

Barriers to Inclusive Education:

A Critical Analysis of Village Education Development
Committee's Participation toward the Border School
Development Project of SEAMEO CED in Lao PDR.

Summary Report

Cheanmaly Phonesavanh

Southeast Asia Minister Education Organization
The Regional Center for Community Education Development.
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Abstract.

The education system in Lao PDR is undergoing a process of decentralization, with the aim of ensuring local- and community-level involvement and thus helping to achieve national goals of universal access to- and completion of basic education, of sufficient quality to result in tangible learning outcomes. To support the decentralization process, in 2008, Ref. No. 2300, Ministerial Decree made provision for the establishment of Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) in order to help community people, formal, non-formal and informal education learners. Research has shown that VEDCs has less applied their roles and responsibilities in their community's with the reason that to establish VEDCs was top-down policies and the district governor was implemented the role in each village. VEDCs themselves in some villages doesn't know their role very well as well as to commit the task and also has less to access training program for capacity building. Working at the field is priorities for their own family livelihood. This research aims to critically analyses VEDC's participation due to their task assigned in selected pilot study especially in Border School on 4 Provinces as: (i) in Ban Sampanhsay and Thanasa, Sangthong District, Vientiane Capital Border school with Thailand; (ii) in Ban Deuy, Dan, Viengxay District, Huaphan Province Border school with Vietnam; (iii) in Ban Phadam Bokeo Province Border school with Myanmar; and (iv) in Champasak Border with Cambodia.

Building on existing work on VEDCs supporting in school development and it identifies the opportunities and barriers that VEDCs are facing and reflected in Border School Development Program.

Based on a literature review of the Village Education Development Committee(VEDC) relationship of school development program at the field work including 3 focus group discussions with 25 VEDCs members and semi-structured interviews with 12 members of Village Education Development Committee as well as 14 participants from various stakeholders at local, district and national level, was conducted between October - December 2019.

The findings have demonstrated that VEDCs are playing some role in most aspects of making School Development Program (SDP) in many schools. In particular, VEDCs seem to be active in problem analysis, identifying priority needs and simple strategies to address the needs of the communities. VEDCs are stipulated to be composed of at least seven individuals, including the village head (serving as chairperson), representatives from the Women's and Youth Union, Student's Parent and the School Director and Teachers. The 'basics' of VEDCs are largely in place,

but there is more work to be done to ensure their optimal functioning. In case study Border School students particularly minorities ethnic group are often affected by outside factors that they are not able to control, including a human trafficking, cross border for illegal trading as well as lacking of school infrastructure, lacking of teachers and motivation from their communities. Therefore, it is recommended to work closely with VEDCs and motivate them to effective in supporting enrolment, improving infrastructure and making various kinds of contribution to school development.

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Education and Sports of Lao PDR was launched Village Education Development Committee(VEDC) in 2008, to build a core of highly trained development VEDC who would play a key role in shaping policy choice towards the vision of a more integrated, prosperous, harmonious in order to help rural areas in education. Then, the VEDC seeks to promote better understanding of education development issues in all provinces among planners, policy makers, academics, and researchers. As education continue to face increasingly complex challenges of education development, the knowledge base required to inform policy choices has become increasingly important. The VEDC program was planned to help promote a more effective link between members and applied their role effectively. VEDCs aims to engage policy process by supporting scholarly works that would bring multifaceted perspectives on development issues and provide now knowledge on the impacts and consequences of policy choices. By providing resources and opportunities to the VEDC could be a potent and active partner in the education development process. To benefit from the opportunities provided by model of VEDC, the Government of the Lao PDR is needed seeking best practices of VEDC roles, good outcomes of communities, and see all includes poor household, minorities ethnic group could access basic educational at least in pilot areas studies of SEAMEO CED Border School Project.

2. Key Questions, Objectives and Methods

2.1 Research Question and Objectives.

The key research question is: What is the key challenges for VEDC of the contribution to improving teaching, the learning environment and linking home and school cultures.

The objectives of the research are to

- i. Critically analyses VEDC's participation in the management of communities, VEDCs and their contribution towards achieving the Education Quality Standards (EQS) at school level;
- ii. Assess the level of diversity within the VEDC representative structure, with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of women and marginalized groups especially in Border School Projects;
- iii. Assess the efficiency and sustainability of VEDC capacity-building approaches currently being implemented in the country;
- iv. And Generate lessons and provide recommendations to inform and support the revision of existing VEDC guidelines and the design of upcoming programs under the Border School Project umbrella that will work in the area of school-community partnerships/ VEDCs and school-based management.

