

Cover Note for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Request

OVERVIEW	
Country:	Lao PDR
Grant agent(s):	UNICEF
Coordinating agency(ies):	Australia-DFAT; UNICEF
Program name:	Lao PDR COVID-19 Education Sector Response
COVID-19 Accelerated Funding amount requested:	\$9,644,366
Agency fees amount (additional to COVID-19 Accelerated Funding amount requested): ¹	\$675,106
Agency fees as % of total COVID-19 Accelerated Funding requested:	7%
COVID-19 Accelerated Funding application date:	5/15/2020
Estimated COVID-19 Accelerated Funding program start date:	6/15/2020
Estimated COVID-19 Accelerated Funding program closing date (must be last day of the month, e.g. June 30 , 2021):	12/31/2021
Expected submission date of completion report (At the latest 6 months after program closing date):	6/30/2022
Grant modality - (please enter 'X')	<input type="checkbox"/> Sector Pooled
	<input type="checkbox"/> Project Pooled/ Co-financed
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Project/ Stand-alone

¹ General agency fees are additional to the Accelerated Funding amount requested, and determined by the grant agent's own internal regulations. They are paid to the agency's headquarters and relate to overhead costs and are typically used to assist in the defrayment of administrative and other costs incurred in connection with the management and administration of grant funds. These fees are pre-determined in the Financial Procedure Agreement (FPA) between the grant agent and the GPE Trustee.

Table of Contents

Cover Note for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Request	1
1. Background and Country Context	3
Introduction.....	3
Lao PDR Education COVID-19 Response Plan.....	4
Lao PDR Education System	4
2. Needs overview	4
3. Selection of Grant Agent	5
4. Description of the proposed programme for the accelerated funding.....	6
Objectives	6
Strategic Principles	6
Key interventions.....	7
Target Population	12
5. Results Framework	14
6. Implementation and Financial Management	20
7. Budget	23
8. Monitoring and evaluation.....	23
Visibility and Communication.....	24
Annex 1: Lao PDR Education COVID-19 Response Plan: Implementation Plan and Budget	24
Annex 2: Lao PDR Education COVID-19 Response Plan.....	24
Annex 3: Concept Note: Teaching and Learning Online Platform.....	25
Annex 4: Concept Note for GIS-enabled online platform to support the planning and monitoring of COVID-19 education response	28
Annex 5. UNICEF Financial and Procurement Rules and Regulations	29

Lao PDR GPE COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Proposal

1. Background and Country Context

Introduction

The Lao People's Democratic Republic has not been spared from the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. While the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has been low compared with neighboring countries, the impact of the pandemic goes way beyond the numbers of cases.

The government set up a National Taskforce Committee for COVID-19 prevention and control to coordinate and manage the responses. The first COVID-19 case was confirmed on 23 March 2020, and with the increase in the number of cases, the government announced a nationwide lockdown from 30 March 2020 under the Prime Minister's Order No. 06.² As a measure to prevent the spread of the virus, all schools and educational institutions have been closed since 19 March 2020. This has disrupted the learning of over 1.5 million children and young people, who were entering the last 2.5 months of the 2019-2020 school year. A prolonged school closure could further put children and young people's learning and well-being at risk.

Moreover, around 1,900 schools have been used as quarantine centres for Laotians returning from neighboring countries. The closure of borders with neighboring countries and the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in these countries has resulted in tens of thousands of Lao migrant workers to return home. An estimated 134,400 Laotians returned from Thailand before 20 March 2020 alone.³ It is expected that with the easing of internal lockdown and travel restrictions to and from Laos, more Lao workers will return.

As the borders reopen, especially in the south of the country, which has a vibrant trade with Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand, and across the relatively porous border with China, new COVID-19 cases might be detected. Laos is bordered by China and Myanmar to the north, Cambodia to the south, Vietnam to the east, and Thailand to the west.

The lockdown restrictions were loosened effective 4 May although inter-provincial travel remains restricted. Based on the notice from the Prime Minister's Office, additional restrictions may be re-imposed by the government if new cases are detected. If an infected case is confirmed in a particular province, stricter measures will be enacted in that province. If a cluster of cases is found in two bordering provinces, then the country may revert to stricter lockdown measures stipulated under Prime Ministerial Order No. 6/PM.⁴

Map of Lao PDR



² Latest figures and updates on the COVID-19 situation in Laos are available from the [Lao Government's website on COVID-19](#)

³ Vientiane Times, 23 April 2020

⁴ The Laotian Times, 1 May 2020 <https://laotiantimes.com/2020/05/01/laos-to-loosen-lockdown-measures-in-bid-to-restart-economy/>

In view of this, it is important that efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Lao PDR and keep all learners and education staff safe (physically and mentally) are intensified. So too are efforts to ensure all learners have access to continuity of learning during temporary school closures, and other mitigation efforts to limit the impact of the pandemic.

Lao PDR Education COVID-19 Response Plan

To guide and ensure a coordinated response to COVID-19 in the education sector, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) with the support of UNICEF and in coordination with the Education Cluster, developed the Education COVID-19 Response Plan (Annex 1). MoES leads the Education Cluster with UNICEF and Save the Children as co-leads. The intent is to use this plan as a key reference for interventions of the MoES and development partners (DPs) to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the education sector and ensure the health and well-being of students and education staff, as well as support continuity of learning. The Lao PDR Education COVID-19 Response Plan has been shared to the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) and benefitted from additional inputs from key MoES line departments and development partners.

The Response Plan has been used as key reference for developing this proposal. Key interventions identified in this proposal are in line with the response plan.

Lao PDR Education System

The Lao PDR education system structure is divided into: early childhood education (covers creches, nursery, kindergarten, and one-year pre-primary), five years of primary education (compulsory), followed by four years of lower secondary (compulsory), three years of upper secondary, followed by post-secondary non-tertiary education (technical and vocational education) and tertiary education with number of years dependent upon the field of study. The official entry age for primary education is six years. A unified standard national curriculum is used for teaching and student learning. The academic calendar starts in September and ends in June.

The country currently has a total of 14,135 public pre-schools, primary and secondary schools (including 8,518 public primary schools), eight Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) and four specialized TTCs (for physical education, art, and two on Buddhism) four universities, and 18 technical and vocational schools under the jurisdiction of MoES. The MoES has identified 40 “Priority Districts” based on a set of social development and education indicators. These 40 districts have been identified as the most disadvantaged and therefore needs additional support. To maximize effectiveness of extremely limited state resources, the MoES has encouraged development partners (DPs) to prioritize their programme/project support and capital investments in these districts. There is a total of 148 districts in the country and 18 provinces. The MoES 40 priority districts are scattered over the 18 provinces.

2. Needs overview

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Lao PDR is enormous. A report from the National Economic Research Institute estimates that economic growth⁵ will slow down to 3.3% in 2020, the lowest rate in over 30 years. The government’s socio-economic development plan for 2020 had originally projected growth of 6.5% for 2020.⁶ An economic slowdown will put additional pressure on Government spending on education and basic services, which

⁵ As measured by gross domestic product (GPD) growth

⁶ The Laotian Times, 23 April 2020 <https://laotiantimes.com/2020/04/23/laos-to-experience-stunted-economic-growth-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/>

is already low compared with other neighboring countries. This highlights that the costs of the pandemic for Lao children and young people are immediate and, if unaddressed, may persist throughout their lives.

Even before COVID-19, Lao PDR in the last five years experienced a surge in natural disasters that have destroyed school facilities, educational equipment and teaching-learning materials, particularly textbooks and teacher guidebooks. This has exacerbated the lack of textbooks, particularly in rural areas. Limited government budget for education and education infrastructure has left an estimated 25% of schools with no clean water making it a challenge to practice proper hygiene as part of prevention and control of the spread of COVID-19. About half of schools don't have electricity. The use of modern technology in education as such is limited and digital literacy remains low, including among teachers.

