help them make the lesson interesting for the children.

2. Use of resources
In most schools there was clear evidence that teachers had been engaged in making resources from local materials to support teaching and learning. In a minority of schools, these resources were displayed or stored in the Principal's office or a separate room and did not appear to be used in classrooms. In most schools resources were clearly on display in classrooms or were borrowed from a central store for classroom use. The use of materials to support the teaching of Lao language

was most evident. Schools had developed flashcards, pictures, words with missing letters, sentences with words which needed to be put in the correct order. In some schools, teachers were ensuring that particular students needing support had clear access to these resources. In most cases teachers held the resources and children took it in turns to come and use them.

A significant observation in nearly all schools was that the production of materials to support the teaching of mathematics was underdeveloped. This was particularly true in Grades 1 and 2 where students are most in need of concrete resources to support the acquisition of mathematical concepts. Where resources have been developed, it appears that teachers are not confident in using them to support mathematical activities other than for counting. The teaching of mathematics in all schools observed, mostly relied on teacher centred pedagogy and there is a clear need for the introduction of new teaching approaches which will support concept development through active learning.

3. Student Groupings
A variety of approaches to student groupings were observed. In most lessons teachers were using able or high ability students to support students with disabilities. Most teachers reported that they had been encouraged by District Pedagogical advisors to teach the children in groups for at least part of the lesson. However, as reported above, there was little evidence that many teachers had an understanding of how group work could be used to effectively support student learning. Most classes were still organised in rows. In some schools children were seated in groups. However, even in these schools there was not a clear understanding of why this was considered useful. In several schools, teachers reported that they had been told to organise the children and furniture in this way but were finding it difficult to know how to teach effectively. This is an interesting example of the ways in which attempts to change teaching pedagogy quickly and without attention to the teacher's

developmental learning process can often cause more problems than they solve. In some of these cases, children were observed sitting facing away from the board which they were being expected to copy writing from.

In one school, a boy who was a wheelchair user was seated on his own in front of the other children, who were organised in rows behind him. He was isolated socially and did not have opportunities to discuss or share his work with others. After the teacher re-organised the classroom with the support of project workers the boy was seated at a table where he could work alongside his friends. His table still needed to be adjusted as it was the wrong height for him to work at, but he was now fully participating alongside his peers. (see photographs on Page 16)

In one school observed, the teachers had had training in active learning techniques, which they had adapted and applied to their own practice. These can be seen in the case study in Chapter 5, 'The Inclusive Lesson'. In this school, teachers were observed adapting group work to suit the purpose of the lesson as required. They had developed a highly sophisticated approach which involved a range of teaching styles, designed to meet the needs of a variety of learning styles. Teachers were observed including music, drama, visual stimulus, auditory input, oracy, and kinaesthetic styles, all within one lesson on Lao Language. The groups were mixed and changed to keep the students active and engaged. Students with disabilities were always supported in a mixed ability group with at last one other student who was able to support and advise them.

Where teachers are trying to develop more inclusive practices, they are experimenting with groupings and trying to match classroom organisation to the needs of the children. This teacher has her classroom organised as a U shape to enable to move around and share visual teaching aids more effectively.

4. Questioning Styles

In most lessons observed teachers were using at least two forms of questions. The most common questions were general ones about the main learning points of the lesson which invited responses from all students. These were often judged to be ineffective in ensuring the engagement and participation of all students, as those students who were loudest or most enthusiastic were observed to be chosen to respond. Most teachers also asked specific questions related to teaching points as the lesson progressed and these were mostly directed to the class as a whole. These questions were often closed questions with a set answer.

In some lessons, particularly those where teachers were starting to think about ways in which they could make group work more active and participatory, teachers were beginning to experiment with questioning styles, introducing more open ended questions, questions where children were given time to think and discuss and questions which encouraged problem solving. In a minority of lessons, teachers were beginning to experiment with specific question and activity strategies such as asking students to discuss an open ended question in pairs with a short set time limit before taking responses from a variety of pairs. Also in a minority of lessons, questioning styles were observed which involved asking specific children different questions relevant to their different levels of ability but on the same subject.

5. Relevance to real life or learners own experiences

In most lessons observed teachers provided some evidence that they were aware of linking learning to students' experiences, prior learning or real life. In some examples, notably in 'The World Around Us' teachers took the children out of the classroom to discuss the environment of the school, nature or local settings. In a minority of lessons teachers were extending this approach to construct lesson content based on children's existing knowledge or interests. These more developed lessons tended to be in schools where there was close attention paid to developing more inclusive practices.

In the next section of this chapter, the lessons presented reflect the ways in which child centred practice can be supported and developed.

Developing Child Centred Practices

If Lao is to develop child centred practice in all schools, it is important to understand how this can be supported. The IE Project Evaluation Team found that where schools are developing a learner friendly environment there tended to be certain key factors:

***Motivated and enthusiastic teachers**,* who usually lived in the local community. The attitude of the teachers was fundamental in ensuring that inclusive child centred practice was being developed in the school. The findings of the PET were

that this was often more evident in areas where teachers are part of the local community. In some urban areas and particularly nearer to larger towns and cities such as Vientiane and Luang Prabang, the project team found that they were more likely to observe teachers who were not engaging with students and appeared to be lacking in motivation and enthusiasm. There may be a range of reasons for this, but possibly where a teacher lives in the same community as the school they work in, this helps them to be more committed to the development of that community.

The evaluation teams visited some schools which were amongst the oldest and most experienced in the project, near or in urban settings, and, as described above, found examples of teachers who did not appear motivated or engaged with the children they were teaching. In these schools the team often found that there was a lack of clear leadership from the Principal and DIT. In one case, the teachers had decided that they did not wish the children to be organised in groups anymore and had returned to teacher centred pedagogy with the children sitting in rows and an emphasis on learning from the blackboard by rote. It would be hoped that in cases such as this the Principal and / or DIT should challenge this change in practice and support the teachers in adapting to the child centred pedagogy so that they felt more comfortable with it. It might be assumed that the schools which are most experienced in the IE project will show evidence of better quality education and therefore this raises some challenging questions about the impact of the project:

- Are more experienced schools in need of training to refresh inclusive ideals and learner centred approaches?

- Does there need to be a new training and development programme designed to develop more effective school leaders?

- Is the guidance given to District and Provincial Implementation teams regarding the ways in which they challenge exclusionary practices clear enough?

In other schools, in districts which were amongst the poorest in the country, where they had very little resources or income from the local community, the evaluation team met teachers who were engaged in working closely with the students, who were making resources out of local materials in their own time and who were enthusiastic in embracing changes to teacher centred pedagogies. One teacher in a mountainous and economically poor area of Luang Prabang Province told us:

> 'It is very obvious to us that these new ways of working with children are more effective. By getting the children to sit in groups we find that they are much more excited about their learning because they can talk to each other and help each other. We have also found that it is easier for us to sit with

groups of children and help them. This has been particularly helpful for the children with disabilities – it gives us more time to help them too.'

A Principal with good understanding of learner friendly practice who offered regular support and monitoring to teachers. Where there was a Principal who was committed to the values and the child centred approach of the Project, the valuation team also tended to find schools that were developing more inclusive practices and that all students were more likely to be achieving in school. This was of particular interest to the Project Team because it re-enforced what was known about the development of inclusive schools internationally. Much of the research into inclusive schools has noted that strong inclusive leadership is critical in supporting and encouraging teachers and the wider school community in developing more inclusive practice (Corbett, 2001; Dyson, Howes and Roberts, 2002; Kugelmass, 2004) Based on their visits to the 26 schools, the evaluation team found that effective Principals were likely to:

- Have attended IE training and refresher courses

- Maintain close collaborative working partnerships with DIT pedagogical advisors

- Work closely with other local Principals to learn from and support each others' schools

- Observe the practice of teachers in their schools on regular basis, offering guidance, support and encouragement

- Encourage teachers in their school to work closely together – sometimes by teaching classes to enable a teacher to observe or work with another teacher; by making sure that the teachers met regularly with each other to discuss ongoing work, plan together and make resources.

- Encourage teachers to be creative and develop their own ideas and approaches to teaching.

- Have a strong and collaborative working relationship with the local community and parents.

- The most effective Principals were not necessarily older or more experienced than the teachers , but in all cases they had a very solid and deeply rooted understanding of effective teaching and had high expectations both of the teachers themselves and of what they wanted the students to achieve.

Regular monitoring and support from District Advisory Implementation Teams
who also had a good understanding of child centred learning. Where there were
motivated and enthusiastic DITs there were more likely to be more effective IE
schools. The Project team found that it was very difficult for a school to develop
inclusively, even where they were motivated, where there was not effective local
advisory support. There were different examples of effective local DIT support but
the essential features seemed to be:

- *Regular visits to schools* which focused on the teaching and learning taking
  place in the classrooms. The most effective pedagogical advisors seemed to
  be those who knew the schools they were supporting very well, who visited
  teachers on a regular basis and were able to offer clear guidance and support
  through practical suggestions. Often these advisors were recently teachers
  themselves or had maintained their teaching expertise and understood the
  challenges of teaching in Lao classrooms.

- *A collaborative relationship with schools.* In the best examples of practice, the
  project team identified local advisors who were able to take on the role of
  a 'critical friend' (Swaffield, 2002) to schools. This is an important way of
  thinking about the role of the advisor because at their most effective they are
  working in such a way that they balance support and challenge. The school
  feel supported because the advisor understands, encourages and advises them
  practically; but also challenged because the advisor critiques their practice
  and encourages them to reflect on ways in which it can be improved, or
  identifies areas where students are not participating or achieving in school.