2.2 Methods

Common qualitative methods were used through VEDCs formal and informal meeting and literature review of VEDC relationship between communities, school instructors and education development stakeholders and making of literature review and field works includes 3 focus group discussions with 25 VEDCs members and semi-structured interviews with 12 members of Village Educational Development Committee as well as 14 participants from various stakeholders at local, district and national level.

3. SEAMEO CED partnership with VEDCs

SEAMEO CED co-operate with VEDCs to find the ways to promote the equitable access to education for the poor and disadvantage children at school level through several programs, projects, activities, events, etc. Then, encourage, promote, motivate, provide assistance, and organize various training workshops, meetings with the management levels and the communities in order to improve the quality of education through the improvement of the existing curriculum, new textbook writing, printing textbooks and nationwide distribution, train teachers and school managers. Furthermore, the education leaders in 4 Province which school has Border with SEAMEO member's countries acknowledge themselves that they have commitment with SEAMEO CED together to development school and communities in certain areas follow by mission and vision of SEAMEO CED. Currently, CED on the plan on center collaborate with other SEAMEO Centers in order to

- Provision of usable water supply (drinking and washing water): pipe line from mountains, pneumatic water sources, wells, etc.
- Electricity connection where possible.
- Provision of teachers and teaching-learning equipment/ materials.
- Provision of training for VEDCs how to collect data effectively by using collecting data program.
- Provision of training of leadership, management skills and technical how to deal with community's people and so on.

Even though, the government provides several training and the terminology is widely recognized but VEDCs in Border School Project got few chance to access due to the fact that geographical is in isolated areas which have no roads, no electricity and so on to access them. It was another way that SEAMEO Secretariat raised the awareness of the barrier of inclusive at the borderland people which led by SEAMEO CED partnership with other SEAMEO Centre to explore challenges faced by school, people in the border and identify SEAMEO Centres and partners' good practices in providing inclusive education for marginalized learners.

4. What should VEDCs do in Border School Project?

SEAMEO CED has number of mission for the Village Education Development Committee in order to help and work effectively at the SEAMEO CED Border School Projects. VEDCs in larger or multi-ethnic villages are often not availing themselves of the existing provision to extend beyond seven members. The 'status-based' VEDC structure promotes their authoritative agency but not necessarily their inclusivity or continuity. There are also challenges in ensuring that all members are committed to and capacitated for their roles. Most VEDCs meet fairly regularly, but not on the monthly basis recommended in official guidance.

3 Years Border School Projects led by CED has never stop to find partners who has the same or similar target to help community, students in rural remote areas. Currently, SEAMEO CED has co-partnership with the regional center of DVV International and center collaboration with SEAMEO INNOTECH to support VEDC and CLC members' roles to effectively applied in their communities and help community to eradicate in number of certain poor as well as brings best resulted of their development performances models in order to disseminate more village in Border School.

Below is agree and support top-down policies for VEDC Mission of SEAMEO CED Border School Project.

❖ **The role of VEDCs is to**

- Summarize and study data concerning the various problems of teachers, students, illiterate persons, schools, equipment and learning/teaching materials.
- Create village education development plans; based on the ideas and needs of the villagers.
- Set up procedures for the labour involved in the construction and maintenance of the school and the school environment and monitor construction, repair and maintenance work.
- Facilitate the wider community in - school construction, repairs and maintenance - allocation and improvement of classrooms and the school environment - looking after the lives and wellbeing of the teachers (VEDC Handbook, 2013).

Moreover, Village Education Committee (VEC) plays a major role in bringing the positive attitudinal change in people towards education and in mobilizing the community and motivating parents/ guardians to send their children to schools, especially girls and children from disadvantaged groups. They are also responsible for school construction and maintenance, purchase of materials, school mapping and micro- planning exercise, preparation of Village Education Plan and school management as well as teacher performance. The village education committee performs activities regarding management and maintains of the school and is particularly useful in monitoring and supervision of primary school (Prakash Jena, 2012).

❖ **VEDCs' Support to Equitable Access and Inclusion**

VEDCs will:

- Collect data on the total number of households and on poor households.

