



1. Project Data

Project ID P145544	Project Name Early Childhood Education Project	
Country Lao People's Democratic Republic	Practice Area(Lead) Education	
L/C/TF Number(s) IDA-53700,IDA-H9100	Closing Date (Original) 31-Jul-2019	Total Project Cost (USD) 23,694,583.53
Bank Approval Date 02-Apr-2014	Closing Date (Actual) 30-Jun-2021	
	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	28,000,000.00	0.00
Revised Commitment	26,153,894.96	0.00
Actual	23,694,583.53	0.00

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

The stated objective of the project was “to increase the coverage and improve the quality of early childhood education (ECE) services for three to five year-olds in Target Districts” (Financing Agreement of May 14, 2014, p. 4).

Three outcome indicators were reformulated during the first project restructuring in 2017. The reformulation essentially consisted of a switch from absolute numbers to percentages, providing more context and validity to the evidence by illustrating the relative change in improved coverage and quality of ECE services. Therefore,



this ICR Review did not apply a split rating, as the revisions reflected better measures of project achievement, unrelated to project ambition, and they were consistent with the theory of change.

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?

No

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

No

d. Components

I. Increasing Coverage of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Target Districts (Appraisal: US\$6.0 million; Revised US\$13.8 million; Actual: US\$11.8 million)

1.1: Community-Based Contracting for the construction of pre-primary classrooms through the provision of construction grants and training to participating villages to construct pre-primary classrooms with age-appropriate water and sanitation facilities with adherence to accessibility standards for physically disabled children.

1.2: Community Child Development Groups for 3- and 4-year-olds. Under this sub-component, the project would pilot Community Child Development Groups (CCDGs) for 3- and 4-year-olds in 48 locations where there were schools with pre-primary classrooms. The CCDG concept would be piloted to provide a separate learning environment for 3- and 4-year-old children to determine if this would have a positive impact on the cognitive development of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children.

II. Improving Quality of Early Childhood Education Services (Appraisal: US\$13.3 million; Revised: US\$11.6 million; Actual: US\$8.2 million)

2.1: Supporting a package of services to deliver: (i) community awareness campaign sessions to engage parents in parental education; (ii) childhood disability screening; and (iii) school meals.

2.2: Teacher and Education Officer Training, including pre-service training, development of a multi-age training module, and in-service training on multi-age teaching techniques for teachers and school administrators.

III. Project Management, Capacity Development, and Monitoring and Evaluation (Appraisal US\$8.7 million; Revised US\$2.6 million; Actual: US\$3.5 million)

3.1: This sub-component would finance incremental costs associated with project management, including logistics, physical space, and transportation.

3.2: Support to monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates



Cost and financing: At appraisal, the project cost was estimated at US\$28 million (consisting of both an IDA Grant and an IDA Credit, each amounting to SDR 9.1 million or US\$14 million equivalent). No direct financial contributions were planned or provided by the Borrower. The actual cost was US\$23.7 million. An amount of about US\$1.8 million was cancelled (Task Team clarifications on March 17, 2022).

Dates: The project was approved on April 2, 2014 and became effective on July 31, 2014. A Mid-Term Review was carried out on January 16, 2017. The original closing date was planned for July 31, 2019, and, with two project extensions aggregating at two years (see below), the project closed on June 30, 2021.

Project restructurings: The project underwent three restructurings, as follows:

- The first restructuring on May 18, 2017 increased the number of pre-primary classrooms from 250 to 550 classrooms, and CCDG shelters from 48 to 73 shelters, while concurrently scaling down activities of a pilot nature: the pilot for community awareness was reduced from 520 to 270 communities, for Multi-Age Teaching (MAT) from 500 to 62 communities, and for disability screening from 340 to 300 children. It introduced a new pilot for “Toy Libraries” in 270 communities targeted for community awareness. The restructuring also introduced changes to the results framework to rectify initial M&E design issues (including unmeasured quality aspects), and to better formulate outcome indicators as explained above in Section 2a, and to reallocate funds between disbursement categories.
- The second restructuring on May 15, 2018 extended the project closing date to December 31, 2020 because of delays in pilot activities related to CCDGs, MAT of preschool children, and the early childhood development community awareness campaign.
- The third restructuring on November 26, 2020 extended the closing date to June 30, 2021 to complete activities.

