



Lao PDR
Early Childhood Education Project
(Credit 5370-LA and Grant H910-LA)

Implementation Support Mission Aide-Memoire
 (December 4-15, 2017)

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Oudomxay Province
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I. Key Project Data

Project Name	Early Childhood Education	Approval Date	2 Apr 2014	Closing Date	31 Jul 2019
Project Number	P145544				
IDA Credit Amount	SDR 9.1 mil	Percent Disbursed	49%	Start Mission Date	4 Dec, 2017
IDA Grant Amount	SDR 9.1 mil	Percent Disbursed	24%	End Mission Date	15 Dec, 2017
IDA Credit Disbursement	SDR 2.2 mil	Percent Disbursed	76%	Next Mission Date	7 May, 2018
IDA Grant Disbursement	SDR 6.9 mil	Percent Disbursed			

II. Introduction

1. An implementation support mission¹ for the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Project (hereinafter referred to as the project) was carried out during the period of December 4-15, 2017. The objectives of the mission were to: (i) conduct field monitoring visits to communities in Northern Lao PDR that implement the Community Child Development Groups (CCDG) and the Multi-Age Teaching (MAT) programs under the project; and (ii) review the implementation progress of the ECE project, identify solutions to implementation bottlenecks, review procurement plan implementation, assess safeguards compliance, plan outstanding activities, and agree on actions and timelines to accelerate the project disbursement.
2. The summary of project status is presented in Section IV, the mission findings are described in Section V, and Section VI contains a summary of the agreed actions.
3. The team wishes to thank the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) and Development Partners (DPs) for their guidance and valuable insights. Special appreciation goes to H.E. Sengdeuane Lachanthaboune, Minister of Education and Sports, Ms. Khampaseuth Kitignavong, Deputy Director General of the Department of Planning, MOES, the staff of the project implementation unit – the Education Sector Plan Coordinating Unit (ECU), and the staff of all departments who contributed to the achievement of the mission’s objectives.
4. In accordance with the World Bank’s Access to Information Policy, it was agreed with the ECU that this aide-memoire will be publicly disclosed.

III. Project Overview

A. Project Development Objective (PDO)

5. The PDO of the project is to increase coverage and improve the quality of early childhood education services for 3 to 5-year-olds in target districts.

B. Project Components

6. The ECE Project support is structured in the following components:

¹The mission consisted of Mr. Plamen Danchev (Senior Education Specialist and Task Team Leader), Dr. Sally Brinkman (Senior Advisor, Early Childhood Development), Mr. Phouvanh Phommalangsy (Education Specialist), Ms. Emiko Naka (Education Consultant), Ms. Achariya Kohbantau (Education Consultant), Mr. Garvan O’Keeffe (Construction Consultant), Ms. Siriphone Vanitsaveth (Senior Financial Management Specialist), Ms. Saysi Sayaseng (Financial Management Consultant), Mr. Latharo Lor (Procurement Specialist), Ms. Waraporn Hirunwatsiri (Senior Environmental Specialist), Mr. Martin Henry Lenihan (Senior Social Development Specialist), and Ms. Boualamphan Phouthavisouk (Team Assistant).

Component 1. Increasing Coverage of Early Childhood Education in Target Districts. This component includes construction of pre-primary classrooms in remote areas with low ECE enrollment rates and piloting non-formal CCDG for children of ages 3 to 4 years.

Component 2: Improving Quality of Early Childhood Education Services. This component pilots: (i) the formal delivery of MAT to groups of children of ages varying from 3 to 5 years; (ii) a methodology for child disability screening (CDS); (iii) a community awareness campaign (CAC) and Toy Libraries (TL) to promote good childcare and health practices, and emphasize the importance of early cognitive stimulation; and (iv) expansion of the provision of the national school meals program (NSMP) for primary education students, piloted under the EFA-FTI Catalytic fund program in Lao PDR (closed 2014).

Component 3: Project management, capacity development and monitoring and evaluation. This component supports overall project management activities, including procurement and financial management, as well as capacity building at central, provincial and district level to ensure regular monitoring and evaluation and provision of implementation support to target communities. A rigorous impact evaluation is embedded into the project design to assess the effectiveness, the individual and combined effects of the CCDGs, MAT, CAC and TL pilots.

IV. Summary of Project Status and Key Issues

7. The project restructuring approved in May 2017 was followed by a short period of re-programming work aimed to align the implementation of the key activities with the new restructuring parameters. A new disbursement category was introduced - the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) Grants, requiring the development and adoption of VEDC Grants guideline. The document was timely developed by MOES and was considered by the Bank of satisfactory quality and substance. Since September 2017, the implementation has regained momentum and disbursements have accelerated, rising from 45 percent to 49 percent. Presently all key activities are under full implementation, with imminent disbursement of the school feeding grants, the first tranche of the newly introduced VEDC grants, and the construction of the first lot of 115 preprimary classrooms (out of the additional 300 classrooms introduced with the restructuring).
8. However, the accrued 18 months of implementation delays (see paragraphs 10 and 12 for further details) relating to the key ECE interventions (CCDG, MAT, CAC, TL) cannot be recovered. With one third of the project lifetime (18 months) remaining until the project closing, half of the IDA grant and credit resources remain undisbursed. The ECE interventions now need to achieve their original PDO to improve the child development outcomes in half of the originally planned implementation time. Concerns remain if the impact evaluation embedded into the project design will be able to detect impacts, given the reduced dosage and exposure to the interventions. The evidence produced by the impact evaluation is expected to inform the government about the most effective ECE approaches for further scale-up under the follow up ECE operation envisioned in the World Bank Country Partnership Framework for the period 2017-2021. Additionally, MOES expressed concerns about the negative impact on the human resources and the capacity built within the Ministry and at provincial and district levels in case of a time gap between the current and the follow-up ECE operation. For the above described reasons, the government is considering a request for extension of the project closing date by 18 months to December 2020.

