Summary
CRS began working in Lao PDR in 2007, primarily in the education sector, and has since worked to solidify its relationship with the Government of Lao PDR through projects to improve the quality of and access to education for all children.

CRS is a leader in disability assistance for the victims of unexploded ordinance (UXO). Operating in Savannakhet and Khammouane provinces, CRS reaches approximately 80,000 direct beneficiaries.

CRS’ strategy in Lao PDR for the next 5 years will continue to enhance its position as a leader in the education and UXO sectors as well as leverage our global experience in agriculture and health to pilot new projects to better serve the people of Lao PDR.

In July 2016, CRS launched its 2016-2021 country program strategy. CRS is also working with local non-profit associations (NPAs) in Lao PDR to strength their programing and management capacity.

CRS works to improve the quality and access to education for all children. Photo by Jennifer Hardy/CRS

80,000 direct beneficiaries are reached through by CRS' Lao PDR country program

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LEARNING AND ENGAGING ALL IN PRIMARY SCHOOL (LEAPS I)

2012-2016
Supported by a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture

Project summary
Learning and Engaging All in Primary School is a Catholic Relief Services project funded by a United States Department of Agriculture award. LEAPS’ goal is to improve food security, reduce hunger, and improve literacy and primary education in 6 districts in Savannakhet Province. Working closely with the Ministry of Education and Sports, the University of Oregon, and international non-profit organization Room to Read, LEAPS has been able to reach more than 36,000 beneficiaries in 308 schools in the 6 districts. LEAPS activities include serving school meals, promoting food safety and hygiene, providing grants to village education development committees (VEDC) for priority school infrastructure projects, establishing school libraries, training teachers in classroom management strategies and literacy instruction, and building support for inclusive education.

Key achievements from October 2016 to March 2017
1. From October to December 2016, CRS community mobilizers worked with village education development committees in all LEAPS communities to update their community maps. A community map is a tool used by teachers, principals, and the committees to assess their village—the maps identify natural and man-made resources and infrastructure, and include population figures (disaggregated by gender and age group) that can be used to calculate key education indicators, such as net enrolment and children with disabilities.

2. CRS field staff completed coaching for cooks and storekeepers in November-December 2016 using new, illustrated training materials. Pre- and post-tests showed an average increase of 17 percentage points in understanding of minimum standards for safe food preparation (from 70% to 87%), and an average increase of 25 percentage points on understanding of dietary and nutrition practices (from 58% to 83%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main indicator</th>
<th>Period achievement</th>
<th>Overall achievement</th>
<th>Project target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools receiving assistance</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of school-age children receiving daily school meals</td>
<td>33,935</td>
<td>34,561</td>
<td>36,660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of daily school meals provided to students</td>
<td>2,712,932</td>
<td>15,725,174</td>
<td>20,195,826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of metric tons of food assistance provided to students</td>
<td>438.37</td>
<td>2,697.25</td>
<td>3,344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of take-home rations provided to teachers/ cooks/storekeepers</td>
<td>9,775</td>
<td>62,839</td>
<td>58,329</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LEARNING AND ENGAGING ALL IN PRIMARY SCHOOL  
(LEAPS II)  

2016-2021  
Supported by a grant from the  
United States Department of Agriculture  

LEAPS II activities include school meals, literacy, and inclusive education. Photo by Jennifer Hardy/CRS

Project summary  

Learning and Engaging All in Primary School (LEAPS) II is a project funded by a United States Department of Agriculture award. The goal of LEAPS II is to improve the literacy of 40,000 school-age children in 350 schools across 7 districts in Savannakhet Province (Outhoumphone, Atsaphone, Phalanxay, Phin, Vilabouly, Sepon, and Nong). LEAPS II activities fall into 3 main categories: School meals, literacy, and inclusive education. Working closely with the Ministry of Education and Sports, Save the Children International, and the University of Oregon, CRS will ensure schools have access to resources and community support to 1) maintain strong attendance by ensuring a healthy and hunger-free learning environment for all students, 2) improve quality of instruction with an intensive model of training and accompaniment of school staff, 3) increase enrolment of children in schools through greater inclusion of children with disabilities and other excluded groups.