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

At appraisal, coverage of ECE was limited. In 2013, the proportion of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in ECE programs was 33 percent, and that of 5-year-olds (in “pre-primary classrooms” attached to a primary school) was 52 percent. ECE coverage varied across geographic, socio-economic, and ethnic dimensions. Coverage was larger for the better-off segment of the population in urban centers and for the Lao-Tai ethnic group. Differences in coverage of ECE services translated into disparities in child development outcomes. The government intended to expand access to ECE, and the Education Sector Development Plan 2011-2015 aimed at creating affordable and expanded access to ECE for all children, especially in poorer and educationally disadvantaged areas.

Importantly, districts targeted by the project were and remained relevant to higher-level government goals for poverty reduction and ethnic development. ECE objectives were expected to contribute to reducing disparities in educational attainment of children across income levels, ethno-linguistic groups, and gender. The objectives remain relevant to the country’s long-term goal of increasing the human capital index, which stood at 0.45 around appraisal, lower than the regional average of 0.59 in East Asia and Pacific



Region. They are also aligned with the World Bank Education Sector Strategy 2020 “Learning for All,” particularly for investing early.

At project closing, the development objectives remained fully aligned with the Country Partnership Framework (CPF for FY2017-FY2021) in Focus Area 2: Investing in People, and with Objective 2.2: Improving quality of primary and pre-primary education and keeping girls in school. The project contributed to CPF indicator 11 (percentage increase in pre-school children ages 3–5-years attending early childhood development/ECE/preschool programs). In addition, investing in ECE is consistent with the World Bank’s twin goals of reducing poverty and boosting shared prosperity, since ECE would be expected to contribute in the long run to reducing poverty in target areas by improving educational attainment that usually leads to higher future earnings.

Rating

High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

Increase the coverage of early childhood education services for three- to five-year-old children in target districts

Rationale

Theory of change

It was reasonably expected that the provision of grants to communities for the construction of pre-primary classrooms, provision of grants to Village Education Development Committees, provision of training to Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) and caregivers, and development and production of CCDG materials and toolkits would result in additional pre-primary classrooms constructed, grants utilized, VEDCs and caregivers trained, and CCDG materials and toolkits produced and available. These outputs would plausibly contribute to increased coverage, measured by children's enrollment rates.

The theory of change was interlinked with quality improvement activities and capacity development that are discussed under Objective 2, below.

Target districts: Project interventions were concentrated in 14 priority districts in five provinces that were on the government priority list for poverty reduction. The country had a total of 47 priority districts, with heavy concentration of ethnic and disadvantaged populations. Priority districts were defined in the 2003 National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy of the government of Lao PDR, based on a set of household, village, and district level indicators. These districts, where one third of the national population resided, were



considered priority districts for poverty reduction out of a total of 143 districts in the country (ICR, pp. 17-18). The total population in Lao PDR was around 6.5 million people during project preparation.

Outputs and intermediate results

Main outputs included grants for the construction of pre-primary classrooms and water and sanitation facilities. The project constructed 550 fully furnished pre-primary classrooms with water and sanitation facilities in 480 schools in target villages. The project also constructed 73 shelters, as planned.

Outcomes

The percentage of children aged 3-5 enrolled in ECE programs in CCDG and MAT target villages increased from a baseline of 12 percent in 2016 to 63.2 percent in 2021, exceeding the target of 50 percent. The share of girls aged 3-5 in the total number of children of the same age enrolled in these programs increased from a baseline of 50 percent in 2016 to 63.5 percent in 2021, exceeding the same target of 50 percent.