The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities in education. The closure of schools has highlighted that not all girls and boys have access to the internet, TV, radio, books and supplies. And not all are in school in the first place. Children and young people living in remote rural areas, children with disabilities, girls, poor and other marginalized groups, returning migrants, are among the most affected. The current school closures and the continued threat of the pandemic will erode gains in the Lao education sector made over the last decades. In addition, the loss of protection and other forms of support that schools provide including school-based health are also compromising children's well-being. Girls may be more susceptible to gender-based violence and be more isolated as their school peer support network shrinks.

While several development partners have mobilized support for an immediate response, much more needs to be done, including putting in place a mix of sustainable interventions that allows the Lao education sector to reopen better, and where possible stay open or have various options for remote learning in the event of second or third waves of the pandemic.

The Lao context necessitates putting in place a blend of interventions to meet the learning needs of the population, including vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. This would include a combination of take-home printed materials, TV, radio and online platforms to support continuity of learning, accompanied by support to teachers and parents/caregivers so they can facilitate learning at home. When schools eventually re-open, additional support may be needed by some students who have lagged further behind. It is also important to put in place interventions that are inclusive and sustainable and can continue to be used post COVID or during other emergencies, such as temporary closure of schools due to floods.

The current situation provides an opportunity for MoES to put in place a sustainable distance education system of good quality, including an online teaching and learning platform (see Annex 2) and a satellite education television that can be used both by students and teachers, including for their professional development.

The needs are huge, the funding limited, making this additional support from GPE crucial to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on children's and young peoples' learning and well-being, and support the Lao Education Sector's recovery.

3. Selection of Grant Agent

Following information from the GPE Secretariat of Lao PDR's eligibility for the new GPE COVID-19 Accelerated Funding, an online meeting between MoES; the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) co-chairs Australia-DFAT (also GPE Coordinating Agency), and the European Union (EU) Delegation; UNICEF (as GPE Coordinating Agency); and the World Bank (as ESPIG Grant Agent) agreed to open a call for expression of interest for the Grant Agent for this fund. Only UNICEF expressed interest, and this was confirmed via email to the ESWG on 24 April 2020. An

ESWG technical level meeting chaired by the Vice Minister of Education on 30 April 2020 endorsed UNICEF as Grant Agent. An official notification was sent by MoES to the GPE Secretariat on the selection of the Grant Agent on 4 May 2020.

4. Description of the proposed programme for the accelerated funding

Objectives

The proposed programme aims to provide a comprehensive response and recovery for the Lao PDR education sector from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as support ongoing efforts towards a stronger, more resilient education system. A key aim is to keep and enhance children's and young people's learning, while safeguarding their health and safety by supporting measures to prevent and control the spread of the virus.

In line with the Education COVID-19 Response Plan, the interventions have the following **overall objective**: Support Government and partners, in close collaboration with the ESWG and Educational Cluster, to **reduce the risks of the social impacts of the coronavirus on the education of Lao children and young people**; and **ensure safe school operations and the continuity of learning and well-being for children and youth, especially for the most vulnerable affected by the pandemic**.

Specific objectives (as per the Lao PDR Education COVID-19 Response Plan)

1. Support learners, educators⁷, caregivers/parents and school communities to prevent the transmission and spread of Covid-19 in line with national public health guidance, and ensure the well-being of learners and education staff.
2. Ensure continuity of learning through the implementation of diverse/key learning activities/opportunities aimed at quality learning and wellbeing of learners, teachers, caregivers/parents, and school communities taking into account equity and inclusivity.
3. Support the safe and inclusive return to school/educational institutions for learners, teachers, caregivers/parents, and school communities.
4. Ensure a coordinated Government and Development Partners response to COVID-19 prevention and control measures for the education sector, in coordination with other sectors.

Strategic Principles

The Lao PDR Education COVID-19 Response Plan and activities identified below adhere to the following principles:

1. Alignment with National Government policies, plans, and rules and regulations; and priority inter-sectoral interventions. Key interventions, decisions and protocols are guided by the National Task Force Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control.
2. Inclusivity and equity, including gender equality, addressing special education needs of learners either due to disability, not being able to speak/understand the Lao language, residing in hard to reach remote areas, and/or poverty.
3. Reopening better and strengthening resilience. The response plan strives to build the resilience of school communities. This also aligns with the MoES aim of strengthening preparedness and resilience of the education sector to disasters.

⁷ Includes teachers, school principals and school staff, pedagogical advisers (PAs), education officials in the districts, provinces and central level.

Key interventions

Cognizant of the current context and in an effort to not exacerbate existing inequalities in education, the interventions under this programme include **a mix of no-tech and low-tech activities**. The aim is to ensure Lao children and young people are not left behind or exposed to a higher risk of getting sick just because their schools don't have internet, electricity, water and soap.

Harmonization and complementarity with activities supported by other development partners has been considered and will continue to be a major consideration. A mapping of the different interventions supported by DPs, including which schools are covered is underway funded by the initial GPE grant via UNICEF headquarters. This programme will allow ongoing activities of the MoES and those funded by DPs to reach more schools, more teachers and ultimately more children. Continuity with the possible new Education Sector Plan Implementation Grant (ESPIG) GPE III funding has been considered. Alignment will also be made to ongoing interventions to strengthen emergency preparedness and resilience in education with support from UNICEF, Save the Children, and other partners.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitates the introduction of new ways of learning for children, for teachers and parents/caregivers. This means support is needed for all concerned to adjust to the new norm. At the same, it should be acknowledged that this does not replace being in school and highlight even more the importance of qualified, trained and well-resourced teachers. The activities under this proposal takes these into consideration.

A rapid assessment will be undertaken with MoES and Provincial and District Education Offices at the start of the programme to assess the situation in the schools. Activities are expected to start in early July, hence a back to school campaign is not included as schools are expected to partially reopen from 18 May 2020 (for Grades 5, 9 and 12), and hopefully in full by mid- or late June, depending on the situation. A back to school campaign for the partial reopening of schools on 18 May and the eventual full reopening is already being supported by UNICEF, EU and USAID and will continue until the end of the school year.

The interventions are grouped into the following outcome areas:

- I. PREVENTION & CONTROL OF COVID-19: Learners, educators, caregivers/parents and school communities are supported to prevent and control the transmission and spread of COVID-19 in line with national public health guidance; and to ensure the well-being of learners and education staff**

Activities identified under this outcome area cover scenarios where schools are closed, partially open, or fully open as identified in the Education COVID-19 Response Plan. A key strategy is to ensure cross-sectoral collaboration, ensuring key health and hygiene messages are shared widely across the Education sector and school communities, and schools follow safe operations guidance when open. These messages where possible will be made accessible, for example, including sign language interpretation in videos and ensuring all posters, leaflets, etc. have simple "easy read" language accompanied by pictures or illustrations.

Outputs:

- Learners, educators, parents/caregivers and school communities have access to key information on prevention of transmission and control of spread of COVID-19 in line with national public health guidance
- Learners, teachers and education staff in disadvantaged and COVID-19 high-risk areas have access to water and follow positive hygiene practices
- Schools follow safe operations protocols based on MoH and MoES guidance

The protection of learners and education staff is particularly important. Precautions are necessary to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 in school settings. At the same time, care must be taken to avoid stigmatizing students and staff who may have been exposed to the virus. Frequent handwashing with soap is one of the proven preventive measures, thus the need for sustained hygiene education in schools, which will complement provision of hardware (e.g. boreholes) and supplies (soaps and cleaning supplies).⁸ This is also expected to have a sustained impact in terms of behavior change and can trigger demand from households for clean water.⁹

MoES data indicate that on average only 70% of schools in the MoES 40 priority districts have water, hence the need to either rehabilitate existing facilities or install new ones (e.g. borehole or gravity-fed water system). Accessible handwashing stations will be installed in schools, particularly those in high-risk populated areas and tippy taps that can easily be set-up by teachers and parents will be promoted for smaller schools. The provision of hygiene and cleaning materials to schools will be done using the School Block Grants mechanism, and funds are directly transferred to schools with clear guidelines on its use. This allows for additional efficiencies in terms of procurement and distribution of supplies. The same modality is being supported by the World Bank and the current GPEII project. Funds from the GPE COVID funding will be used to cover hygiene supplies for schools for school year 2020-21, which starts in September. World Bank, INGOs like Save the Children, Plan International, World Vision, CRS, etc. are providing support to schools for the remainder of the current school year.

