

Paying Closer Attention to the Educational Development *In favour of the National Human Resources and Socio- Economic Development Policies*

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1. Introduction

As we have all well known, the Resolution of the 7th Congress of the Lao People Revolutionary Party has become a reference for the country's determination of the socio-economic development guidelines. Those socio-economic development plans have been clearly identified in each stage such as 2001-2020 and 2005-2010. Although, the implementation of the socio-economic development programme will be carried out with the short-term or long-term stages, above all, education is very crucial and plays an important role as well as determines the above-mentioned socio-economic development achievement.

Following up on the achievement of the educational development projects and the educational quality improvement within the academic year: 1999-2000, the Ministry of Education has carried out a number of various forms of educational strategic plans. The Ministry of Education has turned away from conducting each purpose-specific project such as (i) general, (ii) vocational, (iii) teacher training, (iv) non-formal education, and (v) education administration and management, rather focusing on the implementation of three major action plans as follows:

- ① Action Plan for widening the school entrance opportunities,
- ② Action Plan for quality improvement and equitable opportunities
- ③ Action Plan for educational administration and management

The scope of this presentation should cover some general achievement of the activities in the academic year: 2001-2002. Educational development implementation, general supervision and activities are meant to facilitate the implementation of the three major action plans as follows:

2. Achievements of educational development in the academic year 2001-2002

(1) General Education Tasks

- There has been recently an extensive growth of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools for nurturing conditions to increase the enrollment of each age group of young children in suitable schools. There exist a total of 785 public and private nurseries and kindergartens with

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18,558 preschool children. It compares with Academic Year: 2000-2001 as an increase of 33 locations.

- Public and Private primary level is made up of 8,433 schools. Compared with the previous academic year, it increased by 241 schools. A total of 852,993 primary school students increased by 2.8% from the previous year and now 80.4% of the children between 6 and 10 years old can attend the school.
- Public and Private secondary schools are comprised with 858 schools, increased by 38 locations, making up of 315,572 students. There are 213,490 lower secondary students, which was increased by 9%, whereas upper secondary students are made up of 102,082, which is a 16% increase.
- The remote rural ethnic minority schools have been encouraged and increased in every province. Up until now, there are 2,365 primary students out of a total 5,962 students. Among them, 130 outstanding students participated in the high-level academic competitions mainly in Mathematics, Literature, Physics and Chemistry subjects.

(2) Teachers Training Development Task

- There are a total of eleven Teachers Training Colleges including Faculty of Education, National University of Laos with the total of 6,997 students. In academic year 2001-2002, 2,715 novice-teachers were graduated from those institutes to serve the society.
- The curricula and diversified educational activities have been improved in terms of promoting competence, know-how and quality for students. Besides, there are a number of study tours for teachers among various teachers colleges so as to mutually exchange teaching-techniques and draw lessons from one another. A number of short-training courses have been also conducted domestically and abroad.
- The promotion of the teacher-training centers has been organized for those who have not been formally trained at teachers colleges. Some 1,016 not-formally trained teachers have attended the three-month pedagogical course, which has been conducted to deal with the shortage of teachers at a grass roots level in remote areas.

(3) Non-Formal Education Task

- 48,811 people have reached literacy level, achieving 65% of the illiteracy eradication target, which means among 15 and 40 years old, 83.3% of illiteracy has been abolished.
- Literacy movement to culturally upgrade adults has attained primary school level comprising 19,060 people and achieved secondary school level 1,257 adults.
- Basic vocational training courses have been organized for some 4,646 adults on carpentry, bricklaying and concrete work, clothes making, cooking and catering services, agriculture, and animal husbandry.

- At present, there are 269 vocational training centers and community education centers. In addition, there are distance-education centers in some provinces. Those centers play an important role in curriculum development, teaching equipment and rural level training management.
- Provincial training centers for government staff members, who are responsible for narcotic drug control tasks, have been established in order to implement anti-drug propaganda and campaigns on all kinds of narcotics activities.