The percentage of children aged 5 enrolled in ECE programs in all target villages increased from a baseline of 11 percent in 2016 to 65.7 percent in 2021, exceeding the target of 48 percent. The share of girls aged 5 in the total number of 5-year-olds enrolled in ECE programs increased from a baseline of 50 percent in 2016 to 68.8 percent in 2021, exceeding the same target of 50 percent.

Direct project beneficiaries reached 53,811 people, slightly exceeding the target of 51,700 people.

Rating

High

OBJECTIVE 2

Objective

Improve the quality of early childhood education services for three- to five-year-old children in target districts

Rationale

Theory of change

The theory of change was interlinked with that of Objective 1 and held that activities for improving the quality of ECE services, notably pre-service and in-service trainings for pre-school teachers and administrators, community awareness campaigns, parenting education, training on childhood disability screening, and provision of nutritious meals would lead to pre-primary teachers and caregivers being trained, VEDCs and Village Health Volunteers trained for community awareness activities, children receiving medical screening,



and school gardens established, all of which would plausibly contribute to improving the quality of ECE services.

Research conducted in both developed and developing countries concluded that ECE programs that combine education, parenting education, and nutrition interventions have shown the largest positive impacts, particularly for children from low-income families (ICR, p. 7). The project incorporated all three interventions in its design.

The theory of change was complemented by capacity development activities in management and M&E, and that would result in the production of classroom observation reports, ECE Education Quality Standards being designed and endorsed, and grants being audited. Critical assumptions held that the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) was committed to implement project activities, and that there was adequate governance and coordination among government departments.

Outputs and intermediate results

The project:

- trained 810 VEDC members and 270 Village Health Volunteers on community awareness, supported by training modules and toolkits to increase knowledge and understanding of parents and community members about the importance of ECE and its availability, parenting skills in early stimulation, nutrition, health, hygiene, and childhood disability awareness; and 17,305 community members attended awareness sessions;
- introduced childhood disability screening through medical technical assistants, and 254 children participated in disability screening, received care, or were referred for treatment;
- provided school lunches under the existing scheme of the National School Meals Program, providing 21,886 meals to preprimary and primary students;
- trained 200 ethnic girls as pre-primary schoolteachers through both short- and long-term scholarships (intensive 30-week pre-primary training program for girls who have completed upper secondary school or 12 years of education, and three-year scholarship program for girls who have completed lower secondary school or 9 years of education);
- provided in-service training to 62 pre-primary MAT teachers;
- recruited 146 caregivers;
- established Toy Libraries in 270 villages;
- furnished 100 classrooms with educational toys and books; and
- provided 73 villages with outdoor playground equipment, teaching materials, and child story books.

Outcomes

The percentage of CCDG and MAT teachers receiving performance feedback at least once annually from ECE officers, based on classroom observations, increased from a baseline of zero in 2014 to 82 percent in 2018, short of the target of 100 percent.



The percentage of children aged 3-5 in target awareness villages who were stimulated at home increased from a baseline of 55 percent in 2016 to 74.8 percent in 2021, essentially meeting the target of 75 percent.

The percentage of children aged 3-5 in CCDG and MAT target villages with an overall child development score above 0.6 increased from a baseline of 37 percent in 2016 to 45.8 percent in 2021, short of the target of 47 percent.

Additional findings derived from the Impact Evaluation. Three randomized control trials were implemented under the project to estimate the impacts of CCDGs and MAT, compare the impact between the two interventions, and estimate the impact of community awareness interventions (ICR, p. 18).

Data showed that ECE attendance, parent-child interactions at home (reading books, telling stories, drawing), and child development outcomes (literacy, numeracy, and executive functions) increased significantly in both CCDGs and MAT communities at both midline (end 2017) and endline (early 2020) compared to the baseline scenario in early 2016. Endline scores for CCDGs and MAT interventions were largely similar, according to the ICR.

