

The Process of Adopting a Lifelong Learning Decree in Laos

UWE GARTENSCHLAEGER, OUNPHENG KHAMMANG

Abstract

In 2015, the international community adopted Lifelong Learning in the “Education 2030 Agenda” as the key concept for shaping the education sector in the 21st century. While the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education refers to Lifelong Learning, the concept remains widely unknown in many parts of the world – Key stakeholders in governments are lacking understanding of its implications and of procedures to implement the concept. This article outlines how a Lifelong Learning policy was implemented in Lao PDR, one of the poorest and remotest countries in Asia by posing the following question: What was the motivation for the government to adopt this policy, which factors and actors support the growing understanding and valuing of the concept? Additionally, the article describes how policy developments can be driven in a setting of long-term mutual partnership between local stakeholders and a development partner.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning, Education Policy, Education 2030, Laos, Southeast Asia

1 Introduction

Since the United Nations approved Lifelong Learning (LLL) as the guiding framework for shaping the education system in 2015 (DVV International 2018, p.1), numerous attempts can be recognized to transfer this concept into policy and practice globally. These processes are challenging and time consuming, as LLL represents a complex concept affecting all sectors of the formal education system and beyond. It breaks with many aspects of the classical thinking on education and also tends to be often implemented in environments in which neither the concept of LLL is fully understood nor the actors are prepared to allow changes to the status quo, since they often have a limited understanding of what education should include (Gartenschläger 2019, p.6). This article explores how these challenges arising from developing a modern LLL policy can be tackled in a small underdeveloped Asian country. The driving forces at national, regional and global level and the motivation behind the adoption of a new approach with a specific focus on the role of development cooperation on the policy level are outlined. After providing a short introduction of Laos and the Laotian education system, the work of the “Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband In-

ternational (DVV International)” will be introduced as the Ministry of Education and Sports’ main development partner to support it in the process of implementing LLL. This will be followed by an analysis of the motivation of the Laotian government to introduce LLL as the main framework for education, a description of the adoption process of a Lifelong Learning decree and the main content of this decree. Lastly, the process and challenges, its actors and the interconnectedness of the global, regional and national levels in shaping LLL policies will be analysed in the conclusion.

2 Laos and the Laotian Education system

To understand the process of adopting a Lifelong Learning Decree in Laos, some information on the country and its framework conditions will be given. Laos, or Lao People’s Democratic Republic, is a small landlocked country in Southeast Asia. Since 1975, it has been ruled by the Communist Pathet Lao party. The country is a member of several regional bodies, including the “Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)” since 1997 (Gartenschläger 2016, p. 39).

Its more than 7 million inhabitants are mainly Buddhist in religion and more than 40 % of people belong to ethnic minority groups, 49 of which are recognised by the government of Laos. The population is predominantly young, with more than 50 % under 25 years of age. Nearly two thirds of the population live in rural areas which is one of the highest ratios in the region. Laos remains a Least Developed Country. The Human Development Index rates the country 139th among 189 countries (United Nations Development Programme 2018). Electricity is available to 83 % of the population. Agriculture, dominated by rice cultivation in lowland areas, accounts for about 20 % of GDP and 73 % of total employment. Despite these clear indicators of underdevelopment, the figures for the growing digitalization of the Lao society are astonishing: In 2018, more than 90 % used mobile connections with more than one third being engaged in social media (Digital 2018 Laos).

While the government officially announced the eradication of illiteracy in 2016, independent sources estimate that some 20 % of the population cannot read and write (Central Intelligence Agency 2019). Drop-out rates also remain high, especially concerning the transition between primary and lower secondary education and within the first years of lower secondary education. This affects especially rural areas where distances to secondary schools are far away and children are required to work from an early age. In many cases, parents do not recognize the long-term value of formal education to improve the livelihoods of their families. One main challenge to be solved are poor learning outcomes of students at all levels including primary education. Many children leave school without being able to read and write properly. The linguistic diversity of Laos has been identified as one of the root causes for this problem. Further, severe challenges lie in reaching gender parity in secondary and vocational education. The education sector does not receive appropriate funds: In 2018, around 15 % of the government budget was spent on education, while the Education

Sector Development Plan defines a margin of 17%. Within this education budget, more than 80 % of expenditures are earmarked for salaries and subsidies, leaving very little room for improving infrastructure, trainings and other purposes (European Joint Programming for Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic 2018).