A. Implementation Progress

9. **Component 1** is progressing well. The project's original targets for the construction of pre-primary classrooms and CCDG shelters have been fully met and there is significant progress towards the construction of the additional 300 preprimary classrooms introduced to the component following the

May 2017 project restructuring. With Phase 1 of the construction already launched, 115 new classrooms in 98 villages will be constructed by June 2018, triggering new disbursement of US\$ 1.47 million. The classroom teaching and learning resources for the CCDGs have been procured and delivery to sites is currently being finalized. Full usage of the materials is strongly encouraged and the required capacity building for that purpose has been prioritized by the ECU.

10. However, the initial CCDG implementation delay of 12 months, followed by 6 months without resources and low implementation fidelity, accrue to a total of 18 months of lost implementation time that cannot be recovered. Fully fledged, properly resourced implementation of CCDGs (as well as CAC and MAT under Component 2) corresponding to the original concept is starting only now. Albeit with a delay, the procurement of the playgrounds for all preprimary classroom construction sites (250 completed and 300 new), as well as all CCDG, MAT and CAC sites have been completed, and the delivery and installation on the sites is scheduled for completion by April 2018 (associated disbursement of US\$ 0.6 million).
11. **Component 2** implementation has improved. The NSMP funding has been provided on time, with pending disbursement of the grants for second semester of 2017/2018 in January 2018. For the continuous sustainable implementation of the NSMP program, it is critically important that MOES and development partners revisit the NSMP funding model to align it with the government budget capacity to take over the program after June 2019.
12. Like the CCDGs under Component 1, the MAT and CAC activities have accrued 18-month implementation delays that cannot be restored. The project has made significant investments to develop the capacity at district and village levels to implement these programs, but the evidence from the December 4-7 monitoring visits to project villages (Annex 1) suggests that not all program elements have been understood and implemented well at the local level, thus requiring more capacity building efforts.
13. **Component 3** has marked significant progress. The monitoring and evaluation arrangements for the implementation of the NSMP, the CCDGs, the TLs, the MAT and the early childhood development CAC have been upgraded substantially. External monitoring firms have been recruited to enhance the quality, frequency and regularity of supervision and reporting to the district, provincial and central units of the MOES. The new approach ensures participation of the district education officers in the regular ongoing monitoring activities of the firms, thus improving district officials' monitoring and evaluation skills. Additionally, the restructuring has allocated greater resources for the District Education and Sport Bureaus (DESB) to provide continuous implementation support and monitoring (three times per year for CCDG MAT and CAC), including classroom observations and provision of feedback to teachers and caregivers. Finally, the midline impact evaluation of the project was launched as planned in mid-November 2017, without delays. The data collection from the 370 communities will be completed by January 2018 and the cleaned midline impact evaluation measurement data will become available in February/March 2018.

B. Likelihood of Achieving the Project Development Objectives

14. The PDO consists of quantitative (expanding the access to ECE programs) and qualitative (raising ECE service delivery quality and achieving behavioral change) aspects. With respect to quantitative expansion of access to ECE, the project has already fully achieved the original endline targets, and considering the imminent launch of the additional construction of ECE infrastructure, this aspect of the PDO appears to be on track to be accomplished. With respect to the measurement of the quality aspects of the PDO, the midline impact evaluation data collection (currently underway) will produce results in March 2018.

V. Detailed Description of the Mission’s Findings and the Agreements Reached

Component 1: Increasing Coverage of Early Childhood Education in Target Districts

Sub-Component 1.1: Community-Based Contracting (CBC) for Pre-Primary Education Classroom Construction

15. With the recent project restructuring (May 2017), the project will construct an additional 300 pre-primary classrooms in three phases with all works scheduled to complete by April 2019 (see Table 1 with implementation timeline). Provincial Education and Sports Service offices (PESS) have confirmed that preschool teachers are available for the 115 preprimary classrooms to be attached to the 98 primary schools in Phase 1. The list of schools was submitted to the Bank for review and approval during the mission, thus allowing a timely start of construction activities. As a first step in the process, the Village Education Development Committees (VEDC) included in Phase 1 will be trained on community-based construction, starting in January 2018. It is expected that Phase 1 will be completed by May/June 2018, with estimated costs of US\$ 1.47mil. The project has completed preliminary screening for 288 of the planned 300 pre-primary classrooms, and the remaining 12 pre-primary classrooms, located in villages included in the control group of the project impact evaluation, will be screened in early 2018, with construction planned to avoid potential “contamination” of the impact evaluation results.