But the impact evaluation showed no evidence of community awareness campaign impact on children's early learning environments. The ICR (p. 19) noted that the lack of impact could have been caused by the fact that only a small percentage of VEDCs delivered the full suite of 12 awareness sessions in their villages as originally intended.

Rating

Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale

The objective to increase coverage of early childhood education services for three- to five-year-old children in target districts was fully achieved; and the objective to improve the quality of those services was almost fully achieved. The aggregation of achievements under both objectives is consistent with a substantial rating for overall efficacy.

The outcomes achieved were largely attributable to the project, and the ICR noted that, apart from MOES staff salaries, the project was exclusively dependent on IDA's support and its related activities (see section 7).

Overall Efficacy Rating

Substantial



5. Efficiency

The ICR (p. 13) highlighted the global acknowledgement that ECE interventions are among the most cost-effective interventions in social sectors. In settings marked by high inequalities and high rates of poverty and malnutrition, returns to early childhood interventions have been estimated to range from 6:1 to 18:1, resulting from increased future productivity and earnings alone. In addition, parental education on early child stimulation and the introduction of CCDGs for 3- and 4-year-olds are known to be a contributing factor to the improvement of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills of children (e.g., communication skills, social skills, and emotional development). The provision of school meals is also known to contribute to reduced dropout rates and increased school attendance.

The cost-benefit analysis that was carried out at appraisal suggested that expected benefits would outweigh costs (PAD, p. 14). The analysis used educational attainment as the most easily measured impact of the project, assuming a range of potential outcomes from optimistic (90 percent uptake with two additional years of schooling) to less optimistic (50 percent uptake with one additional year of schooling). Estimates on the returns to education were translated to increases in future income, and then compared to the stream of costs of project interventions. Using a discount rate of 5 percent per year, the analysis suggested that, under the optimistic scenario, the project would result in US\$7 in benefits for each dollar invested. Under a pessimistic scenario, the analysis suggested that the project would bring about US\$2 for each dollar invested.

The ICR carried out a rigorous cost-benefit analysis with sensitivity testing and appropriate assumptions. The analysis assumed that beneficiary children would go on to complete nine years of formal schooling; that students' participation in pre-primary education would result in higher learning outcomes, which would in turn increase the students' expected future wage earnings streams; that benefits accruing to children 3-5 years old from CCDG and MAT programs would amount to only half of the benefits accruing to 5-year-old pre-primary program beneficiaries. Using a discount rate of 5 percent, the net present value of the project was estimated at US\$75.5 million under the baseline scenario, with a corresponding internal rate of return (IRR) estimated at 8.7 percent (ICR, p. 25). Under a pessimistic scenario, assuming that improvements in learning outcomes were only half that of the baseline scenario, the net present value was estimated at US\$15.4 million with a corresponding IRR of 6.1 percent. These estimates suggest substantial economic returns from the project (ICR, p. 25).

At the same time, some adverse aspects of implementation reduced efficiency. The implementation of activities related to CCDGs, MAT, and ECE community awareness was delayed due to their novel nature (ICR, p. 29). There were lengthy processes in developing modules and materials for the awareness campaign, and in finalizing modules and administrative guidelines between MOES and the Ministry of Health. The time taken for all local stakeholders to gain understanding of project innovations contributed to the delays. Activities picked up around the third year, although staff turnover took place at different levels of MOES departments and contributed to variable implementation slow-downs, notably when project focal persons were transferred (ICR, p. 29). ECE community awareness modules remained partially implemented, but there was adequate progress in other project activities, including classroom construction. Subsequently, the project faced school closures due to COVID-19 lockdowns. The implementation period was extended by two years, as noted in Section 2e.

