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Lao PDR McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Project

Baseline Evaluation

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CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

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Learning and Engaging All in Primary School (LEAPS) III, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR)

Baseline Performance Evaluation Report

Program: McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition

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Evaluation Authored by: The American Institutes for Research (AIR)
Cody Bock
John Downes
Trevor Hayes
Glynnis Melnicove
Adria Molotsky
Pooja Nakamura

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List of Exhibits

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Term
AIR	American Institutes for Research
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSBR	Community-Based School Readiness
CU5	Children Under 5
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DAFO	District Agriculture and Forestry Officer
DESB	District Education and Sports Bureau
DHO	District Health Officer
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EQ	Evaluation Question
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GOL	Government of Lao PDR
KII	Key Informant Interview
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LB	Literacy Boost
LBRA	Literacy Boost Reading Assessment
LEAPS	Learning and Engaging All in Primary School
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
ME	Margin of Error
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning
MGD	McGovern-Dole
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Pedagogical Advisor
PESS	Provincial Education and Sports Service
SCI	Save the Children International
SF	School Feeding

USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
VEDC	Village Education Development Committee
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Executive Summary

This report describes the baseline findings of the performance evaluation of the Learning and Engaging All in Primary School (LEAPS) III project in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). LEAPS III is a five-year project (2021–2026) funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. LEAPS III is implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) together with partners from the Government of Lao PDR (GOL) and Save the Children International (SCI). CRS selected the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to design and conduct a performance evaluation of LEAPS III. This report documents the methodology, presents baseline values for key variables, and provide recommendations to ensure the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of LEAPS III activities and outcomes. The values and information presented in this report are critical, as they will serve as the basis for measuring change and the overall success of the project.

Project Background and Purpose

LEAPS III is the third phase of the LEAPS project supported by the USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. LEAPS aims to improve the literacy of school-age children and increase the use of health and dietary best practices. Over the course of LEAPS I and II, the program provided 38 million meals to over 77,000 pre-primary and primary students in 350 schools in seven districts of Savannakhet Province including Atsaphone, Nong, Outhoumphone, Phalanxai, Phine, Sepon, and Vilabouly. CRS also provided a holistic package of programming to support education and health at the school level. Complementary programming included literacy; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); inclusive education; and capacity building for communities and partners. LEAPS III will sustain gains made in the earlier phases through a targeted sustainability plan in 302 schools in six of the seven original LEAPS districts. Schools in the Outoumphone district were handed over under LEAPS II, so are not included in LEAPS III. LEAPS III anticipates reaching over 36,000 beneficiaries during the course of the project.

Evaluation Questions, Design, Methods, and Limitations

The main objectives of the baseline performance evaluation are to 1) establish baseline values and measure the status of performance indicators; 2) ensure that annual target values are applicable and realistic for measuring project outcomes; and 3) establish questions to test the project's theory of change (USDA/FAS M&E Policy, 2019). The evaluation questions (EQs) that aided in meeting these objectives reflect five primary themes: (a) relevance of the program, (b) effectiveness of the program, (c) efficiency of program implementation, (d) program impact, and (e) sustainability of the program. AIR designed a mixed-methods approach to answer the EQs. The quantitative approach included 1) a student survey, 2) Literacy Boost Reading Assessment (LBRA), and 3) classroom observations. AIR also piloted the collection of student attendance data. The qualitative approach included key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). In March and April 2022, AIR collected data from the following participants:

The study faced several limitations, including reliance on self-reported data, absence of class lists, subjectivity of observations, reduced quantitative sample, and reduced instruction time due to COVID-19.

Findings and Conclusions

Below we summarize the baseline values for the McGovern-Dole Indicators (refer to Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. Baseline Values for McGovern-Dole and Custom Indicators

McGovern-Dole Indicators	Baseline
Percentage of students who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand grade-level text	3%
Average percentage of pictures/words/phrases correctly matched	33%
Percentage of students who were proficient in matching words/phrases to pictures	7.4%
Percentage of students who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate proficiency in identifying symbols (75% of symbols correctly identified)	45%
Percent of students who are attentive in the classroom	87%
Average student attendance rate in USDA-supported classrooms/schools	92%
Percentage of schools that meet UNICEF's WASH 2-star school standard	9%
Percentage of students reporting that they are "somewhat" or "very" hungry during their afternoon class	11%
Percentage of students in target schools reporting health-related absences	27.8%

Findings and Conclusions by Program Component

Literacy. Reading skills of Grade 2 students were relatively low, with only 9.3 percent of students classified as readers. Of those classified as readers, 66 percent were classified as beginning readers and only 34 percent were classified as grade-level readers. Fifty seven percent of those classified as readers can read with comprehension, and 43% of non-readers can listen with comprehension. In general, students whose primary language is Lao performed better than non-Lao speakers. For example, Lao-speaking students outperformed students who spoke another main language in the categories of word/phrase to picture matching, familiar word decoding, word pairs, expressive vocabulary, and being classified as a "reader". Students in Atsaphone and Vilabouly districts performed better than students in other districts, most notably Nong and Phine, which appear to lag behind. This is correlated with primary language at least in Nong district, where less than three percent of students speak Lao as the main language. Low literacy outcomes are likely due to several factors, the most important of which is reduced instruction time and a reduced curriculum due to COVID-19. In the 2021–2022 school year, students received on average 70 instruction days, only 40 percent of the total instruction days. The GOL also reduced the curriculum to 80 percent, giving schools a little over one-third of the instruction time to cover 80 percent of the curriculum.

Quality of Literacy Instruction. Teaching approaches such as reading to the class, playing games or engaging in reading activities, and using a variety of teaching materials are not used consistently. Teachers appear to be practicing gender-inclusive teaching approaches but are less likely to use positive pedagogy. Teacher performance quality appears to be in lower in Nong than in other districts, which is to be expected given that Nong is a new district to be covered by LEAPS III and receive literacy boost interventions.

Student Attendance. Student attendance rates are high across all grade levels, ranging from 91 percent to 93 percent, and are evenly split between boys and girls. Attendance rates differ across districts, with Nong and Vilabouly boasting the highest attendance rates and Phalanxay and Sepone the lowest rates.

Student Attentiveness. Overall 87 percent of students were observed to be attentive during lessons, however, attentiveness varied based on subject area and classroom activity. Students were most attentive during Lao language lessons and least attentive during art lessons, and they were most attentive during teacher instructions and transitions and while students were reading, writing, and working in pairs or groups. There was variation across districts, with students in Nong more attentive than in other districts.

Student Hunger. Students are generally eating well, with 94.3 percent of students indicating they had eaten breakfast and 92 percent reporting they ate lunch at school. Only seven percent of children surveyed during afternoon classes said they were hungry. There were no significant differences between boys and girls, suggesting there are no gender-related discrepancies in food allocation. Levels of hunger are low across all districts, but Atsaphone and Nong had lower rates of students responding "Not at all hungry" (73 and 69 percent, respectively) and higher rates of students responding "Very hungry" (eight percent and 13 percent, respectively).