Snapshot of project activity  

1. In January 2017, all CRS field staff were trained to conduct community orientations and answer questions about LEAPS II. In February and March, they visited communities and provided an overview of LEAPS II activities, roles and responsibilities, and changes from LEAPS I to LEAPS II. These changes included a change in commodities to exclude green split peas; a greater focus on sustainability; and the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) pilot. Each community was asked to demonstrate their willingness to participate in the project by signing a new village-level memorandum of understanding.
2. CRS field staff completed a WASH assessment of all schools in the 6 LEAPS I districts throughout November and December 2016 (the assessment will be conducted in Nong in the next period now that school selection there is complete). The information from the WASH assessment is being used to inform the selection of the 30 pilot schools. Initial selection criteria included 1) presence of no other WASH actor in the community; and 2) schools with 0-1 improved water source (but not a borehole), resulting in a preliminary list of 37 schools. In April and May, the WASH staff conducted site visits to confirm and narrow this list.

3. External evaluation consultants, IMPAQ, collected baseline data from March 9-31 in 87 communities in 7 districts, covering a representative sample of the LEAPS II intervention area. CRS held a baseline evaluation preliminary findings meeting in May.

4. To improve communication and transparency between LEAPS II project management and beneficiaries, six CRS staff went to Outhoumphone and Sepon districts to consult communities about community-defined indicators and feedback mechanisms. CRS held eight focus group discussions with four different groups: mothers and teachers in Outhoumphone; and fathers/storekeepers and students in Sepon. Among other activities, community members participated in an activity during which they voted on the kinds of indicators that were important to them as well as the kinds and methods of feedback they preferred.

5. During LEAPS II, the University of Oregon will work with the project to ensure that the inclusive education theories and techniques promoted during LEAPS I over the last 4 years among government officials and administrators are cascaded down to the classroom level. To do this, a team of three UO staff members, Dr. Daniel Close (professor), John Lind (research associate) and Kirsten Haugen (UO staff member), traveled to Savannakhet in March for a 15-school field visit to assess IE practices and perceptions using classroom observation, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and a teacher survey on IE.

On March 9 and 10, the UO team trained the Lao assessment team on the qualitative tools, including four CRS staff and three government staff (one from PESS and two from a teacher training college), who carried out the assessment in schools from March 13-17. The full assessment report will be available in September. Initial impressions indicate that there is room for improved teaching practices in the classroom (the predominant style is teacher lecture, repetition, and transcription) and that parents are very interested in being more engaged in and informed about what is happening at schools.

Project targets
1. Twenty-six percent of students will, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade-level text.
2. A total of 40,429 school-age children will receive daily school meals.
3. A total of 32,705,154 daily school meals will be provided to students.
4. A total of 4,415.20 metric tons of food assistance will be provided to students.
5. A total of 94,177 take-home rations will be provided to teachers/cooks/storekeepers.
Project summary
CRS has been implementing a 2-year disability awareness and assistance project with World Education and the Ministry of Education and Sports in Xeabangfai and Xaibouathong districts of Khammouane Province. The project, Inclusive Communities, has reached more than 55,000 people with its focus on improving access to quality health services, improving the capacity of health professionals to screen for impairments; and by creating an enabling environment for more inclusive communities by sensitizing people to the challenges experienced by those with disabilities, increasing the independence and mobility of people with disabilities, and upgrading teaching methodologies and school infrastructure so that children with disabilities are better able to attend school.