All water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) related activities will be coordinated with the Ministry of Health's Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion (DHHP) and the Centre for Environmental Health and Water Supply (locally known as Nam Saat). Implementation will also be done with the provincial and district education offices. UNICEF has a WASH programme, which works closely with DHHP, Nam Saat and MoES. Several other DPs also work in this area. The UNICEF WASH programme has resources to support provision of water in schools and hygiene promotion and expects to support 60 schools in 2020-2021. WFP is also supporting 900 schools throughout the country as well as other DPs like GIZ Fit for School.

The global [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools](#) issued by UNICEF, WHO and IFRC has been adapted to the Lao context. A [Lao version](#) has been approved by MoH and MoES and is being used to provide guidance for safe operation of schools along with the [Framework for Reopening Schools](#) issued by UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and WFP.¹⁰ The current back to school campaign for the partial reopening of schools, integrates key information from both guidance and includes key messages for parents/caregivers. Further orientations to provincial and district education offices will be undertaken to help them explain safe school protocols to schools and monitor them. An online monitoring tool will be developed and integrated into regular district monitoring of schools (see Annex 3). The support from this programme will include a small grant to districts to monitor COVID-19 related response interventions, including safe school operations.

II. CONTINUITY OF LEARNING: Learners in disadvantaged and COVID-19 high-risk areas have access to diverse learning opportunities, and teachers and parents/caregivers have capacity to support remote learning taking into account equity and inclusivity

Activities identified under this outcome area covers scenarios when schools are closed or partially open. They are also designed to put in place sustainable measures to complement learning even when schools are open. A key

⁸ A training package on Hygiene Action-led by Pupils (HAPiS) is already developed and focuses on daily routine practice of four key behaviours: handwashing with soap, drinking clean water, using and maintaining toilets, and cleaning the school compound. The training package cost is about \$330 per school.

⁹ Hygiene-promotion in schools would include specific messages to support children with disabilities using assistive products at school, including frequent cleaning and washing. e.g. children who use a wheelchair or use crutches.

¹⁰ Lao translation forthcoming being prepared with the support of UNESCO.

strategy is to institutionalize distance learning modalities and content for learners, but also effective support for teachers and guidance for parents/caregivers. This includes integrating communications campaigns and communication for development (C4D) approaches to inform the general public (particularly parents/caregivers) on positive home-based practices to enable learning, and information on digital learning, and education TV and radio programmes. The interventions are also designed to support continuity of learning during a possible second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and/or other emergencies that cause disruptions in the sector (e.g. floods) thereby strengthening resilience to emergencies and disasters.

Outputs:

1. Learning materials/content for ECE/pre-primary, primary (grades 1-5), including children with special educational needs developed and disseminated via various platforms
2. Textbooks and learning materials printed and distributed to students in remote areas
3. Resources, training materials and guidance for teachers to effectively support remote learning developed and rolled out
4. Catch-up/remedial programme for children lagging behind developed and implemented
5. Psychosocial support extended to learners, teachers and education staff in partnership with relevant government bodies and partners

As a response to COVID-19, MoES in early May launched an Education and Sport TV channel under the direct to home digital satellite TV service of Lao Satellite (LaoSat)¹¹, which runs from 6 am to 10 pm daily. Content has been developed by MoES with support from UNICEF, EU, Australia and other partners. Shows for young children (early childhood education age-group) will also be developed. The same content, which is aligned to the curriculum, is aired on national TV and AM and FM radio stations, as well as shared online. Additional inclusive content, especially for the upcoming September 2020 to June 2021 school year are needed. This can help ensure learners can access education programmes during periods when schools may be temporarily closed, either due to COVID-19 or other emergencies such as floods. It can also complement learning in schools.

To maximize the reach of education TV programmes in schools, this programme will include provision of SMART TV and satellite receiver and dish¹² to selected schools in rural areas where signal to regular TV channels may be limited. Education TV can eventually include content for teachers and education staff and the provision of SMART TV also allows schools to use the TV to access content from the teaching and learning online platform that will also be developed. A related intervention is to connect between 80-100 schools with no electricity to the power grid.¹³ On average only 34% of schools in the MoES 40 priority districts have electricity although as of 2018, 93.8% of households throughout the country have electricity.

According to the 2017 Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS-II), 79.3% of households have access to a TV (94.1% in urban areas, 72.2% in rural areas – including 49.4% households in rural areas without road access);¹⁴ 92.3% of households (at least one person from the household) have access to a mobile phone: 98.2% in urban areas, and 89.4% in rural areas. Only 20.6% of households have a radio (22.1% urban, 19.9% rural).

Another key activity is the development of an online and offline education teaching and learning platform where education resources and materials are compiled for use by teachers, pedagogical advisers and students. This online platform can house all online courses, apps, and integrate access to TV, Radio, YouTube channels, and any

¹¹ LaoSat is the only service provider in the country for satellite TV service

¹² Average package cost per school, including SMART TV and satellite receiver and dish and access to programmes is \$350

¹³ Estimated cost is \$300-\$400/school. A rapid assessment will help determine exact school locations within the 40 priority districts.

¹⁴ LSIS-II also showed that 65.5% of women aged 15-49 watched TV at least once a week, including 69.7% in rural areas; the rate is 83.3% for men in the same age group (national average), and 65.5% in rural areas.

videos on education and COVID-19 risk communication materials. It can also feature the national curriculum, virtual classrooms and allows tracking of learning progress. The platform can also be expanded to reach out-of-school children through non-formal education, and can also be used for secondary education. Subsidized internet access will be facilitated through partnerships with service providers. MoES is in discussions for a partnership with a service provider that can give free internet access to 1,000 schools across the country. This could be further expanded to partnerships with other service providers. Aside from the MoES ICT Department, the technical support of the National University of Laos will also be engaged to support the setting up of this platform. Key line departments in the Ministry, the Teacher Training Colleges, academia and DPs will be engaged to develop content.

UNICEF will tap its partnership with Microsoft and Cambridge University to set-up this online and offline teaching and learning platform for students, teachers, and pedagogical advisers. Called the Learning Passport¹⁵, this platform includes virtual classrooms, and an offline version and app. It also comes with digital literacy materials to support teachers and parent/caregivers. EU and UNICEF through the Partnership to Strengthen the Education System (PSES) in programme in Lao PDR will also bring in additional resources. Discussions are ongoing to use the same online platform to support teachers' continuous professional development, among other measures, as part of GPE III.

The use of technology to support teaching and learning is still in its infancy in the country, but the pandemic highlights the need to accelerate expansion, particularly in rural areas. While the cost of connectivity is going down, the cost for Lao children and young people without connectivity is increasing. Those who are not connected risk exclusion and disadvantage as most of the modern world remains out of their reach. There are on-going interventions in the country to use ICTs in education, albeit small-scale. Online learning is being used by some private schools in the country. ChildFund has introduced its "Library for All" online platform in Laos and provided tablets to 8 schools in Houaphanh Province. Aide et Action Laos has developed an app to learn Lao Language and provided tablets to 20 schools in Vientiane, and 15 schools in Oudomxay Province. Other partners have provided smart tablets to some schools, which can then be used to access the online platform. World Vision, USAID, Australia-DFAT supported online resources developed through the All Children Reading (Grand Challenge for Development).¹⁶ The Association for Autism Vientiane developed the first Lao language picture-based app which is suitable for children from ethnic groups to learn Lao language.¹⁷ UNESCO is also considering to introduce and adapt its [LearnBig](#), a multilingual online reading resource platform in Laos.