Health and Hygiene Practices. Students are practicing good health and hygiene behaviors, with 92 percent reporting they wash their hands at school and 80 percent indicating they use soap. Findings are consistent across districts and by sex, except for Nong, which had notably lower rates of students washing their hands (84 percent) and using soap (66 percent). Latrine use is low, only 43 percent on average, and it varies by sex and district, with girls using latrines more often and Nong having the lowest rate of latrine use.

Findings Based on Evaluation Criteria

Relevance. The program is well aligned with stakeholder needs, and planned activities are appropriate for addressing stakeholders' concerns. The project design takes into consideration the economic, cultural, and political context, with some caveats.

Effectiveness. Project stakeholders have resources and capacities to ensure effective implementation, but several challenges demand attention: literacy skills of parents are variable and could be strengthened to better support at-home learning, teachers and principals face challenges related to managing multi-grade classrooms and teaching non-Lao-speaking learners, community members have limited ability to contribute to school meals, and coordination between community and GOL stakeholders is minimal.

Efficiency. There are a number of challenges that could affect project efficiency, including a lack of timely and effective communication between project stakeholders, particularly those in remote areas, and a current M&E system whose complexity may impede the handover of monitoring activities to the GOL.

Expected Impacts. Project stakeholders believe that support provided by LEAPS III will continue to improve the quality of literacy instruction and thus increase student attendance and attentiveness and improve literacy, nutrition, and WASH outcomes.

Sustainability. Communities and the GOL have the capacities, resources, and motivations to support the sustainability of LEAPS III activities. However, stakeholders need to overcome several challenges, including the difficulties that communities face in contributing to the school meals program, the complexity of the current M&E system, and the risk of unanticipated natural and biological shocks.

Recommendations

Improve access to at-home learning materials to better support learning during times of shock. During school closures, students experience learning loss for several reasons, including parents' inability to support at-home learning and lack of access to learning materials. LEAPS III should consider improving access to at-home learning materials as well as using community-based models to support group learning.

Build teachers' capacity to manage multi-grade classrooms. Given high incidence of multi-grade classrooms and learning loss due to shocks, LEAPS III should consider providing additional training and developing teacher materials to manage multi-grade classrooms. LEAPS III should continue working with the GOL to address this issue at a national level.

Capture lessons from the implementation of informal ECE in pilot villages to help advocate to the government for the inclusion of ECE at district and national levels. Although there is broad support for the inclusion of formal ECE, limited capacity of teachers to deliver ECE content and high incidence of multi-grade classrooms are barriers that could reduce success of ECE initiatives. LEAPS III should capture lessons learned from the informal ECE pilot to help demonstrate the importance and utility of such initiatives.

Support MOES in creating guidelines for instruction and support to teachers for early Lao language development, and establishing interventions targeting ethnic areas and early Lao language development for non-Lao-speaking communities. Non-Lao-speaking students are falling behind other students. The disparity is particularly apparent in Nong. LEAPS III should pay special attention to non-Lao speakers and perhaps conduct community outreach to non-Lao-speaking communities to get a sense of the unmet needs and ways the project could address those needs.

Consider adaptations to the literacy measurement tool. Two critical adaptions should be considered for the literacy measurement tool. First, in line with research, it would be appropriate to increase the number of words that need to be read correctly (from 5 out of 104 to 90 out of 104) to meet the criterion for being a "reader." Second, the breakdown between readers and listeners seems misaligned with the literature. It would be useful to measure listening comprehension in all participants and reading comprehension only in those who have the requisite thresholds in the subskills predictive of reading comprehension.

Strengthen the management and advocacy capacity of VEDCs. VEDCs could serve as a strong community advocate and sustainable resource supporting LEAPS III initiatives. Previous phases on LEAPS have been successful in building the capacity of VEDC members, however, members lack specific management and advocacy skills needed to support the transition and handover of the school meals program. LEAPS III should provide the members with targeted project management, financial management, and advocacy training so the VEDCs can better support and manage school-based initiatives.

Improve coordination among district-level government officials. Despite the role that they could play, district-level government officers are not routinely involved in the planning and implementation of school meal activities. Improving coordination would help ensure sustainability of the school meals program.

Collaborate with community and GOL to support mechanisms that promote community contributions to school meals. Community members are interested in supporting the school meals programs but face challenges making contributions. LEAPS III should collaborate with community mechanisms and the GOL to address the key barriers that are limiting food availability within communities.

Improve WASH facilities at schools. Although a high percentage of students reported washing their hands at school, including with soap, data suggested there is not consistent access to soap at handwashing stations. Additionally, school latrine usage remains low. LEAPS III should consider stocking schools with soap; improving sanitation, especially latrine, conditions to meet UNICEF's standards; continuing to promote handwashing and latrine use; and working with schools to budget for sustainability efforts.

Simplify the M&E system and processes to ensure efficient handover to the local government. While the M&E system was effective in providing the project with information to inform programming, it is too complex for the GOL. LEAPS III should 1) develop simple user-friendly M&E processes, 2) ensure officials are trained, and 3) advocate for increasing the GOL's budget to cover more frequent monitoring.

Develop more interactive and localized community feedback mechanisms. Community members are aware of the project's hotline, but many, particularly non-Lao speakers, do not use it. LEAPS III should develop interactive and localized feedback mechanisms that allow stakeholders to provide feedback in the language and modality of their preference, such as face-to-face meetings or a WhatsApp channel.

1. Introduction and Purpose

This report describes the baseline findings of the performance evaluation of the Learning and Engaging All in Primary School (LEAPS) III project in Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). LEAPS III is a five-year project (2021–2026) funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) McGovern-Dole (MGD) Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. LEAPS III builds on the successes from two predecessor projects, LEAPS I (2012-2016) and LEAP II (2016–2021). This section provides a brief overview of the context for the baseline performance evaluation, including a description of the project design and the purpose of the evaluation. Section 2 outlines our evaluation methodology, including research questions, sampling design, data collection instruments, data analysis, and evaluation limitations. In Sections 3 and 4, we present the quantitative findings related to the project's key outcomes of interest and the qualitative findings based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee criteria. In Section 5, we summarize our conclusions based on the quantitative and qualitative data analysis, and in Section 6 we conclude with recommendations.

