

## LAO PDR

### Country Summary of Higher Education

#### **Background<sup>1</sup>:**

**Recent expansion of tertiary education sector:** Lao PDR has experienced a rapid growth and change in higher education since education reforms for the public and private sectors were introduced in 1995. Particularly, the growth of the private sector is significant. 14 private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were newly established by 2000 and additional 17 registered by 2005. As a result, enrollment in private HEIs dramatically increased from 2,716 to 14,371 during 1997-2005. The public sector also showed a steady growth, doubling its enrollment from 11,250 to 22,984 during the same period. The total enrollment in public and private HEIs tripled from 15,217 to 45,684 during 1997-2005.

**Tertiary education system:** The higher education system in Lao PDR consists of National University of Laos (NUOL), Souphanouvong University, Champasack University, five teachers training colleges, and 31 private higher institutions. The system provides academic, professional, and technology programs for those who have completed upper secondary education. Academic program offers bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate; professional program offers bachelor's degree, graduate diploma, and higher graduate diploma; technology program offers diploma. The Department of Higher, Technical and Vocational Education (HTVED) is responsible for managing, coordinating, and monitoring the higher education sector.

**Quality assurance mechanisms:** The Ministry of Education (MOE) has established a formal accreditation and quality assurance process to respond to the rapid expansion in higher education, applying the following three measures. 1) Improving the admission system based on equity and access to disadvantaged groups, academic performance, and financial need; 2) increasing the number of programs and career guidance services that satisfy the quality and relevance required by students, parents, employers, the community, and the labor market; and 3) improving teacher quality and increasing the number of qualified teachers.

NUOL has set up a Quality Assurance Task Force, consisting of representatives from each faculty, to develop the self-accreditation mechanism. Its main objectives are to 1) ensure that NUOL delivers quality studies and services; 2) improve quality of teaching and learning activities; 3) strengthen research, community services, and cultural and environmental preservation; and 4) continuously support the enhancement of the program implementation in all faculties.

**Government Strategy & Policy Reforms:** The history of the higher education reforms in Lao PDR started in 1995 when the Government passed two decrees<sup>2</sup> for the public and private sectors, placing the importance on higher education for economic growth and development. Through these decrees, the private sector designed the legal framework for the establishment and operation of private HEIs and the public sector formed the NUOL by merging 10 small public HEIs to improve coordination and management mechanism. To build diversification into the higher education system, the Decree of Higher Education Curriculum was passed in 2001. The current Government priorities to further develop and improve higher education are to 1) improve education sector management through HTVED; 2) rationalize the type and number of courses offered at training institutions; 3) improve the quality and relevance of the curriculum; 4) ensure cost-effectiveness of the higher education sector; and 5) develop an integrated equity and merit-based systems to ensure access to HEIs for qualified individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> References: The Current Situation of Higher Education in Lao PDR, Division of Higher Education, HTVED, MOE, September 2005; Higher Education in South-East Asia, UNESCO Bangkok, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> The Prime Minister's Decree establishing the National University of Laos; The Prime Minister's Decree on Private Higher Education in 1995 (revised in 2000).

## Summary Data Table on Higher Education (Data in 2005)

Enrollment	Total Enrollment	47,424
	% of Female	41.2%
	% of Private	22%
Gross Enrollment Rate	Total	7.9%
	Male	9.2%
	Female	6.6%
Student Teachers Ratios		
Teaching Staff	Total Number	2,287
	% of Female	31%
	% of teachers with Maters	
	% of teachers with Doctorate	
Gross Graduation Rates*	Total	1.7%
	Male	2.1%
	Female	1.4%
Total Public Expenditure on Education	% of GDP	2.3%
	% of Govt. Expenditure	11.7%
Total Public Expenditure on Higher Education	% of total education budget.	9.2%
Number of Higher Education Institutions	Total	39
	National University of Laos	1
	Souphanouvong Univ.	1
	Champasck Univ.	1
	Private HEIs	31
	Teachers Training Colleges	5

Source: Global Education Digest 2006, UNESCO,

\* Number of graduates regardless of age in a given level or program expressed as a percentage of the population at the theoretical graduation age for that level or program

### Issues:

Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The capacity of the sector is unable to meet the excess demand. In 2005, only 7,369 out of 37,496 upper secondary graduates managed to enter an HEI.</li> </ul>
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enrollment of women, ethnic minorities, and disabled groups in particularly public HEIs is low.</li> </ul>
Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research capacities and foreign language programs are weak in many HEIs.</li> </ul>
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More HEIs that provide students with relevant training and academic programs need to be established. NUOL is the only university that offers a comprehensive set of academic programs at the national level.</li> </ul>
Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public expenditure on education is low (2.3% in 2005).</li> <li>The government budget allocation into salaries and student stipends is too high.</li> </ul>
Governance/ Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HEIs needs to build capacity for the autonomy and accountability in curriculum design, student admission, institutional structure, resource mobilization, etc.</li> <li>HTVED needs to increase the number of trained staff in policy making, monitoring &amp; evaluation, and institutional curriculum development.</li> <li>HTVED needs to develop a coherent policy and administrative framework to integrate all HEIs across all their government affiliations.</li> </ul>