Well-designed digital learning platforms have the potential to provide interactive and engaging remote education, which could greatly benefit disadvantaged students, if they are provided access. A UNICEF analysis of 2017-2019 Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey-6 (MICS6) data from 14 countries showed that children with internet access at home also have substantially higher foundational reading skills. This highlights the importance that investments in connectivity in disadvantaged areas must be a priority. The aim is not to exacerbate the digital divide but accelerate access and find the most innovative ways to provide online learning for disadvantaged learners.

Acknowledging low digital literacy levels among teachers and parents/caregivers, orientation and training packages will be developed. UNESCO will also support this initiative and has already developed a teacher training on digital skills package. In parallel, building on the previous and current experience, best practices and tools, and ongoing engagement with countries in Asia-Pacific on competency-based teacher training reforms to facilitate ICT-pedagogy integration, UNESCO plans to support the Lao government/education stakeholders in developing

¹⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-and-microsoft-launch-global-learning-platform-help-address-covid-19-education>

¹⁶ <https://allchildrenreading.org/>; <https://www.digitallibrary.io/>

¹⁷ The App works offline once the app has been downloaded. The dictionary can be customized to grade levels for common words. Children have the ability to develop sentences and hear Lao language words.

ICT Competency Standards for Teachers through capacity development workshops that would guide teacher education and professional development programmes in ensuring effective ICT-pedagogy integration.¹⁸ UNESCO also has other online resources that can be linked to this platform. Online safety will be a key consideration.

Recognizing that providing electricity and internet access to schools in hard to reach areas would still be a challenge, printing and dissemination of textbooks and “take-home” learning materials will also be a key intervention. While the textbook ratio could be 1:1 in primary, this remains a challenge in lower secondary. As mentioned above, floods in the last five years have also destroyed textbooks and learning materials in schools contributing to the shortage. While some DPs like Australia-DFAT and JICA support the development and printing of textbooks for Grades 1 and 2¹⁹, there is still a gap across the various grades in primary and lower secondary. The temporary closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic meant learners in schools with a textbook shortage could not bring them home. Textbooks can last 2-3 school calendars thus benefitting a higher number of learners. Clear guidance for schools to allow students to bring home textbooks will again be circulated, as well as instructions for students and parents to “care” for the textbooks.²⁰

The temporary closure of schools also highlighted the need for additional learning materials for home learning for children and for parents/caregivers to provide support, particularly in rural areas. LSIS-II (2017) data show that on average, only 4.2% of children live in households that have 3 or more books for the child (11.8% in urban areas; 1.3% in rural areas). Provision of additional learning materials at home should also come with guidance for parents/caregivers taking into account low literacy environments and needs of children with disabilities. Several partners like Save the Children, World Vision have supported MoES develop additional resources during the pandemic, which can continue to be used.²¹ There is also a possibility for World Bank to introduce its Read@Home initiative in Lao PDR, which could mobilize additional resources and technical support.

Equally important is the capacity development for teachers, school principals and pedagogical advisers to support remote learning. This can include how teachers help students re-start their education and catch-up in their learning when schools reopen and at the start of the new school year in September 2020. This should also include how teachers help identify and support students that need catching up. Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) will be engaged in developing this capacity development support to teachers on remote learning that could also be integrated into pre- and in-service teacher trainings; thereby also ensuring sustainability and enhancing resiliency of the education system for future emergencies. The support will also engage the learning resource centers within school clusters in the 40 priority districts. UNESCO will also support this component.

Under normal circumstances, many learners already need support to master competencies needed to move to the next grade. The school closures due to COVID-19 is expected to have exacerbated this challenge. Catch-up/remedial support for children will as such be provided. This remedial support will be implemented with district education offices (DESBs) and possibly with INGO partners. TTCs and the academia will be engaged. This catch-up tutorial/ remedial support will prioritize children in hard to reach areas who have no access to TV, radio and the internet, including children with disabilities.²² Support will be done through a face-to-face approach and complemented with e-learning and teaching resources with offline access to the teaching and learning platform

¹⁸ Under the CapED COVID-19 education response, UNESCO will support the development of ICT competency standards for teachers (ICT-CST) and the integration of the ICT-CST in pre-service and in-service teacher training as well as in capacity development of teachers and teacher educators.

¹⁹ Math textbooks are printed with MoES budget, JICA supports its development.

²⁰ UNICEF earlier supported developing related campaign materials on like this video on “borrowing and caring for your books” for children (English version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuQuTqZzyRw>)

²¹ World Vision supported development of home activities books for Grade 1, 2 and 3 being reviewed RIES and will be printed and distributed for in Soukhouma, Nong, Xonnabouly, Thapangthong.

²² The support may include provision of assistive devices to children with disabilities where feasible

(activity II.3). EU and UNICEF will also support coverage in schools in additional districts. For children in other districts, extra remedial support can be done via the online teaching and learning platform complemented by additional support from teachers (activity II. 6 and II.7). While schools in the 40 priority districts will be the target, schools in other districts with low learning outcomes may also be included (depending on results of the rapid assessment).

EU and UNICEF will support MoES in the development of a test item bank for pre-primary and primary teachers, as well as pedagogical advisers and ECE technical officers, to freely draw from for conducting classroom-based student assessments. This is aimed at helping identify possible gaps in students' learning against curriculum objectives to better enable teachers to adjust their teaching to the needs of their students. This will be key to helping students restart their regular school education and catch up in their learning and as such diminish the risk of students falling further behind or dropping out. This will also help teachers identify which students would need catch-up/remedial support.

In addition, the provision of psychosocial support to teachers, education staff and students will be delivered in coordination with relevant government bodies and partners like the Lao Women's Union.²³ This includes sharing key messages to minimize the stigmatizing impact of COVID-19. UNICEF has developed information and related materials for parents and caregivers providing advice for parents and families on coping during the COVID-19 pandemic. These materials can be used to complement psychosocial support in schools.²⁴

Communications campaigns and communication for development (C4D) approaches will be a complementary intervention to inform the general public (particularly parents/caregivers) on positive home-based practices to enable learning, and how to access and use digital learning, and education TV and radio programmes. Existing communication channels widely used in the country like SMS, WhatsApp groups and loudspeakers in the communities/villages will also be used for the mass communication and C4D interventions. These interventions will be co-funded by UNICEF.

III. MONITORING, REPORTING AND COORDINATED RESPONSE

Details under Section 8 monitoring and evaluation, including details on rapid assessment, regular monitoring and on the GIS-enabled online monitoring platform for the COVID-19 response (Annex 3) to track which development partners are working in which areas and their coverage, reducing overlaps and ensuring all areas in need are covered, facilitating a coordinated response.

Target Population

Activities under this programme will focus on high-population density areas of Vientiane Capital and Savannakhet, as well high-risk provinces where confirmed cases of COVID-19 were found - Vientiane Capital, Luang Prabang and Xaysomboun. - and border areas. These provinces will be prioritized especially for risk communication and hygiene-related activities (Outcome 1). Outcome 2 interventions will prioritize the 40 MoES priority districts but also high-risk areas. Further targeting of specific schools to be supported will be based on a careful review of data and further consultations with MoES and DPs. The ongoing mapping of areas supported by DPs (see details in

²³ *The Lao Women's Union and Lao Youth Union have established hotlines for psychosocial support with UNICEF and UNFPA support.*

²⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/laos/parenting-during-corona-virus-outbreak>

monitoring section) will ensure there will be no overlaps and the schools most in need will be covered, as much as possible. Adjustments may also be needed after the rapid assessment is completed.

National information campaigns aim to reach the majority of the 1.2 million pre-school, primary and lower secondary students across the country, 52% girls. Provision of hygiene kits are also expected to reach all public pre-primary and primary schools across the country (9,500 schools) and this will be complemented by provision of clean water, handwashing facilities and in-school hygiene promotion activities that combined will reach 1,000 schools across the country. Specific activities will prioritize pre-primary and primary education, and for some activities also lower secondary education (e.g. printing of textbooks, teaching and learning platform). Meeting the needs of children with disabilities will be a major consideration while acknowledging there is limited available data.