1.1. Project Context

Despite its continued inclusion on the United Nations list of the 46 Least Developed Countries,[1] Lao PDR has made significant progress in its development goals over the last three decades, cutting poverty by more than half, reducing hunger and malnutrition, and improving education and health outcomes. Since the mid-2000s, undernourishment in Lao PDR has declined by 11.5 percent.[2] Poverty declined by 6.3 percent nationally between 2013 and 2019, with provinces in southern Lao PDR making significant progress (29.9 percent in 2013 to 17.7 percent in 2019).[3] In Savannakhet Province, stunting in children under five fell by 12.6 percent between 2011 and 2017.[4] Mortality in children under five declined by nearly 60 percent between 1990 and 2018. More children are attending school, with the proportion of children over age six who have never attended school falling from 38 percent in 1995 to 13 percent in 2015. While high dropout rates remain a challenge, the net enrollment rate at the primary level in 2019 was 98 percent, with equal numbers of both boys and girls.[5]

Despite these considerable advances, the country has recently suffered from "runaway" inflation rates, threatening public sector spending and the ability of millions of people to buy basic commodities like food and gas.[6] Between April 2021 and April 2022, the kip (the currency of Lao PDR) depreciated in value by about 30 percent against the US dollar, leaving many of the country's poorest scrambling to make a living.[7]

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[1] https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/ldcs-at-a-glance.html

[2] FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO. (2019). *The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2019. Safeguarding against economic slowdowns and downturns*.

[3] https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lao/publication/lao-pdr-poverty-profile-and-poverty-assessment-2020

[4] Lao Statistics Bureau. *(*2017). Lao Social Indicator Survey II (LSIS II).

[5] https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/7356/file/SEA-PLM%202019%20Main%20Regional%20Report.pdf

[6] RFA Lao. (2022, June 3). Food prices double in Laos as inflation grips economy. Retrieved from https://www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/inflation-06032022185839.html

[7] World Bank. (2022, May 12). Lao PDR economic update, April 2022: Restoring macroeconomic stability to support recovery. World Bank News. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/05/12/lao-pdr-economic-update-april-2022-restoring-macroeconomic-stability-to-support-recovery#:~:text=Inflation%20increased%20from%20under%202,in%20low%2Dincome%20urban%20households.

Such a downturn comes at a critical time in the country's efforts to raise standards of wellbeing. In terms of key development indicators, Lao PDR lags behind many Southeast Asian countries, and much more needs to be done to address poverty and malnutrition, improve education and access to clean water, and encourage best practices in sanitation and hygiene. More than 18 percent of the population still live in poverty, while nearly 20 percent suffer from moderate to severe food insecurity.[8] Less than half of all primary schools and only 25 percent of health facilities have access to safe drinking water and sanitation.[9] Overall, 33 percent of children under five are stunted, 21.1 percent are underweight, and 44.1 percent suffer from anemia. While it has declined in recent years, the stunted growth percentage among children under five in Savannakhet Province was 28.4 percent in 2017. The maternal mortality rate remains among the highest in the region.

With regards to education, despite the policy of the Government of Lao PDR (GOL) of making children eligible for five years of free and compulsory basic education, net enrollment at the pre-primary level remains low; in Savannakhet Province, only 25 percent of children entering the primary level had previously attended early childhood education (ECE).[10] An early grade reading assessment found that more than 30 percent of all Grade 2 students could not read a single word, and among those who were able to read, more than 50 percent could not comprehend the words they read.[11] These reports also showed that the percentage of nonreaders was significantly higher in the non-Lao-speaking groups.

Another factor contributing to dropout and grade repetition is student absenteeism in Lao PDR. Irregular attendance at school can be detrimental to learning because students may miss key concepts and chances to review.[12] In Lao PDR, in particular, absenteeism may result from asynchrony between the academic school year and the agricultural cycle. For example, in highly rural and agricultural communities, households locate their plots far from town centers and schools. In these communities, parents often take their children with them to the field during planting or harvest season, resulting in children being absent from school for months at a time throughout the academic year.[13] Absences cause student performance to suffer, and they ultimately contribute to the low literacy levels of primary school students.

1.2. Project Description

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been working in Lao PDR since 1994 and in Savannakhet since 2012. Programming in Savannakhet, through the LEAPS program, supports high-need areas and government priorities to increase equitable access to school, support quality education in the classroom, provide nutritious meals to primary age children, and improve health and sanitation at the school level.

[8] The World Bank. (2020). *Lao People's Democratic Republic Poverty Assessment 2020: Catching up and falling Behind.*

[9] https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/04/03/water-supply-sanitation-and-hygiene-for-improved-nutrition

[10] LSIS II. (2017).

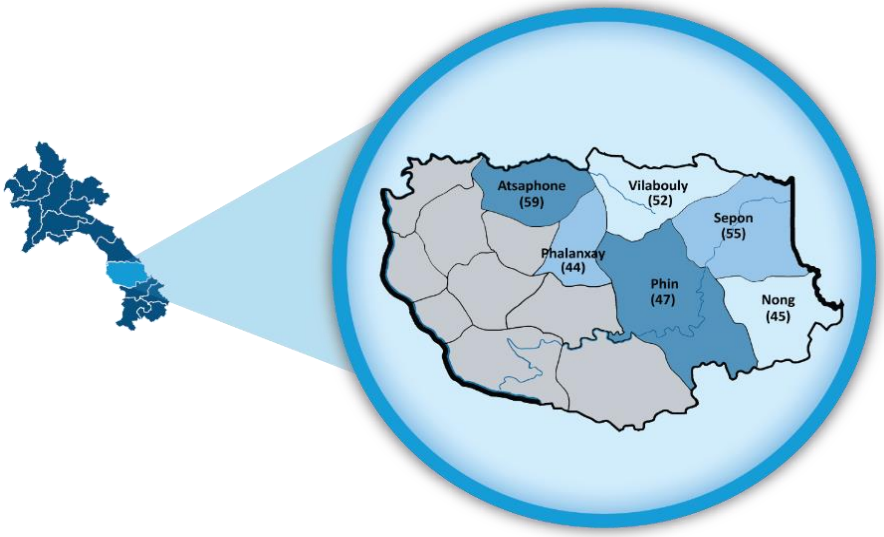
[11] UNICEF. (2015). *Situational analysis: Student learning outcomes in primary education in Lao PDR.* Vientiane. Laos Ministry of Education and Sports.

[12] UNICEF & SEAMEO. (2020). *SEA-PLM 2019 main regional report: Children's learning in 6 Southeast Asian countries.* United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) & Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO)—SEA-PLM Secretariat

[13] Ministry of Education and Sports. (2013). *Education sector development plan (2011-2015)* (Review and Update: Final Report).

