



CRS education programs improve students' access to books and other learning materials. Photos by Anoutta Vongladsamee/CRS.

School Lunch Project (SLP)

2021 -2025

PROJECT OVERVIEW

School meals are an essential intervention to improve educational outcomes and reduce food insecurity among children in Lao PDR. School meals increase enrollment, retention rates, and learning achievements for primary school students. School meals also provide an opportunity to promote good hygiene, proper nutrition, and local food production. In fact, for every dollar invested in school meals in Lao PDR, the economic return is more than six dollars in improved health and educational outcomes¹. World Food Programme (WFP) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) are working with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) to strengthen and hand over the school meals program to the national system, ensuring its sustainability and impact on future generations.

In five MOES priority districts of Khammuan and Savannakhet provinces, CRS and WFP partner on the School Lunch Project (SLP), funded by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food For Education program. Implemented in partnership with MOES, the project provides a comprehensive package of school health and nutrition activities, including school meals, safe access to water and sanitation, inclusive education, and promotes local ownership and capacity.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The School Lunch Project **improves healthy dietary practices and literacy learning outcomes for vulnerable primary school children** from remote and rural areas, in alignment with the priorities of the Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2021-2025.

SLP supports:

249 schools

1,500 education staff, including teachers and school principals

21,000 students

1,500 cooks, storekeepers, village education development committee members

QUICK FACTS

PROJECT TYPE	Food for Education and Child Nutrition
FUNDING	USDA, \$7.5 million
PROJECT LOCATION	Khammuane Province 4 districts (Mahaxai, Nhommalath, Xaybouathong, and Boualapha) Savannaketh Province 1 district (Xonnabouly)
# OF SCHOOLS	249
PROJECT PARTICIPANTS	24,000 (direct participants)
TIMEFRAME	2021-2025
PARTNERS	World Food Program, Ministry of Education and Sports

¹ MOES, WFP, Cost-Benefit Analysis of the School Meals Programmes in Lao PDR May 2018



School meals

18,320

pre-primary and primary school students are receiving nutritious lunches.

SLP targets students in 249 primary schools. Respecting local norms and staple items for a **balanced diet**, the school meals include fortified rice, lentils, canned fish, vegetable oil fortified with Vitamins A and D. This is complemented by **community contributions**, including vegetables from **school gardens**, and **links with local farmers**.

SLP trains volunteer cooks and storekeepers on safe food preparation and storage practices and village education community development (VEDC) members to assume responsibility for the school lunch management at the village level.



Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

130

schools are improving water supply systems and students' hygiene practices.

CRS utilizes local technical expertise to co-design the system and conduct geophysical surveys, drilling, unexploded ordnance (UXO) screening, and test pumping. SLP **water supply system** designs align with national standards, and the site selection is made in accordance with the schools' development plans. SLP mobilizes community members around this water infrastructure investment creating **Water User Committees** to acquire adequate infrastructure maintenance knowledge and links with suppliers. SLP also focuses on improving knowledge of hygiene practices through child-friendly "nudges" and by engaging **WASH Ambassadors**, where older students in each school are identified based on their uptake and ability to influence the behaviors of others and serve as models of good hygiene behaviors.



Inclusive Education

4,000

children are improving their reading and writing in 90 vulnerable schools.

By leveraging education materials explicitly designed for the Lao context and non-Lao-speaking children to accompany the new national curriculum, CRS leads the literacy component and trains primary teachers and local authorities educators in four districts in Khammuane on improving their skills of **literacy instruction** and **student-center needs**.

To allow teachers to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of their instructional strategies, CRS uses a **Formative Assessment Toolkit**, developed in collaboration with RIES (Research Institute for Educational Sciences). When practiced with fidelity, the formative assessment enables teachers to understand better which teaching methods, lessons, and activities are most effective and for which specific students.

Providing literacy materials is also vital for children to practice and have fun, so SLP creates **Corner Libraries** and **Take Home Learning Materials** with storybooks, alphabet cards, and writing materials. CRS also contributes to MOES's **digital transformation** agenda in Laos by promoting the utilization of digital applications for literacy acquisition, including the national digital learning platform, Khang Panya Lao.

Strengthening the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)



The School Lunch Project is designed to incorporate sustainability, and during implementation, groups of schools will be handed over under the National School Lunch Program's management. In order to prepare the path for this transition, CRS and WFP are providing technical support and capacity building to conduct a **Community Capacity Assessment (CCA)**, to assess community capacity for school feeding. The CCA will be used throughout the project cycle, first to identify needs in schools, then to assess the capacity of schools, communities, or districts to be handed over. WFP and CRS are working to integrate this tool into the Government's system for use in the NSLP.