- *Developing local learning networks between schools.* In several examples, DITs
  have been able to support and encourage schools in meeting regularly with
  other schools – sometimes to discuss and share practice, sometimes to
  observe different approaches to teaching. This is deeply significant for the
  development of a child centred approach across all schools in Lao PDR. A
  key finding of the IE Project, re-enforced by the evaluation, has been that
  teachers often want to change their practice towards a more child centred
  approach but are unsure how to. Training sessions are not necessarily the
  answer to this because they do not offer teachers the opportunity to see
  Inclusive practice in a real classroom. The Project has found that teachers
  need to be given the opportunities to visit other schools, observe different
  teachers and, most importantly, discuss with those teachers how they are
  planning and delivering the curriculum. This enables them to return to their
  own schools and adapt ideas they have seen elsewhere and try different
  approaches in their own classrooms. It is important to note that the Project
  is not advocating 'copying' practice or 'transferring' supposed good practice
  from school to school. Schools, teachers and school communities are all very

different and what works in one school may not necessarily work in another. What does seem to work is to enable teachers to develop their practice through the creation of 'interruptions' (Ainscow, 1999) in their thinking and practice, such as visiting other schools, encouraging them to think about what they have seen in the context of their own work and using this as a stimulus to extend and develop their own practice.

Teachers who had received in-service training in IE / child friendly approaches within the last 3 or 4 years. Schools where teachers had received IE training or refresher courses in IE relatively recently were more likely to be aware of developments in child centred teaching pedagogy. They were also more likely to be aware of guidance against using corporal punishments and the implications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Interviews with children indicated that corporal punishment was only in use in 4 of the schools visited. However, this cannot be taken as evidence that it did not take place in other schools visited, since children may have been reluctant to speak out. However, where children discussed the reasons they enjoyed school, they would often identify the teachers kindness and the lack of corporal punishment as an important factor in their positive experience.

Although the IE 5 Point Star approach had been used in IE training for most of the life of the Project, in later years, trainers had adapted and improved the model to include more practical detail on ways to make the classroom more learner friendly. This process had been supported by the publication of UNESCO's 'Embracing Diversity Toolkit' (UNESCO 2005). Although the content of the UNESCO toolkit had not been directly included in the IE training materials, it had influenced the ways in which IE trainers had developed their course content. The nine schools involved in the IE Project School Improvement and Self Evaluation Project between 2005 and 2007, were also given copies of key booklets from the UNESCO toolkit to support their practice in school.

Good communication / partnership working with the local community. Schools which had a close and collaborative working relationship with their local community and parents were far more likely to be successful in developing learner friendly environments. The benefit of working closely with parents and village is that it can support the development of the school more effectively - parents and community can raise funds to provide equipment and improve buildings and the environment; parents can support the learning of students at home and also ensure regular attendance and punctuality. Where there are concerns about vulnerable groups of students and families, the local community can support the school in trying to ensure that children are participating and achieving in school.   Some examples of this that were noted were:

- A student who was physically impaired because of Polio and could not walk to school received help from different members of the local community to support him in getting to school each morning;

- A very poor family where a grandmother was supporting her two grandsons, whose parents died, were supported with gifts of rice and food from the community to ensure that both boys attended school regularly instead of helping in the fields during school time;

- A farmer who was not allowing his daughter to attend school, was supported and encouraged by members of the local community to understand that she was entitled to attend in the same way as other children.

  In many schools, the local community is responsible for many aspects of the schools development and environment – maintaining grounds, providing funds for books, new classrooms, classroom furniture and blackboards, etc. Out of the 26 schools visited 18 were judged to be actively working to develop more learner friendly environments and in all of these cases, they also had strong relationships with parents and community.

Ensuring the Participation and Achievement of children with disabilities.

The overall finding of the IE evaluation, was that children with mild and moderate disabilities are mostly being successfully included in their local schools; their attendance is good and grade repetition has dropped significantly following MoE guidance on this issue. Teachers are actively supporting students mostly through key strategies that they have been taught in IE training:

- Actively giving extra attention in class to children with disabilities. The most effective support for students with disabilities was observed where teachers were actively sitting with or working with students individually or in a group. Many students need help and support from the teacher to practice certain skills or just to understand the concepts which are being taught.

- Ensuring that they are sitting with other children who can support them in their work. It is not possible or beneficial for teachers to sit with or support students with disabilities all the time. It is more beneficial for students to support each other with their learning. Based on observations from the evaluation visits, in one school judged to have highly developed inclusive practice, students move around the classroom sitting with different groups and partners several times during a school day. This means that they have

experience of working with different groups and abilities across a range of curriculum areas. In some schools children with special needs and disabilities are always grouped together which can lead to these students viewing themselves as unsuccessful because they always sit with other students who are struggling to understand the lesson. Enabling children to experience a range of groups and friends supports the development of positive self-esteem, which is a key component of being a successful learner.

- Wherever possible using resources to support student's learning; usually comprising of stones or chopsticks for maths, pictures and flashcards for Lao language. The IE Project has provided schools with a small amount of money each year, approximately $50, to support the production of resources using local materials. The most effective IE schools have organised themselves, and often members of the local community, to produce these materials on a regular basis. In schools which are developing learner friendly classrooms, these resources are being actively used in the classroom to support children's learning.

- Collaborating and communicating with parents to encourage them to support and work with children at home. Many students need support at home – in effective IE schools the teachers, parents and community have worked closely together to develop innovative approaches to supporting learning out of school. One example is the homework club described in the previous chapter; other examples include the use of schemes where older students or siblings are asked to work with younger children after school to support their literacy or maths; in other examples, young adults are paid a small wage by the community to support children's learning at home and after school. In 2 schools, community and school had begun discussions with the DIT to consider the use of these young adults as paid Teaching Assistants in the classroom, working to support children with their learning. There are a number of complex issues that need to be considered when developing the role of Teaching Assistants. However, when they are used effectively, directed by the teacher and given appropriate support and training, the role can have a significant and positive impact on the achievement of all pupils in the classroom, as well as those with more complex needs.

Challenges

There are also some significant challenges regarding the education of students with disabilities which still need to be addressed in Lao PDR.

- Teachers are experiencing particular challenges in developing specific approaches to individual difficulties – e.g. providing differentiated activities for children; developing more complex classroom management strategies to keep children engaged and interested in their work. A significant number of children were identified as having disabilities by the schools. However, many only needed very basic medical intervention to support them e.g. short-sightedness, squints, minor hearing impairments, minor physical impairments. This indicates the need for health and education services to develop collaborative working practices to ensure these children are identified early and given access to the services they require at a young age. Children with Visual Impairments are being taught braille in Primary Schools in Vientiane and Savannakhet and Secondary School in Vientiane. However, there needs to be more emphasis on developing the skills of teachers to provide an appropriately resourced and differentiated curriculum for these students, particularly in subjects such as mathematics and science. In addition older students with visual impairment reported that they were loosing motivation to study at Upper Secondary School because of difficulty in accessing the curriculum. There was also little evidence that children with moderate or severe hearing impairments were being adequately supported in mainstreams settings.

- There is a clear need for the development of specialist services / advisory teachers who can support schools in providing appropriate curriculum activities for children with specific disabilities. This would require the development of highly specialised and trained Advisors , initially at central level, who are skilled in the key areas of HI, VI, Communication and Interaction Difficulties, Physical Disabilities, Learning Difficulties and Emotional Difficulties.

- It was interesting to note that the Project Evaluation Team saw little evidence of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), one of the most significant groups of students with disabilities internationally. This may be because team members were not trained to identify the condition. In 20 schools visited by the Project consultant, only three students were identified who might possibly be judged to have ASD. When these students have been discussed with schools or medical staff, they have been described as having 'mental problems'. The behaviour of all three students was very challenging and it may be that significant numbers of students with ASD are among those

not attending school and whose true numbers still remain hidden. This is discussed in more detailed in Chapter 6.

• Students with more complex needs are not currently catered for within the IE Project. The number of this group of prospective students is not currently known but it is clear that there are a significant number of students with profound and multiple disabilities who are not currently in school or receiving educational or medical support. There needs to be an accurate survey of these children and young people in order to develop a clear and effective strategy for meeting all their needs.

• Pre-Service and In-Service training are key areas which need to be strategically developed in order to ensure that all students with disabilities are enabled to participate and achieve in Lao schools. Of fundamental importance will be the structure of pre-service training. As long as Inclusive Education training is provided as a discreet module, student teachers will find it difficult to understand that Quality Education means the education of all students. Inclusive values and teaching strategies need to be embedded across the complete pre-service curriculum in order to support student teachers in developing their understanding of the ways in which learner centred classrooms can be created. This can only be achieved if Teacher Trainers are supported in developing their understanding of this. One finding of the IE evaluation was that the IE trainers in the pre-service institutions felt that they themselves did not have the experience or the expertise to effectively teach student teachers how to develop a child centred pedagogy. As has been already noted, this is not simply a case of 'training' the trainers ; opportunities need to be created for trainers, in the same way as for teachers, to visit different schools and observe a range of approaches and styles of child centred teaching.

Other Vulnerable Groups

Girls were found to be achieving as well as boys across all IE schools. Their rates of attendance, enrolment, completion and drop out were all of a similar level to boys. This is likely to be linked to factors already identified and particularly the fact that no project schools were in very remote areas, where the enrolment of girls can be a greater challenge.

The quality of the data collected in relation to children from ethnic groups and poor families was less reliable, as described above. The evaluation team found that schools experienced challenges in differentiating between different classifications for ethnicity and there was evidence of miscalculations and errors in some of the data presented by schools. Schools were also confused about the classification of poor families, often using a comparison with other families in the local area to establish their own criteria for 'poor' rather than using national criteria. For these reasons, quantitative data relating to these groups is not cited here. The summary of findings below relates to the qualitative enquiry undertaken during the evaluation visits and represents the overall impressions of the evaluation team.

Across the IE Project, the view of the evaluation team, in relation to ethnicity, was that students from ethnic groups are achieving in IE schools where there is evidence of child centred practices. The main challenge to ensuring the participation and achievement of these students was found to be where students did not speak or understand Lao, and there were no arrangements in place to use other students as a resource to support second language acquisition. It was also found that where teachers lived in the local community, they were more likely to speak a range of languages including the local language and Lao. This meant that they were able to support students whose first language was not Lao.

In visits to schools where the evaluation team judged that there were children from poor families, the team's findings were similar to those for ethnic groups; where there was evidence of schools developing more participatory approaches to lessons and school generally, children from poor families were more likely to be making progress. The main challenge to ensuring the participation and achievement of these students was found to be where schools were not working in close collaboration with local community to ensure that poor families were encouraged and supported in sending their children to school regularly. The greatest barrier for these children often appeared to be linked with their families economic needs causing irregular attendance in school.

In the next part of the book a series of case studies are presented which enable some of the issues raised here to be explored in more detail.