According to the Department of Non-Formal Education, less than 1% of the education budget is spent on Non-Formal Education (NFE), leaving the sub-sector dramatically underfunded and neglected. Currently, the activities in non-formal education focus mainly on equivalency programs¹ and skills trainings, delivered by a network of Provincial and District NFE Centres. While these centres exist countrywide at provincial level, they have been established in less than half of all districts. At village level, Community Learning Centres (CLCs) are supposed to offer non-formal education. However, currently, only a few of these centres are operational.

3 DVV International: The Approach and Motivation of the Development Partner

The main development partner in the Lao non-formal education sector is DVV International, the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association. Since 2009, DVV International has been active in Laos². As a part of the "Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband" (DVV), DVV International supports the establishment and improvement of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) structures, especially for the marginalized, in more than 30 countries worldwide (DVV International 2019). The Institute celebrates its 50th Anniversary in 2019.

The Regional Office in Vientiane implements projects in Laos and Cambodia and cooperates with regional partners like the "Asian South-Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)"³. The interventions target three levels and are closely interlinked, as shown in figure 1. While the micro-level aims at implementing training courses for youth and adults directly, the meso-level focuses on capacity building for trainers, managers and decision makers in ALE. The macro-level represents the most important objective, to support the establishment of a sustainable and adequate ALE system through improving the legal, financial and administrative framework of a country.

1 In the case of Lao PDR, equivalency programs offer opportunities for school drop outs to receive primary and secondary education degrees.

2 For more information: www.dvv-international.de or www.dvv-international.la

3 For more information: www.aspbae.org

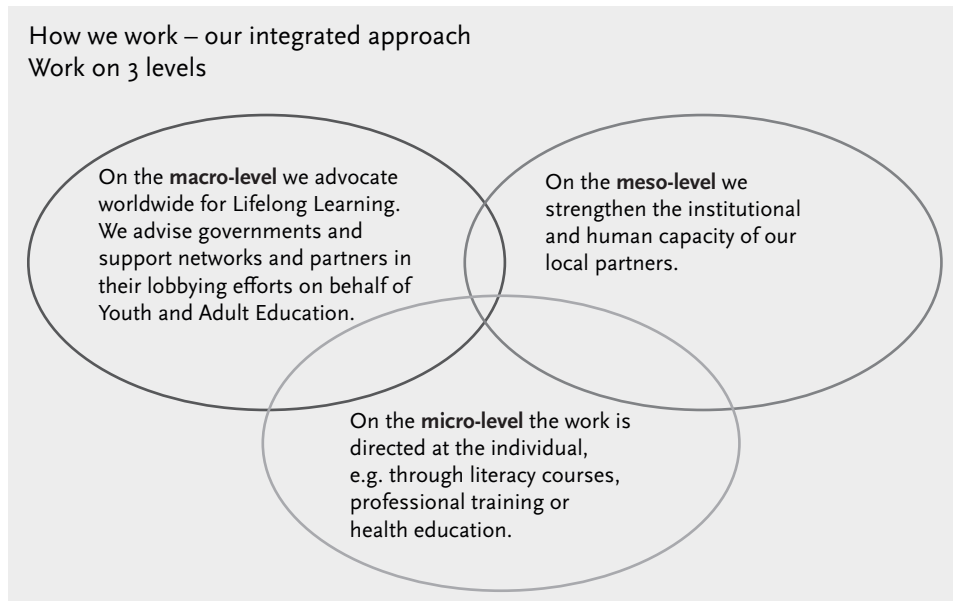


Figure 1: Integrated approach of DVV International

In the case of Laos, this approach transfers into a set of interlinked activities:

- The establishment of CLCs in 24 villages of Nong and Sepon districts, two of the most marginalized regions in the country located near the Vietnamese border and inhabited by the Brue ethnic minority, should demonstrate the value of these community based NFE institutions.
- Mobile Skills Trainings which bring teachers from Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) schools for one or two weeks to remote villages to offer demand-oriented skills trainings. The objective is to offer tailored services to target groups which are unable to attend TVET schools directly due to financial and geographical constraints.
- Additionally, the DVV office engages in capacity building events, e.g. training cycles for facilitators and managers of NFE centres as well as the improvement of the NFE Development centre⁴ as a Resource-Centre for the sub-sector.
- A very promising cooperation exists with the Faculty of Education of the National University of Laos (NUOL) to integrate modules on LLL into teacher education at university and college level. This activity is further supported through the framework of a partnership with the University of Cologne, Faculty of Education.