5. Results Framework

RESULTS FRAMEWORK: Lao PDR Education COVID-19 Response (GPE Proposal)					
OUTCOME I	PREVENTION & CONTROL OF COVID-19: Learners, educators, caregivers/parents and school communities supported to prevent and control the transmission and spread of COVID-19 in line with national public health guidance, and to ensure the well-being of learnings and education staff (covering scenarios where schools are closed, partially open, fully open)				
	Outcome I Indicators: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A) # of students reached with targeted messages and information on COVID-19 total, male, female, # with disabilities (if data is available); B) # of teachers and education staff reached with targeted messages and information (total, male, female) 2. # of schools; # of students reached with hygiene promotion -total, male, female, # with disabilities (if data is available) 3. # of schools, # of students supported with clean water 4. # of schools, # of students provided with handwashing facilities 5. # of schools following safe school operations practices 				
Outputs	Activities (linked to COVID Response Plan)	Indicators	Target	Baseline	Means of Verification
1. Learners, educators, parents/caregivers and school communities have access to key information on prevention of transmission and control of spread of COVID-19 in line with national public health guidance	I.1 Working with the Government-led communication task force continue to develop communication materials on COVID-19 prevention and control in schools (e.g. videos, infographics, posters and flyers, radio spots, social media messages (main channels: Whatsapp groups, social media, community radio, TV spots)	Communication materials developed for learners, educators, parents/caregivers and disseminated via various platforms	Communication materials developed for radio, TV, online, print and via community loudspeakers (where possible in other local languages/with translation, sign language)	TBD	Reports from MoES and DPs
2. Learners, teachers and education staff in disadvantaged and COVID-19 high-risk areas have access to water and follow positive hygiene practices	I.2 National hygiene campaign and promotion in schools	Hygiene promotion information campaign and training package developed and rolled out	1,000 pre-primary and primary schools located in high-population density areas and in the 40 priority districts	TBD	Reports

As of 15 May 2020

	I.3 Provision of hygiene and cleaning materials to schools using the School Block Grants mechanism (e.g. soaps, cleaning materials)	# of schools, # of children	9,500 pre-primary and primary schools across the country	TBD	
	I.4 Provide clean water to target schools	# of schools, # of students supported with clean water	200 pre-primary and primary schools located in high-population density areas and in the 40 priority districts	25% of schools have no water	Reports
	I.5 Provision of handwashing facilities to target schools	# of schools, # of students provided with handwashing facilities	700 pre-primary and primary schools located in high-population density areas and in the 40 priority districts	TBD	Reports
3. Schools follow safe operations protocols based on MoH and MoES guidance	I.6 Printing and dissemination of guidelines on Safe Schools Operations (Guidance already developed)	Safe Schools Guidelines printed and disseminated (Y/N)	Guidelines distributed to 18 Provincial and 148 District Education Offices and 4,500 schools	N	Reports
	1.7 Monitoring of school operations by DESBs – how schools are following protocols for safe schools	DESBs regularly monitor schools	148 DESBs monitor safe school operations as part of regular school monitoring visits	TBD	Reports
OUTCOME 2	Continuity of Learning: Learners in disadvantaged and COVID-19 high-risk areas have access to diverse learning opportunities, and teachers and parents/caregivers have capacity to support remote learning taking into account equity and inclusivity <i>(covers scenarios when schools are closed, partially open, and to complement learning even when schools are open)</i>				
	<p><i>Outcome 2 Indicators:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. # of children and young people supported with distance/home-based learning 2. Teaching and learning materials produced for students, teachers and families by medium of delivery (TV, radio, print, online) 3. # of students supported with textbooks and learning materials 				

As of 15 May 2020

Outputs	Activities (linked to COVID Response Plan)	Indicators	Target	Baseline	Means of Verification
1.Learning materials/content for ECE/pre-primary, primary (grades 1-5), including children with special educational needs developed and disseminated via various platforms	II.1 Develop additional content for the Education and Sport TV channel aligned with the curriculum (content to be shared via <u>radio and online platforms</u> as well)	Additional content for Education and Sport TV channel developed and aired, and disseminated via radio and online platforms	Education programme for TV and radio developed and aired throughout school year 2020-21	TBD	Reports from MoES and DPs
	II.2 Provide TV and satellite receiver and dish set for selected rural schools, including connecting some schools to the electric power grid (linked to II.3)	# of schools provided with TV, satellite receiver and dish set	300 schools	0	Reports from MoES and DPs
	II.3 Development of an education teaching and learning online & offline platform where education resources and materials are compiled for use by teachers, PAs, students. This online platform can house all online courses, apps, and integrate access to TV, Radio, YouTube channels, videos on education. The platform can be used during the school closure and post COVID/other emergencies. It includes “virtual classrooms.” Subsidized access will be facilitated. Online safety will be a key consideration. A notebook and projector will be provided to schools to facilitate online and/or offline access.	Teaching and learning online & offline platform developed and functioning (Y/N) # and % of schools in 40 priority districts provided with direct access to the teaching and learning platform	Teaching and learning platform developed and functioning 750 schools in 40 priority districts	N 0 schools	Reports
	II.4 Training of teachers, principals and pedagogical advisors in use of Teaching and Learning Platform (II.3) and digital literacy	# of teachers and education staff trained on use of teaching and	15,000 teachers and education staff at central, provincial and district levels	0	Reports

As of 15 May 2020

		learning platform, and on digital literacy			
2. Textbooks and learning materials printed and distributed to students in remote areas	II.5 Printing of textbooks and additional learning materials approved by MoES for distribution to students (for pre-primary, primary and lower secondary). This should include guidance on how parents/caregivers can support learning at home, including for children with special needs; guidance should take into consideration parents/caregivers with low literacy levels	# of students supported with textbooks and learning materials total, male, female, # with disabilities (if data is available)	200,000 students in remote areas in MoES 40 priority districts	0	Reports from MoES and DPs
3. Resources, training materials and guidance for teachers to effectively support remote learning developed and rolled out	II.6 Develop resources, guidance for teachers on how to support students' remote learning. These can also include how teachers can help their students re-start their education and catch up in their learning when schools re-open. Include how teachers can help identify and support students that need catching up	Resources developed and used	Resources developed and used contributing to setting up of "course/module" at TTCs on supporting distance learning	TBD	Reports
	II.7 Capacity development for teachers and school principals to support remote learning (can then be integrated into broader teacher professional development plan) (linked to II.5 – some schools to be covered)	# of teachers supported to facilitate home-based/distance learning	5,000 teachers	TBD	Reports
	II.8 Supporting selected Learning Resource Centers within the School Clusters, including provision of learning materials both electronic and print	# of school clusters supported	50 school clusters in 40 priority districts	TBD	Reports

As of 15 May 2020

	Budget is linked to II.3, II. 5, II.6 and II.7				
<i>4. Catch-up/remedial programme for children lagging behind developed and implemented</i>	II.9 Implement additional catch-up tutorial / remedial support for children, including those who could not access online media, radio or TV. Linked to II.6	# of learners accessing catch-up/remedial lessons	6,000 students in remote schools in S 40 priority districts	TBD	Reports from MoES and DPs
<i>5. Psychosocial support extended to learners, teaches and education staff in partnership with relevant government bodies and partners</i>	II. 10 Provide psychosocial support to teachers, education staff and students in coordination with relevant government bodies and partners. This includes sharing key messages to minimize the stigmatizing impact of COVID-19.	# of schools reached # of students; # of teachers/education staff reached Key messages integrated in national communication campaign (Y/N)	200 schools reached; 1,800 students; 400 teachers/education staff key messages integrated in national communication campaign	0 0 0 N	Reports from MoES, MoLSW, LWU, etc. and DPs
III. MONITORING, REPORTING AND COORDINATED RESPONSE					
Output	Activities (linked to COVID Response Plan)	Indicators	Target	Baseline	Means of Verification
<i>1. Regular monitoring and timely reporting; and coordinated delivery of Education COVID response</i>	III. 1 Rapid assessment, mapping of ongoing support, and monitoring of uptake and coverage of interventions (surveys, field visits, etc.). This also includes UNICEF financial quality assurance activities	Rapid assessment undertaken (Y/N) Mapping of ongoing support and coverage (Y/N) Regular monitoring undertaken	Rapid assessment completed Mapping completed and regularly updated Regular monitoring via an online tool	N Mapping ongoing N	Online GIS platform
	III. 2 Regular meetings of the Education Cluster/ESWG	# of Education Cluster/ESWG meetings where COVID-19 education response is discussed	Quarterly meetings	Education Cluster meeting as needed	Minutes from Education Cluster, ESWG Meetings

