

POLICY BRIEF

The Impact of Conditional Education Assistance supporting transition from primary to lower secondary school.

Providing education cash assistance for poor and disadvantaged students in remote areas with a focus on the year of transition from primary to lower secondary school supported social behaviour change through increased students' confidence and motivation to complete secondary school and reduced early marriage.

BACKGROUND

The education system within Lao PDR, promotes eight years of compulsory education for students from age six to fifteen, while in reality, a significant number of adolescents do not continue study beyond primary school. The nationwide Net Enrolment Ratio¹ for public lower secondary education is low (69.7%) with considerable differences among districts. Girls, from poor households and remote and rural areas who drop out of school, are also associated with a higher likelihood of early marriage and early pregnancy².

In partnership with the Lao Ministry of Education and Sports, the Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (British Embassy Vientiane) and World Vision Taiwan, World Vision International Lao PDR (WVI-L) has **piloted over three academic years (2019-2021) a targeted intervention in selected villages of Pak Ou district (Luang Prabang)** with the aim to

improve the educational outcomes for the most vulnerable girls, especially from ethnic communities, by focusing on a specific pathway of change: **generating the demand for education for lower secondary schools with the support of their caregivers.** The approach used a **conditional education cash transfer** to the most vulnerable adolescents, with a focus on girls. In total, around 220 adolescents who finished Grade 5 received conditional education assistance, which was linked to attendance for the first year of the lower secondary school in the district. The selection to prioritize cash transfer gave families the freedom and flexibility to leverage their own resources and use the conditional education payment to meet remaining needs (uniforms, transport, books, school materials, food, accommodation, etc.).

The education assistance amount

KEY FINDINGS

1. The number of disadvantaged children, including girls, **transitioning to lower secondary school has increased.**
2. The conditional assistance **brings sustainable behavior changes for the education of children.**
3. The continuation of the educational journey to secondary school **reduces the likelihood of early marriage.**
4. **Gender inequalities still challenge girls** to study at home.

was calculated in accordance with the Government Decree on Allowance for Students in Poverty and Disadvantaged Families n. 385 dated 15 December 2017, with the distribution of 1,350,000 KIP (around 151 USD)³ per student in two installments, one per semester (August and December). At the beginning of the intervention, the households were informed the support would be given for the transition year (to ensure a system that would be sustainable in the long term).

METHODOLOGY

This policy brief presents key results from two evaluations conducted by World Vision internally in 2021 and from a research consultant (Education Consulting Company - ECC) in 2022. The research questions for the evaluations were:

- (1) How does the educational assistance impact students' study?
- (2) Does the targeted education assistance increase secondary enrolment in the following years?

The external study used a mixed method approach which combined interviews, questionnaires, classroom observations, and focus group discussions between February and March 2022, in 10 villages of Pak Ou District, with a sample of 254 participants: 206 for the quantitative survey, and 48 for the qualitative interviews. The majority of the student respondents and recipients were Khmu (66%), followed by Hmong respondents (33%) and 1% Lao-Tai ethnic group.

KEY FINDINGS

1 The number of disadvantaged children, including girls, transitioning to lower secondary school has increased.

While the enrollment rate for secondary school was 68% for Pak Ou district in the academic year 2020-21, this rate increased to **92.7% of children** from our target villages.

In comparison, only 58.6% children enrolled during 2017-18 school year in our target villages.

3 The continuation of the educational journey to secondary school reduces the likelihood of early marriage.

94% of caregivers of children who received support considered secondary education as a priority rather than marriage, signaling a change of attitude and practice of parents.

While 54% of the older siblings in these same families were married before 18 years old, **parents expect that their youngest children will get married after having completed their studies** and are around 23 years old.

The expected age of marriage had changed from 17 years old (average) to 23 years old (average).

2 The conditional assistance brings sustainable behaviour changes for Educational Outcomes.

98% of the recipients said they are more motivated and they study more than before.

Learning outcomes of recipients were almost similar to the students without assistance (average score of 7.19 compared to 7.43) and **attendance was higher** (reduced absence about 2.65 days for the recipients against 4.64 days).

95% of the parents surveyed are willing to support their children until they complete secondary school even if there's no conditional assistance.

4 Gender Inequalities still challenge girls to study at home.

Although transition rates to secondary school are quite similar for girls (92.3%) and boys (92.7%), **72% of girls spend more than 1 hour with house chores** while this figure drops to **34% for boys**.

Girls still experience disadvantage with less time to complete their homework and learn.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Increase financial resources to support the transition year between primary to secondary school, for disadvantaged children, including girls.

The conditional educational cash transfer provided a positive bridge to reduce demand-side barriers and encouraged a positive caregiver attitude towards continuing education and a lower probability of early child marriage.

2

Cash transfer amounts could be adjusted to cover additional education expenditures for families, considering the current COVID-19 economic impact, inflation, and depreciation of the currency.

The monthly education cost was calculated to be around LAK 340,000 while a household earned less than LAK 500,000 per month. Ideally, based on a calculation, the assistance amount should be around LAK 3,600,000. However, the financial participation of the caregivers should be encouraged to maintain a sense of parental responsibility and investment in education. Provision of complementary activities in order to increase family incomes could encourage parents' efforts to support their children's schooling.

3

Establishing synergies with other sectors and involving village authorities, village elders, and Lao Women Union to celebrate the importance of education for both girls and boys, and avoid inequitable household workload expectations for girls.

4

Adolescents students need to be more informed and guided through professional orientation and higher education options to motivate and help them shaping their personal life plans. Engaging older siblings, role models and local professionals to champion support for children's learning and education strategies should be promoted.

HUMAN INTEREST STORY

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF POVERTY FOR HER FAMILY: THE STORY OF KARYIA

"With climate change, we lack rainwater during rainy seasons and droughts become more frequent. We have a poor rice production harvest, and we do not have enough food for family consumption. This is very challenging to keep on supporting our children's education". says Ya Xiong, 53 years old. As a result, the two elder daughters of the family dropped out of school after completing the 3rd grade of secondary school. This is a common reality among the ethnic communities of Pak Ou District, Luang Prabang province, where fewer than 70% of children transition from primary to lower-secondary school. Kariya is the youngest daughter of the family. In 2021, she was part of the 120 vulnerable children in Pak Ou district to receive conditional education assistance and transition to grade 6 in secondary school, with the support of the British Embassy in Lao PDR



HUMAN INTEREST STORY

I want to become a medical staff so that I will be able to treat patients and pass on hygiene and sanitation knowledge to the children, adults, and communities in remote areas.

and World Vision. She received 1,350,000 KIP to cover her tuition fees, together with a kit composed of a blanket, school uniform, study materials, and hygiene items including reusable menstrual pads.

After a successful academic year, her parents have found ways to support her to pursue her learning journey and pursue her dream to become a nurse: "with World Vision's support, we have more food for family consumption and we can have enough income to support our children's education," says Kariya's father and World Vision.

OUR PARTNERS



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REFERENCES

1. Lao PDR Education and Sports Management of Information System (LESMSIS) [2022]

<https://lesmis.la/en/LA/dashboard?year=2022>

The net enrollment rate is the ratio of children of official school age who are enrolled in school to the population of the corresponding official school age.

2. National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (NCAWMC), Care, Child Fund, Plan, Save The Children, World Vision [2022] - Joint Study of Qualitative Analysis on The Drivers of Early Marriage and Adolescent Pregnancy in Lao PDR.

The main drivers identified for early marriage include school drop-out and poverty.

3. Banque pour le Commerce Extérieur du Laos (BCEL) [August 2020] Exchange rate between USD/LAK

1 USD = 8,920 LAK