⁴ In the Lao system, NFE Centres represent the institutions responsible for offering NFE on the provincial and district level, while CLCs fulfil this function on the village level.

4 The global debate on LLL

Based on the experiences from these activities and the participation in global and regional conferences and workshops, the Department for Non-Formal Education (DNFE) requested DVV International to support the process of creating a Prime Minister Decree for a Lifelong Learning. The DNFE is the most important partner for DVV International in cooperating with the government (Hinzen 2015). The ambitious undertaking of developing a decree is based on the current global debate identifying LLL as the core concept for the education sector in the 21st century. The development of the concept goes back to the legendary Faure-Report “Learning to be” (Faure et al. 1972) as well as the equally famous Delors-Report “Learning – The Treasure within” (Delors et al. 1996). Both argued that education and learning could not be limited to formal pathways only, but that learning should be understood as a lifelong and lifewide endeavour. At the time, the potential of non-formal and informal learning had been fully discovered and a debate around the need and passion to learn “from the cradle to the grave” was initiated, very much supported by civil society actors. CONFINTEA V – the global conference on adult education organised by UNESCO – which took place in Hamburg 1997 was a pinnacle in the endeavour to foster a holistic understanding of education and learning.

However, the new millennium initially saw a decline in recognition of these concepts. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focused on primary education (United Nations 2015), and the Dakar Framework of Action (UNESCO 2000) of the Education for All process was very weak regarding education outside the traditional formal system. It took another fifteen years of strong advocacy work to change things to the better: The Education 2030 Agenda and the education goal of the Sustainable Development Goals, both adopted in 2015, defined Lifelong Learning as the key concept for the education sector (UNESCO 2016). This breakthrough has had impacts on regional and national policies. For Southeast Asia, ASEAN, SEAMEO⁵ and the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok are key stakeholders in education, and all of them adopted LLL in their work. The UNESCO Regional Office invites governments annually to the Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED) to promote the implementation of the SDG 4 goal “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UNESCO 2016, p.7). APMED strongly encourages policy makers to include Lifelong Learning into the national policies.

5 Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation, established in 1965. SEAMEO has eleven member states (the ten ASEAN members plus Timor Leste) and promotes regional cooperation in education, science and culture. In this capacity, SEAMEO is able to shape the education agenda on the national level. In 2013, a Center for Lifelong Learning (SEAMEO CELLL) was established in Ho Chi Minh City to support the development of the new framework (SEAMEO Regional Centre for Lifelong Learning 2019).

5 Developing a Lifelong Learning Decree in Laos

After outlining global developments concerning the concept of Lifelong Learning, the next section will be referring to the process of implementing a Lifelong Learning Decree in Laos by pointing out the motivation of the government, the benefits that result in such a decree as well as the process of drafting the decree. Afterwards, the main content and further developments are discussed.

5.1 Motivation of the government

As Lao PDR is a member of the United Nations and UNESCO, the government tries to streamline its education policies to suit international developments in the sector. At the moment, Lifelong Learning dominates the discourse. The substantial influence of global debates on Lao PDR's education priorities is linked on the one hand to activities UNESCO, UNICEF, SEAMEO and ASEAN are implementing. On the other hand, the dependence of foreign aid leads to an openness for external concepts.

In Lao PDR, Lifelong Learning has existed for a long time, mainly in form of intergenerational learning in families, villages and temples. However, for many years, there has not been a national legal framework to regulate and support it. In 2007, the first Education Law was adopted, including Non-formal Education and Informal Learning as part of the education system. The Law was updated in 2015. Article 26 states: "Lifelong learning is the integration of formal and non-formal education to support all, including girls and boys, to receive lifelong learning to develop an intellectual society to meet the demands of development".

Today, the country faces internal as well as external challenges. These challenges include economic, cultural and social as well as political, technological and environmental aspects. In this situation, a growing number of decision makers are attracted to the concept of Lifelong Learning to achieve human resources development and to be able to cope with new circumstances regarding economy, society, and the environment. This goes hand in hand with the government's objective to graduate from the Least Developed Country status in the very near future. This ambition demands to invest in knowledge development and to enable the population to link to act regionally and be competitive on the emerging ASEAN labour market.

Following these ideas, the 8th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2016–2020 highlights the need to realize education reforms focusing on the expansion of educational opportunities, in particular of marginalized people and rural inhabitants. The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy presents a framework of developing and implementing initiatives to reduce the poverty rate and to promote sustainable economic growth through a variety of educational programmes, mainly related to vocational training. Such policies as the Technical and Vocational Training Law and the Decree on Higher Education also constitute a legal foundation for developing a policy on Lifelong Learning.