LEAPS III which is the subject of the study is the third phase of the LEAPS project supported by the USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program and will be implemented by CRS from September 2022[14] to September 2026 in Lao PDR. LEAPS aims to improve the literacy of school-age children and increase the use of health and hygiene practices.[15] Over the course of LEAPS I and LEAPS II, the program provided over 38 million meals to over 77,000 pre-primary and primary students in 350 schools in seven districts of Savannakhet province including Atsaphone, Nong, Outhoumphone, Phalanxai, Phin, Sepon, and Vilabouly. In addition to school meals, CRS, through LEAPS, also provides a holistic package of programming to support education and health at the school level. Programming has included literacy; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); inclusive education; and capacity building for both communities and partners. These schools received teacher training, reading camps, classroom materials, and community engagement activities. The LEAPS II final evaluation showed improvement in basic literacy skills, reduced hunger among students, increased use of WASH and hygiene practices, and increased access to water. LEAPS also focused on building the capacity of community-based structures including Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) to support community-based education initiatives, including the school meals program. In support of sustainability efforts, CRS supports the National School Meals Program and in February 2021 began transitioning implementation of activities in Outhoumphone district, including 46 schools, to government management.

Exhibit 2. The Six LEAPS III Districts



In 2021, CRS was awarded a follow-on award totaling 23 million USD to continue the work of LEAPS and sustain the gains of the project through a targeted sustainability plan in 302 schools in six of the seven original LEAPS districts (Exhibit 1). Schools in the Outoumphone district were handed over under LEAPS II, so are not included in LEAPS III. LEAPS III will build on the successes of LEAPS I and II, and continue with teacher training, teaching coaching/mentoring, providing material support to schools, and community engagement in additional to new activities around digital libraries all while better aligning with the national curriculum. Of the 302 schools included in LEAPS III, 159 of the schools received Literacy Boost interventions under LEAPS II. LEAPS III will contribute providing Literacy Boost to schools from LEAPS II, and will expand by providing Literacy Boost intervention in Nong which has not previous received such support. Exhibit 2 below provides an overview of the key LEAPS

[14] The LEAPS III grant agreement was signed in October 2021, however given the overlap with LEAPS II activities for LEAPS III will not commence until September 2022.
[15] These two main objectives serve as the SOs in the LEAPS results framework.

interventions by phase and demonstrates how the project phases have built on and reinforced success. LEAPS III anticipates reaching over 36,000 beneficiaries during the course of the project.

Exhibit 3. Key LEAPS Project Interventions by Phase

	LEAPS I	LEAPS II	LEAPS III
Literacy Interventions	• Designed and distributed instructional materials to align with the GOL's literacy curriculum • Trained teachers on literacy instruction, inclusive education, child centered teaching methods, and library management • Trained school administrators in inclusive education and management • Built the capacity of VEDCs to serve as community education advocates and engage with parents on community initiatives • Established school libraries	• Distributed literacy learning materials • Trained teachers on literacy instruction, inclusive education, and learning circles using LB • Conducted training of trainers with GOL on the LB • Identified and assisted with providing support to children with disabilities • Piloted readiness camps to support non-Lao language students • Conducted summer reading camps • Worked with teachers to established reading corners • Built the capacity of VEDCs to serve as community education advocates and engage with parents on community initiatives	• Train teachers on literacy instruction, inclusive education, and learning circles using LB • Prepare for and handover of literacy activities to GOL management • Establish Community Based School Readiness program to improve school readiness for pre-primary students • Pilot access to digital reading materials • Establish a Youth Literacy Champion internship program
School Meals	• Distributed school meals to schools in all seven districts • Trained VEDC members on managing community contributions • Distributed take home rations to cooks, storekeepers, and teachers • Trained cooks and storekeepers on food preparation and storage • Built and rehabilitated school kitchens • Capacity building of GOL on school feeding	• Distributed school meals to schools in all seven districts • Distributed take home rations to cooks, storekeepers, and teacher • Trained cooks and storekeepers on food preparation and storage • Built and rehabilitated school kitchens, warehouses, and store rooms • Provided small grants to VEDCs to enhance local ownership of school meals • Piloted handover of school meals management in Outoumphone district	• Distribute school meals to all schools in the six districts • Work with communities to promote contributions to the school meals program • Plan for and handover management of the school meals program to local government management in all six districts • Build the capacity of VEDCs and local government counterparts to management school meals • Conduct advocacy efforts with the GOL to expand the school meals program • Develop partnership with farmers to support food supply for school meals • Support school gardens • Train cooks on nutrition and preparing nutritious meals

Nutrition and WASH		• Built and rehabilitated school latrines, wells, and water systems • Piloted WASH programming and messaging in schools • Established school gardens to increase dietary diversity in schools	• Rehabilitate school infrastructure • Promote WASH messaging through community engagement activities

1.3. Theory of Change and Results Framework

The main aim of the LEAPS III project is to improve literacy of school-age children and improve health and hygiene practices. The project's theory of change for achieving this result is:

> ***If*** literacy gains achieved under LEAPS are consolidated through capacity building to successfully provide access to necessary reading materials and improved pedagogy in line with the national curriculum, ***if*** schools have knowledge of and access to diverse and nutritious food in school meals, ***if*** pre-primary students gain greater access to early childhood learning opportunities that prepare them to enter formal schooling, ***if*** community and school capacity is strengthened and solidified to manage school infrastructure, daily cooking, and school gardens, ***if*** schools have regular access to water and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure that contributes to a healthier learning environment, ***if*** local farmers are able to supply locally produced foods to schools for school meals, ***if*** the Government of Laos has increased capacity at all levels – national, provincial, district, and community – to manage and implement a National School Meals Program (NSMP), ***THEN*** LEAPS III-supported schools in Savannakhet province will successfully graduate to the Lao NSMP, which will enable sustained student attendance and attentiveness, literacy outcomes, and health and dietary outcomes beyond the life of the project.

In this phase, LEAPS III will carry forward many of the same activities—school meals, WASH, and literacy—but will also include ECE interventions and agriculture support for school meals. Furthermore, LEAPS III is designed with sustainability in mind, especially the sustainability of the school meals program and of improved teaching approaches. Throughout the five-year project, program activities, with a focus on school meals, will be transitioned to government management through a phased approach, with targeted follow-on support post-transition. For LEAPS III implementation, CRS will work with Save the Children International (SCI), which will implement the literacy component of LEAPS III, with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) as the key government partner and with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture helping to promote quality programming and provide ongoing support.

The school meals portion of the project remains the most substantial component and will be implemented in all 302 schools. CRS will distribute a food basket of USDA-donated commodities: fortified rice, lentils, and vitamin A fortified oil. The food basket of donated commodities will be complemented by local and regional procurement of commodities such as sachi inchi powder, soy milk, and chicken eggs. CRS will work with teachers, storekeepers, cooks, and government partners to ensure the functioning of the school meals program, the monitoring of school meal activities, and the correct distribution and accounting of all commodities. As part of the sustainability efforts, CRS will implement agriculture activities to support school meals. CRS will support school gardens and roll out a pilot agriculture program with local farmers

to link local agriculture production to school meals. LEAPS III will support WASH efforts by upgrading water systems and providing hygiene training and will work to increase school-level nutrition knowledge through trainings and community events. Save the Children will implement literacy programming using an adapted version of their Literacy Boost methodology tailored to the Lao context and further refined to align with the new MOES curriculum and the Learn to Read project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Lastly, to ensure children have access to early childhood education in areas without pre-primary access, CRS will roll out community-based school readiness (CBSR) programs in a select number of schools so that children have access to early learning, which is vital for success in primary school.[16]

With this combination of activities, CRS, through LEAPS III, aims to improve the literacy and health and hygiene practices of project participants, but it also aims to build a strong and healthy school environment with targeted trainings and capacity building that will support the continuation of project activities beyond the life of the project by transitioning programing to MOES. Refer to Annex 4 for the LEAPS III results framework.