5

Case Studies

Inclusive Case Studies

This section of the book features case studies of different aspects of the IE Project which illustrate some of the lessons learned and challenges faced.

The Inclusive Lesson

The curriculum in Lao PDR is supported by a text book for core subjects in each Grade. One of the challenges for the IE Project has been to find ways to support teachers to be confident enough to experiment with the lessons in the text books and develop new ways of teaching the content to make it more child centred and relevant to all the students in the class. In this case study we see how a Grade 3 teacher, with the support of her Principal and IE project staff, has taken a reading lesson and de-constructed it in order to make a new lesson which is far more stimulating for all learners.

The original lesson is Lesson 28 in Grade 3, Lao Language Text Book and is the story of the Tiger and the animals. The other animals become tired of the Tiger because he keeps attacking and eating them. They get together and make a plan to put a stop to his bad behaviour. They ambush him and kill him. This lesson can be observed being taught in many Grade 3 classes around the country. It is normal to observe rote learning, and a teacher centred approach with children reading aloud together or taking it in turns to read it aloud in a group. The teacher in this case study feels that the traditional styles of teaching are not very effective. In the lesson presented, the teacher is trying to respond to the different aspects of the IE 5 Point Star. She is aware that children learn in different ways and so is trying to support them in learning to read by developing their understanding of the complexity and depth of the story through a number of different activities and approaches. She combines oral / auditory activities, with movement / kinaesthetic activity and visual approaches. It is also worth noting that no expensive or externally produced resources were needed to teach this lesson.

Ms. Chansamay qualified as a teacher in 2004 and has been teaching at Bhoung Phao Primary School since 2006.

The teacher begins the lesson by singing a song with the children linked to the theme of the lesson – in this case they are singing a Lao folk tune about wild animals. The children enjoy this - they are engaged, all are participating in the lesson and they are introduced to the main theme in a fun and exciting way.

The teacher then reminds the children that their homework was to read or listen to a parent or sibling read to them, the story of the Tiger and the Animals. She then re-tells the story with children volunteering to tell different parts to the class. Oral telling of the story helps children to become familiar with the different aspects and characters. As they tell it aloud themselves they develop their confidence in using language.

The children then take it turns to act out the story several times with the teacher making sure that a diverse range of children have a turn. Acting out the story is a different way of experiencing it – it allows children who may not have quite understood the correct order of events a chance to experience it again. It also allows children with kinaesthetic learning styles the opportunity to explore its complexity.

The teacher then asks the children to move to different tables. She does this several times a day – sometimes using games to mix them up. In this way she can ensure that the children do not become bored sitting with the same group of children; it also ensures that the groups are mixed ability so that children can support each other with their learning. It helps to promote positive self esteem as the children are all encouraged to see themselves as successful learners.

The children are asked to choose a character from the story and to draw it from their imagination. This encourages the children to be creative and to 'enter into the story' themselves. It builds on the experience of acting the story out and helps it come alive for the children. The teacher is engaging with the children paying special attention to those who she knows will need extra encouragement and support.

The teacher encourages the children to share ideas and support each other. She re-tells parts of the story to help them decide which animal they want to draw. There is much changing of minds as the children make their choices. The teacher does not attempt to tell the children what they should do – allowing them to choose, supporting those who are unsure, helps to ensure they feel motivated as they have ownership of their work.

The teacher pays special attention to children who she knows need extra support or encouragement. She has arranged the groups for this activity so that a child with a learning disability is on a table with some confident and able learners. They are a resource which she knows can support him in the activity. The school has worked hard with all children to develop their understanding of the importance to respect and support each other.

The teacher has a picture resource which she brings to support this student with his drawing. She knows he is lacking in confidence in drawing – as are several of the children – because he doesn't get many opportunities to practice outside of school. He needs help with his pencil grip and also to be able to 'imagine' what the animal he wants to draw looks like. She has prepared some pictures for him to look at. The teacher also encourages him to look at the pictures of other children – they in turn encourage and praise his efforts.

Once they have drawn their animal, the children are asked to write part of the story in their own words. This was the first time these children had been asked to do this and both the Principal and class teacher were very interested to see what would happen. The children were excited to be able to make choices about their learning in this way and this led to increased motivation and a higher standard of work than would normally be expected. The children were very proud of their achievements and enjoyed sharing their work with each other.

The lesson finished with children reading out parts of their story to children in their group and to the rest of the class. They were all very enthusiastic to be allowed to do this – evidence that they were motivated and felt that they had achieved in the lesson. The teacher encouraged the children to praise each other and she gave positive and constructive feedback to each child. The children reported on how they had enjoyed the lesson: 'We love this lesson' and 'Lao language used to be boring but now it's our favourite' they told the Project team.

The lesson finishes with another song, all the children are participating and showing how much they have enjoyed the lesson.

Afterwards the teacher commented on the lesson. 'It didn't take too long to prepare – about the same as usual. I made sure the children knew they had to read the story for homework; some of them I asked their parents or older brothers and sisters to read it to them. Then I wrote a brief plan of the different activities with the Principal and made sure I had the resources I needed – some paper, pencils and a few pictures of animals in the story. I notice that the children learn so much more when we work like this and also I enjoy it too. It is so exciting to work in this way – it makes me feel very creative and I find I can develop different ideas and new ways of teaching the lessons. I am lucky because the Principal and the District Pedagogical Advisor support me to work in this way – also we share ideas with each other as teachers. The actual lesson is exactly the same length as a normal Lao language lesson but look at how much work the children did – and the quality of it..'

Where teachers in the IE Project are beginning to work in a more learner friendly style, they are finding the same results occur. Children are enjoying lessons,

are motivated and achieving more highly. Children with disabilities and other vulnerable learners are supported through a range of different strategies none of which segregate the child or cause low self esteem. The teachers are enjoying teaching and the children are enjoying learning.

Ms Phoukhieng Nitsavatong, Principal of Bhoung Phao Primary School since 1995
Mr Thong Yonh Chandala, Deputy Director Thoulakhom District Education Service since 2000
Ms Chansamay Vanthanouvong, Grade 3 Teacher, Bhoung Phao Primary School; qualified in 2004

Inclusive practice in school is developed most effectively through close collaboration between teachers, Principals and Advisors. The Education Service Advisors in Thoulakhom District, Vientiane Province work closely with teachers and schools to support and challenge them., enabling the development of creative and innovative lessons such as the one illustrated here.

The Inclusive Principal

This Case Study focuses on the Principal of an IE School and explores the ways in which she supports the development of more inclusive practices in her school.

Ms. Phoukhieng is the Principal of Bhoung Phao Primary School, in Toulakhom District, Vientiane Province. Bhoung Phao was one of the first IE schools in Phase 1 of the Project, becoming an IE School in 1996.

The school has become well known for its attempts to provide a high quality education for all students through child centred teaching methods. The role of the Principal in providing strong and clear inclusive leadership is vital to the successful development of the school. In examining the way in which Ms. Phoukhieng works we can gain valuable insights into the requirements for an inclusive school leader.

Ms. Phoukhieng has a clear vision and understanding of Inclusion and what she wants to see in her school: 'For me the most important things are to know that every child in our local community is coming to school – they are all enrolled here and once we have them we make sure they stay; nobody drops out. We have worked closely with our local community to ensure this – we have children with disabilities, children from poor families and equal numbers of boys and girls. Sometimes we have to spend time convincing parents of the importance of school so that they make sure their children attend every day.
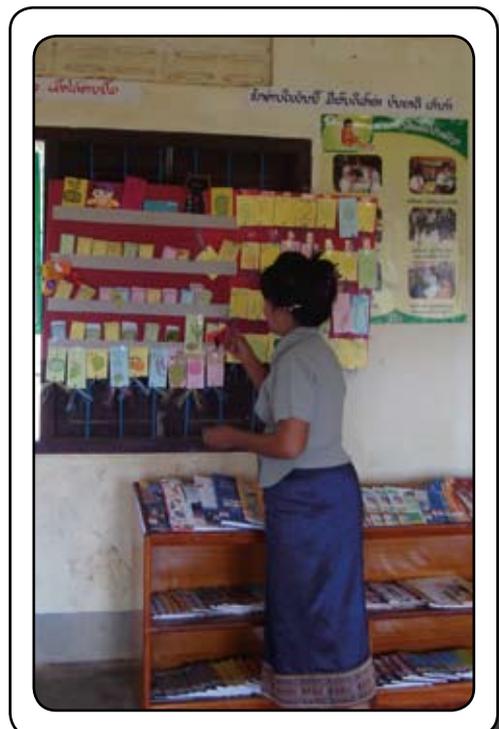
'In fact, working closely with the local community is one of the most important parts of being an Inclusive school. Enrolment is only a part of it. We also collaborate with parents and community to discuss how well they think the school is doing. We were a part of the School Improvement and Self Evaluation Project and learned a great deal about the importance of gaining the views of everybody in identifying what areas were strong and what needed to be improved. For us its a year round process – self evaluation is not something that happens once a year – we need to work closely with everyone all the time to make sure we are making school as enjoyable and as effective for all children as we possibly can.'

Ms. Phoukhieng has a very broad view of inclusion and sees it as putting the child at the centre of the learning process. 'All children are different – so teachers have to plan for that when they think about lessons. We aim to make our lessons as active as possible – the children, sing, dance, act out stories and make their own books and resources for learning. We have discovered that child centred classrooms are much more effective than the traditional style.'

Ms. Phoukhieng supports her teachers to develop their practice by working alongside them. She watches their teaching and makes suggestions on things they might want to try and change. All the teachers are encouraged to plan together and each classroom is designed so that it enables a combination of group work and space for movement. 'As Principal I see it as my role to support the teachers in developing their skills – but I feel that the best way forward for this is to work together as a team. So, we plan together, sharing ideas, making resources and discussing issues in the school. Through the school improvement project we learnt about reflective practice – where we think about our teaching and ways in which we would like to change it. As an inclusive school this means that we are always trying to make sure that all our children are happy and fully participating in school. We believe that if this is the case then they will learn more effectively.'