The Lifelong Learning policy is also relevant for the further development of the National Qualification Education Framework and Education Quality Assurance in

the country. It will foster the integration and adaptation of regional standards, necessary especially for ensuring the competitiveness of the Lao workforce, which is a critical issue at the moment. The Lifelong Learning Decree is considered an important cornerstone for the Human Resource Development Strategy; one reason for why the LLL-policy aims to transfer the responsibility for implementing Lifelong Learning concepts to the Human Resource Committees at all levels from the centre down to the village.

In the process of Lifelong Learning policy development, the government supports the Ministry of Education and Sports as the key ministry to collaborate with various stakeholders, including other ministries and government agencies as well as international and regional agencies, to share technical information and financial support. Particularly the Ministry affected by the Decree, UNESCO, DVV International and SEAMEO CELL are involved in this process.

5.2 Prospective Benefits

Before describing the process of adopting the LLL decree, the paper aims at reflecting on the impact it can have on the development of the education sector in Laos. The Lifelong Learning Decree will lead to a change in human resource development in Lao PDR. In general, the decree will promote a broader view on education than the traditional narrow belief, i. e. learning merely takes place through formal and non-formal education channels. For educators and policymakers, this is a historical national legal framework to open up learning opportunities to everyone, and to recognize the value of all forms of learning – formal, non-formal and informal. In this sense, the Lifelong Learning Decree would be a guideline to rethink and innovate policies and programs to promote learning opportunities for all people and to recognize the importance of informal knowledge and skills acquired from informal learning – learning through everyday life activities. At the local level, the Lifelong Learning Decree is a legal document to support Article 24 & 26 of the Education Law,⁶ which translate guidelines on informal learning and Lifelong Learning into practice, particularly at the provincial and district level, by providing new learning opportunities to people. The Lifelong Learning Decree shall open learning opportunities for different social groups of people and uphold the value of informal learning to be equally important as formal and non-formal learning. Thus, the decree would be useful and beneficial for all people in Lao PDR, particularly for the people of working age who do not have the opportunity to access non-formal education. It will create alternative choices for learning as well as jobs. For employers, the decree will support them to conduct a clear analysis of the knowledge, skills and competencies of their employees as the latter's knowledge and skills acquired from work experience and everyday life were officially recognized. In addition, the Lifelong Learning Decree would be a policy guideline for private and public educational institutes both within the country and in international cooperation to gain the following benefits:

6 registered number 62/NA, issued on 16th July 2015.

- The Lifelong Learning Decree will be used as a legal framework to promote education in the form of Lifelong Learning and ensure the quality and effectiveness of learning. In this sense, innovative learning approaches together with effective coordination among different sectors and stakeholders would be developed;
- The Lifelong Learning Decree will be a guideline for all sectors, particularly organizations which have educational institutes to develop Lifelong Learning programs and appropriate learning approaches to allow all people to assess to learning at all times and anywhere. In addition, students' registration processes, regulations, and curricula can be comparable and respond flexibly to the needs of individuals and organizations of all sectors. New services can be developed in order to provide educational opportunities for all people;
- One outcome of improved cooperation between the various constituencies will also be a supporting mechanism to call for more investment for education. Additionally, existing infrastructure could be used for multiple purposes more effectively in order to promote education for all people. In the Lao context, where the education system itself is structured in isolated silos, this kind of networking could lead to an immense increase in effectiveness by using scared resources;
- Educational institutes will be provided with guidelines to develop learning assessment systems, recognition and validation of learning outcomes which will be equal to and transferable between formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- The Lifelong Learning Decree would also be used as a national structure to link learning programs and learning outputs acquired from all forms of learning with regional and international frameworks in education development;

In summary, the Lifelong Learning Decree would bring a change for the education system and enable it to meet the needs of people, economy and society in the face of ongoing and rapid changes of social, economic and technological factors. Beneficiaries would include people, individuals and social groups, as well as private and public sector actors contributing to the ultimate goal of Lao PDR in promoting people to acquire knowledge and skills required for social and economic development necessary to reach the government's objective for leaving Least Developed Country status.