- Collect data on school-aged children (and illiterate adults), specific situations etc., disaggregated by gender and ethnicity.
- Promote education children and adults who have never yet studied, or who dropped out from studying regularly, especially females and members of ethnic groups.
- Advise on food which is healthy according to the nutritional principles.
- Monitor the attendance of children, especially with respect to absenteeism, so as to consult their parents or guardians in order to find a solution.
- Promote the vocational skills of the community and young people by promoting traditional arts and handicrafts and the establishment of income generation groups. The wider community should:
 - Collect statistics on school-aged children in the village, assist poor children, send their children to school regularly, check the number of students with class teachers, watch out for children not going to school. From VEDC (Handbook 2013).

A key function of the VEDC is to support and encourage access to education and to reduce dropout of children from school. A central strategy that is stipulated is the collection of disaggregated data on household membership, which has the potential not only to increase enrolment but also reduce inequalities related to gender, poverty, remote location or other factors. Frequent interactions with the community including visits to children's homes are also encouraged.

❖ **VEDCs' Support to Teaching/ Quality.**

Roles of VEDCs

- Create lists of qualified and unqualified teachers, persons able to assist teachers and school principals, and of teachers' needs.
- Take the various issues involved with learning and teaching for consultation with the villagers, teachers, and students so that they may together seek out solutions according to actual circumstances and the capacity of the village without having to rely on superior levels.
- Organize activities for students to improve and repair the school, to purchase learning and teaching equipment, and to assist teachers when in difficulty.
- Set up storytelling and the telling of local fables and legends (potentials/heritage) and the cultural, material, and psychological ways [of their village] by village elders, teachers, and educated persons of the village families.
- Areas for wider community participation Monitoring and assisting teachers in their teaching:
- Monitor the punctuality of teachers with respect to their teaching hours, check whether or not the days off taken by teachers are in accordance with the officially issued calendar.

- For those with knowledge or expertise in a field which is suitable for the subject or lesson being taught, assist the teachers (especially in the teaching of local curricula).
- Assist teachers in the production of teaching equipment and so forth. (VEDC handbook 2013).

❖ **Strategies to Improve Teaching and Learning.**

- Encouraging children’s regular attendance.
- Monitoring teacher attendance.
- Food and accommodation support for teachers.
- Provision of materials for teaching-learning resources.
- Extra-curricular activities for children.
- Encouraging different contributions from community to improve the learning environment.

Even though, VEDC have received insufficient investment to effectively fulfill their mandated roles. The report on Basic Education notes that ‘the effectiveness of VEDCs seems to rest on a range of factors, including the capacity and education levels of its members, as well as the geographic and cultural cohesiveness of the village. Whilst there is some evidence of the impact of strengthened VEDCs on community awareness of girls’ education and increased support to schools and teachers, there continue to be significant challenges in ensuring regular and meaningful community participation, especially with regards to more disadvantaged community members’. SEAMEO CED was planned and try to filled the gap by seeking partnership both in domestic and international, regional at least the Border School Project could access needed.

5. SEAMEO CED Border School Project: Briefly Review.

SEAMEO CED has been working on the SEAMEO Flagship Border Schools Project. The Border Schools Project is an Inter-Centre Collaboration that has important origins in Sustainable Development Goal 4 “to achieve equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” as well as SEAMEO priority area number 2 “addressing barriers to inclusion and access to basic learning opportunities for all learners through innovation in education delivery and management. The project is currently supported by both the Ministry of Education and Sports in Lao PDR as well as the SEAMEO Secretariat.

The Border Schools Project was initiated by SEAMEO and led by SEAMEO CED to address some of these challenges by:

- Developing an understanding of the challenges faced by border schools; and
- Addressing the problems of inequity and access to quality education for marginalized communities of SEAMEO Member Countries.

Some of the key focus areas of the Border Schools Project include teaching and school capacity development, increased community involvement and engagement and the development of networks and resources (including partnerships between VEDC and SEAMEO CED).

In the early year of 2019, SEAMEO CED was organized international workshop for presenting the issues and challenges of the Border School faces.

6. Challenges and Opportunity in Border School Development Project.

Over the last two years, SEAMEO CED has been emerging as a research, coordination and training organization that demonstrates leadership in community education development via community driven research projects connecting education with socio-economic community priorities. The organization's mandate covers both formal, non-formal and informal education contexts with a significant focus on livelihood development and lifelong learning.

