



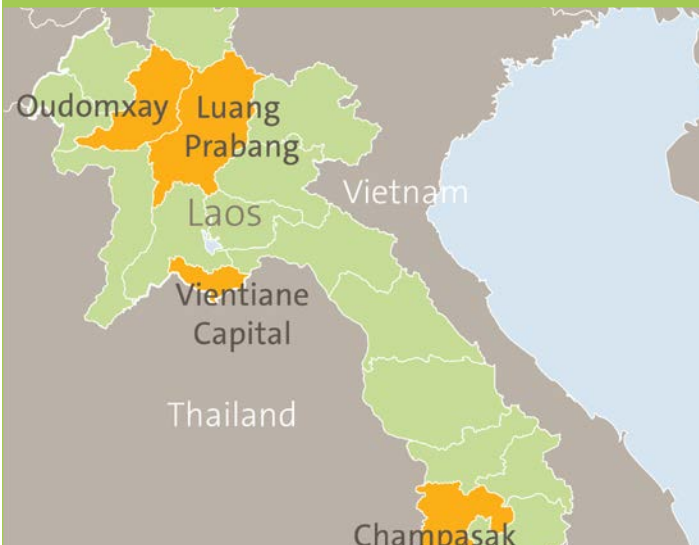
More than

30%

of second graders
cannot read a
single word.



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.

Over the last decade Laos has experienced an economic upturn, averaging 7.7 percent GDP growth (World Bank). The World Bank also reports that Laos has halved extreme poverty from 46 percent to 23 percent, more than halved maternal mortality and lowered child mortality. These outcomes are strong indicators of progress, but Laos still has a long way to go. Approximately 80 percent of the population lives on less than \$5.50 a day, and even the top 1 percent of Lao people live on less than \$15 a day. In the rural areas where 87 percent of 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

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.

Improving access to education in Laos has been a priority of the government in recent years. Spending on education as a percentage of GDP has risen from 2.9 percent to 3.7 percent. Primary school enrollment rates also increased drastically from 58.8 percent in 1992 to 98.7 percent in 2014.

While spending on education has increased, there are still significant challenges with school infrastructure. Nearly half of schools in Laos have a leaky roof, only slightly more than half have a water supply, 20 percent have electricity and fewer than half of the schools have toilets. Increased enrollment rates do not paint a full picture either. The average child in Laos will go to school for 10.8 years but will only learn the equivalent of 6.4 years of schooling. A major reason for this lack of learning is the linguistic diversity. Students are studying in Lao but speak another language entirely at home. Attending class is also challenging for students living in rural communities, who often have to walk extremely long distances to reach the nearest school.

Girls face extra barriers to education including pressures to

marry early or help with household duties, especially in poor families. 35 percent of girls marry by the age of 18. There is a strong correlation between early marriage and illiteracy. Women in Laos demonstrate that with high rates of child marriage and a literacy rate that is 23 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 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 years following. Our programs are now active in five provinces in total and we have benefited more than 600,000 children to date through our Literacy and Girls’ Education Programs.

Most recently, we partnered with the Ministry of Education and Sports to implement components of our Literacy Program at scale. Through this partnership, we aim to improve early grade reading skills for non-Lao speaking students and children with disabilities. We are implementing new Literacy Program components, such as oral language support and assessment, and pre-primary support. Our pre-primary support includes reading centers with 16 new storybooks, teacher G=guides, professional development trainings for teachers and other materials.

Our Results in Laos

Literacy Program

New children benefited in 2018	29,271
Children benefited cumulatively	654,305
New schools in 2018	66
Schools cumulatively	1,318
New children’s book titles published in 2018	7
Books distributed cumulatively	1,971,201

Girls’ Education Program

Total participants in 2018	892
Number of participants cumulatively	2,560
New secondary school graduates in 2018	313
Secondary school graduates cumulatively	852

Give with confidence. Room to Read has achieved 13 fourstar ratings from Charity Navigator since 2007, an achievement that less than 1% of charities can claim.

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