5.3 The process of drafting the decree

Following the analysis of the motivation of the government and the impact the decree can have, the paper aims to describe the process of designing and adopting the concept. In order to operationalize Lifelong Learning in the country, the Department of Non-Formal Education arranged a first meeting on the concept of Lifelong Learning for ministry staff and external stakeholders in March 2012. The purpose of the meeting was to raise awareness and understanding of the essential features of Lifelong Learning among Lao policy-makers and other relevant actors. A second meeting took place in December 2013 with the objective of engaging representatives of the ministry and provincial education sectors in an open-format discussion on how to

structure the national LLL policy. Based on the suggestions provided by the participants of the second meeting, the Department of Non-Formal Education drafted a Lifelong Learning policy for Lao PDR and involved stakeholders in its revision. For this purpose, the Department of Non-Formal Education initiated a project, supported by DVV International and UNESCO, on establishing the policy. An external consultant was invited to develop the policy in two stages: The first stage included a desk study on the situation of Lifelong Learning in Lao PDR as well as the developments on Lifelong Learning in neighbouring countries, followed by a three months consultancy for the Department of Non-Formal Education. The preparatory activities included an extensive analysis of literature materials and policy documents related to LLL policies in regional and international contexts including Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. Documents on education for sustainable development, global citizenship education, the ASEAN economic community and other matters helped to build a detailed understanding of the LLL concept's development from a global perspective. The second stage was a series of interviews and discussions with Lao policy-makers in non-formal education and other international stakeholders, especially from the German development sector. The potential of the education sector in Lao PDR as well as demographic data were considered and used in the preparation of the policy. In accordance with the findings, a first draft was presented in early 2016 at a workshop at which representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sports had a chance to give their input to the content of the draft policy. Subsequently, a technical validation workshop was conducted to collect feedback from experts in policy design on the draft's outline, format and other technical features. The Department of Non-Formal Education revised the draft and shared it during a series of meetings and workshops with representatives of provincial offices of the Ministry of Education and Sports, other Ministries and stakeholders. This process took place from mid 2016 to mid 2019.

The development of the LLL Decree has initiated multiple discussions during several internal and higher-level workshops and meetings. The final draft of the decree was accompanied by an impact assessment, a format which was recently introduced as a national tool and mechanism for the development of any law and decree by the Ministry of Justice. At the most recent workshop in early 2019, the Lifelong Learning Decree was finalized and subsequently submitted to the Ministries concerned as well as to the Cabinet of the Prime Minister. It will be introduced and approved in the Government's monthly meeting, expected in June 2019.

The development of the Lifelong Learning policy has been supported technically and financially by the DVV International Regional Office which is working closely with the Non-Formal Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Sports. DVV has co-organized several activities such as study visits, capacity building trainings, workshops and meetings within Lao PDR as well as internationally and regionally. Additional support was provided by UNESCO Regional Office Bangkok by co-funding the consultant for developing the Decree and the UNESCO Institute for

Lifelong learning who hosted two Lao officials for research projects related to Lifelong Learning for one month in Hamburg.

Parallel to the development of the Lifelong Learning Decree, the Faculty of Education of the National University of Laos developed and piloted a module on Lifelong Learning in teacher education in cooperation with DVV International. The module was launched in the academic year 2017–2018. It is being expanded during 2018 to 2019 to Savannakhet University, located in the central region, and Souphanouvong University in the north of the country. The Faculty of Education has organized a workshop to exchange and share experiences of the pilot programmes in three Universities. This cooperation provides unique chances to promote LLL, as nearly all of the teachers and trainers in non-formal education are professional teachers. Additionally, the holistic concept of LLL demands to be implemented from the earliest education level to create a positive image of learning and to enable the next generation to learn autonomously. The LLL Decree will open opportunities to extend these efforts to Teacher Training Colleges as well where most of the primary school teachers are trained. Currently, the TTCs belong to a different department in the Ministry which aggravates cooperation.

In the following, the different steps in developing the LLL Decree are summarized. In *Step 1* an external consultant conducted a baseline survey and developed a first draft of the Decree in March to April 2016:

- The external consultant from the Philippines conducted the survey and developed the first draft of the LLL policy. She was embedded in the Department of Non-Formal education and worked closely with one Deputy Director general as her counterpart.
- The draft of the LLL policy was commented on by the participants in several workshops and meetings.
- Afterwards, the first draft of a Lifelong Learning Decree was translated into English and submitted to a high-level meeting in the Ministry of Education and Sports. Based on the feedback, it was revised, particularly to involve and clarify the responsibilities of all stakeholders, not only the education sector. The structure of the Lifelong Learning Committee was improved and it became an integral part of the Human Resource Committee to avoid overlaps and creation of additional structures.