Many SEAMEO Member Countries share their borderlands yet the quality of education received in border schools is generally poor and compounded by factors such as remoteness, poor infrastructure and services, low household and community income, low human capacity and cross-border migration. Significant attention has been paid to actively improve and enhance the quality of education and health in border communities in order to achieve the SDGs. Border regions also represent significant economic and social opportunities in terms of commercial agriculture and eco and cultural tourism especially in Myanmar-Lao province of Bokeo and Laos-Vietnam province of Houaphan. Investment in education is a key element to enable border communities to take advantage of these opportunities but also drive the social and economic development of Lao PDR into the future.

In order to be better understand the specific challenges of each community, a pilot study was conducted during the year of 2019 with school teachers, managers and district office staff to better understand their main opportunities and constraints and existing resourcing. Some of the common issues faced by border schools included: teaching and education management capacity (for example, teachers received on average about 1.2 training opportunities in 8 years). Other challenges include multi-grade teaching, teaching in Lao as a second language and limited knowledge to teach specific subject areas. Moreover, a lack of school infrastructure, cross border land for trade and motivation from their society.

Some potential project activities were identified including training activities and development opportunities in schools to integrate agricultural knowledge into developing the school, village development committee, and community collaboration. The pilot study also identified issues specific to primary schools including unique multi-grade teaching challenges; inappropriate

enrolment ages (such as late enrolment ages); smaller student numbers and competing economic activity. There are also additional issues specific to Lower secondary schools including decreasing teacher training opportunities, limited community engagement and family support for schooling; pressure to earn economic incomes and the perception that education does not provide economic and job opportunities. Many of these issues are socio-cultural as much as they are poverty related. The findings of the pilot were confirmed by representatives from the border schools themselves including Ban Dan and Ban Duey Schools in Houaphan Province who highlighted some of their current opportunities and resources as well as challenges including limited parental support and the need to develop strategic planning and school management skills. Houay San and Phadam schools in Bokeo Province had similar challenges, and Kengkang Primary and Nonsamphanh School in Champasak identified the need to develop teaching resources and to build teaching skills in specific subjects. Santhong Lower Secondary School in Vientiane Capital identified the need to develop their capacity in specific subjects and highlighted the value of working with parents to support school attendance.

The visit to Samphanna Lower Secondary School Border with Thailand which highlighted the important role of students, families and the community in ensuring that schooling is a positive experience. The students demonstrated that many of them face the challenge of managing “double identities”. This mismatch creates significant issues in terms of the movement of students for economic reasons to support their families. It was also clear that more work needs to be done in order to develop a better understanding of the aspirations and motivations of students and families. The project also created a space to match the needs of Border Schools with existing capacity and skills within SEAMEO Centers in order to develop a way forward via a joint planning session identifying amongst other things areas for collaboration and where more research is required.

In order to address some of these issues, a trial of student activities was carried out at Namsang Secondary School in Santhong District in order to connect agricultural students from the National University of Laos (NUOL) with some of the current livelihood concerns identified in Santhong District, Vientiane Capital. A series of activities were carried out from 6-10 May 2019 in conjunction with school students to demonstrate practical agricultural science-based activities that had practical value for the community. The main objectives of the activities were to promote learning and awareness as well as introduce students to clean agriculture – including compost and animal feed production as well as simple food processing from local plants. In subsequent interviews, many students from Namsang School reported the value of these practical activities that did not occur often in the community – enabling them to not only build their knowledge and skills but also enjoy new friendships. A total of 337 students enthusiastically participated in the activities

which were well supported by teachers who commented on how they wished that activities occurred over a longer time frame and requested annual activities in the future.

7. Case Study Contexts

In Huaphanh Province, where the School Border with 3 Province of Vietnam is located in the northern part of Lao PDR and is about 650 Kilometers from Vientiane Capital. It is an upland province and is covered by forest (76%), mountain (16%) and rice fields (8%). A total of (13,44%) households are one of the poorest in Lao PDR. It has one of the highest rates of multigrade classrooms (62 % in 2015) in Laos.

Viengxay District is located in the Northeast of Huaphan Province and is 28 kilometres from the Huaphan Province centre. Viengsay District has 14 village clusters, 104 villages, 5,782 households and 7,070 Families with a total population of 32, 647 People. There are 5 major ethnic groups (Thaideng 58,85%, ; Lao 14,76%'; Kamu 14,30%, Hmong 9.30%; Emien 2,35%).

Ban Dan and Ban Duey Primary Schools are located in Viengxay District Huaphan Province and are rural communities heavily reliant on agricultural production and livestock. The school has major multigrade classroom issues. For examples, grade 1-2-3 study in the same class and grades 4-5 are in the same class. The school has a temporary building was located in the centre of village.