Table 1. Timeline for Construction of 300 Additional Pre-Primary Classroom

Phase	2018												2019			
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A
Phase 1 - 98 schools, 115 preprimary classrooms	VEDC Training	VEDC Training	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction
Phase 2 - 84 schools / 93 preprimary classrooms						VEDC Training	Advance payment	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction	Construction
Phase 3 - 73 schools /80 preprimary classrooms												VEDC Training	Advance payment	Construction	Construction	Construction
Phase 3 - additional 12 preprimary classrooms												VEDC Training	Advance payment	Construction	Construction	Construction

16. The contract for the 735 sets of playground equipment for the MAT, CCDG and pre-primary schools has been signed, with delivery from Thailand to Vientiane agreed by February 2018. Installation on site is planned before the Lao New Year, in April 2018.

Sub-component 1.2: Community Child Development Group (CCDG) for 3- and 4-year-olds

17. Since the last implementation support mission in September 2017, the CCDG implementation has made good progress. The Bank mission team field visit observations in CCDG villages in Oudomxay province (December 4-7, 2017) showed encouraging improvements (see details in Annex 1: Field Visit Report). Most of the CCDG tool kits were delivered to CCDG villages in November 2017, but have not yet been fully utilized because the caregivers do not know how to use some of the items. The instruction on how to use CCDG materials is included in the caregivers’ refresher training being conducted during December 2017 – February 2018. The instruction could be reinforced by DESB staff during DESB visits to CCDG villages. Additional consideration should be given to refresh teaching and learning materials and activities to keep the CCDGs interesting and maximize continued engagement and participation of children.

18. Caregivers and VEDCs still need frequent training, supervision and implementation support on how to conduct and manage the CCDG program. A refresher training for the first group of caregivers was carried out in November – December 2017. The training for the second group will take place in February 2018. Both VEDC and caregivers are required to have a clear understanding on how to utilize the CCDG annual operational grant, which could be used for purchasing teaching and learning materials and toys for children’s learning in the CCDGs. As agreed in the previous implementation support mission (September 2017), the project will finance the production of instructional videos on the key aspects of CCDG, to be used when the DESB officers and external monitors visit the CCDG villages, and leaving a copy of the video materials in the CCDG for continuous use by the CCDG caregivers. During the mission, it was agreed to reconsider the original December 2017 deadline for the videos’ concept and script, acknowledging that the international technical advisor (TA)’s priority is to ensure the quality delivery of the ongoing trainings to the CCDG, MAT and CAC communities. It is important, however, to ensure that the instructional videos would be completed by mid-2018 and regularly used thereafter until project closing. It was also reconfirmed that the ECU need to include the selection of a video production firm in the project procurement plan.
19. The restructuring has significantly increased the resources and arrangements for ongoing support of CCDGs by the DESB staff. DESB officers will conduct visits to monitor CCDG activities three times per year, observing CCDG classes and providing feedback to caregivers. DESB visits are crucial in assessing the CCDG program implementation and providing technical support to caregivers. The results from the DESB visits will also inform the CCDG Caregivers’ refresher trainings, which are to be implemented twice a year throughout the project life. DESB visits to CCDG villages will be combined with monitoring of CAC and TL activities in the same villages. The first DESB visit for monitoring CCDG, CAC and TL will start in February 2018 after the VEDC Grants will be made available in January 2018.

Component 2: Improving Quality of Early Childhood Education Services

Sub-component 2.1: Supporting Services Package

(a) Community Awareness Campaign (CAC)

20. The CAC aims to improve the project community members’ understanding of the importance of early childhood education, early cognitive stimulation, nutrition, health and hygiene. CAC refresher training for all 270 villages is currently being delivered and will be completed in January 2018.
21. It was identified that new content for the CAC needs to be developed to keep the CAC interesting and relevant. There is a potential for integrating into CAC modules some new childhood disability awareness materials developed through the projects’ disability component. Another opportunity is the inclusion of materials developed under the World Bank’s Health Governance and Nutrition Development Program (HGNDP). Some of the CAC communities have already been exposed to the HGNDP due to overlapping target villages between the ECE project and the HGNDP. Since CAC communities are part of the ECE impact evaluation, it is critically important to ensure that all of them are exposed to the same treatments. As such, if some of the CAC communities have been exposed to the HGNDP materials, all others need to follow suit with the support of the ECE project.
22. Like the CCDGs, the CAC communities will greatly benefit from both instructional video content and short videos related to the CAC modules. It was discussed and agreed with MOES that a concept and script for these CAC video materials will be prepared with the assistance of the international TAs of the project, by no later than end June 2018. Meanwhile the project will revise the procurement plan to include a selection of a video production firm.