Step 2 includes shaping of LLL policy, finalizing and submission to the Government for approval:

- With the support of UNESCO and DVV International, the Department of Non-Formal Education cooperated with stakeholders concerned and other education partners to finalise the Lifelong Learning Decree. Ten different workshops and meetings, at technical and high level, were organised. The workshops and meet-

ings involved the key partners who are directly responsible for the development of legal frameworks and laws in the country, e.g. the Ministry of Justice.

- Finally, in the beginning of May 2019, the report on the development of the Lifelong Learning Decree was submitted to the Minister of Education and Sports by the Director-General of Non-Formal Education. The Minister of Education and Sports further sent an official letter to the Prime Minister' Office and the Ministry of Justice for further procedures.
- The adoption of the Decree is on the agenda of the Cabinet of Ministers in June/ July.

5.4 The main content of the decree

Finally, the content of the decree as a result of the outlined process will be highlighted. In the view of the Lao government, it should translate main parts of the Education Law into practice. The most recent draft of the Lifelong Learning is comprised of 11 parts and 54 articles.

The objectives of the decree are to set the principles and regulations regarding the definition, implementation, management, monitoring, supervision and promotion of LLL in Lao PDR to ensure that teaching and learning, evaluation, recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning and research of the learning outcomes in the formal, non-formal and informal learning follow the same framework. The Decree should improve the quality of the teaching/learning process and ensure that Lao citizens have the opportunity to upgrade their education, knowledge, skills and competencies in order to contribute to the development of the country, including its integration into the regional and international context.

The Government supports LLL as an important policy for human resource development by promoting learning to all Lao citizen – independently of their age, sex or ethnicity- including Lao citizens who live abroad. They should be provided with opportunities to education and skills development in all forms of learning, including flexible learning pathways adopted to their real situation. The Government promotes LLL by providing teaching and managing staff, budget, and infrastructure as well as training and counselling support for staff who are working in the field of LLL. The Government motivates and promotes individual persons and institutions concerned in the country as well as international partners to contribute to the development of knowledge, personal intellectual capacities, technical skills, scientific knowledge and the budget for Lifelong Learning Programmes.

The LLL support structure will be established at three levels: central, province and district. A national Lifelong Learning Committee will be established at the central level, chaired by the Minister of Education and Sports as the president. Similar structures will be established at the province and district levels. To avoid overlaps, these committees will be merged with the already existing Committees for Human Resource Development. Additionally, joint committees will be established in central agencies who are responsible for promoting LLL in their own organization. The national Lifelong Learning Committee will be located in the Ministry of Education and

Sports. Besides the Minister of Education and Sports as the chair, a Vice Minister of the Ministry of Planning and Investment will be one Vice chair as well as the Vice Minister of Ministry of Education and Sports. Other vice ministers will be members of the committee to represent the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Ministry of Culture, Information and Tourism, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, National Assembly, National University, Lao Women Union, Lao Youth Association. The national Lifelong Learning Committee will play a key role in developing the Lifelong Learning Strategic Plan, including a budget allocation for the activities.

The secretariat of the national Lifelong Learning Committee will include the Director-General of the Department of Non-Formal Education as the chair, a Deputy Director-General of the Department of Planning as a vice chair (the is as well the Secretary of the Human Resource Development Committee), a Deputy Director-General of the Department Non-Formal Education as a vice chair. Other members include key personnel from the Department of Non-Formal Education, the Department of Planning (from the secretariat of human resource development committee) and other relevant departments at the Ministry of Education and Sports. The Lifelong Learning policy will support the implementation of the national education system including formal, non-formal and informal education to ensure the quality of the formal and non-formal curriculum. The learning process can be organized within education institutions, outside, and mobile. Formal, non-formal and informal learning and studies can be conducted in the government, private and social institutions as well as in the community.

The trainers and teachers of LLL are mainly recruited from the educational personnel, particularly teachers of the formal and non-formal sector. They receive support from the government in the form of pre- and in-service training, salary and additional necessary revenue, particularly for research. The government will constantly support institutions in charge of creating new innovative learning activities etc. The certification of learning outcomes and the monitoring and evaluation system will follow and apply the national certification mechanism. It is recommended to extent it to include informal learning. The certification of learning outcomes under the concept of Lifelong Learning will be introduced into the national qualification framework and quality assurance mechanisms.

