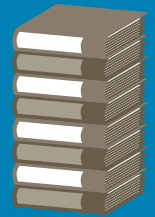


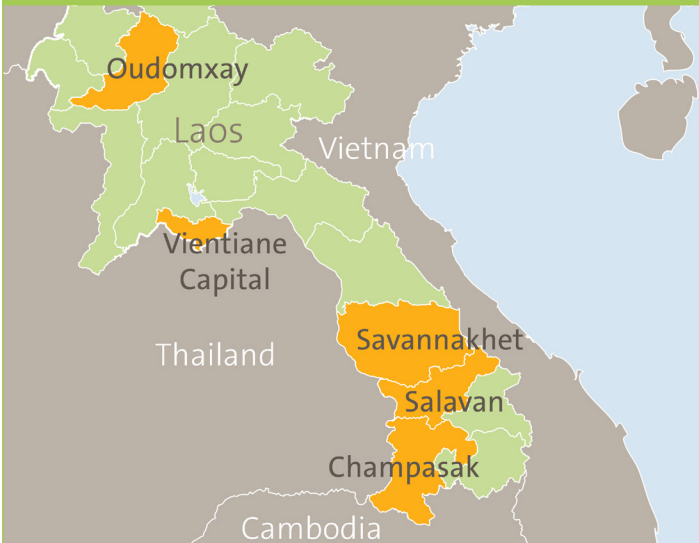
Our Work in Laos



Living in one of the world's **least-developed countries**, most Lao children don't have access to schools, libraries or books.



Our presence in Laos



Country Overview

Laos has seen a large amount of political upheaval in its recent history, which has left its population impoverished and lacking access to many modern advancements. The Lao People's Democratic Republic was established in 1975 after the Pathet Lao (Lao Nation) revolted against the monarchy that had ruled the country for six centuries. Under control of the new government, the country suffered from a weakened economy and isolation.

Although there has been slow improvement since the Lao government began allowing privatization in 1986, the majority of Lao people live on less than \$2 per day and the country is one of the least developed in the world. Laos' workforce is largely unskilled and 85 percent of the population relies on subsistence farming. In the rural areas where most Lao people live, there is poor infrastructure and very little access to electricity or drinkable water. The country is characterized by geographic and ethnic diversity, and struggles to distribute resources and opportunities equally among distinct groups.

Country Information

Population	7 million
Land area	237,000 km ²
Languages of instruction	Lao
Launch of operations	2005
Room to Read office	Vientiane



Educational Landscape

With half of the population of Laos below 18 years of age, the educational system is in urgent need of improvement. The inequality that exists within Laos based on ethnicity, gender, and wealth prevents many children from receiving equal access to education.

Traditionally, only one of Lao’s 49 recognized ethnic groups, the Lao Loum, relied on formal education. Many of the other groups lived without written language, and only men within those groups had access to education through Buddhist temples. A secondary education system was established during the French occupation. The system used the French language and catered to the upper classes, furthering the gap between social groups. In an effort to provide a common language for the whole country, the Pathet Lao streamlined the Lao language in the 1950s and implemented it as the language of instruction nationwide. This system is still in place today, and poses a major challenge for ethnic groups that do not speak the Lao language.

Although primary and secondary school are free and literacy rates are rising, students in Laos still struggle to stay in school, especially if they come from vulnerable populations. Many schools lack appropriate reading materials, and have poor quality classrooms and limited

trainings for teachers.

Attending class is even more challenging for students living in rural communities, who often have to walk extremely long distances to reach the nearest school. Girls also face pressures to marry early or help with household duties, especially in poor families. These barriers to education have left Lao women with a literacy rate that is 17 percent lower than their male counterparts.

History and Results

In order to address these obstacles, the government is making an effort to engage families and communities in education reform. Room to Read has worked very closely with the government in this effort since we began our work in Laos in 2005. Our focus in the country has been on improving infrastructure, providing access to quality learning materials, and supporting children at risk of dropping out of school in the most underserved areas of the country.

We signed a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Lao government in 2011 that discussed our plans to continue our programs and expand our reach in the country in the coming years. Room to Read continues to be a leading organization in the effort to improve access to quality education for the boys and girls of Laos.

2018 Laos Targets

Literacy Program	
Schools supported	148
Children benefited	32,130
New local language titles	7
Reprinted local language titles	3
Girls’ Education Program	
Total participants	1,250



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