Number of Challenges of Ban Dan, Ban Deuy found 1. Director has lacking of doing strategies plan and management skill. 2. Teachers are lacking of management and multi grade-teaching skills. 3. Lacking of teacher guideline, students guide books, toys and equipment to facilitate of teaching and learning. 4. Village Education Development Committee do not actively apply their roles and responsibilities. 5. Parents rely on only teachers to teach their kids at school, lacking of motivation and encourage their kid go to school and students learning outcomes remain low and poor outcomes.

In Bokeo Province where the School Border with Myanmar is located in the Northern Province in the west-east of Laos. It is located about 894 km from Vientiane Capital, 70% of the total area is mountainous. Bokeo shares a border with Thailand and Myanmar The province is generally poor.

Merng district is in the west-east of Bokeo Province has 5 village clusters with 28 villages, with 15,754 people. There are 8 ethnic groups in Merng: Leu 22.1%, Lahoo 44.25%, Ahka 16.94%, Hmong 6.88%, Kmu 2.70%, Ill-mien 2.06%, Lamead 1.9%, Yuan 3.20%.

The School major issued were found that 1. Grade 5 students do not continue to grade 6; 2. Low transition rate between grades; 3. High drop-out rate due to following parents to production fields; 4. Teachers have limited teaching skills and Lack of knowledge of resources such as library and books; 5. Some parents cannot speak Lao language.

In Vientiane Capital, Sangthong District where the school has Border with Thailand is Vientiane Capital is the capital city of Laos and has a total area is 3920 square kilometres. The population is about 900, 000 and the average density is 200 people per 1 meter. The landscape is mostly river plain and there are two main rivers the Mekong and Nam Ngum with a shared the

border with Thailand. Vientiane capital consists of 9 districts and some districts are located on shared traditional and international borders with Thailand.

Sangthong district is based in Vientiane capital city. The district is located in the center of Vientiane to the northwest which is about 55 kilometers and has 35 villages (with 13 villages along the Lao-Thai border). The population of Santhong is 30,747 and consists of 3 ethnic groups which are Lao lom, Kuemmu and Hmong. There are 7 secondary schools, 2 lower secondary schools, primary schools, 10 preschools and 10 kindergarten schools.

School face some challenges. 1. Learning outcomes of students remain poor; 2. Lacking of teaching experiences for some subject teachers; 3. Not enough teaching materials; 4. Not enough teachers' office space; 5. Not enough water for gardening; 6. Improve school infrastructures such as school fences by planting more trees inside school areas.

In Champasack Province where the School near the Borderland of Cambodia is located in the Southern Part of Laos and it has a distance far from Vientiane Capital city around 700 km. Land area: 153,500 ha, Population: 714, 364. Champasak Province shares border with Thailand and Cambodia.

Sukuma District is located far from the city of Champasak around 64 kilometers, also has 6 groups of education which include 56 villages and total population is 56,000. There are 3 ethnic groups such as: Lao 76,9 %; Suay 22,39 %; Khmer 0,65 %.

Phonthong District is located far from the city of Champasak along the South around 2 kilometers, it has 9 groups of village which include 71 villages. The total number of population is 99,374 (women 50,745) which include two ethnic groups.

The Border School in both District has number of challenges. 1. The students graduate from Grade 5 do not continue to study in Lower Secondary Education Level because parents could not support for further education; 2. Some weak students on these subjects: Lao language, mathematics, English and others; 3. Some students have low in socio-economic status and some parents do not understand how education is important for their children; 4. Lack of learning and teaching materials; 5. Some students who have a home far from school will not come to class in the afternoon because of distance; 6. Village Education Development Committee do not involve yet in education development.

However, on the site research has demonstrated of respond the challenges but do not in critically analysis of the cope yet.

Conclusion

Given the role of the SEAMEO CED in running a number of community-based activities - including vocational, basic education and literacy trainings, developing teaching materials, capacity building of school leaders, teachers and curricula on various themes, up-skilling of Master trainers, providing adult education training across sectors and providing monitoring and evaluation from SEAMEO Secretaries - it is well placed to design and implement a pilot Project for 'Promoting Community-based for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific'. VEDCs is another partnership to support communities in embedding quality learning in their pursuit of sustainable development. The implementation process is evaluated and recommendations for improving the Border School Project are developed and provided to SEAMEO member's countries in order to practice in their Borderland countries issues.

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