1.4. Purpose of the Evaluation

The main objectives of the baseline evaluation are to (a) establish baseline values and measure the status of performance indicators; (b) ensure that annual target values are applicable and realistic to measure project outcomes; and (c) establish questions to test the project's theory of change (USDA/FAS M&E Policy, 2019). Leveraging a mixed-methods evaluation, survey data was triangulated with qualitative interviews to provide contextual information for the quantitative analysis, providing CRS with the data needed to understand the current conditions within LEAPS III schools and communities, develop appropriate annual and life-of-project targets, and set learning priorities for the project. Specifically, while the quantitative data identify the current status of students' education, nutrition, and health outcomes, the qualitative data collected through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) complement the quantitative data to help CRS understand the key challenges that may be affecting the current education, nutrition, and health of students. In addition, the qualitative data identify stakeholders' priorities and needs to help CRS address the challenges and improve the current education, nutrition, and health of students. Together, the quantitative data provide the "what" and the qualitative data provide the "why" and "how" to help CRS develop programming that is responsive and tailored to the specific needs of the community.

2. Evaluation Design and Methodology

2.1. Evaluation Questions

AIR employed quantitative and qualitative methods to provide CRS with baseline values for performance indicators to assist with assessing progress toward the expected outcomes throughout the life of the project. The evaluation questions (EQs) that aided in meeting these objectives reflect five primary themes: (a) relevance of the program, (b) effectiveness of the program, (c) efficiency of program implementation, (d) program impact, and (e) sustainability of the program. Addressing these questions enabled us to evaluate the project design as well as identify factors that will enable scale-up and sustainability of the

[16] Nonoyama-Tarumi, Y., & Bredenberg, K. (2009). Impact of school readiness program interventions on children's learning in Cambodia. International Journal of Educational Development, 29(1), 39-45.

project. In the following paragraphs we describe overarching purpose of each theme and how it was assessed at baseline.

- **Relevance.** Investigating the relevance of the LEAPS III project in this context means assessing the extent to which the project design incorporates the needs of primary school children in Lao PDR as well as the needs of parents, schoolteachers, administrators, meal providers, community members, and government counterparts. Given the project's focus on sustainability and transitioning activity management to the government, relevance in this context includes an exploration of how appropriate the project design is for addressing stakeholder needs and capacity related to ensuring a smooth handover and continuation of activities. Further, such investigation entails analyzing whether project objectives and strategies were formulated in a realistic and culturally appropriate way. To assess the relevance at midterm and endline, we first need to identify and understand the challenges, needs, and priorities of primary school children in Lao PDR as well as the needs of parents, schoolteachers, administrators, meal providers, community members, and government counterparts. Therefore, at baseline, we will focus on identifying and unpacking the specific challenges and opportunities facing stakeholders in promoting quality education, addressing the nutrition needs of the students and communities, promoting improved WASH practices, and managing activities after handover. This information will be used to inform the design of LEAPS III project activities and implementation strategies.
- **Effectiveness.** Analyzing effectiveness means evaluating the extent to which project inputs and activities lead to the outputs, such as production of higher quality literacy instruction and materials, and the outcomes, such as improved quality of literacy instruction, identified in the results framework. The effectiveness of the various elements of LEAPS III will be measured by the extent to which they achieve their objectives relative to the results framework. We will also explore whether the activities are appropriate for building capacity for long term sustainability of activities, including management of the school meals program. Effectiveness in this context will be measured by whether the government and community stakeholders have demonstrated commitment and taken action to support transition and handover of activities. At baseline, we will seek to identify what resources or assistance is needed, based on stakeholder priorities, to ensure that project activities promote the intended outcomes. This will include identifying existing capacities of key stakeholders, such as teachers, principals, and government counterparts, and what assistance they need to effectively implement project activities during the life of the project as well as after the transition. At midterm and endline we will assess whether the interventions were designed with the stakeholder's needs in mind to promote the intended outcomes.
- **Efficiency.** Analyzing efficiency of project implementation means assessing the conditions for delivering project activities outlined in the results framework, such as teacher training, delivery of improved literacy curriculum to students, and effective linkages to nutrition supplementation programs, as well as activities related to sustainability and handover. To address efficiency, we will assess the timeliness of outputs, potential overlap with other projects, collaborations with partners, main barriers and bottlenecks to project implementation, and the extent to which gender equality was considered in the allocation of resources. At baseline, we will seek to identify if and how the project intends to manage, monitor, and solicit feedback from

stakeholders throughout implementation. At midterm and endline, we will then reflect on whether the project was able to implement and use the anticipated management and monitoring systems described at baseline to ensure the timeliness of outputs and the efficient allocation of resources.

- **Impact.** To assess impact, we will examine perceptions of and evidence suggesting the extent to which the LEAPS III project inputs translate into improved literacy, health, and nutrition for primary school children. We will also explore the impact of project activities on handover and sustainability efforts. At baseline, we will establish the starting values from which impact will be measured at midterm and endline. Specifically, at the student level, we will establish the starting point for literacy levels, attention and engagement, student health and hunger, and WASH knowledge and practices. At the teacher level, we will establish the starting point for teaching instruction capacity and skills.
- **Sustainability.** A key element of the LEAPS III project is the handover and transition of schools to government management. CRS will gradually handover management of all schools using a phased approach, in which management of school meals is handed over at three points in program implementation. As such, this theme is critical to understanding the success of LEAPS III and requires us to assess the delivery of inputs and project activities as well as linkages between activities and desired outputs to determine the extent to which the benefits of the intervention are likely to be sustained and replicated. We will draw lessons from other components of the study (relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness) to assess whether the intervention has strengthened capacity in such a way that the benefits of the project are likely to be sustained in the future, especially after the transition of school meal management to the GOL. At baseline, we will seek to identify if and how the project is planning to incorporate sustainability measures in the design, management, and implementation of the project. We will also seek to identify any key characteristics that could promote successful transition to government management as well as any potential barriers or challenges that may hinder efforts to promote sustainability. At midterm and endline, we will then reflect on whether the project was able to successfully incorporate these sustainability measures and if not, what adjustments will need to be made to ensure sustainability moving forward.