Key achievements from October 2016 to March 2017
1. A total of 186 children and adults received 190 assistive devices, including wheelchairs, corner chairs, bicycles, tricycles, tricycles with handles, crutches, hearing aids, and eye glasses.
2. All 140 teachers trained on inclusive education teaching methods and individual education planning could explain how the instructor should communicate with all children (i.e., using a combination of instruction methods and pictures, adjusting the classroom seating to assist CWD, focus on peer education, repetition of lessons, and paying special attention to the needs of CWD).
3. Seven children and one adult successfully underwent cleft palate or lip surgery at Mahosot Hospital in Vientiane. No issues were reported during monitoring conducted two months after surgery.
4. Twenty-six adults underwent cataract surgery at Xaibouathong and Xebangfai District Hospitals. No issues were reported during monitoring conducted two months after surgery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main indicator</th>
<th>Period achievement</th>
<th>Overall achievement</th>
<th>Project target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of people who received surgical and medical treatment</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of PWD who received appropriate assistive devices and instructions on their care and use</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of assistive devices distributed</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Baeng Teoansouliya was born with a cleft palate that made essential daily activities extremely difficult. Simply eating and drinking were a challenge. His cleft palate also left him with a noticeable speech impairment and he was teased by other children. Feeling self-conscious, Baeng decided to quit school.

As part of Catholic Relief Services’ community mapping and screening for impairment in Xaibouathong District, Khammouane Province, and with support from the USAID-funded World Education Laos (WEL) TEAM project, Inclusive Communities, CRS identified Baeng as a candidate for cleft palate surgery.

Baeng demonstrated a particular maturity when given the option to receive cleft palate surgery. He was not afraid because he firmly believed that surgery would help him live a more meaningful life. After CRS briefed Baeng and his father, Heung, on the surgery, the qualifications of the Mahosot Hospital doctors, and what they could expect before and after the operation, Baeng and Heung accompanied CRS staff, provincial and district government partners, and several other families on the 8-hour journey to Vientiane.

The success of the surgery was immediate. Baeng was able to eat and drink without any problems. Speech was initially a struggle but, with time, it improved. Upon visiting Baeng in his home 6 weeks after the surgery, the CRS and WEL TEAM staff found he had resumed his schooling and was enjoying studying the Lao language. To continue improving his Lao at home, his teacher had provided him with additional exercises to practice challenging sounds that he was trying to master. The teasing had substantially reduced and though some of his friends still called him “mute kid”, it no longer angered him. Baeng said he was much more confident in his speaking than before.

Neighbors also commented that his speech had improved, and his parents said Baeng spoke more loudly. They were excited to see how his speech would continue to improve over the subsequent 6 to 12 months, the timeframe doctors said was required for the palate to completely close and heal. Until then, Baeng was embracing his new life.
Summary
The objective of the project was to build on the progress made under the previous CRS-funded project to raise greater awareness of autism in Lao PDR and to further enhance the capacity of the Association for Autism to better assist more children with autism in Lao PDR.

Key achievements
From January to December 2016, the AFA has been working on a project called Improving Awareness and Quality of Service for Autistic Children in Lao PDR with support from CRS. Through this project, AFA and CRS have served 150 people as direct beneficiaries and 2,500 as indirect beneficiaries.

A total of 37 teachers in Vientiane have been trained how to teach and better understand children with autism; 29 parents, including AFA staff, have increased their capacity for coaching autistic children in cooking and sewing. A total of 2,500 people in Vientiane have been reached through advocacy, awareness-raising and outreach.

AFA has also engaged in networking at the regional level within Southeast Asia through participation in four events. Twenty-six people affiliated with AFA participated, including parents, students and AFA staff. In August 2016, AFA conducted a family camp for 25 families in Khon Kaen, Thailand. These activities gave parents the opportunity to better understand their children through workshops, discussions, and games.
Summary
The Lao Disabled Women’s Development Centre is passionate about education and believes that education is crucial for success. During this one-year project in four target villages in the Hadxaifong district in Vientiane, the center is providing training on making efficient cooking stoves and pails, marketing, gardening, and creating production groups for people with disabilities and their families. With the improved knowledge and skills, PWDs can be more independent and they and their families will have the opportunity to earn income.