As of 15 May 2020

	III. 3 Documentation of good practices, lessons learned, communication and visibility; reporting	Documentation prepared Timely reporting to GPE Secretariat	Timely reporting to GPE Secretariat (e.g. <u>bimonthly</u> survey)	0	Documentation, reports
--	--	---	--	---	------------------------

6. Implementation and Financial Management

See implementation plan with timeline and budget in ANNEX 1

The MoES has established a Task Force to develop the GPE proposal chaired by the Deputy Director General, Department of Planning. The task force includes representatives from MoES line departments as well as development partners. A similar body/oversight committee will be set-up to oversee the implementation of the programme once funding is confirmed. A Committee to oversee the MoES COVID-19 response has been set-up (MoES Ministerial Decree #1212) coordinated under the Cabinet Office.

MoES will take leadership in the implementation of the programme with clear roles and responsibilities to be outlined for each line department as well as provincial and district education offices. MoES will also ensure regular engagement of the Education Cluster and the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG). All members of the Education Cluster – from both MoES and DPs - are also members of the ESWG.

Provincial Education and Sports Services (PESS) and District Education and Sports Bureau (DESB) will have pivotal roles in programme implementation and monitoring. Education Support Grants for DESBs across the country will be provided for them to support the implementation and monitoring of activities. This mechanism is already in place and is being used by other DPs, including Australia-DFAT. Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) will also be engaged, as appropriate.²⁵

UNICEF as the Grant Agent will ensure implementation is in line with the proposed interventions, and will provide technical guidance, rigorous monitoring, and quality assurance, including ensuring transactions are in line with established financial and procurement guidelines. The UNICEF Lao PDR Education Programme will manage the GPE COVID programme, under the responsibility of the Chief of Education, with daily management supported the education team (education manager, education specialists and programme assistants). UNICEF WASH, Child Protection, and Planning and Management (PM&E) teams will also be regularly engaged to support programme implementation. UNICEF will engage additional experts to support specific activities as well as monitoring and documentation.

UNICEF will work with the Education Cluster and the ESWG to ensure that the GPE COVID funds are used in a complementary manner with resources made available by other DPs, including the World Bank and JICA for GPE III, Australia-DFAT, EU, UNESCO, WFP, and other donors. UNICEF also coordinates the Education sub-group under the Lao PDR-United Nations (UN) Partnership Framework 2017-2021.²⁶ UNICEF will also engage with GPE to leverage the GPE platforms and other platforms such as Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)²⁷ and the global cluster mechanism, for sharing best practice and capacity development.

A rapid assessment will be carried out at the start of the programme. Implementation modalities for specific activities will be discussed further with MoES respective departments as well as DPs, to ensure resources made

²⁵ While MOES sets overall policy and provides oversight, the PESS take overall responsibility for education development within their jurisdiction and DESB are responsible for the direct provision of early childhood education, primary and lower secondary services, including technical support. To support the decentralisation process, a 2008 Ministerial Decree called for the establishment of VEDCs and District Education Development Committees. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) is responsible through their District Governor's Offices for the establishment and functioning of VEDCs and DEDCs.

²⁶The United Nations Country Team in Lao PDR, consisting of all the UN specialised agencies, funds and programmes working in the country, together with the World Bank, supports the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Lao PDR's national development targets through sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development. The UN focusses its assistance on the most vulnerable and poor, in particular women, children and youth. www.la.one.un.org/about-us

²⁷ <https://inee.org/>

available will be optimally utilized. Cost efficiencies will be sought, including in the delivery of materials like textbooks and learning materials to schools by working together with various DPs.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Mitigation Strategy
Quarantine, lockdown and other restrictions in movement due to COVID-19 will affect humanitarian/emergency programming and response	High	While restriction in movements to control the spread of COVID-19 will have an impact on the rapid assessment, regular meetings for the programme, and field visits, this will be mitigated with the use of ICTs such as online meeting platforms (zoom, webex) and by using WhatsApp groups, etc. Additional support to boost internet bandwidth in MoES may also be considered as needed.
Economic slowdown will further lead to reductions in the government budget for social sectors like education. This would lead to further cuts in already insufficient funding for education.	High	Funding from GPE can help offset expected budget cuts in the education sector and will ensure learners in remote areas get learning materials, and that provincial and district education officials regularly monitor schools, particularly in the MoES 40 priority districts. UNICEF, along with development partners, in particular EU and Australia as co-chairs of the ESWG, and World Bank as GPE ESPIG Grant Agent will continue to advocate to improve allocative and operational efficiency in the education budget, and to continue to prioritize public investments in education.
Availability of needed supplies and restrictions of bringing in supplies to the country with borders closed	High	UNICEF's Supply Division in Copenhagen can facilitate access to supplies. UNICEF will also coordinate with other UN agencies in the country, including WFP to facilitate procurement and delivery of supplies
Natural disasters, including heavy rains and storms could cut off access to some areas	High	Timeline for implementation of activities will factor in the rainy season when there is high risk of flooding in some areas. An Education Contingency Plan is currently being developed with UNICEF support and will also be used to guide interventions for emergency preparedness and response.
Lengthy administrative and procurement processes both from UNICEF and MoES may delay implementation	Medium	UNICEF has activated emergency procedures for COVID-19 response. This allows for simplifications in several procedures that can fast-track some processes. The internal capacity of UNICEF, particularly with its WASH, finance and supply capacities will be boosted in anticipation of GPE COVID programme related transactions. Support will also be provided to MoES through orientations on the procedures. A consultant will also be hired to support MoES with the coordination and administrative and financial processes.
Coordination and communication from central, provincial, district levels to schools if not well functioning could affect programme implementation	Medium	MoES and UNICEF will work closely to put in place communication mechanisms and protocols. Roles and responsibilities for each line department at the central level as well as provincial and district levels will be clearly spelled out. Mechanisms for follow-up and regular monitoring will also be

		put in place. Use of ICTs, including WhatsApp groups, which are used throughout the country will be utilized.
Quality of outputs, including resources for students and teachers	Medium	A combination of international and national expertise will be tapped to provide support to the programme implementation. Engagement with academia (e.g. Lao National University) will also be promoted. As many activities also include support from several other development partners, they will also be engaged to provide quality assurance.
Low digital literacy in the country	Medium	Acknowledging that the use of technology to support teaching and learning is still in its infancy in the country and there is low digital literacy, the design and introduction of the online teaching and learning platform will take this into account. This includes a mass media campaign and C4D interventions to support digital learning, as well as digital literacy trainings and training on how to use the platform for teachers, parents and students. Experiences from various organizations already using digital options in education in Laos will be factored into the design, including from private schools. Experiences from other countries introducing the same approach will also be reviewed. The introduction of the teaching and learning platform will be done in phased approach, there will be several tests and modelling before scaling-up.

7. Budget

See implementation plan with timeline and budget in ANNEX 1

Budget breakdown by Outcome Area

Outcome 1	\$ 3,442,000
Outcome 2	\$ 5,684,878
Monitoring	\$160,000
UNICEF Operating Costs	\$357,488
Total	\$9,644,366

8. Monitoring and evaluation

A rapid assessment will be initiated as a key starting activity for this programme. Results will be used to sharpen the design of implementation modalities as well as zoom in on the schools where activities will be implemented. Online monitoring tools will be designed to facilitate monitoring at the school, district and provincial levels. Documentation of lessons learnt and case studies will be prepared.