2.2. Evaluation Design

For the LEAPS III baseline evaluation, we used a mixed-methods approach to answer all EQs, creating synergies in the process. AIR designed the quantitative approach to establish baseline values for the key performance indicators related to the core LEAPS III activities in the six districts where the project will be implemented. Building on AIR's experience conducting the LEAPS II evaluations, we used the same quantitative methodology and sampling strategy to allow for comparability, where possible and appropriate, between project periods. Additionally, we conducted the fieldwork in March 2022, the same time of year as the data collection for the LEAPS II evaluations. We thus captured data on student outcomes during the same time of the school year, again allowing for comparability, where possible and appropriate. AIR used a qualitative approach to complement the quantitative findings and provide baseline information to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of LEAPS III activities. Whereas the quantitative methods focused on establishing the current status of performance indicators and answer questions related to LEAPS III targets, while the qualitative methods helped answer the evaluation criteria questions, provide explanations to the quantitative findings, and establish potential

questions that will be used to test the project's theory of change in subsequent evaluation rounds. For each question, the table in Annex 1 lists key evaluation questions, the data source, and the data collection method(s) employed to address these questions.

2.3. Sampling Methods

2.3.1. Quantitative Sampling

AIR used a two-stage random sampling approach. First, we randomly selected schools from across the six project districts (Atsaphone, Nong, Phalanxay, Phine, Sepone, and Vilabouly) in accordance with the relative number of project schools in each district to include in our quantitative sample. Second, we randomly selected students within the sampled schools. We conducted initial power calculations for the performance evaluation based on guidance from the USAID Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Toolkit.[17] These calculations yielded a desired sample size of 820 Grade 2 students with a margin of error (ME) of 0.080 (8 percent). However, resource constraints necessitated a statistically similar but reduced sample size for this evaluation. Therefore, we calculated the ME for various sample sizes until we found a reduced sample that worked within our resource constraints and produced a similarly small ME. The resulting sample of 660 Grade 2 students across 66 schools (approximately 11 schools per district) gave us a ME of 0.085 (8.5 percent), similar to the original ME of 0.08 (8 percent).

Using the sampling frame of 660 Grade 2 students across 66 schools, AIR then applied two sampling schemes for two distinct target populations: the 302 LEAPS III schools that will receive only the school feeding component and the 196 schools that will receive the school feeding component and the additional Literacy Boost component. We then proportionally selected a representative sample of schools from each of these distinct samples. Of the 66 schools in our sample, 34 of the schools received Literacy Boost interventions under LEAPS II. The schools in Nong make up the majority of those who did not previously receive Literacy Boost interventions as this is the first phase of the project in which Nong will receive Literacy Boost interventions.

In the second stage, we selected students to be surveyed within each sampled school. At each school, we selected a sample of students by physically lining up boys and girls separately for each grade in their classrooms, and identifying the *nth* student for random selection (refer to Exhibit 2 for the composition of the schools and their sampling).[18] We then randomly selected 10 students (five girls and five boys) from each Grade 2 classroom and five students from each of the other grade levels across all sampled schools. The physical sampling approach is consistent with the sampling approach used during the LEAPS II evaluations, however there are inherent limitations to this approach which are discussed further in section 2.6 Evaluation Limitations. Using this sampling scheme, at baseline we aimed to reach a sample size of 1,980 students across the 66 schools included in the performance evaluation. However, due to extenuating circumstances (e.g., school closures due to COVID-19 and student absences, etc.), we were only able to achieve a sample of 1,829 students at baseline. We reran ME calculations and confirmed that this sample was qualitatively equivalent to the intended sample (the ME was 0.088 rather than 0.085). At each subsequent evaluation round, we will attempt to collect data from a repeated cross section of 1,980

[17] https://www.edu-links.org/resources/early-grade-reading-assessment-egra-toolkit

[18] To identify the nth student for random selection, we used a simple rule as follows:
$nth\ girl\ or\ boy\ to\ sample = Total\ number\ of\ girls\ or\ boys\ in\ each\ grade / Total\ number\ of\ girls\ or\ boys\ to\ be\ selected$

students using the sampling approach defined above. Refer to Annex 2 Sampling and Power Calculations for addition information.

Exhibit 4. Sample Composition by School Type and Grade

District	LEAPS III schools	LB schools	Number of schools to sample	Number of LB schools to sample	Total number of Grade 2 students		Total number of Grade 1 and Grade 3–5 students	
					Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Atsaphone	59	29	13	6	130	139	260	250
Nong	45	37	10	10	100	82	200	195
Phalanxay	44	36	10	8	100	82	200	166
Phin	47	34	10	7	100	84	200	176
Sepone	55	29	12	6	120	101	240	246
Vilabouly	52	31	11	7	110	80	220	228
Total	***302***	***196***	***66***	***44***	***660***	***568***	***1320***	***1261***

Note. LB = literacy boost.

In addition to the student sample, we also sampled classrooms from each of the sampled schools to conduct classroom observations. When visiting a school, we randomly selected a grade level to observe (from Grade 1, 3, 4, or 5) as well as a Grade 2 class. When feasible, we conducted classroom observations during literacy lessons. We aimed to observe 132 classrooms in total, but due to extenuating circumstances similar to those mentioned above (e.g., school closures due to COVID-19 and student absences), we were only able to observe 129 classrooms (two classrooms per each sampled school).

Exhibit 5. Classroom Observation Sample Composition by Grade

Grade	Number of classroom observations	
	Planned	Actual
Grade 1	17	18
Grade 2	66	61
Grade 3	16	14
Grade 4	16	17
Grade 5	17	19
Total	**132**	**129**

Note: We observed Lao language lessons in 72% of Grade 1 classes, 98% of Grade 2 classes, 71% of Grade 3 classes, 71% of Grade 4 classes, and 37% of Grade 5 classes observed.

2.3.2. Qualitative Sampling

AIR purposively sampled key stakeholders to participate in qualitative data collection. KIIs were conducted with relevant project staff and local government representatives to provide insight into the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, anticipated impact, and potential sustainability of interventions. FGDs were conducted at six schools (one school per district). FGDs were conducted with parents (one male and one female parent FGD in each district), Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) members, teachers, and cooks to shed light on the effectiveness, efficiency, and potential sustainability of LEAPS III

interventions from the perspective of the key beneficiaries. In total, AIR conducted 46 KIIs with stakeholders and 24 FGDs with a total of 107 participants. Exhibit 4 presents the baseline qualitative sample by stakeholder type.