'We have several children with disabilities and we have learnt that the most important thing for these children is that the teacher works actively with them. The IE Project has supported us in thinking about new ways of working but it is always the role of the teacher which is important. In our classrooms you will see teachers sitting at tables with groups of children working with them, explaining things, showing them *how* to do their work. We also make sure the children work in many different groups all the time – they move around a lot because we don't want them to get bored but also to give them a chance to work with different children.'
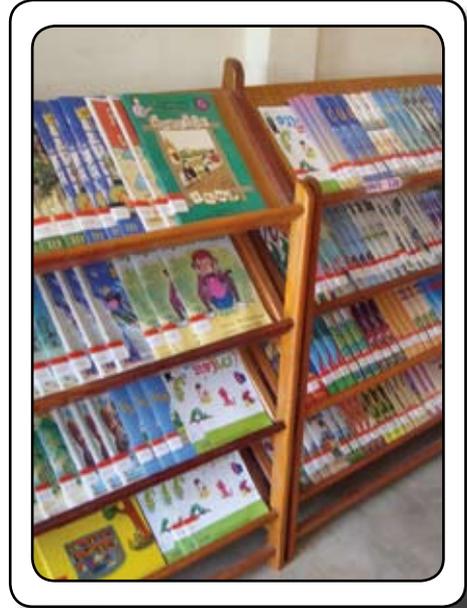
'We have been lucky here, to get the opportunities to visit different schools and discuss teaching approaches with so many different professionals. We have learnt that you cannot watch somebody teach in another school and then take it back to your school to try and copy them. It doesn't seem to work that way. You need to adapt ideas so that they work in your school and in your classroom'

All children are different and so are teachers and schools. If you want to be a really Inclusive School, then you need to understand that. We all have to accept that children are different and learn in different ways. To include everybody – make sure they all enjoy and do well at school – then we need to make sure our lessons are fun, lively, full of activity and that they are different every day. That way nobody gets bored – not the children, the teacher or the Principal! I have learnt that we are on a journey as a school –one that may not ever finish. We are journeying towards being a better school and that journey happens every day. It means we are always trying to improve our collaboration with parents – helping them to help their children at home; we are always trying to make our lessons better, always trying to make our school more attractive. I want to see all my children happy in school, all the time – so they see this as their second home!'

Four Included Students

These Case Studies focuses on the experiences of four students. Their stories highlight the successes of the IE Project, as well as the challenges it has faced in developing comprehensive quality educational experiences for all children.

Lili

Lili, is 6 years old and lives in a northern province of Lao PDR. This case study was written with her mother.

'Lili is a beautiful girl – she is so happy all the time. She loves to sing and dance around; tries to play the guitar, and loves drawing. Lili really likes stories and she has a fantastic memory – she can remember all the characters and details from stories she has heard or watched on TV. Lili has many friends around where we live and is always outside playing with them – she is quite independent and will confidently walk off down the road to find her friends.'

'When Lili was born there was a problem and she was deprived of oxygen for some time. It seems likely that this has caused her to have some difficulties as she has developed. Lili was quite delayed in her development – she had quite weak arms and legs and it took her a long time to learn to move around. She used to slide on her bottom rather than crawl and she didn't start standing until she was 4 years old. Lili was also quite late talking – not until she was 3. We took her to hospitals in Laos and in Thailand. The Doctors didn't seem to know what was wrong. However, now we are fairly sure she has Cerebral Palsy. It has mostly affected her movement – she is weaker in her left leg, and sometimes finds it hard to coordinate her movements. Lili also has poor muscle tone around her mouth and in her arms and hands. This has affected her speech and her writing and drawing because it's hard for her to grip the pencil.'

'People in the community have had a mixed reaction to Lili. When she was younger I used to take her around and people would look at her as if she was strange and make comments about her. I would feel very upset and also angry. I cannot understand the attitude of some people in our country – they treat the disabled as if they are different and to be avoided. Actually, I think it is people who cause the problems – they disable children like Lili with their negative attitudes and the things they do to make life more difficult for people like her. We should be helping and supporting children and adults who are experiencing difficulty – not being negative or trying to pretend they don't exist.'

'Lili started school at the age of 2 years and 8 months. We were really lucky because the local IE Pre-School was happy to enrol her. They have been so supportive. Her teacher Ms. Chanhpeng has helped her a lot. For the first 18 months she couldn't

walk but they encouraged her and it made a big difference. I think their positive attitude has been so important for Lili – she loves going to school. It is somewhere she feels at home and where she is loved and understood. Lili has so many friends at school and loves taking toys and games to share with the other children. For the future I am hoping that her Primary school and her secondary school have the same positive attitude as the teachers at her Pre School. I think that is what makes Inclusion work - everyone wanting to work together to make things change so that children like Lili can be successful.'

The Principle of Lili's school, Ms. Somchanh Tamdala talks about the schools experience of working with her: 'Lili is very active at school. She is sociable, loves the other children and is loved by them. She is a very warm hearted and generous child. I think some people might look at Lili and think she may have learning problems because it is not easy for her to speak clearly. Of course this is not correct. She is very clever and understands very well – but she does speak slowly and we need to be patient to listen to her. The other children also have to be patient – but what a useful lesson this is for them. Going to school with someone like Lili is a great opportunity for these children – they are learning so much from her but also it will help to reduce negative attitudes to disability in our community. I don't think they see Lili as different – she is just their friend. After all, everyone is different – nobody is the same. In September of 2009, Lili will start Grade 1 in the local Primary School which is also an IE School. We will work very closely with them to make sure Lili's transition is smooth. We are arranging for teachers to visit here and meet Lili, observe her in class, discuss with her mother and teacher how best to meet her needs. Working collaboratively and in partnership together, we can all make sure that children such as Lili can be as successful as anybody else in school.'

Nina

Nina is 13 years old. She lives in a semi remote area in a northern province of Lao PDR. Nina had a normal early childhood – she reached all her health milestones at an appropriate age until she was 18 months old. Then she became sick and developed a very high temperature. There was neither a Doctor available nor any medication. Her mother could do nothing to reduce her fever and Nina began to experience very violent convulsions. This left her with a physical impairment affecting her mobility but it also left her profoundly deaf. Nina was not able to attend school until she was 10 years old, when the local Primary School became part of the IE Project.

Nina loves school. Her mother told the Project team that every morning she wakes up and packs her bag ready for school. She is so excited she cannot wait to go. At school she has many friends and is very popular – other children say she is very kind and warm hearted. Nina's teacher says that she tries her hardest in school and seems to want to learn everything she can.

Unfortunately Nina is only able to communicate with those around her through gestures and some sounds. She has not been taught sign language and it is questionable whether she has been able to develop any internal understanding of formal language – she cannot read or recognise numbers very effectively. Nina and her mother communicate by pointing. Nina's teacher feels very anxious that she cannot teach Nina more effectively and feels she needs more support.

Nina is a good example of a child who has benefitted from the IE Project – she is in school and enjoying her experience there; she has friends and is motivated to learn.

However, she is also a good example of the challenges faced by schools in the IE Project. The teachers in Nina's school do not have enough experience or training to support Nina as well as they wish to. Nina was not categorised by the school as having a Hearing Impairment, but as having a Physical Impairment. Perhaps because of this, local advisors and health officials were not fully aware of her needs. She has now been identified as a priority referral to the new Special School for Hearing Impaired

Children in Luang Prabang and will be taught sign language. Nina is a child who needs to be with her friends attending her local school. However, she also needs specialised support to learn sign language; her teachers needs specialised advice on inclusive ways of ensuring her full participation and achievement. It is possible to achieve this without segregating Nina – she should not need to permanently attend a special school - however, currently the only way in which she will be able to access the specialised teaching she needs is to live as a boarder at the Luang Prabang Special School . It is an indicator of the limitations of the Project that many children like Nina all over the country are not receiving the support they need. Her mother told the Project Team: 'I am so grateful that the IE Project has a school here and Nina can go to school now. She loves it and that is a great relief to me. But I am still very worried about her because until she can understand and communicate, how can she learn properly – and she really wants to learn like the other children.'

Lao PDR needs to strategically address at a policy level the provision available for students such as Nina. There are too many children with diverse needs to be educated in Special Schools. It is also highly questionable whether special school would be the most effective provision for them. The provision for students with hearing impairment at the special school in Vientiane can only accommodate 70 students and offers a curriculum up until the end of Lower Secondary School.   In Luang Prabang and Savannakhet the Special Schools have similar limited capacity. Beyond this, there is only vocational training available for the hearing impaired. Additionally, the special schools report that many students face enormous challenges when they return to their home communities because there is nobody there who can communicate in sign language, leaving them socially isolated.

What is needed is to develop highly trained teachers, advisory teams and well resourced schools which can identify the individual needs of children such as Nina at an early age and ensure that they and their families receive the appropriate support and provision from an early age. Developing community use of sign language is possible but it needs to be developed strategically.

The first steps towards this are already in place but it is a slow process in Lao PDR. The next step needs to be the training of advisory teachers specialising in the most common forms of disability, such as Hearing, who can be based in specialised resourced centres across the country and can actively support schools in identifying students who need support and providing training to improve the quality of educational experience in schools.

Valita

This Case Study was written by Valita Khamdaranikon, a student at Phiavath Secondary School in Vientiane.
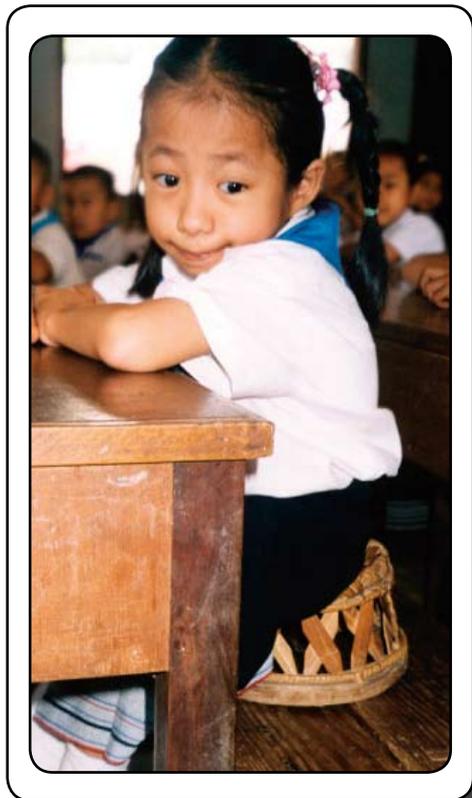
My name is Valita and I am 18 years old. I live in Vientiane with my Grandmother, Aunt and Uncle. I am the youngest of three sisters.

