

The Impact of the Village Education Development Committee on Attendance Rates in Primary Schools in Laos—Through a Survey of the People involved in Education in the Capital Region—

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The achievement of Education for All (EFA) is one of the biggest objectives in the development of education in Laos. The government of Laos has placed great emphasis on implementing universal primary education for all by the year 2015. They have been promoting policies emphasizing the decentralization of educational administration as one of their main strategies in achieving their goal of EFA.

In 2008, the Ministry of Education decided to establish a Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) in each village, as a way of promoting their decentralization policy. The VEDC's main purpose was to promote the government's Education for All program in each respective village. The establishment of the VEDCs was an idea which evolved through an international educational cooperation project with Sweden. This successful innovation was later adapted by a JICA cooperation project in Laos and eventually became an established policy of the Ministry of Education.

This paper examines the impact of VEDCs on the improvement of attendance rates in primary schools in Laos. The impacts were measured by surveying the people involved in education in the capital region.

The survey showed that in several districts, the establishment of the VEDCs and their related activities, contributed to the EFA goals in different ways. For example, in the Feuang district, where the VEDCs have continuously been working since their initial establishment in 2003, VEDCs fostered the minority groups' attendance at primary schools in this poor district. The results suggest that VEDCs have contributed to the improvement of school attendance of the "Bottom 10%" groups of people who are, in many cases, minorities or people living in remote areas of the country.

The survey also revealed various factors which contributed to the improvement of the attendance rate at primary schools in Laos. One economic factor was that VEDCs were successful in providing laborers for agricultural work. This support provided opportunities for the children of this group to attend school. Another significant contributing factor was the changing positive view children had on education and going to school. Children became excited about going to school to see their friends and to have fun learning through the efforts of the VEDCs.