(b) Toy libraries (TL)

23. TLs have been introduced into the project design through the May 2017 restructuring, responding to the extremely low level of interaction between parents and their children in the project communities. The TLs contain a set of age appropriate toys and books to enable parents of pre-school age children (0-5 years old) to stimulate and promote their children's learning. The TLs are not designed as resources for CCDG or MAT, but for general community use, ensuring that families not using any ECE service could benefit from them as well.
24. Presently the TL's distribution is being initiated, so communities are yet to receive them. The Bank mission team reiterated its advice from the previous implementation support mission in September 2017 that the TLs should be distributed to the villages as soon as possible. Presently the Toy Librarians from each village are being trained (as part of the November 2017 – January 2018 CAC refresher training) on how to manage the TLs, including how to use the toys and books provided in the TL to stimulate child development. Therefore, timely provision of TLs is critical so that librarians can apply the knowledge received through the trainings with TLs delivered to the villages.
25. It was agreed that the materials developed by the Ministry of Information and Culture in conjunction with UNICEF for the specialized ECD TV series "My Village" (42 Claymation episodes, 7 story books and a music CD) will be incorporated into the TLs. The instructions for the use of "My Village" package would need to be incorporated into the next training for CAC VEDCs/Toy Librarians. As part of the initial fielding of "My Village" supported by UNICEF, MOES staff have already been trained, and the same staff could therefore be approached to support the ECE Project's Master Trainers.

(c) Childhood Disability Screening (CDS)

26. MOES' CDS implementing unit staff, supported by the International TA, have undertaken a mapping of disability and rehabilitation services for children aged 0-5 years in Vientiane Capital and Oudomxay Province. This was the first implementation step as part of the revised concept for CDS component implementation. The results from the mapping have been reviewed by MOES and the Bank team during the mission. It is recommended to expand the CAC by a series of parent education workshops on topics relating to disability, child development, and accident prevention. This approach would better equip families to understand and respond to the revised Washington Group's Child Functioning Questionnaire. Capacity building on disability is crucial especially for teachers to do simple screening in the classroom and for village health centers to provide first level treatment and rehabilitation options.
27. It was discussed and agreed with MOES that the successful implementation of the CDS activity implementation plan (Annex 2) would require continuous support by the International TA. Therefore, it is suggested that the duration of the current contract of the TA be extended with no additional cost to a new closing date of October 2018.

(d) National School Meals Program (NSMP)

28. The mission team reiterated the urgent need to revise the NSMP implementation manual to reflect the implementation of the first agreed NSMP sustainability measure, namely taking out the rice provision from the project funding of NSMP. Another important revision to the NSMP that was discussed in September 2017 is the amendment to the NSMP manual relating to the source of information on the number of children and schools receiving support under the NSMP. It is critically important to ensure the funding is based on official statistics - the EMIS annual education census. To advance the discussions and agreements on the sustainability of NSMP, it is suggested that the sustainability measures be discussed and agreed upon urgently at a meeting of the ECE Project Steering Committee, by end January 2018. With respect to the NSMP fund transfer for semester 2 of the 2017/2018, the mission team has recommended using the template and estimation principles used for the semester 1 transfers, based on official EMIS data on children in NSMP communities.

Sub-component 2.2: Teacher and Education Officer Training

Multi-age teaching (MAT)

29. MAT teaching and learning aids boxes are currently being delivered to the target villages. To reinforce implementation fidelity, refresher trainings for MAT teachers will be carried out in January – February 2018 during the school semester break. It was agreed that the DESB staff will conduct visits to monitor MAT activities three times per year, where they will observe MAT classes and provide feedback to teachers. The first DESB visit for monitoring MAT, CAC and TL will start in February 2018 after the VEDC Grants will be made available in January 2018.

Component 3: Project Management, Capacity Development and Monitoring and Evaluation

(a) Midline Impact Evaluation Data Collection

30. The contract negotiations between the MOES and Indochina Research Laos were concluded in October 2017 and the firm began the midline data collection on November 6, 2017. Fieldwork will be completed in early January 2018. The Bank team observed the data collection fieldwork in Oudomxay with no major problems identified.

(b) Inclusion of key early childhood development indicators into the Education and Sports Management Information System (ESMIS)

31. The mission team met with Deputy Director General of Department of Planning (Mr. Maaly Vorabouth) to discuss the potential inclusion of key early childhood education indicators into the ESMIS. The system is planned to undergo a major upgrade, including the development of Minimum Standards for data and information management. Presently the plans include measurement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2 with data to be collected in 2020 through the next Laos Social Indicators Survey. The WB stressed that the SDG 4.2 could be delivered through the planned ESMIS system enhancements with the inclusion of the shortened indicator suite developed by the ECE project, which has already been trialed, adapted, piloted and utilized in both the baseline and midline measurements of the ECE Impact Evaluation. This indicator would be more sensitive to change and could be conducted annually providing improved evidence of enhancements to school readiness through policy and service enhancements.
32. The Deputy Director General of Department of Planning requested further TA to support the development of indicators leveraging off the ESMIS enhancements. An international technical advisor (Dr. Ravi Venkatraman) supporting the improvement of the monitoring and evaluation systems has already been contracted by the ECU. His TOR includes the inclusion of the suite of ECE indicators (developed originally for the ECE Impact Evaluation) within ESMIS. Dr Venkatraman is well placed to be able to support the development of SDG4.2, and will do so in consultation with UNICEF, BEQUAL and the relevant government departments.