I was born with Brittle Bones or Osteogenesis Imperfecta. It means that there is a problem with one of the proteins that supports my bone structure so my bones are a little weaker and more fragile than they should be. It has meant that I have been able to do all the things other children and young people can do, but I have sometimes had to find different ways to do them!

My family tried to do many things to help me with the hope that one day I might be normal like the other children. For example, they wanted me to have an operation but my blood is a special group – 'O' which is very difficult to find in Laos, so finally they decided not to operate on me.

This is a picture of me at Primary School in March 2001. You can see I had a special seat to sit on so that I could be at the right height for the desk. I loved going to primary school – my teachers helped me learn so much. I had lots of friends and made really good progress there.

Valita's Grandmother talks about Valita starting school: 'In 1996 when Valita was 6, I heard that there was a primary school near where we lived that had started to enrol disabled children. I carried Valita there myself and asked the Principal if she could start school the same as the other children. They said she could and that they would try their best to support her. I am so pleased I did that, because other people were advising me not to send Valita to school – but look at her now! She has almost completed Upper Secondary School. I will always support Valita to achieve what she wants to do in her life and I would ask the government to make sure that they don't put limits in the way of the disabled. I believe they have the same right to a good life as anyone else and it's our job as parents, teachers and the government to make sure that we enable that to happen for every disabled person in our country.'

This is me with my friend Phetmany. She is one of a close group of friends who I spend a lot of time with at school. I can stand and move around independently but I use a wheelchair as well. My friends are fantastic and they help me a lot – like for example they carry me up or down the stairs to lessons which are on the first floor. Actually I think the school could organise the lessons differently because at the moment they have different year groups on different floors. But I think to re-arrange things to accommodate me would mean changing the whole system so I don't mind too much. I do feel quite sorry for my friends though because it is getting harder to carry me as I get older. For me there are other issues too – I need someone to take me to the toilet which I feel embarrassed about. I just feel like I shouldn't have to bother my friends and disturb them to help me.

Phetmany says: *'I am 15 years old and in the same class as Valita. I like being her friend and we have a good time together. Valita is really good fun to be with – in our group we play games, chat just the same as any other teenagers. We know that there are some things that Valita finds it harder to do – we know her difficulties, but it's ok because we can help her. We know she feels embarrassed that we need to help her – she feels like she is bothering us, but really we don't mind at all. But we do feel, as Valita's friends that it shouldn't be this way. Valita has the same right as me to be able to go to school or university and to get into classrooms and toilets. The government should try and make sure that disabled people can get to do the same things as everyone else without friends and family having to help them. Valita is happiest to be independent and at the moment she has to rely on others sometimes.'*

I have really got a lot out of school, first at Phasay Primary School, now here at Phiavath Secondary. These schools have supported and encouraged me all the way through my school life. Now, I have 3 important goals in my life:

1. I would like to study astronomy. I love to look at the stars and have always been fascinated by the universe – how it was formed and what is out there in space. I know I will need to study hard for this – particularly in science and mathematics – but it is a dream for me to do this.

2. I would love to travel to Japan. I have always wanted to go there – ever since I watched some documentaries on the TV. It seems a very beautiful place; their traditions and culture are very interesting. I hope I can go on a cultural exchange visit one day.

3. I want to continue living with my family. They are so supportive to me. My uncle is like my father and he encourages me to be ambitious. I want to do something interesting and exciting with my life. Some people suggest that I could go and work with disabled people when I leave school. I don't really understand why they suggest this – maybe it's because of my condition; they think I can only work in a centre for disability but I think this is rather limiting for me. I want to carry on studying for myself and do the things that I am interested in.

I don't want other people to try and limit what I would like to do because of my disability. I want other people to know that all disabled people have the right to do to the same things as others. We can succeed in our dreams if others provide us with the opportunity and support us. Some people tell me that my dreams are unlikely to be successful, but I would like others to enable me to make my dreams come true.

Inpang Vilayhong

This Case Study was written by Inpang Vilayhong who is teaching at the Special School in Vientiane. Inpang was one of the first students to attend the school in 1993. Inpang went onto study in an IE Project Primary school and Secondary School, before training as a teacher.

My name is Inpang Vilayhong. I was born on 5th December 1981 at Xay village, Xaythany district, Vientiane Capital. My parents are farmers and quite poor. I have two sisters and five brothers. I was the fifth one. Now, I have 2 jobs: a teacher & a masseur. I'm a teacher at the blind school at the National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) in Vientiane. I teach Braille language for blind children who are preparing to study in mainstream school. I also teach Information technology (computers) to blind students who study in the secondary school. After I have finished teaching at NRC, I work at a Traditional massage clinic at Simeuang for my extra income.

From birth until I was 4 years old I was normal. When I was 4-5 years old I wanted to go to school but my mother said "you are too young for school, you have to wait until you are six" so I waited as my mother told me but with hope that soon I would have a chance to learn like my brothers and sisters. However, when I was five I fell down and the next day I had a terrible headache. My parents treated me with traditional medicine. I was not getting better, so they brought me to the hospital. When I was in the hospital my eyes couldn't see very well and were getting worse day by day. My parents were informed by the doctor that he was unable to treat me. Finally, I was blind and had to stay at home. I could not go out and play with my friends. I was also unable to go to school, because there was not a school for blind children at that time.

On 4th February 1993 a special school for blind children was established at the NRC.

Initially, the school sent messages through the villages and district authorities to campaign for blind children to go to school. In the first year there were five students, four males and one female. I was one of the five students who had a chance to study in the first year and in total, I studied in the NRC for 4 years. During this period I studied Braille language, music and learned how to travel by using a stick. After that I was transferred to Phasay Primary school and studied with the other children until I finished Grade 5.

Before I joined the mainstream IE school, I was informed by the teachers at NRC that I was going to study with other students. At that time I was quite worried, because I was afraid that the other children would discriminate against me and I would not be able to achieve a good score. But when I was there, it wasn't as I thought. The teachers and friends that I made gave me lot of help and I achieved well in my studies. I was always in the top 5, out of 60 students in my class, for the monthly exams.

After finishing primary school I continued to study at Phiavat secondary school for 6 years. In the first year of secondary school, I did not have any problems travelling to school, because I had someone to pick me up every day. But in the next year, the teacher asked me to try to walk to school by myself. At that time I was feeling unconfident because I wasn't familiar with the road to school. It was also the rainy season, with a lot of mud and also heavy traffic. I was lucky because I had a friend who was physically disabled and he had to use a wheelchair to get to school. Every day we went to school together. I pushed his wheelchair through the muddy road, so he was just like my eyes & I was like his legs as we made our way to school.

Every day we brought food for lunch to school together. After finishing lunch, another friend who was blind like me, would play the guitar & we sang songs together with pleasure. All of our activities were interesting and other children in school wanted to join us and so we made more friends. These friends who were not disabled helped me travel to school every morning and brought me back home after class. I asked them every day about the route we travelled to school. My friends clearly explained to me. Day by day, I became familiar with the road and then I tried to go to school by myself. When I left NRC for school, I remembered the starting point. When I lost my way I would come back to the starting point to start again. I did this many times until I was able to go the right way. Finally, I was able go to school by myself independently.

During my time studying at Phiavat secondary school I did very well in almost every subject. The only low score I got was in mathematics, because some areas of mathematics are quite complicated for the blind students and there are not enough resources to support our learning. At that time my favourite subject was English. I did not only study this subject at school but I also studied from other people by asking word by word until I could speak some English.

When I was at secondary school, I wished to continue to study in university at

Dongdok after I finished. The university did not accept my application. I was permitted to have an entrance test, but after the exam I was informed that "The University was not able to receive me yet since there was not a curriculum for teaching the blind students." I was very disappointed and I felt that this was discriminating against me. Even though I couldn't enter the Dongdok University, fortunately I still had a chance to study at Dongkhamxang Teacher Training Centre. After I finished there, I won a scholarship on a Leadership of Disability training course in Japan for 10 months. At the beginning, I was trained in Japanese language for 3 months. Then I learned about the Japanese government policy and system for disabled people, employment, sports etc.

Whilst in Japan, I was not only studying. I also visited many places. My favourite place was the Pacific Ocean which I used to learn about when I was in secondary school. My teacher told me that this Ocean was the biggest in the world. When I heard that, I really wanted to go there even though I couldn't see, but I never thought that I would have a chance. My dream came true. When I walked on the beach, by the ocean I had imagined for so long, I felt so proud. I heard the sound of the ocean waves crashing on the sand and it scared me. However, I decided to go swimming with joy and forgot about the scary feelings. I walked on the beach and collected the shells for souvenirs and to remind me that I had swam in the Pacific Ocean.

I would like to write about what my experience of school has taught me and to make some suggestions for the development of education for blind and disabled students in Lao PDR.

My teachers at Primary and Secondary School, all taught the students with sight to understand and help the blind students. For instance, other students would read for them and help the blind in many different ways in lessons. I think this is so important – that teachers encourage positive attitudes, respect and support for others in all students. I would like to make some suggestions for practical ways to support blind students:

- In drawing and art lessons, technology, design etc, the school should always have a model for the blind students to touch and feel – we can experience shape and form with our hands and this helps us learn.

- If there are sports activities for non disabled students, then there must be the same provided for the disabled too.

- All schools should have equipment for teaching mathematics and science to blind students in specialist subjects such as: Physics, Chemistry, Biology etc.

- There need to be appropriate textbooks & learning equipment for blind students in every school

- All subjects at university level should be provided for all blind and other disabled students and they should all be enabled to learn in the same way as others. Disabled students must not be discriminated against.

- There must be employment opportunity for the blind after they have finished from vocational school or University.

