



Lao PDR: Food for Education

IMPROVED LITERACY OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

LEARNING AND ENGAGING ALL IN PRIMARY SCHOOL (LEAPS II):

In September 2016, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) signed a five-year agreement, ensuring a second phase of Learning and Engaging All in Primary School (LEAPS II). From 2012 – 2016, LEAPS I served over 12,000,000 meals and increased student attendance by 38%. Working closely with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), LEAPS II will continue **to improve literacy of 40,000 school-age children in Lao PDR in 350 schools across seven districts** of Savannakhet Province (Atsaphone, Outoumphone, Phalanxaye, Phin, Vilabouly, Sepon, and Nong). LEAPS II activities fall into three main categories: school meals, literacy, and inclusive education.

School Meals

In order to improve literacy, school attendance, and student attentiveness, CRS will provide food to **40,000 students daily**. This will include rice, lentils, and vegetable oil, which will be prepared into nutritious hot meals by local cooks. All food will be stored in community warehouses and prepared on-site in school kitchens. To ensure a high standard of hygienic food preparation and storage, CRS will train **3,377 local cooks, storekeepers and community leaders**. While CRS provides the key meal ingredients, communities will contribute firewood and water for cooking, as well as vegetables, meat, eggs, herbs and spices to make a nutritious meal. Community participation and contributions are vital for long-term sustainability. Schools will work with CRS staff to initiate and **expand school gardens**,

QUICK FACTS

Project Type	Food for Education
Funder/funding	USDA, \$27.49 million
Project location	Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR
# of people served	91,866 (direct) 258,214 (indirect)
Timeframe	2016-2021
Partners	Ministry of Education and Sports Save the Children University of Oregon

which is part of the primary school life-skills curriculum and contributes to the Government of Laos Homegrown School Feeding policy.

LEAPS II will **pilot water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) activities in 30 schools**, focused on behavior change and WASH infrastructure improvements. MoES trainers will mentor teachers on the **FIT for School** approach, which promotes daily handwashing and tooth brushing, regular deworming, and improved access to clean water, washing facilities, and appropriate sanitation. CRS will also support **construction of latrines and water points**. To ensure good management and upkeep, CRS will **train hand pump mechanics and form Water User Committees** to oversee community education and involvement.



faith. action. results.



CRS encourages student handwashing. Photo by Tom Chaves

Literacy

LEAPS I began amidst a dire context in which less than 20% of people in eastern Savannakhet Province could read or write. The LEAPS I literacy pilot demonstrated that students in schools where meals were combined with libraries and teacher capacity strengthening showed a **six-fold increase in oral reading fluency** (24 words per minute vs. 4) and a **five-fold increase in reading comprehension** (2.1 questions answered correctly out of 5 vs. 0.4) than children from non-LEAPS schools.

Building on this success, CRS will expand this model, which focuses on improving school resources and teachers' capacity to teach reading and writing. In partnership with Save the Children (SCI), CRS will promote early grade reading using the **Literacy Boost** approach, stocking **180 reading corners with books and reading activities** for Grade 1-3 classrooms. CRS and SCI will work with **150 school administrators to train 360 teachers** in improved reading, writing, and teaching techniques, accompanied by monthly coaching and monitoring of literacy instruction.

In addition to improving resources and teaching practices, CRS will work to keep children in school. In Savannakhet Province, 23% of children in Grade 1 drop out. For many students, primary school is their first exposure to Lao language, which makes school more challenging. To increase literacy and reduce dropout, CRS will pilot 24 summer literacy camps for **600 first graders** in order to increase exposure to spoken and written Lao. Camps will last 5 weeks, focusing on oral comprehension and development of language, vocabulary, and fine motor skills, such as holding a pencil.

Inclusive Education (IE)

According to the National Education Sector Plan 2010-2015, only 4% of children with disabilities (CWD) enroll in school. CWD face many barriers to enrollment, including stigma, poor

access to medical screening, and teachers who lack the skills to assist CWD to learn and develop fully. With CRS' support, Village Education Development Committees (VEDC) will learn how to identify all school-age children who should be enrolled in school. VEDCs will work with teachers and CRS to develop strategies to encourage enrollment.

CRS will work in targeted areas with a team of doctors to screen **4,440 children for disabilities** and provide **196 assistive devices** such as eyeglasses, hearing aids, and mobility devices in order for CWDs to participate more fully in their homes, schools, and communities.

CRS will continue collaborating with the University of Oregon (UO) to train **20 Master Trainers** and **180 principals and teachers** on classroom strategies, management, and lesson plans for IE. Based on an assessment of classroom practices, UO will design targeted teacher trainings to better accommodate CWDs and work with authorities to develop an IE action plan for Savannakhet Province.

Meanwhile, CRS will hold refresher trainings on Child Centered Teaching Methods, IE practice and policy, Individual Education Plans, and promote the dual language English-Lao website that houses IE resources and online training modules (<https://blogs.uoregon.edu/iecollaborativelaos/>).

PROJECTED OUTCOMES

CRS, in partnership with the MoES at the district, provincial, and national level, as well as SCI and UO, will improve the educational outcomes of school-age children in Savannakhet Province by serving **32 million meals**, providing **79,252 books**, and distributing **196 assistive devices**. By building the capacity of Government staff, teachers and principals, communities, and students, the gains in educational outcomes will continue beyond the five-year award and help to **improve literacy of school-age children in Lao PDR**.



Students showing improved alertness due to school meals and improved teaching strategies. Photo by CRS Rice Bowl staff