(c) Procurement

33. The procurement processes are back on track. All large procurement packages for goods and consultant services have been completed. The mission suggested that the pending Terms of References for selection of two consultants: i) National TA on programmer for double Entry Account Software; and ii) Interpreter (simultaneous translation and document translation), be finalized and selections initiated as soon as possible. The mission also conducted a procurement ex-post review for the project. The letter of procurement ex-post review with consolidated findings will be sent to the project for clarification on the findings and issues. The mission suggested the ECU update the procurement plans by adding all new

packages required and submit them through STEP for the Bank’s review and no objection by January 7, 2018.

34. The project is applying the Bank’s Systematic Tracking of Exchanges in Procurement (STEP) system, which is a comprehensive and mandatory end-to-end procurement processing system that allows the Bank and the project to track and manage all procurement related exchanges through the procurement cycle. The training on the STEP was delivered to the project by the Bank’s procurement team, and more hands-on training will be provided based on needs.

(d) Financial management

35. The overall financial management performance of the project is moderately satisfactory. The audit report was submitted timely but the IFR is submitted with delays. The project is still lacking an annual budget and work plan, and therefore variance analysis was not performed on previous IFRs. It is almost the start of FY 2018, but the FY 2018 budget is also not yet prepared.
36. The main key finding requiring project management’s attention and immediate action relates to long outstanding advances. As at the time of the mission, there were five items of advances totaling over 390 million kip (approximately US\$49,000), which had remained unliquidated for over a year. It was noted that the activities relating to three advances had been postponed with no confirmed date for implementation. The ECU was advised to immediately return these cash advances to the project bank account. By the end of the mission, only 255 million kip was returned to the project’s bank account. The remaining should be returned by December 31, 2017. For future activities where implementation is postponed for more than two weeks or with no confirmed date, the advance should be returned to the project bank account and disbursed later when ready to implement. **There needs to be strict enforcement of this rule.** If necessary, the ECU need to assign or propose additional staff to take on the responsibility of monitoring and following up advances to ensure that advances are liquidated timely. Delayed liquidation of advances impacts the project’s ability to replenish funds and could also lead to ineligible expenditure as supporting documents may be lost or misplaced.
37. Physical count of project assets is also not yet completed. The bank mission team strongly recommends that physical count be carried out and the asset register updated by the end of December 2017.
38. The following list of remaining outstanding advances must be liquidated by December 31, 2017:

Voucher No.	Description	Advance in LAK	Activity Date	Status
PV304	WS on meeting quality of basic Education _china	15,886,200	19/05/16	Still outstanding Document for liquidation has been compiled and to be submitted to DOF for clearing
PV304	WS on meeting quality of basic Education _china	15,458,260	19/05/16	Same as above
PV113	WS on TOT to use the curriculum & teaching on MAT	255,232,000	22/01/16	Still outstanding Activity has been cancelled and funds returned to the project bank account. Evidence needs to be submitted to DOF to reverse the advance
PV270	Monitoring for SLP Y2015-2016 of ODX, PSL, HPH, XYL, BKK	75,090,000	22/04/16	Still outstanding Activity has not been carried out, WB recommend to deposit the funds back into project account
PV517	WS on SLP Y2015-2016_DPPE	29,590,000	30/09/16	Same as above

(e) Environmental and Social Safeguards:

40. *Construction works.* There have been no civil works since the last mission as the construction of the 250 preprimary classrooms were completed in 2016 and the additional new construction is under preparation. Based on the discussions with the ECU and consultant who designed the classrooms and its facilities, there seems to be no compliance issues from environmental and social safeguards perspective. The Environmental Monitoring and Inspection Form has been used to screen and assess the environmental impact of the project. No asbestos-based materials have been used and the supervision in this respect has been conducted by trained district engineers. The Environmental Code of Practice (ECOP) has been followed and the Environmental checklist to monitor the post construction has been applied. These include i) compliance with the planned mitigation measures and environmental obligations; ii) occurrence of notable environmental pollution such as dust, water pollution and noise, etc.; iii) occurrence of complaints; iv) site cleaning upon completion; v) proper disposal of construction wastes; and vi) erosion prevention measures for river protection. However, ECU informed the mission that they have had trouble to reduce environmental impact on soil erosion at some construction sites.
41. The mission informed the ECU, CCDG and MAT teams that the environmental impact assessment needs to be considered from two perspectives: i) the impact of project pre-primary classrooms' civil works on environment; and (ii) vice versa. It is necessary to mitigate both impacts. Safe drinking water and sanitation system should be provided as important facilities to the pre-primary classrooms. The mission was informed that the completed 200 pre-primary classrooms have been equipped with toilets and water supply systems are in place.
42. For the outstanding construction works, it is recommended that in addition to ensuring no asbestos-based material is used, the source of sand should also be verified and avoid illegal dredging gravel. The classrooms' painting must be done with non-heavy metal based paints. Last, but not least, no illegal logging should be allowed. The construction of pre-primary classroom in steep slope sites need to follow a proper design as per the slope safety recommendations in the operation manual to reduce the soil erosion or possible landslides. With respect to the upcoming installation of the playground equipment, the mission was informed that a safety installation methods will be applied - eight stands will be fixed firmly on a concrete foundation. The plastic part of the playground has been certified as per safety standard. It is recommended that the playground be surrounded with grass lawn, regularly cut and maintained.
43. *Occupational Health and Safety / Students' Safety.* The ECU assured the mission that the selection of sites for the pre-primary classroom is considering children safety. For example, the location of the classrooms needs to be away from the main roads, while transmission lines and electricity cable should be kept away from the classroom/school area.
44. *Gender.* The mission was informed that both boys and girls have equal access to school. Both male and female workers have had equal access to school construction jobs, with female workers having been assigned to financial management tasks.
45. *Climate Resilience.* Based on the field trip observations for the CCDGs, there was one case where the access to the site location required crossing an unstable bridge that may be easily inundated during the rainy season. It is advisable to ensure regular maintenance of bridges along the routes for accessing preschool facilities to ensure children safety. Annual maintenance cost/budget need to be ensured in such cases. The electricity outlets need to be place at greater heights to avoid electricity short circuits in flood prone areas.
46. *Institutional Arrangement and Capacity Building on Safeguard:* For the new Phase 1 construction works (98 Primary Schools, 115 preprimary classrooms), the supervision engineers have not been trained. The CBC 4 days-training includes i) construction techniques; ii) CBC concept; iii) school