Efficiency Rating

Substantial



a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
ICR Estimate	✓	8.70	100.00 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

Relevance of objectives is rated high, as objectives were responsive to country needs for early childhood education and remained fully consistent with the World Bank Education Sector Strategy 2020 and with the Country Partnership Framework (FY2017-FY2021) at project closing. Efficacy is rated substantial, as development objectives were almost fully achieved. Efficiency is rated substantial, based on the expectation of substantial returns, but with implementation shortcomings that moderately reduced project efficiency. The overall outcome is rated satisfactory, indicative of essentially minor shortcomings in the operation's achievement of its objectives, in its efficiency, and in its relevance.

a. Outcome Rating

Satisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

The ICR reported several risks related to maintaining development outcomes, notably in terms of financial sustainability. Except for staff salaries, the total expenditure of the operation was financed by IDA, and the ICR (p. 36) estimated that there was a high risk that financial constraints may be encountered to support the maintenance of 550 pre-primary classrooms, the continuity of VEDCs and CCDGs, including allowances for awareness facilitators, caregivers' remuneration, replenishment of toys and materials, operation and monitoring costs, pre-service and in-service training, and school meals. Technical sustainability may also be affected due to teacher transfers and attrition of caregivers. The ICR noted that collective efforts and sense of ownership would likely be diminished once the project ends if project interventions were viewed as a "Bank project" (ICR, p. 37).

Nevertheless, a follow-on operation (Learning and Equity Acceleration Project or LEAP, P173407), approved in March 2021, expanded the ECE program and developed a plan for financial sustainability (ICR, p. 31). The risk to development outcome is likely to be mitigated by prevailing national policies related to poverty reduction, education development, and ethnic development promoting inclusion. Factors that would further



facilitate risk mitigation include political stability in the country and institutional strengthening generated by the project.

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

Project preparation benefited from lessons learned in ECE in the country and globally, including for overcoming demand-side constraints through awareness about ECE benefits, attention to disability, and provision of school meals, and for enhancing clarity in the lines of responsibility in ECE service delivery (PAD, pp. 10-11).

MOES was the project executing agency, supported by a Project Coordination Unit. MOES was responsible for project implementation according to agreed administrative arrangements, financial management and procurement practices, and applicable safeguard policies (PAD, p. 11). MOES was to be guided by a Project Steering Committee and a Project Advisory Council, supported by a Working Group. MOES would implement project activities as part of the day-to-day work of its line departments, including with counterpart officials at the provincial and district levels.

Implementation arrangements were adequately prepared, including for financial management, procurement, and safeguards. The ICR reported that preparation included intensive public consultations, meetings, workshops, and focus groups. The Bank Team developed an Implementation Support Plan that provided details on supervision, technical oversight, fiduciary oversight, external audits, and procurement training.

Risks and risk management measures were adequately identified overall, except for risks associated with the introduction of new concepts such as CCDGs and MAT. The ICR (p. 37) reported that the introduction of these new concepts required time to be understood by stakeholders. Related delays necessitated project extensions, and the ICR noted that implementation of new concepts requires realistic timetables at the initial project design stage.

The ICR (p. 34) stated that, at appraisal, the project identified necessary building blocks for ECE, but did not include a sufficient set of interventions to address unmet demand for ECE access. Importantly, the initial M&E design lacked coherence and clarity between outputs and outcomes related to the quality improvement objective (ICR, p. 34, and Section 9). It was not clear how the quality of ECE services would be improved, and outcome indicators did not capture the stated objective (quality standards designed vs. quality improvement of ECE services). The above shortcomings were subsequently rectified during implementation (see Section 2e, first restructuring).

Quality-at-Entry Rating
Moderately Satisfactory



b. Quality of supervision

Bank supervision and implementation support missions were carried out on a regular biannual basis. According to the ICR, the quality of reporting was adequate. The Aide Memoires carried key findings, implementation gaps, and challenges, and key discussions with government counterparts with recommendations for follow-up actions. Supervision of fiduciary aspects and environmental and social safeguards was carried out once a year jointly with other technical specialists.

Throughout the seven-year implementation period, the project had six Task Team Leaders. According to the ICR (p. 29), there was no indication of negative impacts resulting from the frequent turnover. Task Team members were based in the Vientiane Country Office.