UNICEF is already supporting MoES set-up a **GIS-enabled online monitoring platform for the COVID-19 response** (see Annex 3) using initial funding from GPE. The online platform will draw from available MoES data and allow for additional field data collection to reflect “real time” data on numbers of schools, students and villages provided with support via the Education Cluster and other partners. The online platform will also be able to track which development partners are working in which areas and their coverage, reducing overlaps and ensuring all areas in need are covered. The platform will provide **3W** – who is doing what, where – information used in emergency clusters around the world. This will greatly enhance MoES’ and the Education Cluster’s ability to monitor the response and take timely corrective measures. It will also allow for easier reporting of the education response to Government channels. The platform can also be expanded for use in regular MoES monitoring. A user-friendly questionnaire/data collection tool that can be used online and offline on phones, tablets or any internet browser is being developed. Additional questionnaires will be developed, which can be used by both district education officials as well as DPs for easier reporting. This will also enable data collection for sharing in the bi-monthly survey from the GPE Secretariat as part of the response monitoring.

This platform will form part of the Lao Education and Sports Management Information System (LESMIS). All data collected on learners, teachers and education staff will be disaggregated by sex, and where available data on children with disabilities will be included.

Priority will be given to integrate monitoring of COVID-19 response activities into existing monitoring mechanisms in the MoES, including by district education offices. A situation analysis of the M&E system in education is being finalized and will be used as key reference.

As mentioned above, UNICEF with the support of EU will support MoES develop a test item bank for pre-primary and primary education to help teachers measure whether students are learning. These can also be used to measure whether children receiving additional support through this programme are showing improved learning. UNICEF with EU support will also carry out a study on the impact of COVID-19 on repetition and dropout looking at school year 2020-21. As part of this programme, action research will be undertaken on the different remote learning options with the aim of refining the interventions to make them more effective. This is crucial as many of the interventions are linked to activities of MoES funded by other partners.

Visibility and Communication

UNICEF will regularly feature activities under this programme in the UNICEF Laos online platforms, which has exponentially expanded in recent weeks following the COVID-19 pandemic. Human interest stories will also be published and shared to the GPE Secretariat. Any publications, brochures and related documents produced will acknowledge the GPE support and include the GPE logo. UNICEF will follow the GPE branding guidelines based on the “GPE Protocol for Communications and Media Outreach Related to GPE Grants and Programs in Partner Countries.”

Annex 1: Lao PDR Education COVID-19 Response Plan: Implementation Plan and Budget

See separate attachment

Annex 2: Lao PDR Education COVID-19 Response Plan

See separate attachment

Annex 3: Concept Note: Teaching and Learning Online Platform

Introduction

The ongoing COVID-19 emergency response, as well as the recent MoES national consultations on teacher professional development, ongoing discussions for the Education Sector and Sports Development Plan 2021-25 and Lao PDR Global Partnership for Education Programme III (GPE III) have highlighted the need for developing a *MoES Teaching and Learning Platform* that serves two main purposes:

- 1) Facilitating the (online and offline) learning of children and youth;
- 2) Enhancing teaching by supporting the work of and professional development of teachers, principals, pedagogical advisors and ECE technical staff.

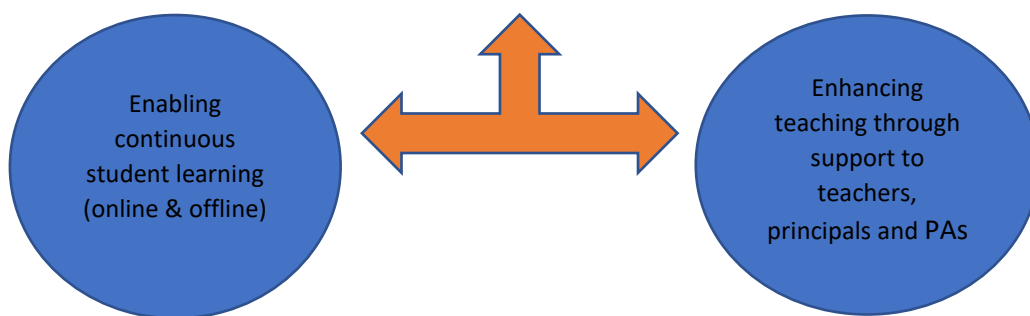
In response, UNICEF and EU as part of PSES will support MoES with the development of a Teaching and Learning Platform in close coordination with other development partners. This platform is to form part of a larger multipurpose MoES webpage that for example could provide access to the LESMIS Platform under development (within permission rights), a space for school principals to upload school data, key policy documents, etc.

The support provided by UNICEF's 'Learning Passport' initiative - a partnership between UNICEF, Microsoft and Cambridge University - will allow for the speedy development of the initial platform (within a period of about 3 weeks); thereby enhancing MoES' COVID-19 response in education by making the pre-school and primary curriculum available online, as well as other teaching and learning resources available online for students, parents, teachers, principals and pedagogical advisors.

A Teaching and Learning Platform tailored to the Lao context

[UNICEF's 'Learning Passport'](#) - an online teaching and learning platform, can quickly be adapted to the Lao context.

Figure 1: Overview envisaged online (& offline) Teaching and Learning Platform



Supporting student learning

- The platform allows for hosting the national curriculum. This includes making the curriculum (and supporting resources) available online for students, teachers and others to use. When schools are closed, or when students are unable to physically access school for a variety of reasons, they can continue their education online, following the national curriculum. This could help provide ongoing education to children whose schools are closed due to COVID-19 or other future emergency situations like floods or other natural disasters. The platform could also support online learning for children who cannot physically access schools, due to disability or location.

- The platform allows for creating a record of all the content taken by the student. In this way, teachers will be able to monitor student progress and support their learning both online and/or offline. Similarly, parents are also able to follow their child's learning via the platform.
- Other online resource and apps already developed by other development partners can also be integrated into this platform taking into account copyright and other permissions.

Enhancing teaching

- In line with the conclusions of the national consultations on the professional development of teachers organized by the Department of Teacher Education (DTE) with other MoES departments, the platform could greatly support the work of and professional development of teachers, principals, pedagogical advisors and other DESB staff; an exercise led by DTE and Teacher Training Colleges, in line with the GPE III programme design.
- Uploading of available teaching resources (e.g. teacher guides) will be followed by the development and/or identification of additional teaching materials. For example, PAs will play a pivotal role in the identification of good examples of effective lesson plans or lesson materials that are to be shared with other schools and PAs on the platform.
- Similarly, materials and other resources in support of the professional development of teachers, principals and pedagogical advisors will be developed and uploaded to the platform.

Ensuring access to the platform

- The platform will initially be developed online, followed by the development of an offline platform.
- The platform can be accessed using multiple means; computer, tablet and phone. USBs allow for easy uploading of the platform content to off-line resources (e.g. tablets or computers in schools without internet connection).
- UNICEF and EU will support access to the platform by the purchasing and distribution of tablets to schools and PAs in targets districts. A small-scale trial may also be pursued to explore the effectiveness of provision of tablets to students to support their learning from home in case of emergency.

Management of the Teaching and Learning Passport

- The platform will be owned by MoES and is ideally part of a larger multipurpose MoES webpage.
- Successful development and implementation of the platform calls for strong coordination across MoES departments and centers and TTCs, in particular DTE, DGE, RIES and TTCs and ICT Department initially. Given the pivotal role of the platform for enhancing teaching i.e. the work and professional development of teachers, principals and PAs/ECE technical officers, it is proposed DTE leads a MoES development committee, engaging selected development partners (see also GPE III design). Close coordination with GPE III implementation is key. Technical support from the National University of Laos will also be mobilized.
- UNICEF technical team will provide ongoing support to MoES in the development of the platform for a duration of two years. It is envisaged that after this period MoES will be able to maintain and extend the platform without or only minimal support by UNICEF and/or other development partners.

What are the next steps?