Exhibit 6. Baseline Qualitative Sample by Stakeholder Type

Stakeholders	Number
Key informant interviews	
Catholic Relief Services staff	1 KII with LEAPS III chief of party 1 KII with LEAPS III monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) manager 1 KII with LEAPS III logistics manager
Save the Children staff	1 KII with education program manager 1 KII with MEAL manager
UNICEF staff	1 KII with chief of education 1 KII with education specialist
World Food Program (WFP) staff	1 KII
Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) representative	1 KII
Provincial Education and Sports Service (PESS) representative	1 KII
District Education and Sports Bureau (DESB) representatives	6 KIIs (1 per district)
District health officers (DHOs)	6 KIIs (1 per district)
District agriculture and forestry officers (DAFOs)	6 KIIs (1 per district)
Pedagogical advisors (PAs)	6 KIIs (1 per district)
School administrators/principals	6 KIIs (1 per district)
Teachers	6 KIIs (1 per district)
Focus group discussions	
Cooks	6 FGDs (1 per district)
VEDC members	6 FGDs (1 per district)
Parents	12 FGDs (1 female and 1 male FGD per district)
Total KIIs and FGDs	**70**

To approach school selection for the FGDs, we categorized schools into high, medium, and low performance based on data from the LEAPS II endline evaluation, including metrics such as student attentiveness, student attendance, and rates of cooking. Additionally, given the discussion on community capacity and the importance of motivated VEDCs to school development, we factored in data from CRS on VEDC performance (the VEDC score percentage for each VEDC using CRS' VEDC rating tool). Using the performance ratings, we selected two high-performing (80 percent and above), two medium-performing (60-79 percent), and two low-performing (below 60 percent) schools to include in the qualitative sample. When selecting schools, we also sought to include communities where Lao is not the primary language, as Lao language prevalence can sometimes indicate higher socioeconomic status. Exhibit 5 presents the FGD sample by district, school rating, and stakeholder group.

Exhibit 7. Focus Group Discussion Sample

District	School rating	Cooks	VEDCs	Parents		Total
				Male	Female	
Atsaphone	**Medium**	2	5	10	6	17
Nong	**Low**	3	6	9	3	18
Phalanxay	**High**	4	5	8	6	17
Phin	**High**	2	4	13	7	19
Sepone	**Medium**	3	4	12	6	19
Vilabouly	**Low**	5	2	10	6	17
Total		**19**	**26**	**28**	**34**	**107**

2.4. Data Collection Methods

2.4.1. Quantitative Data Collection Methods

At baseline, we used four main quantitative instruments to capture literacy, health, and nutrition outcomes.[19] The evaluation instruments include the following.

A **student survey** was used to collect data on students' backgrounds, student hunger, health, and school and household literacy environments. The tool was administered to all 1,829 sampled students in the schools. The student survey used was from the LEAPS II evaluation, which was translated and adapted to the Lao context based on cognitive interviews[20] in February 2017 to align it with the objectives of the LEAPS III evaluation and then updated again during LEAPS II midterm (2019) and endline (2021) based on further field testing. Prior to data collection for the LEAPS III baseline, AIR worked with CRS to update the most recent version of the student survey.

We captured student literacy outcomes using Save the Children's **Literacy Boost Reading Assessment (LBRA)**, which has been locally validated by the MOES and assesses children's symbol awareness, single-word recognition, reading fluency and accuracy, and reading comprehension. We supplemented the LBRA with an AIR-validated subtask to capture basic reading comprehension (picture-word matching). The additional subtask allows (a) more reliability than the comprehension questions associated with oral reading fluency (as measured with Cronbach's alpha signifying greater internal consistency of the picture-word matching task), (b) measuring comprehension at a basic level, and (c) quicker testing. The LBRA was administered to all 568 Grade 2 sampled students in the schools. We assess Grade students to capture student literacy outcomes after two years of program dosage at midline and endline.

Students' attentiveness and teachers' classroom activities and pedagogical skills were measured through a **classroom observation** tool. Under LEAPS II, the IMPAQ team adopted a time-sampling technique based

[19] All instruments are provided in the Annex. The combined student survey and LBRA is presented in Annex 5, and the classroom observation tool is provided in Annex 6.

[20] A cognitive interview is an individual, face-to-face, in-depth interview that aims to understand how respondents comprehend and respond to questions.

on the Stallings "snapshot" method, coupled with a revised version of the Student Record of Behavior.[21,22] This tool measures the percentage of attentive students by recording teacher and student activities and materials at 10 separate instances (snapshots) throughout a class. We created the tool to measure the percentage of attentive students and to capture potential factors of attentiveness (other than school feeding), such as class size, subject, class arrangement, and activities. We updated the tool by adding questions on positive pedagogy, inclusive education, and literacy-specific pedagogy. The observation tool was implemented in a total of 129 classrooms. We prioritized the classroom observation for Grade 2 classes since Save the Children's LB programming targets these classrooms. Similarly, as with the LBRA, students in Grade 2 classes will have received 2 years of programming at the time of follow-up.

During the baseline evaluation phase, we pilot tested the collection of **student attendance** data. These data could help AIR identify if there are any correlations or trends between student attendance, literacy skills, health, and hunger. To collect the data, we asked enumerators to look at teachers' records to calculate monthly average attendance rates by class/grade level for a period of four months (October–December 2021 and February 2022). Enumerators captured this information on paper, and SKO entered the data into tablets manually using double entry techniques to ensure quality after the teams left the field.

2.4.2. Qualitative Data Collection Methods

AIR developed FGD and KII protocols to answer the evaluation questions. Each FGD and KII protocol was designed to be conducted in 45–90 minutes. The approved tools and qualitative protocols were translated into Lao and checked for cultural appropriateness and clear wording to ensure that Lao and non-Lao speakers could easily understand and respond. During the cultural sensitivity review, we identified any poorly worded or potentially inappropriate items as well as questions that may be difficult for the study population to understand and thus yield incomplete answers. In addition to reviewing the tools for cultural sensitivity, AIR pilot tested the tools with participants at one of the sampled schools to ensure that the questions were valid and provided the appropriate data.

In AIR's experience collecting qualitative data during the LEAPS II evaluations, we found that community participants (parents and students, especially) are often hesitant to engage in FGDs from shyness. In addition, mothers often have a difficult time responding to theoretical questions, such as "how would you improve the school meals program", and respond better when asked about concrete matters within a relatively recent period, such as whether they cooked a meal for students in the past week. For the final evaluation of LEAPS II, AIR utilized a drawing exercise in which the facilitator drew a young child on a piece of paper and asked parents to answer questions about the child and their daily activities. We found this exercise helpful for framing the conversation with parents and familiarizing the participants with the FGD facilitator and note taker. Drawing on this best practice, AIR used the same method when speaking with parents during the qualitative data collection for the baseline to elicit conversation.

For all FGDs, AIR had a dedicated facilitator and note taker. AIR did not record any of the interviews because of cultural sensitivities, so the note taker was responsible for capturing detailed information during the interviews, capturing direct quotes from respondents where possible. AIR originally planned to conduct all FGDs and KII in person, but due to the worsening COVID-19 situation during the time of data collection (March 21– April 1, 2022), AIR had to adjust the fieldwork schedule and conduct a number of

[21] O'Malley, K. J., Moran, B. J., Haidet, P., Seidel, C. L., Schneider, V., Morgan, R. O., … & Richards, B. (2003). Validation of an observation instrument for measuring student engagement in health professions settings. *Evaluation & the Health Professions*, *26*(1), 86–103.