drawings; iv) financial management and budgeting; v) construction inspection; vi) safety and environment management. The ECU assured the mission that the screening/impact assessment form, the operation manual as well as the ECOP will be applied and that the project staff will receive appropriate training.

47. *Monitoring and Evaluation:* The mission was informed that the construction of the pre-primary classrooms would be supervised and monitored by District Engineers. The ECU is responsible for the proper monitoring of environment and social issues. The mission requested a safeguard monitoring report prior to the next Implementation Support Mission.

VI. Summary of Agreed Actions

#	Action	Responsible Entity	Deadline
Overall			
1	Project steering committee meeting to discuss the NSMP measures and the considerations for potential extension of the project closing date	MOES (ECU)	January 2018
Component 1. Increasing Coverage of Early Childhood Education in Target Districts			
2	Complete training schedule and budget for Phase 1 CBC and submit to Bank for review.	MOES (CBC/ECU)	December 30, 2017
3	Conduct training workshops for VEDC (5 teams, 9 locations).	MOES (CBC/ECU)	Mid-January 2018
4	CBC advance payment made	MOES (CBC/ECU)	February 2018
5	Start of construction of pre-primary classrooms	MOES (CBC/ECU)	March 2018
6	Delivery and installation of playground equipment to schools	MOES (CBC/ECU)	Mid-April 2018
7	Deliver CCDG refresher training to all 146 CCDG caregivers.	MOES (ECU and IUs)	2 nd group: February 2018
8	Develop a concept and a script for CCDG instructional videos	MOES (TA, ECU and IUs)	April 2018
9	Launch the DESB monitoring and support visits to CCDG communities	MOES (ECU and IUs)	February 2017
Component 2. Improving Quality of Early Childhood Education Services			
10	Deliver MAT refresher training to all 62 MAT teachers	MOES (ECU and IUs)	January-February 2018
11	Deliver CAC refresher training, combined with Toy Libraries and the VEDC grant guidelines.	MOES (ECU and IUs)	January 2018
12	Deliver the Toy Library boxes to all 270 CAC villages	MOES (ECU and IUs)	January 2017
13	Launch the DESB monitoring and support visits to CAC, MAT, and TL communities	MOES (ECU and IUs)	February 2018
14	Develop a concept and a script for CAC instructional videos and video materials in line with the CAC modules	MOES (TA, ECU and IUs)	April 2018
15	Disburse NSMP Semester 2 funds to VEDC accounts	MOES (ECU, IEC, DOF)	January 2018
Components 1 and 2 VEDC Grant			
16	Village-level VEDC Grant Guideline training	MOES (CAC)	January 2018

17	Budget drafting and submission for Bank's approval	MOES (CAC and ECU)	December, 2017
18	Bank's review	WB	December 25-29, 2017
19	Approval process	DOF/ MOES/ MOF	January 2-12, 2018
20	Grant transfer to Project Account	DOF	January 15-19, 2018
21	Grant transfer to village bank account	DOF	January 22-26, 2018
Component 3. Project management, capacity development and monitoring and evaluation			
Monitoring and Evaluation			
22	Complete midline IE data collection	ECU, IRL	January 2018
23	Midline data cleaned and analyzed	ECU, IRL, WB	March 2018
24	Launch NSMP Independent monitoring visits-Round 1	ECU	February 2018
Procurement			
25	Update the procurement plan and submit to the Bank through STEP for review	ECU	January 7, 2018
Financial management			
26	Clear long outstanding advances	ECU, IU	December 31, 2017
27	Refund unused advances to the project bank account	ECU, IU	December 31, 2017
28	Complete physical count of project asset and update project asset register	ECU	December 31, 2017
29	Submit IFR for the quarter ended December 31, 2017	ECU	February 15, 2018
30	Submit FY2017 audit report and management letter	ECU	June 30, 2018
31	Discuss preparation of FY2018 budget with WB task team	ECU/WB	To commence as soon as possible
Environment and Social safeguards			
32	Submit the Environment and Social impact monitoring	ECU	Quarterly report and Prior to the next mission
33	4-days Training of District Engineers	ECU and Project Engineer	