The Bank Team was reportedly effective in helping the project overcome initial delays, where the understanding of new project concepts took time to take hold. The first restructuring introduced corrective measures to address design weaknesses discussed above in Section 8a. The Team facilitated subsequent restructurings that allowed additional time to complete project activities.

Overall, the quality of supervision is considered satisfactory with a minor lapse in data verification. According to the ICR (p. 35), the Bank Team used data provided by the Project Coordination Unit as a reference for the Results Framework, and that there was a need for more attention to data verification and triangulation of MOES data with the findings of the third-party firm.

Quality of Supervision Rating

Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

The objectives were clearly stated. They were well reflected by coverage indicators, but not by quality improvement indicators. As previously noted in Section 8a and the ICR (p. 34), clarity and alignment were lacking between outputs and outcomes concerning quality improvement of ECE services. The outcome defined by the PAD as "ECE quality standards designed and endorsed" did not reflect quality improvement of ECE services. The ICR also noted that training on Community Awareness Campaigns did not reflect the quality of campaigns. Another design issue was that the original set of intermediate results indicators missed some key outputs (e.g., community awareness, school meals) and necessitated subsequent revisions in the results framework. Baselines were available.

The design included monitoring services by a third party and an impact evaluation that aimed at comparing the outcomes of CCDGs, MAT, and ECE community awareness interventions.



b. M&E Implementation

According to the ICR (p. 31), the Department of Pre-Primary and Primary Education collected, consolidated, and analyzed data and information from various centers and line departments, as planned. Indicators included in the Results Framework were tracked, updated, and shared with the Bank. Reporting templates were developed for quarterly and annual reporting, and captured the required information for each component. The baseline, mid-line, and end-line surveys for the impact evaluation were completed. There were disruptions in data collection for the endline survey due to school closures resulting from COVID-19 in 2020, but sufficient data was collected by that time to allow data analysis (ICR, p. 31). The project revised outcome and intermediate results indicators in 2017 to rectify M&E design shortcomings.

Data verification weakness was discussed in Section 8b. Also, the ICR (p. 38) noted that, in Lao PDR, several departments managed different types of education data: the Department of Planning was responsible for the Education Management Information System; the Department of Pre-Primary and Primary Education for project progress reports; the Department of Teacher Training Education for trained teachers; and the Department of Inspection for reviewing the Education Sector Development Plan.

c. M&E Utilization

M&E utilization was extensive. M&E findings were used for project monitoring and for the corrective restructuring in 2017. The disability screening pilot was scaled down. When the 2016 baseline data of the impact evaluation showed very low levels of parent-children's interactions, the project added "Toy libraries" to its activities.

At the sectoral level, M&E findings were included in the Annual Performance Monitoring Report of the Education Sector Development Plan, establishing the project's importance within the overall education sector (ICR, p. 30). Findings of the impact evaluation were used to include CCDGs and MAT as key strategies for meeting ECE objectives in the Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2021-25.

M&E findings were also used to inform the design of the Learning and Equity Acceleration Project (LEAP, P173407) that was approved in March 2021, as noted in Section 7. In particular, as the impact evaluation showed that CCDGs were beneficial for 4-year-olds and those in socioeconomic status quintiles 2 and 3, the LEAP project expanded the program. Also, taking into account evidence of improved outcomes associated with MAT, the LEAP project intended to continue supporting that intervention. Findings of the impact evaluation were shared in global fora, thus contributing to further understanding of ECE aspects at wider levels (ICR, p. 31).

M&E Quality Rating

Substantial



10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

The ICR (p. 32) reported that, throughout the life of the project, performance was rated satisfactory.

The project was classified under Category B for Environmental Assessment (OP/BP 4.01) in view of classroom construction in existing school compounds. The PAD (pp. 16-17) noted that an Environmental Screening Checklist was included in the Environmental Code of Practice that provided guidelines on how to determine the most appropriate site considering the health, safety, and security of school children and structural integrity and environmental soundness of school buildings and premises. The Code of Practice was integrated in the Community Based Contracting Operational Manual to ensure that the environmental safeguards were included in planning, construction, and operation of the new facilities. The Environmental Code of Practice and the Contracting Operational Manual included an Environmental and Social Management Plan focusing on mitigation measures and monitoring.