(4) Vocational Education and Tertiary Education Tasks

- There are 28 public and private technical and vocational colleges with 808 private college students among a total of 15,384.
- More vocational training college surveys have been conducted in some provinces such as Oudomxay, Xiengkhouang and Bokeo.
- Various special vocational training courses need to be further established so as to meet the increasing demand for tertiary education than the previous academic year.
- Vocational Advisory Council for national level has been founded with a large number of representatives from various social and economic sectors. It is their duty to contribute useful and creative ideas and brainstorm conscientious wisdom from all social sectors towards the vocational development and skills for the younger generation.
- All the faculties within National University of Laos need to carry on development in multi-faceted manners to gradually improve lecture quality. Simultaneously, establishment of provincial universities has been well under the preparation in Louangprabang and Champasack provinces.
- Tertiary level private education needs to be supported. Currently, there are 8 private colleges with the total of 5,391 students.
- In parallel with the dispatching of students to study overseas under the cooperation scholarship schemes between the governments, there are more and more students who study abroad by supporting themselves financially.
- High school graduates totaled 25,929 students, 56,7% of whom were accepted into further studies both within the country and abroad, as well as private school in academic year 2001-2002. Creating appropriate provision for those with medium education level or higher education level from a variety of different vocational institutes is essential for them to seek more opportunities to continue further tertiary education at university's bachelor degrees courses.

(5) Physical Education Tasks and Campaigns Against Narcotics

- Sports and artistic music activities have been organized to create a cheerful and delightful atmosphere, keeping students away from drugs. Examples of such activities include, the National

Secondary-Student Games in Khammouane Province, a Sing Contest and narcotic drug prevention concerts in the rural areas.

- Drug prevention and eradication committees have been organized within certain administrative levels such as ministerial, provincial, district, and school. Simultaneously, those committee members were trained within the scope of narcotic drug control tasks towards active roles and duties.

(6) International Relations and Cooperation

- The 10-year cooperation schemes on education between Laos and Vietnam have delivered some achievement and a few lessons have been drawn from them, particularly regarding the cooperation of the border provinces.
- Human resources development programs in telecommunication technology have been under the preparation amongst four countries: Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam.
- Japanese grant aid agreement for AY 2002-2009 to construct 700-Primary Schools has been signed. At present, 3 primary schools have already been built in the initial stage.
- The educational quality development project formulation has been succeeded and the second-phase-educational development programme in cooperation with World Bank has been extended. Concurrently, the multi-cooperation projects with Japan, France, Belgium, and the European Union are now under preparation.

Overall Assessment and Remarks on Educational Development Plans for Year 2001-2002

✧ Strong Points

In the previous academic year 2001-2002, the internal situation in Laos and the international circumstances changed. Those changes have brought both advantages and disadvantages towards educational tasks. However, teachers and educational staff have done their best and carried on creating progressive movements towards educational commitments for better education.

✧ Weak Points and Shortcomings

- Expansion of education to the remote rural areas has been largely restricted. The disparities of educational quality between urban and remote areas have not been resolved.
- There is high percentage of no access to school for children in the remote areas.
- There is acute insufficiency in the number of teachers and classrooms in these areas.

3. General guidelines on and activities for the action plans.

(1) General Guidelines.