ANNEX 1: Field Visit Report on the Implementation of CCDG and MAT Programs

In the period December 5-7, 2017, the World Bank mission comprised Mr. Plamen Danchev (Task Team Leader), Dr. Sally Brinkman (Senior Advisor), Ms. Emiko Naka (Education Consultant), and Ms. Achariya Kohtbantau (Education Consultant) conducted field monitoring visits to communities in Oudomxay province that implement the Community Child Development Group (CCDG)² and the Multi-Age Teaching (MAT)³ programs under the Early Childhood Education (ECE) project. The mission was accompanied by Mr. Phisitxay Soulinthone (Deputy Project Director) from the Education Sector Development Coordination Unit (ECU) of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES). The objective of the field visits was to observe the implementation of the CCDG and MAT and to supervise the ECE project mid-line impact evaluation data collection conducted by the survey firm hired by the MOES – Indochina Research, Laos (IRL).

Key findings

CCDG

The mission observed satisfactory impacts of the CCDGs on participating children, parents and community members. Most of the children were enthusiastic and engaged in the activities led by the caregivers, they seemed happy and smiling, enjoying the time spent with other children, the caregivers and the parents in the CCDG shed, both during more structured activities (singing, playing instruments) and during free play time. Most of the materials and toys provided in the CCDG Toolkit have arrived to the villages only recently and have not yet been fully utilized. However, while waiting for the Toolkit to arrive, toys were purchased with the CCDG grant for children to play - some very popular toys were well received and used by the children, while others, such as puzzles, were provoking great interest as well as challenge as some of the puzzles appeared too complex for the CCDG age group. While simpler puzzles suitable for the CCDG age group could be of greater benefit for the younger CCDG children, the more complex ones prompted direct support from the participating parents, which is a very welcome positive, albeit unintended consequence. Even with the scarce resources provided so far, and with the Toy Libraries not yet distributed to the communities, CCDG children caregivers and parents alike were excited to play with the toys and the available learning materials. The mission also observed that children have learned to interact with each other well. They could play together in group and share toys. The children that were less engaged were not left unattended by the caregivers, they tried to encourage those children to participate and be involved in a mild and inviting manner. Despite the delays in providing the CCDGs with the resources planned to support them, communities and CCDG caregivers managed to mobilize resources either through the CCDG operating grants or through community contributions to make toys and materials available for adequate functioning of the CCDGs. Such actions and attitude are to be commended and encouraged, and the next trainings of caregivers and VEDC should also encourage such proactive attitude.

CCDG classroom activities and attitudes of the CCDG caregivers

The CCDG caregivers showed enthusiasm in implementing the CCDG activities despite the scarcity of supporting materials. In half of the CCDGs visited, the caregivers led the CCDG activities mostly as per the daily schedule they have been trained, while the other half gave could detect the changes in the classroom mood and gave priority to free play as needed. The mission observed that the caregivers genuinely took good care of children in the CCDG. They were very patient and tried to engage every child in the activity. The

² Namor District – Phouthong Village, Nam Vuen Tai Village; La District – Huay Thong Village, Kokmaiyai Village

³ La District – Samakkyxay Village

caregivers reported that, out of four main activities⁴, children enjoy free play and movement activity the most. They also like drawing and coloring. The activity that the caregivers found challenging is the circle activity because children tend to move, not sitting still. All the caregivers interviewed highlighted the need for continued capacity strengthening support by the ECE project.

Attitudes of CCDG Communities and Parents

The communities visited expressed their appreciation on having the CCDG program in their villages. Although the first benefit they reported is that they could leave the children with good care at the CCDG shelter before going to work in the fields or farms, they themselves observed that their children have learned many things from attending the program. Children enjoy coming to the CCDG and play with friends and caregivers. They share and socialize with other children. Personal daily hygiene practices for children have also been improved. One pre-primary class teacher reported that children who participated in the CCDG last year have better skills than the previous cohort of children attending the pre-primary class prior to having the CCDG. For instance, they could hold a pen to draw or write, interact with other children appropriately, learn to count the numbers and write the alphabets faster. In half of the CCDG communities, the number of parents attending the CCDG session was significant (on average 9 parents per 24 CCDG children attending). In these communities, the team observed greater involvement of the parents in the activities, including direct support to children in implementing the assigned tasks/activities. In the other half of the CCDG communities the mission team observed fewer parents or grandparents participating in the CCDG classes, mostly sitting at the back of the room. The project should strive to incentivize parental involvement and CCDG attendance as the parents' observations during the CCDG classes can help them practicing activities at home as well.