The government encourages investments by and cooperation with development partners and internal and external stakeholders in both technical and financial aspects of the implementation of a consistent Lifelong Learning policy and practice. The main financial resources for the implementation of a Lifelong Learning policy will be provided by the government with the support from other sources in and outside the country, including the private sector.

5.5 Further developments

The adoption of the decree can be only the first step to shape the education system in an LLL framework. Major challenges still lie ahead to make sure change will happen not only on paper. The following describes briefly the next steps:

- The Ministry of Education and Sports has finalized the draft of the decree and submitted it to the Prime Minister's office, the Ministry of Justice and to other key Ministries who are members of the Government Conference.
- The Decree will be adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers in July 2019.
- The Ministry of Education and Sports, particularly the Lifelong Learning Committee managed by the Department of Non-Formal Education with the stakeholders concerned, will develop the guidelines, strategy and implementation plans of the Lifelong Learning Decree, including budget needs.
- The Ministry of Education and Sports, particularly the Department of Non-Formal Education as the key secretary for implementing the Lifelong Learning Decree, will invite relevant stakeholders to organize a workshop on launching and disseminating of the official Lifelong Learning Decree. It will be conducted at different levels (central, provincial and district). It will also involve civil society and international agencies in the country.

6 Summary: Drafting an LLL Decree as an intervention on the Macro level

DVV International as the main development partner has supported the whole process of developing and adopting the LLL Decree since 2012. At the same time, the policy gains at the global level, especially around SDG 4, were instrumental for fostering the process. As a conclusion, we would like to share some lessons learnt from this project:

- Developments at the global level do trickle down to national policies: Lifelong Learning was developed as a concept at the global level. It became prominent as the key framework for shaping the education sector in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals when it was explicitly mentioned in SDG 4 on education. During the years, UNESCO Regional Office Bangkok, ASEAN and SEA-MEO invested a lot of efforts to introduce the concept and to raise the understanding for it in the region. These efforts have paid off: LLL has become a striking example for the potential of a global debate in changing the reality on the ground. It could be interesting to conduct more research (comparative and case studies) on how global debates are reflected in national policies, who are the driving forces and enabling factors.
- At the same time, the adaptation of global concepts to local circumstances is extremely challenging. Still, we live in a world with very diverse realities, including the education sector. Much of the efforts in drafting the LLL Decree were dedicated to foster the understanding of the concept and its translation to the

Lao local context. This tension between the global discourse and regional/national traditions and cultures cannot be overestimated and are worth to become subject of case studies.

- This tension includes not only the concept of LLL. “Translation” can also be understood literally: Much of the terminology used globally does not make sense in Lao language – or simple does not exist. At one of the workshops, the consultant was asked for the meaning of the term “stakeholder”. It took around 45 minutes to clarify the idea for a Lao audience without being able to find a Lao term. Another layer of the language challenge is the need for constant translation of Lao to English and English to Lao, in case non-Lao speaking experts are meant to be involved. Based on our experience, the role of language and the impact of the dominance of English at the global level on national developments should be analysed.
- The work of the consultant represents another interesting lesson learnt. Although the person engaged had multiple experiences working in international teams and other settings, it was still a challenge to create a productive work environment for her, e.g. different understandings of punctuality, respecting deadlines and other aspects of work ethics. It continued with the need to know and respect certain Lao procedures and standards and included as well some aspects of intercultural learning, e.g. communicating and facilitating conflicts. As modern development cooperation relies heavily on short-term consultancy, it would be advisable to investigate on the challenges inherent of this approach and its (widely unintended) impacts.
- It should be accepted that changes at the Macro-level need time, especially in contexts like Laos where procedures are often unclear and seem unstructured, and the capacity of key partners have to be built during the process. This process offers valuable learning opportunities, e.g. having to clarify the idea of informal learning. Unfortunately, the dominating outcome orientation in development cooperation with strict timelines and indicators limits the spaces for harnessing these productive added values.
- Changes especially at the Macro-Level need a strong partnership as a fundament, built on trust and at least a certain openness. The development partner has to invest time and efforts in building informal networks and maintaining good relationships to the counterpart.