These ideas are linked to expectations for Disabled students. We need to encourage teachers and disabled students to have very high expectations of what can be achieved. In this way we can enable and motivate students to achieve their potential. For example, for myself I have always expected to finish my studies, have knowledge and skills, have a job and be able to take care of myself in the same independent way as others. My expectations are quite high and far. I would like to study abroad for 4-5 years. When I've gained knowledge & experience I'll come back to develop and improve the quality of life for all blind people in Lao PDR. Lao people are good, kind and generous which can be shown in many ways, especially by helping disabled people. Many in Lao understand the needs of disabled people, and they are helping us without discrimination. However some people still do not understand us as can be seen by the way in which some people talk and behave. At school, some students don't want to play with disabled students, because they are afraid to get a disease from them. Some children want to play together, but they experience shame and embarrassment that others will tease them for having a disabled friend. Teachers and schools need to challenge this and support children to understand each other properly. This can be done with patience and time. I know some schools have done a lot of very effective work to create a warm, loving and supportive atmosphere which welcomes all students regardless of their background, race or disability.

In the community, many people think that the blind cannot do anything and have no feelings. For example, some people seeing the blind go to a festival or wanting to travel, say: "You can't see - why do you want to go? If you go, you can't see and you won't know anything". Some say to the blind who want to get married: "if the blind marry, their child might cause a problem to society" or "marrying a blind person will embarrass their spouse; when guests visit the home of the blind how will they be able to take care of the guests?'

For some disabled or blind people, these negative attitudes can motivate us to prove them wrong, encouraging us to be stronger and try to do our best. However, some blind or disabled people may not be able to challenge those words and would feel unconfident and de-motivated. I think this is one of our challenges in Lao PDR - to develop a society where the disabled are welcomed and supported, where they have the same rights to education, employment and a social / family life as all others. This is my dream and one that I want to work to achieve.

Inclusive Schools and Communities

This Case Study focuses on two different communities and analyses the factors which support successful Schools, developing Quality Education for all students.

Ban Han School - an IE School

Ban Han Village is in Sayabury Province, approximately 15 kms from Hongsa town. The total population of is 2,147 of which 48% are female. The ethnic makeup of the community is 100% Lao Loum . Most villagers are farmers and it seems likely that the village will be affected by a lignite mine which will cause the school to be rebuilt.

The local school is an IE school and is also called Ban Han. It has a pre-school attached where 74 children are enrolled. In the Primary school, 160 children are enrolled in grades 1-5. There 11 children with special needs enrolled although no students with disabilities have been able to continue to the District Lower Secondary School.

There are 13 teachers who all live in the village. School performance data indicates that there is 100% enrolment in pre-school and primary school. There are a low level of drop outs and irregular attendees due to poverty. The school is the core school for the cluster and is very active in collaborating with other local schools. The Parent Teacher Group is also very active and there is good community support.

The quality of education offered by the school is generally judged to be high within the Lao context.

What Are the Community Factors Supporting the Quality Of the School?

- Most parents value education and ensure their children go to school

- Community can afford to pay fees, contribute to costs of volunteer teachers (fees – 8,000 kip per year per student; + books, uniform, etc.

- Teachers trained in inclusive education

- Teachers are from the village

- Good school management

- Active cluster

- Most villagers have a reasonable income

- Cultural value of formal education

Mr Sithath Outhaithany, NIT team leader, working with children in an IE School, during an evaluation visit.

Ban Samaki - not an IE School

Samaki XY Village in was established in 2003. Ban Samaki Primary School serves 2 villages – Samaki Xy and Hua Na. Total population of Samaki Xy is 698 and the ethnic makeup is 100% Lao Theung. Most of the village is poor and rely on subsistence farming.

In the school there are 226 children enrolled in grades 1-5. 5 teachers work in the school, none of whom live in the villages it serves. The age range of the students is from 6 -18 years and there are 51 children aged between 13-18. Within the local community, 33% of children aged 6-10 have never enrolled and of these, 30 children, 76%, are girls. Only 26% of children go on to study in Lower Secondary School. There are significant challenges in ensuring attendance of all students, for example, in Grade , up to 50% are absent each day.

The quality of education offered by the school is generally judged to be low within the Lao context.

What Are the Community Factors Affecting the Quality Of the School?

- Parents have many children and can't afford to send all children to school (fees – 8,000 kip per year per student; + books, uniform, etc.)

- School is overcrowded

- Children have a different mother tongue – can't speak Lao

- Teachers don't live in the village

- No in-service training for teachers (not an IE School)

- Parents have low level of education

- Lower Secondary School is far from the village

- Poverty

- Language and culture

The case studies presented through an examination of community factors affecting these two schools, serve to highlight some of the key factors which have been shown in this book, to support the development of more inclusive schools in Lao. In the first school, part of the IE Project, there is a clear link between the community and the school. Parents value education and support the school financially and also by ensuring their children attend school. The teachers are part of the community and are therefore more motivated and engaged in their work. Where there is a close link between community and school there is also likely to be stronger school management because of community support and monitoring. In the second school, which doesn't have the benefit of support from a national project, there is a lack of community support and involvement in the school, both financially and actively. The teachers are not members of the school community and have not received additional training. There are significant challenges in the school in regard to the range of students enrolled and their attendance.

It seems clear from even a brief analysis of these contexts that the IE Project can support schools in a range of different ways. Training and project support for a school draws communities together. It supports strong management and school leadership and enables communities to become more actively involved in schools. In service training for teachers can encourage motivation and enable schools to reach out into local communities and identify areas for school-community development, encouraging enrolment and lowering dropout rates. Tensions between cultures and different languages can be overcome in this way, enabling economically poorer members of the community to see the value of education for all their children.

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6

Final Thoughts

Final Thoughts

The Lao Inclusive Education Project began as a small scale pilot project in one school, trying to improve the quality of education for children with disabilities and other children likely to fail. After 16 years it had developed into a national initiative which had introduced child-centred teaching methodology into every district of the country. By 2008, the project had achieved its original aims by changing the landscape of educational provision in Lao to enable most children with disabilities to attend schools where they would be welcomed and taught by trained teachers. In many respects the project paved the way for the reform of education in Lao which is now aiming for every school to be a child friendly school with all teachers being re-trained in learner centred pedagogy.

The IE Project may be finishing as a separately funded project but the principles it stood for will continue to be priorities for the Ministry of Education. This final chapter presents a brief strategic overview of some of the areas which the Ministry may need to focus on in the coming years.

Developing Systems for Reliable Data Collection

Strategic planning for the medium term in Lao PDR, includes the introduction of unified data collection systems. The lessons learned during the data collection for the evaluation of the Inclusive Education Project may be invaluable in considering how best to develop such systems in Lao PDR. The experience of the Project Evaluation Team led them to conclude that it is not enough to develop what appears to be a comprehensive set of guidelines for data collection. Unless there is clear understanding of the language and concepts, then simple errors will be made at all levels, ranging from difficulty in classification through to miscalculation. The following points may help to support the development of more effective and reliable data collection processes:

- *Clarity of Purpose*: there should be a clear set of aims for the collection of data

  ♦ What information do we need to know and why?

  ♦ How will the collection of this data feed back into the development of policy and impact on the improvement of practice?

- *Clarity of Language*: is everyone at a strategic level clear about the purpose and the meaning of key terminology? The experience of the IE Project has demonstrated that there can be confusion even over relatively simple terms such as 'poor families'. If strategists are clear about the definitions of terms, this will support the development of understanding throughout the system.

- *Accessible Systems:* any new system which is designed for Provincial / District teams and schools, should be simple and easy to use. Although the professionals at all levels in the IE Project demonstrated a willingness to learn and a commitment to reliability and validity, their lack of experience meant that they found it easiest to use systems and processes which were either familiar or built on existing knowledge and experience.

- *Provision of Training at All Levels:* Any data collection system is only as reliable as the data which is entered into it a school level. Any attempt to introduce new systems quickly across the country will result in inaccurate data being entered into the system, unless ongoing training and support is given to Principals and District Teams.

Inclusive Education At Policy Level

The Inclusive Education Project has advocated for the rights of all students to access a meaningful and equitable educational experience in schools. This must be enshrined at policy level in such a way that no child is allowed to slip through the system and miss out on their education. Currently the education system is being reformed and it is important that this re-organisation acknowledges the rights of all to attend their local pre-school, primary and secondary school. The new Quality Standards for schools in Lao PDR should support all schools in developing learner friendly classrooms. No student with disabilities should be turned away from any school or institution on the basis that their needs cannot be met. Where schools have not been part of the IE Project it is essential that they are aware of their requirement under law, to offer places to all children in their local community, including those with disabilities.

Policy must also extend to access to higher education. Currently some students with disabilities do not have access to a university education on the basis that the institution argues that their needs cannot be met. This is discriminatory and needs to be challenged. Similarly, current policy states that teachers should be 'healthy' – this is ambiguous and confusing. Prospective teachers who are disabled should be supported and encouraged to train as teachers for mainstream schools. In doing so, discriminatory attitudes and practices can be challenged at institutional levels.

Another challenge at policy level is to develop a shared understanding of the language which is being used. Inclusive Education still carries conflicting meanings for different people and groups. The IE Project has moved away from a focus on disability towards removing the barriers to participation, enjoyment, achievement for all students. However, because of the original aims of the project, it has continued to be associated with the needs of students with disabilities. There is a danger that, within new reforms, definitions may become confused. The challenge is ensuring that the

rights of all students to a quality education are at the centre of all policies and that everybody working in education clearly understands the implications of this.

Numbers of Disabled Children Who Are Not In school

One of the original aims of the IE Project was to enable children with mild to moderate disabilities to attend a mainstream school. It seems likely that with the establishment of at least 3 IE schools in every district, that this has been achieved for the majority of children in this group.

However, there are significant numbers of disabled students whose needs can be classified as more severe or complex than those currently provided for by the IE schools. These students may include students with a number of different impairments or disabilities.

Classifying disability by severity is not always useful. Its accuracy and application depends on having a commonly agreed and understood language for defining disability and this is not currently in place in Lao PDR. Increasingly, there is an international trend of measuring functional limitations, rather than disability. However, it is still useful to think about the numbers of students with particular conditions and also the numbers of students not attending school. At the time of writing, there has been no national strategy to map the numbers or types of disability relating to school aged children. Some data has been collected through the National Census of 2005, but the government of Lao PDR does not currently know, nor is it able to clearly estimate, how many disabled children of school age, are not currently in school.