The project also triggered OP 4.10 Indigenous Peoples, and conducted a Social Assessment to identify potential barriers related to ECE implementation, including training, language instruction, and recruitment of ethnic teachers/caregivers for ethnic minority students. Based on the assessment and consultations with representatives of ethnic minority groups, the project emphasized ethnic caregivers training, annual refresher training, and feedback mechanisms. The project trained 200 ethnic girls as pre-primary schoolteachers in project areas through both short- and long-term scholarships (see Section 4, Objective 2, Outputs).

b. Fiduciary Compliance

Although financial management risk was assessed to be substantial at appraisal (PAD, p. 15) given that project activities included extensive community-level support and participation, financial management performance, including procurement, was satisfactory, and benefited from adequate procedures, arrangements, internal control, and fiduciary standards. The Bank's financial and procurement teams also conducted periodic reviews to gauge performance and compliance. All interim financial reports and annual project audit reports were received in a timely manner with unqualified opinion (ICR, p. 33).

The ICR (p. 27) noted that Lao PDR has a strong nexus between public service providers and key stakeholders in the community. According to the ICR, most public schools in Lao PDR shared key information with their local communities, and 82 percent of public schools made their financial audit reports publicly available.

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

None reported (ICR, p. 28).



d. Other

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11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	This ICR Review rated Quality-at-Entry as moderately satisfactory because of shortcomings in the initial project design, theory of change and M&E design, with lack of coherence between outputs and outcomes pertaining to the quality improvement objective, and with an insufficient set of interventions to address unmet access needs. These shortcomings were satisfactorily rectified during implementation. Both ICR and this ICR Review rated the Quality of Supervision as satisfactory. The aggregation of both sub-ratings is consistent with a moderately satisfactory rating for overall Bank Performance.
Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	
Quality of M&E	Substantial	Substantial	
Quality of ICR	---	Substantial	

12. Lessons

The ICR (pp. 37-38) offered several lessons and recommendations, including the following lessons, partially re-stated by IEG:

The introduction of new concepts in development projects requires time to be understood by stakeholders. Under the project, the concept of Community Child Development Groups and Multi-Age Teaching took time to be adequately appreciated by key stakeholders in both the public sector



and the community. Related delays necessitated a total implementation period of seven years and indicated the need for more realistic timetables to implement unfamiliar concepts.

Scholarships constitute important incentives to teacher-trainees from hard-to-reach areas to become pre-primary schoolteachers and to be deployed in remote schools. The project trained 200 ethnic girls as pre-primary schoolteachers through both short- and long-term scholarships.

Early childhood education has multi-sectoral dimensions. Coordination and collaboration among sectors, stakeholders, and communities facilitated progress made in early childhood education in the country. Teams of the Department of Education and Sports collaborated with their peers in other sectors, notably the Ministry of Health, the Department of Finance, and the community. The project also benefited from internal collaboration among departments of the Ministry of Education and Sports: District Education and Sports Bureau, Department of Inspection, Department of Planning, Department of Pre-Primary and Primary Education, and Department of Teacher Training Education.

13. Assessment Recommended?

No

14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR was results-oriented and aligned with development objectives. It adequately illustrated the theory of change and aptly identified initial design issues. The ICR's analysis was thorough and supported by adequate evidence. The ICR appropriately linked the narrative with the efficacy rating. Its thorough discussion of M&E aspects was noteworthy. Specific lessons were directly derived from project experience. The ICR was internally consistent overall and followed guidelines, but lacked reporting on actual costs by components, and had occasional lapses in clarity and an outstretched narrative that exceeded the recommended length.

a. Quality of ICR Rating

Substantial