References

- Central Intelligence Agency (2019). *The World Factbook. East Asia/Southeast Asia: Laos*. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/la.html> (Access on: July 30th 2019:

- Delors, Jacques; Al Mufti, In'am; Amagi; Isao; Carneiro, Roberto; Chung, Fay; Geremek, Bronislaw; Gorham, William; Kornhauser, Aleksandra; Manley, Michael; Padrón Quero; Marisela; Savané, Mari-Angélique; Singh, Karan; Stavenhagen, Rodolfo; Suhr, Myong Won; Nanzaho, Zhou (1996). *Learning: The treasure within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000109590> (Access on: July 2nd 2019).
- Digital 2018 Laos (2018). *All the Data and Trends you need to understand Internet, Social Media, Mobile and E-Commerce Behaviours in 2018*. Available at: <https://www.slide-share.net/DataReportal/digital-2018-laos-january-2018> (Access on: July 30th 2019).
- DVV International (2018). *The United Nations Agenda 2030 – The contribution and the potential of youth and adult education. Expert Paper*. Available at: https://www.dvv-international.de/fileadmin/files/Inhalte_Bilder_und_Dokumente/Materialien/Fach_und_Positionspapiere/DVVI_Fachpapier_SDG_e.pdf (Access on: July 2nd 2019).
- DVV International (2019). *DVV International Overview*. Available at: <https://www.dvv-international.de/en/dvv-international/profile/> (Access on: July 2nd 2019).
- European Joint Programming for Lao People's Democratic Republic 2016–2020 (2018). *Mid-Term Report. September 2018*. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/book_mid-term_report.pdf (Access on: July 30th 2019).
- Faure, Edgar; Herrera, Felipe; Kaddoura, Abdul-Razzak; Lopes, Henri; Petrovsky, Arthur V.; Rahnema, Majid; Ward, Frederick (1992). *Learning to be. The world of education today and tomorrow*. Paris: UNESCO. Available at: http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/15_60.pdf (Access on: July 2nd 2019).
- Gartenschläger, Uwe (2016). Von New York nach Nong – Die Auswirkungen der „Millennium Development Goals“ und „Education for All“ auf die non-formale Bildung in Laos. In: Schemmann, M. (Ed.). *Internationales Jahrbuch der Erwachsenenbildung 39. Nach Millenniumsentwicklungszielen und Education for All: Bilanz und Ausblick aus der Perspektive von Süd-, Ost- und Südostasien*. Köln: Böhlau.
- Gartenschläger, Uwe (2019). Editorial. In: Gartenschläger, Uwe (Ed.). *Rethinking adult learning and education – Asian perspectives*. International Perspectives in Adult Education 77. Bonn: DVV International.
- Hinzen, Heribert (2015). *Sharing for Learning in Lao PDR. DVV International Engaged in Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Development in Asia Pacific*. Bonn: DVV International.
- SEAMEO Regional Centre for Lifelong Learning (2019). SEAMEO CELL. Available at: <https://www.seameocell.org> (Access on: July 3rd 2019).
- UNESCO (2000). *The Dakar Framework for Action. Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments*. Paris: UNESCO. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000121147> (Access on: July 3rd 2019).
- UNESCO (2016). *Education 2030. Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4*. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656> (Access on: July 3rd 2019).

United Nations (2015). *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015*. New York: United Nations. Available at: [https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%201\).pdf](https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf) (Access on: July 2nd 2019).

United Nations Development Programme (2018). *Human Development Indices and Indicators. 2018 Statistical Update*. Available at: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2018_human_development_statistical_update.pdf (Access on: July 2nd 2019).

Authors

Uwe Gartenschläger, M. A., studied History, Political Science and Philosophy at the Universities of Berlin and Cologne. After working with a church-based adult education provider specialized on topics of reconciliation and history, he joined DVV International in 1995. In this context, he has been country director in Russia, regional director in Central Asia and served as the deputy director in Bonn. From 2015 to 2019, he has been the director of the DVV International Regional Office for South and Southeast Asia, based in Vientiane, Laos.

Contact

DVV International, Obere Wilhelmstr. 32, 53225 Bonn, Germany
gartenschlaeger@dvv-international.de

Ounpheng Khammang, B. A., graduated at the National University of Laos was a teacher at a formal secondary school at Vientiane Province. From 1991 to 1994, he was working at the Education Services of Vientiane Municipality before moving to permanently working at the Department of Non-Formal Education, Ministry of Education and Sports since 1995 up to 2016, when he retired in the position of deputy director-general. Currently he works as a consultant at the DVV International Regional Office in Lao PDR.

Contact

DVV International – Regional Office South and Southeast Asia, No 351/19, Watnak Ngai Road, Thaphalanxay Village, Sisattanak District, P. O. Box 1215 Vientiane, Lao PDR
khammang@dvv-international.la