- Following the endorsement of MoES, UNICEF Lao PDR, with the support of the UNICEF Learning Passport team based in New York, will initiate its support to develop a platform tailored to the needs of MoES.
- This work starts with the identification and uploading of the digitalized primary and pre-school curricula (i.e. PDF), as well as other teaching and learning resources to the platform, once established.
- UNICEF Lao PDR office can support MoES in the identification and selection of approved learning and teaching materials for the platform.
- An international ICT in education specialist and a national consultant will be recruited by UNICEF (with support from EU) to support MoES in the development of the platform.
- The initial set up of the online Teaching and Learning Platform can take about 3-4 weeks. Extension of the platform to off-line format and the secondary sector will follow in due time. Enrichment of the platform with additional content will be an ongoing process.
- Orientation and training packages for all target users will be developed and rolled out. UNESCO will also support this initiative and has already developed a teacher training on digital skills package.
- Online safety will be a key consideration.
- A campaign to share information about this platform once it is launched will also be initiated.

Annex 4: Concept Note for GIS-enabled online platform to support the planning and monitoring of COVID-19 education response

The Government of Lao PDR (GoL), under the leadership of the National Committee for Covid-19 Prevention and Control is leading Lao PDR's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Like in other countries globally, these measures include the temporary closure of all schools. As of 19 March, all education institutions in Lao PDR have been closed. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), with the support of Development Partners, is taking a range of measures to offer children support to continue learning at home and promote COVID-19 safety messages for teachers, children and their parents.

UNICEF, as co-lead of the Education Cluster with MoES and Save the Children, will support MoES in the development of a GIS-enabled online platform to support the planning and monitoring of the COVID-19 preparedness and response in education in Lao PDR, with possible extension of the platform to other sectors once it has been established. This will be funded under the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) grant to UNICEF to support a coordinated response to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on children's learning.²⁸

The envisaged online platform will draw from available MoES data and allow for additional field data collection to reflect "real time" data on numbers of schools, students and villages provided with support via the Education Cluster. The online platform will also be able to track which Development Partners are working in which areas and their coverage, reducing overlaps and ensuring all areas in need are covered.

The platform will provide **3W** – who is doing what, where – information used in emergency clusters around the world (see examples below). This will greatly enhance MoES' and the Education Cluster's ability to monitor the response and take timely corrective measures. It will also allow for easier reporting of the education response to Government channels, UN country team, etc. The platform can also be used in other emergencies, e.g. to response to floods. It can also be expanded for use in regular MoES monitoring.

A user-friendly questionnaire/data collection tool that can be used online and offline on phones, tablets or any internet browser will also be developed. UNICEF will ensure translation of the questionnaire from English into Lao. As part of the platform, the service provider will develop an easy-to-use, online interactive (GIS supported) map to help MoES and development partners at various levels of the system in their monitoring and planning.²⁹

An external service provider will be contracted by UNICEF to develop the platform, working closely with the MoES Education Statistics Centre (ESSC) and ICT Center under the coordination of the MoES Cabinet Office, which leads the Education Cluster. The service provider will also provide online trainings for MoES technical staff, particularly from the ICT center on the online platform and how to maintain it. Online progress meetings between the service provider team and UNICEF, MoES Cabinet's Office, MoES ESSC (EMIS and ICT) will be conducted throughout the development of the online platform and monitoring tool.

Example of Cluster 3W online platform (covers various sectors): Myanmar Information Management Unit: [https://themimu.info/3W Dashboard by Village Tract](https://themimu.info/3W_Dashboard_by_Village_Tract).

²⁸ One of the key intervention areas under the GPE grant is "crisis response, risk analysis, response planning and system designs including data collection and monitoring for efficient delivery, (at national, subnational and school level)."

²⁹ The map may also integrate number of confirmed COVID-19 cases at the village or district level to allow MoES to identify heavily-affected areas that would require additional support.

Annex 5. UNICEF Financial and Procurement Rules and Regulations

UNICEF's financial risk management is aligned to the UN standard Framework Harmonized Approach of Cash Transfers (HACT) to Implementing Partners. The adoption of the new harmonized approach is a step in implementing the Rome Declaration on Harmonization and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which call for a closer alignment of development aid with national priorities and needs. The approach allows efforts to focus more on strengthening national capacities for management and accountability, with a view to gradually shift to utilizing national systems.

HACT is based on an assessment of the risks associated with transferring cash to implementing partners, including the risk that cash transferred to implementing partners may not be used or reported in accordance with agreements between the agency providing the cash resources and the implementing partner.

According to the UN HACT principle it is recognized that the level of risk can be different for each Implementing Partner. For each Implementing Partner, UN Agencies effectively and efficiently manage this risk by:

1. Assessing the Implementing Partners' financial management capacity (micro assessment of IP receiving over \$100,000 per year);
2. Applying appropriate procedures for the provision of cash transfers to the Implementing Partner (mitigation measures); and
3. Maintaining adequate awareness of the Implementing Partner's internal controls for cash transfers and proper utilization of resources to beneficiaries through assurance activities like regular financial 'spot checks', programmatic field visits or financial audits.

Micro-assessment

The first stage of the HACT financial management approach is to conduct a Micro-Assessment of the IP's financial management systems. Each micro-assessment concludes with a statement of the overall risk profile related to cash transfers, rated as 'low', 'moderate', 'significant', or 'high'. A 'low risk' rating indicates a well-developed financial system and function control framework. A 'significant risk' or 'high risk' rating is given if the system is more nascent and the control framework is inadequate to assure that cash transfers are used and reported as agreed with the Agencies. **The findings of the Micro-Assessment primarily guide the frequency and coverage of assurance activities (spot checks) and capacity building for enhancing financial systems of the IPs.**

The results of the micro assessment are valid for a period not to exceed the duration of the Programme cycle and may extend across Programme cycles. For example, a micro assessment conducted at the beginning of the fourth year of a five-year country Programme cycle will be valid up to the end of the third year of the following country Programme cycle unless there was a change in the IP's management structure or processes and procedures as noted above. If significant changes to an IP's organizational management structure or processes and procedures with respect to the Programme are observed, a new micro assessment may be deemed necessary by the agency during the Programme cycle.

Spot Checks

At a minimum, one (1) spot check is required for all implementing partners reporting more than US\$50,000 expenditures in a year from funds provided by UNICEF. Significant negative spot check findings result in scheduling

of additional assurance activities. A spot check is not required in the year when an audit is completed. These visits act as a 'mini audits' of financial expenditure against agreed project budget lines.

Audits

Any IP receiving more than \$100,000 per year might be sampled by HQ for a 'special audit' based on Risk level of that implementing partner. The risk-based audit methodology utilizes a comprehensive process for selecting implementing partners to be audited taking into consideration financial risks, the operating environment and prior audit results. The methodology allows for a robust global risk assessment and the ability to aggregate and analyze the audit results.

The last audit for UNICEF Lao PDR was in 2016. The Audit covered both programmatic and financial aspects of the Programme management. Audit reports are available through the normal UNICEF channels.

Procurement Procedure

UNICEF Financial regulation (article XII) obligates all UNICEF country offices and their staff to carry out any procurement (of services and goods) by means of competitive tenders. Major exceptions would be under acute emergency situations or prices are fixed by some regulatory bodies. Depending on the nature of purchases, either invitation of bid, request for proposals, request of quotations is issued to invite interested service providers.

Those proposals and bids are evaluated by two different panels, 1) technical panel comprising a group of expertise specialized in the area, subjects, items, and 2) financial panel comprising of a variety of officers in UNICEF including supply, financial and Programme units. Financial panel opens and reviews only those proposals that were successful in the technical review. Both evaluation results are tabulated and ranked for the final recommendation. Contract Review Committee whose mandate is mainly to review if 1) appropriate authority has been obtained for making the commitment, 2) The interest of UNICEF and its funds (including donor's contribution) are protected, and 3) the purchasing activities are carried out in conformity with the regulations and rules, then meet and review the whole selection process, and recommend or not recommend for commitment. It is a lengthy process especially if the amount of commitment is large, however the process ensure necessary steps are followed through and that any unnecessary and detectable misuse of funds are avoided.

UNICEF has activated emergency procedures (currently up to October 2020) as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response aimed at simplifying some procedures in accordance with UNICEF rules and regulations.