Key achievements from October 2016 to March 2017
Lao Disabled Women’s Development Centre, with close support from CRS, conducted a project orientation in September 2016 which 77 people attended, including local authorities, PWDs, and their family members. Thirty-four PWDs and their family members were trained to make stoves to give them the opportunity to increase employment and income. In January 2017, a survey in 4 villages in Hadxaifong district found 54 PWDs and their family members who were interested in training with LDWDC. CRS also supported LDWDC to make a vegetable garden at their center, which will help provide daily food for more than 50 staff.

With the improved knowledge and skills, people with disabilities can be more independent

Training in making cooking stoves and pails (above) and in gardening (below) gives women with disabilities a chance to earn an income.
Lao PDR Country Program Strategy 2016-2021

GOAL: LAO PDR’S MOST VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES HAVE ENHANCED RESILIENCE

EDUCATION
Primary school age children have increased access to improved basic education.
IR1: Boys and girls in remote and poor communities have improved access to primary schools.
IR2: Boys and girls in primary school access quality literacy tools and improved literacy instruction.
IR3: Quality inclusive education structure and systems are in place at basic education level.

UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE
Vulnerable communities are safer from UXO and have reduced the long-term effects of UXO.
IR1: Vulnerable communities apply safe behavior practices in UXO-contaminated areas.
IR2: UXO survivors access life-saving care, support, and recovery services.

AGRICULTURE
Vulnerable households have improved food security throughout the year.
IR1: Households adopt efficient production practices.
IR2: Households link products to markets.

HEALTH/ NUTRITION
Vulnerable and marginalized groups in target provinces have improved health.
IR1: Adults and children with disabilities access rehabilitation and medical services.
IR2: Vulnerable households and children adopt safe WASH behaviors.
IR3: Vulnerable households and children are utilizing more nutritious food.

CROSS CUTTING: INCLUSION OF GENDER, ETHNICITY AND DISABILITY IN ALL INTERVENTIONS.

VISION: BY SUPPORTING BASIC SERVICE DELIVERY FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES, ALL CITIZENS OF LAO PDR HAVE IMPROVED ACCESS TO BETTER SOCIAL SERVICES.

PARTNERSHIP
Continue to work closely with the Government of Lao PDR and relevant members of Lao civil society.

INTEGRATION
Seek opportunities to integrate between sectors, contributing to greater impact on beneficiaries.

CROSS-CUTTING
Particularly in the areas of disability, gender, MEAL, financial controls and efficiency.

OWNERSHIP
Promote greater ownership of projects by partners and communities to better sustain project outcomes.

RESEARCH
Invest in key research opportunities in coordination with international and local universities.

CAPACITY BUILDING
Strengthen the capacity of Lao staff across sectors.

CRS will prioritize communities in the food insecure and under-developed districts of Lao PDR. Priority will be given to Savannakhet and Khammouane provinces where CRS can leverage its existing reputation and relationships around its education and UXO programs. These provinces will serve as an entry point for the new sectors of agriculture / food security and health / nutrition, whose approaches can later be applied to other areas of the country.
CRS mission statement
CRS is the official international humanitarian agency of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. CRS’ relief and development work is accomplished through programs of emergency response, HIV, health, agriculture, education, microfinance and peacebuilding. CRS eases suffering and provides assistance to people in need in more than 100 countries, without regard to race, religion or nationality.

CRS focuses on these key areas of service, taking a holistic approach to relief and development, with 10 fields of expertise:

- Agriculture
- Emergency Response and Recovery
- Health
- Water and Sanitation
- Education
- Justice and Peacebuilding
- Microfinance
- HIV Relief
- Mobile Technology
- Partnership and Capacity Strengthening

We strive for excellence in all that we do, ensuring the programs we support in these fields of expertise are community-based, participatory, equitable and results-driven.

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