As part of the final evaluation of the project, the Project Evaluation Team began an initial exploration of this issue with colleagues working for the National Rehabilitation Centre, Provincial Rehabilitation Centres, Community Based Rehabilitation teams, Hospitals providing services for disabled children and also staff working for the Catholic relief Service and Handicap International. Based on the experiences of professionals working in a range of settings, estimates of the national number of disabled students currently not in school have been established. Additionally, the Team has attempted to estimate the number of students with certain medical conditions across the country. These figures are only an estimate. However, in the opinion of the professionals involved, the true figures are likely to be significantly higher:

- Numbers of severely disabled students with a variety of conditions and of school age, currently not attending school – **2500**

- Numbers of students with Severe Cerebral Palsy, currently not attending school – **400**

- Numbers of students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, currently not attending school – **300**

However, it should also be noted that internationally, statistics for disability are often represented as a percentage of the total population.

> 'Data from developed countries and some recent studies in developing countries over several regions (namely, Brazil, Ecuador, India, Nicaragua, Vietnam, and Zambia) suggest that an estimate of 10-12 percent is not unreasonable. This estimate is in line with the United Nations' often cited figure of 10 percent, which in fact was an informed guess based on data available from developed countries.' (Mort, 2007, p.2)

If this approach is used to estimate the numbers of school age children in Lao PDR, then the estimate provided above can be seen to be very low. Based on 2005 data from the Ministry of Education (2008), there were 1,135,012 children in Primary or Lower Secondary School. This would mean that (on the basis of 10%) there were approximately 113,501 disabled children in the country at that time. In order to calculate how many children may have severely disabled, a figure of 4% of the total has been recently used (Mort, 2007). This would give a total of 45,400 . A significant number of these students can be expected to be out of school.

Whilst all of these figures are estimates, they suggest that whilst the IE Project has been successful in challenging discrimination against some groups of disabled students, it has not been able to affect change for all disabled students. The Project Evaluation Team therefore made the following recommendations:

- The right of all students to attend school should be applied in practice to ensure that those disabled students currently out of school are given the same opportunity to be educated as their peers.

- The first step in achieving this should be the initiation of a multi-professional working group to include Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and partners to establish a strategic plan to

  ♦ Define the different types of disability / impairment / functional limitations in Lao PDR within the context of a social model of disability.

  ♦ Map the numbers of school aged children with different types of disability / impairment / levels of functional limitations

  ♦ Establish the number of disabled children of school age who are not attending school

- Establish a strategic plan to comprehensively meet the educational needs of all disabled students which does not re-enforce discriminatory or segregatory practices.

Developing Education for All Through Teacher Training

The IE Project has learnt several important lessons about training teachers in Inclusive Education. One of the first, described in this book, is that teachers and policy makers often identify training as the most important factor in ensuring success. In the context of Inclusion, research around the world and within the IE Project, has found that in fact, the attitudes of the teachers are fundamental in developing innovative and inclusive practices. The experience of the project, as demonstrated in the inclusive lesson case study, is that where teachers engage with the idea of changing lessons so that all children are participating and achieving, then their attitudes being to change. As well as enjoying their teaching more and becoming increasingly motivated, they are also enabled to understand how children with disabilities and special needs can be included in ordinary lessons in mainstream schools.

The most able of children can fail in schools where they are not wanted; children with the most complex needs can succeed in schools where teachers welcome them and do their best to ensure they participate and reach their educational potential. Training in the IE Project has been important but it has been those aspects of training which supported the development of positive teacher attitudes to disability which have been particularly successful. Many teachers will need to be trained in IE over the coming years – in order for this to be successful the training must work to change negative perceptions of disability into positive ones. Teachers need to be shown that all children can enjoy and achieve at school.

Perhaps the key word here is 'shown'. It is not enough to tell teachers 'how' to change their practice. If one thing is clear from the experience of training within the IE Project it is that teachers need to visit other schools, discuss ideas and lessons with colleagues and then reflect on how they can try new approaches out in their own classrooms. Importing new ideas into schools requires teachers to take ownership of them, adapt them and integrate them into their own practice so that new pedagogies are no longer new but 'the way we teach in our school' (Balshaw, Grimes et al, 2005). Therefore, part of the strategy for developing new inclusive approaches to teaching and learning needs to be centred on developing and strengthening the existing cluster school model. However, the idea of a cluster school as a 'centre of excellence', whose practice is to be copied and re-produced in other schools needs to be re-visited. The Cluster school should rather be seen as a resource for supporting the development of reflective practice – facilitating teachers to visit and observe each other, enabling joint learning to take place and encouraging schools to try out new ideas for themselves and then to share and discuss their experiences with others. Developing reflective practice in schools will support the development of professionalism and help to drive the move towards the introduction of more inclusive practices.

Strengthening pre-service training for Inclusive Education is part of the current

national strategy and this is to be applauded. Inclusive principles of education need to be embedded in all areas of teaching and learning. There are specific components of core IE training that can be included within an IE module, such as challenging attitudes and misinformation, or approaches to meeting the needs of identified groups of learners such as those with Visual Impairments, Hearing Impairments, etc. However, inclusive teaching is about:

- providing good quality teaching and learning experiences which engage and motivate children;

- planning lessons which take into account their current levels of development and set them challenging targets to achieve;

- seeing each child as an individual with their own individual strengths and needs.

In this sense, pre-service training for IE needs to be seen not as an add-on to the existing curriculum but as a way of revitalising and renewing it.

Specialised Support for Disability

Students with disabilities have been a core focus for the IE Project. and for many of these students, the it has provided equitable educational opportunities. However for others, as explored through the case study of 'Nina' the situation is more complex and presents a different set of challenges. If the new education system in Lao PDR is to truly meet the needs of all students with disabilities then there needs to be a strategic initiative to identify and develop those areas where there are currently gaps in provision and expertise. Other countries in the region have taken the strategic decisions to develop specialised segregated provision. This has proved costly and often ineffective. The solution is to address the issue through strengthening expertise in schools.

Students in the following groups are priorities in that they need specific support and resources to enable their teachers in ensuring they reach their educational potential:

- Students with visual impairments

- Students with hearing impairments

- Students with communication and interaction impairments

- Students with learning difficulties

- Students with physical difficulties

One strategic development that would make a difference to current levels of provision would be to identify and train existing teachers in specific areas of impairment. The expertise to provide most of this training either does not currently exist in Lao PDR or is concentrated within a very small number of individuals. Therefore, initially it would need to be provided through a neighboring country. In the short to medium term, the Ministry of Education should aim to initially train a teacher in each province in each area of need, to act as an advisory teacher. Such advisory teachers could support schools in identifying children, developing effective interventions and resources and also in training teachers. In the long term there needs to be localised training and centres for resourcing and advice within each district to ensure no child is unsupported. These suggestions do not reflect a medical model of disability; rather, they acknowledge the need to find a cost effective and sustainable solution to a serious challenge and to develop expertise and capacity at a local level.

And one final thought ...

There are many other suggestions throughout this book describing areas which could be strengthened or developed. It is hoped that the book has provided a useful and informative overview of the Inclusive Education Project, its areas of achievement and also its weaknesses. Perhaps a final thought should be to reflect on a strength of Lao PDR itself. Those who live in, work in or visit Lao are aware that it has many positive features – its geographical variety, the warm and friendly people who work here. But perhaps its greatest strength is the degree to which local communities work together and support each other. In the 'Developing Quality Schools for All' Project (described in chapter 3), many teachers were interviewed and asked about their motivation for becoming a teacher – without exception they said 'Because I love my country and I want to help it grow strong again'. When they were asked about why, as part of the project, they wanted to improve their schools, they said: 'Because we work together in our community to do the best we possibly can and we want our school to provide the best education for all our children'. It is this will to work together, to find solutions as a community that is at the heart of all the improvements and achievements of the Lao PDR Inclusive Education Project and that should be the single most important lesson for the country to take from this as it tries to ensure a Quality Education for All.

Appendix A

The Quality Standard

The Quality Standard

The Quality Standard was presented in 'Seeking A Fine Balance' (Holdsworth 2003) in order to 'help readers visualise exactly ... the quality points which a monitoring and support team visit would be seeking. On such a visit the team would be looking for the following features and discussing with people any improvements that might be needed and how to make this happen.' In the interests of supporting the reader in understanding the development of the project, this is re-produced below.

In classrooms:

- The atmosphere must be calm and purposeful. Neither children nor teachers should seem overstressed.

- Children with special needs should not stand out too much but be an integral part of the class.

- The class should be working cooperatively. Any competition should be low key.

- Children should all be offering (and receiving) help from each other. Children with special needs should also be helping others as well as receiving help.

- Children should be taking part in the class and contributing to the lesson as appropriate.

- Teachers should be creative in finding ways to ensure all children take part in all activities.

- Where possible children should be offered choices.

- Where necessary, children with special needs should have 'favoured places' in the classroom where listening and seeing conditions are good and teachers can easily reach them.

- Teachers should be using a variety of methods including whole class work, and different types of group work.

- Teachers should be using a variety of home-made visual aids and other materials adapted to the needs of the children.

- Teachers should be responding sensitively o the learning in the classroom and not sticking rigidly to the curriculum materials.

- There should be some acknowledgement of diversity with different children required to do different amounts of work at different standards.

- Children should be praised for personal achievements. Comparisons with other children should not figure too highly. There should be flexibility in ways children's progress is recorded.

- Teachers should be offering extra help where needed to individuals and small groups, but extra help should be limited to the smallest changes and least intrusive ways possible and withdrawn as soon as the child no longer needs it – see point b) in BOX 8.

In Schools:

- The school should be well cared for and (at the very least) clean and tidy.

- The head teacher should be working with staff to ensure the quality is kept up. Special help should be offered to weaker members of staff.

- Improved quality of learning and teaching should be showing in reducing failure and repetition rates.

- There should be good relationships with the families and community.

- There should be special relationships with the families of children with disabilities.

- Good records should be kept.

- The school should be actively recruiting age appropriate children with disabilities into the lowest grade year by year. This should be done through the community and community organisations.

- Over recruitment, through accepting children from outside the catchment area or much older children who have never been to school, should not be taking place.

- The progress of all children entering school should be watched so that any child with learning problems of thought to be in danger of failing can immediately be offered help.