- ① School attendance opportunities need to be expanded in conformity with the country's social economic development plans. With reference to educational quantity and quality, a large gap amongst zones, provinces, genders, and ethnic minorities is to be reduced step by step.
 - ② Reduce adult illiteracy and implement educational upgrading for target adults especially in integrated economic developing zones and poverty-stricken areas. In particular, women and those who have remote educational opportunities.
 - It is essential to create ample opportunity for people to have life-long learning and for adults to have a variety of choices in their studies.
 - ③ Paying closer attention to quality improvement for every class and field of study is necessary; e.g., curricula, textbooks, teaching equipment, teacher upgrading, developing teaching methodology involving advanced information technology.
 - It is imperative to implement suitable policies on promoting women and those with remote educational opportunities for further education at vocational colleges, technical colleges and higher educational institutions within the country and abroad.
 - ④ Teacher training development tasks and upgrading teacher competence in every level are essential to adjust policies for teachers in accordance with resolutions and provisions for them.
 - ⑤ Private educational expansion including general, vocational and higher level education should be promoted. Simultaneously, it is a beneficial policy to facilitate those with their own finance and/or budgets to open private schools.
 - ⑥ Conducting moral education for teachers, staff and students is important in order to encourage their comprehension towards the government policy on national construction and development.
 - It is worthy to educate people to respect the national law and to promote the national fine traditions and cultures.
- (2) Activities carried out to improve each action plan
- Activities to support school access expansion:
- i. It is essential to expand opportunities for every school level, nationwide, especially in remote community zones. In particular, primary education level is important as it aims at encouraging people to acquire basic knowledge for the socio-economic development.
 - School premises expansion for every class in remote and poverty stricken areas is needed. This requires community contribution in building schools.
 - ii. Achieving the implementation of basic education plans for girls -- This project will construct 441 primary schools in remote areas. The Japanese government grant aid project for 700 primary school and the second-phase educational development project of SIDA, UNESCO, UNICEF and NGOs towards 2008 are to be completed.
 - iii. Expanding the 5-year primary school system in sufficient student areas and conducting double class teaching.

- iv. Seeking every opportunity to continuously improve conditions for ethnic minority, female children, children with a remote chance, and handicapped children for schooling.
 - v. Implementing scholarship policy for poor students with the best academic records in order to encourage them to continue their higher education.
 - vi. Continuing literacy programs for targeted adults between 15 and 40 years old so as to encourage their studies for all levels of higher education.
 - vii. Providing basic vocational training for 15-40-year-old population by stimulating the existing local labour training skill centers to further improve productivity.
 - viii. Completing the construction of vocational-technical colleges in Khammouane, Oudomexay, Xiengkhouang and Bolikhamxai provinces according to the plans.
 - ix. Continuing the construction of regional universities in Champasack, Savannakhet and Louangprabang.
- (3) Activities to encourage quality improvement and equitableness:
- i. Undertaking teachers' development continuously in the teaching at each level of knowledge and know-how.
 - ii. Developing curriculum, textbooks, and providing sufficient teaching-aids and instruction materials to schools at all levels in an equitable manner. Organizing means to qualitatively examine students' academic competence in appropriate correlation with their degrees and the academic systems.
 - iii. Encouraging and paying closer attention to specially talented and outstanding students. Enhancing the inspection and evaluation process of education under definite principles and regulations.
 - iv. Implementing the projects against narcotic drugs in schools and educational institutions by appropriate measures.
 - v. Activities for the administration and management of action plans. Enhancing the moral and ethic education among staff, teachers and students. Improving and clearly determining the administrative and supervisory roles at each level. There should be appropriate and harmonious working plans for the efficient and qualitative success.
 - vi. Appointing staff to appropriate positions based on the real competence and eligibility while monitoring and appraising their undertaken responsibilities systematically.

Conclusion:

Although Ministry of Education has attempted to develop the education adapted to the better quality and new standard, and decided the general guidelines for the future improvement during the last period of time, there have been a number of challenges and complicated situations now and then. We realize that the education sector will be confronted with a great deal of obstacles in the future such as:

- As it is known, Laos is one of the least developed countries (LDCs), its least socio-economic development has inevitably impacted on the Lao educational development. First of all, it has revealed that our Lao educational quality is relatively low by the international standard.
- Problems of severely inadequate number of qualified teachers and instructors, and a high percentage of graduated teacher students who are unwilling to engage in the teaching professions.
- Problems of insufficient instruction materials and textbooks for both teachers and students in the course of learning processes.
- Poor administration and management, and the limited budget of the government to grant for education.

In conclusion, the education sector has to be better improved and promoted in order to develop human resources to meet the needs of the government's strategic policy objectives in the process of socio-economic development. It is, however, basically the decision of government as well as the participation of all Lao people. This is also illustrated in the Constitution, which proclaims that: ***"Educational development is the duty of all Lao people"***. With regard to the foreign grant aids and cooperation in forms of bilateral assistance and NGOs assistance, the Ministry of Education will have to achieve better satisfactory accomplishment in educational development.