MAT

In the MAT classroom, the mission also observed that children were well engaged and enthusiastic. The classroom is far better resourced compared to any of the CCDGs that were visited. The teacher reported that it was very difficult to manage more than 20 children with different ages (and more so with different abilities) in one class with just one teacher. Consequently, attention is given with priority to the children aged 5 who will be transitioning to primary grade 1 in the following year, while the children of lower ages are left to play freely or observe attend activities with 5 year olds. The teacher requested more content to be added to the MAT manual developed by the MOES and more detailed lesson plans.

Issues for MOES management attention

Access to CCDG sites

In two of the four CCDG villages visited by the team, the access to the CCDGs is challenging for young children. In Huay Thong Village, La District, the CCDG shelter is located on the other side of the river (together with the primary school and pre-primary class). During the rainy season the water level is often high and it becomes too risky for young children to commute. In this period, they miss classes 1-2 days a week.

⁴ 1. Movement, 2. Circle, 3. Creative arts and games, 4. outdoors



In Kokmaiyai Village, La District children presently attend CCDG in a very small room within the existing primary school. The CCDG shelter is under construction located next to a new primary school, also under construction, but the site of these two new buildings is located outside of the village – in order to get there, children will have to walk a steep hill across the village to get to the main road, and then walk down the main road until they reach the CCDG shelter. This will make access to the CCDG both difficult and dangerous (traffic of the main road) for children aged 3 and 4. The mission suggests that the CCDG shelter, once completed, be used for primary classes for older children, while the village can use the existing primary school located at the center of the village for the CCDG and the preprimary classrooms.

Delayed delivery of CCDG resources

CCDG tool kits have been delivered just recently and not well used. The CCDG caregivers training took place in September 2016 and the CCDG activities commenced soon after the training October 2016 but without the CCDG tool kits being made available until November 2017. The mission observed that the CCDG tool kits are available in the CCDG shelters visited. But majority of the materials in the tool kits have not been used. Some are still in the plastic wraps. While this was not desirable, the mission strongly encouraged the caregivers to use them as much as possible to stimulate children's learning and interaction. The caregivers reported not knowing how to instruct children to play with some toys, for instance, the dining sets, therefore, they were left untouched in all the villages visited. A brief instruction on how to use the materials and how to play with the toys in the tool kits will be helpful for the caregivers to be able to maximize the use of all items available in the tool kits.



Unpacked and unused flashcards, unopened play sets and teaching aids

Land ownership of CCDG sites

One CCDG shelter premise has not been granted land ownership certificate. In Nam Vuen Tai Village, Namor District, the village reported that its primary school as well as the CCDG shelter premises are still awaiting the official granting of land ownership, which they have submitted the request to the district for quite a long time. Without the land ownership certificate, there is no guarantee that the land may not be taken away for other purposes than education. The mission was pleased to be informed by the PESS that notification on land ownership for the school and the temporary land ownership certificate have already been sent out while the official certificate is in process. The mission suggested that this information be communicated to the village.

Payment for caregivers

Incentives to CCDG caregivers are not paid on a regular basis. While the frequency of payment to CCDG caregivers was reportedly different from one village to another, it was clear that they have not been paid monthly, some received a payment every six months, others reported payment every three months. The payments of CCDG caregivers must be further clarified in all upcoming training opportunities for the CCDG villages.

CCDG grant use

The use of CCDG Annual Operational Grant is not well understood. The CCDG villages receive the CCDG annual operational grant at the amount of LAK 4,800,000 per village per year. With this amount the community, through VEDC, could purchase basic teaching and learning materials that they think suitable for children's learning and development. In the absence of CCDG tool kits, only one village took initiative to purchase some toys and puzzles for children in the CCDG to play with. The CCDG villages should be encouraged to spend the CCDG annual operational grant to purchase teaching and learning materials. This could also be emphasized in the VEDC Grant Guideline training that will take place in the coming months

Annex 2: Proposed work plan for Child Disability Screening (CDS)

Activity	Dec		Jan			Feb		Ma r	May				Jun			Jul			Aug				Sep			Oct			
	W 3	W 4	W 1	W 2	W 4	W 1	W 2	W1	W 1	W 2	W 3	W 4	W 1	W 3	W 4	W 1	W 2	W 4	W 1	W 2	W 3	W 4	W 2	W 3	W 4	W 1	W 2	W 3	W 4
Draft Training Manual and Guidelines for pre-screening																													
Workshop on Service Mapping, Draft Training Manual and Guidelines																													
Manual sent to ECU																													
WB Feedback/NOL manual																													
Study tour to Cambodia for 15 Senior Staff (MOES and MOH) from SHTT																													
Incorporate WB feedback																													
Lao translation																													
Meeting to plan the TOT for Pre-screening																													
TOT Training for pre-screening																													
Presecreeing Training for VEDC/VHV/Caregivers 6 pilot vilages																													
Pre-screening in the 6 pilot vilages																													
Workshop on findings of the pre-screening in the 6 pilot vilages																													
Plan and schedule the medical intervention																													
Plan the Educational intervention																													
Prepare a pilot database of the results of the Pre-screening																													