- The school should be in active cooperation with other I.E schools in the district.

- The school should take an active part in I.E training and review meetings.

- The school should be helping new school joining the I.E programme in their district and province.

In Districts:

- The district should be involved in the monitoring and support of the I.E schools.

- The district should take an active role in preparing schools and communities about to join up.

- The district should be taking an active role in the Annual Review Meeting and the annual planning.

In Provinces:

- A provincial implementation Team (PIT) drawn from the various sections and departments and supplemented by excellent head teachers or school staff should be in place and working actively.

- A new PIT should be able to cooperate with the NIT on the administration of the project, administer training workshops, help with monitoring and support and work with the districts on annual planning.

- The province should be taking an active role in the Annual Review Meeting including hosing such a meeting as required.

- With some experience (2 years) the PIT should be able to monitor and support teachers without help from the NIT.

- As experience grows the province should be able to host internal study visits from newer provinces.

- Within 4 years and following training the PIT should be able to run training workshops with minimal help from the NIT.

Support and Monitoring teams need to have ways of responding to problems and difficulties or the process becomes one of the 'inspection' rather than support. And although we expect all schools to reach the quality standard within about 2 years, some places need more help if they are to reach this goal. So if problems are detected, monitoring teams can arrange:

- Additional or longer monitoring visits;

- Short visits by staff to stronger schools so as to discuss with their staff and observe the methods they are using;

- A 2/3 day visit by a director from a stronger school;

- Small amounts of extra training.

Appendix B

Indicators of Inclusive Development

(with clarifying questions)

1. All pupils feel welcome in the school

1. Does the school have a policy to enrol / include all children, including students from diverse groups?

2. Do teachers welcome all parents and their children when they come to the school?

3. Do all teachers feel ownership of the school?

4. Do students feel ownership of their classroom?

5. Does the school celebrate local cultures and communities in signs, displays and events?

6. Do all children equally exercise their rights e.g. disabled children / disadvantaged groups of children participate in all school activities?

2. All Students Support each other in their learning

1. Do Teachers actively support and encourage good relationships between students?

2. Do Teachers encourage students to help each other?

3. Do students willingly share their knowledge and skills?

4. Do group activities allow students to divide up tasks and share what they have learnt?

5. When other students in the class are troubled do students help them to calm down?

6. Do students share the responsibility for helping to overcome the difficulties experienced by some students in lessons?

7. Are students involved in assessing each others learning?

8. Are students involved in helping each other to set educational goals?

3. All students are well supported by school staff

1. Do teachers try to make lessons easy to understand?

2. Do teachers plan appropriately to support all children?

3. Do teaching materials reflect the backgrounds, experience and interests of all students?

4. Do teachers provide accessible materials or translations for students who do not speak Lao?

5. Do teachers actively teach students in a variety of groups during the lesson?

6. Do teachers support disadvantaged groups of children e.g. is there detailed planning to ensure disabled children are making good progress in their learning?

4. Teachers and parents cooperate well

1. Do teachers regularly communicate with parents?

2. Do teachers invite parents for consultation in order to help or solve problems related to children's learning?

3. Do parents feel that there is good communication with school staff?

4. Do parents feel well informed about school policies and practices?

5. Do staff value the knowledge that parents have about their children?

6. Do staff encourage the involvement of all parents in their children's learning?

5. All students are treated equally as valued members of the school

1. Teachers pay equal attention to all students

2. Teachers give opportunities for students to select activities based on their ability

3. Is a variety of backgrounds and home languages seen to make a positive contribution to school life?

4. Are higher and lower attaining students valued equally?

5. Are the achievements of all students given equal support and prominence?

6. Do disadvantaged groups of children receive equal treatment e.g. children from poor families are given the same opportunity to join after school activities which require a financial contribution.

6. All students feel that their opinions and views are valued.

1. Do Teachers give the opportunity for students to give their comments?

2. Do Teachers listen and respond to student comments and questions?

3. Do students feel that teachers listen to them?

4. Do students feel that teachers respond to their comments?

5. Do teachers provide opportunities for disadvantaged groups of children to share their opinions?

6. Do disadvantaged groups of children feel that teachers listen to their opinions?

7. All students can access learning in all lessons.

1. Do teachers prepare lessons and lesson plans that are appropriate for the learning of all children?

2. Is teaching planned to support learning rather than to deliver the curriculum?

3. Is there an attempt to view teaching and support from the point of view of all students?

4. Do lessons pay attention to the emotional as well as the intellectual aspects of learning?

5. Do students feel that they are actively engaged in most lesson activities?

6. Are children with special needs encouraged to develop their talents? e.g. some children with special needs may be talented in producing handicrafts.

8. All students can access all parts of the school building.

1. Do teachers arrange seating in classroom appropriate to all students?

2. Is seating organised according to individual needs and age of students? E.g. is the furniture the correct size for the age group? Do children with physical disabilities have adapted chairs and tables where necessary?

3. Do students have access to all parts of school building that they need access to e.g.: classroom, toilet, play area?

4. Are the needs of students with partial sight or partial hearing as well as physical impairments considered in making the buildings accessible?

5. Does the school have separate toilets for girls, boys and teachers / adults?

6. Does the school monitor accessibility of the buildings and facilities for teachers and students?

9. All students attend school every day.

1. Do teachers keep a daily record of student attendance?

2. Do teachers try to find out the reasons for student absence?

3. Do teachers have good relationship with all students?

4. Do teachers create an attractive school environment?

5. Do teachers communicate well with students' parents?

6. Do teachers monitor the attendance of children who may be at risk of poor attendance e.g. children who have been bullied, children who are struggling to achieve in school.

10. All students enjoy lessons.

1. Do students enjoy lessons?

2. Do lessons convey a sense of excitement in learning?

3. Do teachers use a variety of teaching techniques and activities?

4. Do teachers use a variety of teaching materials in their teaching?

5. Do teachers try to make classrooms attractive, and a good learning environment?

6. Do parents feel that their children enjoy school?

11. All students are engaged in all lesson activities.

1. Do teachers clearly explain how to do activities?

2. Do teachers support all students in classroom activities?

3. Do students feel that they are actively engaged in most lesson activities?

4. Do teachers encourage all students to become actively involved in activities?

5. Do teachers organise activities according to children's individual needs? E.g. children are asked to complete tasks that are within their abilities.

6. Do teachers evaluate their lessons to ensure that all students are participating? Do teachers plan the lesson appropriately based on the different students' ability?

12. All students achieve their learning in all subjects according to their individual ability

1. Do teachers plan the lesson appropriately based on the different students' ability?

2. Do teachers include details in their lesson planning of how they will support the learning of children who are learning more slowly than others in certain subjects?

3. Do teachers use a variety of materials in teaching and learning activities?

4. Do all students feel that they are making progress in school?

5. Do teachers regularly follow up and assess students learning outcomes?

6. Are teachers able to make judgements about the amount of progress individual students are making in different subject areas?

13. All students learn together

1. Do teachers organise learning activities for all students to be able to fully participate?

2. Do teachers encourage all students to support each other?

3. Do all children show respect for each other?

4. Do all students willingly share their knowledge and skills with each other?

5. Do students enjoy the social aspects of school life?

6. Are students involved in assessing each others learning?

14. All students have access to health services as necessary and appropriately.

1. Do teachers give advice to all students on the 3 areas of cleanliness?

2. Do teachers regularly organise sports activities?

3. Do teachers collaborate with health staff to check students' health?

4. Do teachers collaborate with parents to support the development of students' health?

5. Do students have a positive attitude to health?

6. Do students know the causes of common diseases?

7. Do students know how to protect themselves from common diseases?

8. Do teachers give children opportunities to ask health-related questions? E.g. are there opportunities for discussions about health and cleanliness?

15. The School ensures that all students are admitted to the school

1. Does the school try to find out if all the vulnerable children are in school?

2. Does the school encourage the parents to send their children to school?

3. Does the school provide the necessary support to vulnerable groups of children so that they are able to enter school?

4. Do the teachers pay particular attention to vulnerable children to ensure they are learning?

5. Does the school monitor and follow up students' attendance?

6. Does the school encourage and reward children who come to school regularly, particularly those from disadvantaged groups? E.g. the school gives special certificates to children with 100% attendance.

16. All vulnerable children are successful in their learning

1. Does the school have a policy on the annual and final grade examination with a specific expectation for vulnerable groups of children?

2. Has the school developed a plan for supporting vulnerable children in order to help them complete their study?

3. Do teachers adjust the teaching objectives, using appropriate teaching methods, to ensure vulnerable children are successful in lessons?

4. Do teachers encourage children's classmates to help vulnerable children?

5. Does the school monitor the teaching for disadvantaged groups?

6. Does the school monitor the achievement of children from disadvantaged groups?

7. Do teachers encourage all children, but particularly those from disadvantaged

groups, to use the school library?

8.   Do teachers plan opportunities for more able or experienced students to support the learning of children with special needs or less experienced learners.

17. *School creates an environment which supports all students' learning*

1.   Does the school try to develop the facilities for students to access all parts of the school building?

2.   Do teachers arrange appropriate seats for vulnerable children in the classroom?

3.   Does the school create a good school environment (does school have trees, flowers, gardening, clean school yard, school compound, etc)?

4.   Does the school have adequate toilets for children (boys and girls) and teachers?

5.   Does the school have a library and allow children to borrow books?

6.   Do teachers decorate the classroom to attract children and motivate them to learn? e.g. do they display children's work and learning resources attractively?

7.   Is there enough classroom furniture for all children to sit and work comfortably?

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Peter has worked on a variety of different educational projects in different countries in the region; in addition to Lao PDR, Peter has worked in Thailand and India as well as in the UK. In 2009 he began work on a new inclusive school improvement project in Vietnam. Peter's work is mostly concerned with the development of schools which are aiming to ensure the full participation, achievement and enjoyment of all children in the school's local community. His philosophy is that the most effective way to do this, is to involve everybody in the school and local community in the process. He has found in his work in different countries, that invariably teachers, children and parents all want similar things from schools: they want children to enjoy their education and also to achieve as well as they can. In his work he tries to enable this to happen for all children.

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Save the Children Norway fights for children's rights and for children to live dignified lives, whoever they are and wherever they live.

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