[22] Stallings, J., & Mohlman, G. (1988). Classroom observation techniques. In J. Keeves (Ed.), *Educational research, methodology, and measurement: An international handbook.* Pergamon.

KIIs remotely via phone or video service (Teams, Zoom, etc.). Given internet connectivity issues as well as challenges with remotely facilitating group discussions, AIR prioritized conducting the local-level FGDs and KIIs during the shortened fieldwork period. KIIs with provincial- and national-level stakeholders were easily adjusted to remote modalities.

2.4.3. Human Subject Protections

Prior to collecting data for the baseline evaluation, AIR sought approval from AIR's internal institutional review board (IRB) to ensure that the proposed evaluation complied with international rules and procedures. AIR's internal IRB reviewed the baseline evaluation methodology, data collection instruments, participant consent and assent forms, data collection procedures, and data governance plan to ensure that the research was ethically sound and safeguards the rights, safety, and well-being of children and other respondents. AIR used the IRB-approved evaluation instruments to collect the baseline evaluation data. In line with GOL policies and procedures, prior to starting data collection, CRS notified and obtained consent from the MOES to collect data from the selected schools. In addition to obtaining consent from the MOES, each data collection team was accompanied by a PESS Officer.

At the time of fieldwork in March and April 2022, the GOL did not restrict movement within or across districts in Lao PDR due to COVID-19. However, to ensure the safety of our team, project stakeholders, and beneficiaries, in collaboration with CRS and our local data collection partner, we developed a comprehensive safety protocol before launching the data collection. In accordance with the safety protocol, enumerators were required to wear personal protective equipment (PPE), observe social distancing, complete daily temperature checks prior to starting data collection, and administer COVID-19 tests on a weekly basis. In addition, enumerators provided surgical masks and hand sanitizer to students prior to starting data collection. AIR and CRS established a protocol for notifying schools and stakeholders in the event a member of the data collection team tested positive with COVID-19.

In addition, before administering the evaluation instruments, AIR trained enumerators on procedures to interview respondents, protect respondents' privacy and confidentiality, follow COVID-19 safety protocols during the survey, and secure the data. Enumerators also received training from SCI on safeguarding children at school. During the data collection, the survey team first obtained written consent from teachers and/or principals to survey students. The team then asked for students' verbal assent, assured them that their participation was voluntary, and told them that they could terminate the survey at any point. After data collection, the evaluation team protected the privacy and confidentiality of respondents by storing the data on secure servers and separating personally identifiable information from the survey data.

2.5. Data Analysis Methods

2.5.1. Quantitative Analysis

We began our quantitative data analysis with an assessment of data quality and quality control checks. We then proceeded with data-cleaning activities prior to performing the data analysis to generate the baseline evaluation results. We provide more detail for each step below.

An important first step in cleaning the data is to address missing data (e.g., imputation and deletion). Upon receiving data from the enumerators, we examined the frequency distributions for each survey question (including student survey, LBRA, and classroom observations) to ensure that all data are within a valid range. We modified and updated the computer script used at LEAPS II endline to complete logic

checks to ensure that the responses to each survey question made sense (e.g., that skip patterns functioned properly). In addition, we carefully reviewed the data, checking for coding errors, misapplied ranges, inconsistent answers, or other illogical results.

Following the data quality and quality control checks, using Stata we analyzed the cleaned data to report descriptive statistics at baseline on all USDA McGovern-Dole performance indicators. We report survey questions as single indicators and developed indices by combining several survey questions. For the LBRA, we followed the guidance of SCI in presenting the distribution of second-grade students' reading levels and derived the percentage of students passing the minimum threshold (75 percent) for each reading skill (e.g., symbol identification and passage reading) except word-phrase matching (for which we used an 80 percent threshold). For other outcomes, we analyzed the survey data and disaggregated the results by student sex, grade level, Lao-language speakers, and district, if applicable. We report differences across mean outcomes by these metrics when we found p-values<0.10, i.e. 90% statistical significance, unless otherwise specified. For the reading results, we also looked at the breakdown of findings by language spoken at home. For the newly added questions in the survey and LBRA, we provided summary statistics and triangulated them with other relevant outcomes and/or qualitative findings. Similarly, we examined the attendance and attentiveness of students and teachers in the classroom. In Section 3, we present the descriptive analyses in tables, bar charts, histograms, and other visualizations.

2.5.2. Qualitative Analysis

Detailed FGD and KII notes were transcribed and translated into English in an easy-to-read template for each of the questions asked. AIR conducted reviews of the notes to ensure their clarity and thoroughness. Any identifying information, such as individual names, were removed from the notes prior to analysis. Once the notes were cleaned, we used qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) to manage and facilitate the analysis process. We entered the translated notes into NVivo and coded them according to a thematic coding scheme based on the evaluation questions. We then used the software to explore patterns of similarities and differences across schools and pull out the relevant cross-cutting themes and any interesting divergences. Using this systematic process, we were able to capture salient findings across each research domain (relevance, effectiveness, etc.) and key similarities and differences that may usefully complement the quantitative results.

2.6. Evaluation Limitations

The study faced the following limitation in evaluation design and analysis.

Reliance on Self-Reported Data*.* The quantitative approach relies on self-reported data from children on socially and potentially culturally sensitive subjects such as food security or health-related absences from school. Thus, the data should be interpreted with caution because they are particularly susceptible to social desirability bias; young children, especially in Grade 1, may not always be emotionally and cognitively able to answer survey questions effectively. To minimize this limitation and improve data reliability, we devoted considerable attention to cognitive testing of the survey instrument with children in Grades 1–5 before the LEAPS II baseline performance evaluation in 2017. In consultation with our data collection partners, we adjusted question phrasing to make sure children could understand the questions and feel comfortable answering. Further, we thoroughly trained enumerators on best practices for administering surveys to children, including ways to make them feel comfortable and to elicit more honest responses.

As for the qualitative research, the data collected reflects individual perspectives, which are subject to bias and preconceptions. Further, gathering data from mothers proved particularly challenging during the LEAPS II evaluation phases. In non-Lao communities, women have often struggled to present their opinions about education. Recognizing this potential challenge, our experienced interviewers made sure to dedicate the time needed to explain the questions to these mothers. Another limitation, also evident in previous LEAPS evaluations, is that parents who are motivated to support their children's education may be more likely than others to participate in a focus group. Thus, enthusiastic responses from parents about the importance of education should be interpreted with caution.

Absence of Electronic Class Lists. We sampled from students who were present at school rather than from the full classroom. While our approach ensured sampling consistency across schools and achieved a random sample of students who were present on the day of data collection, the possibility of systematic absences might induce a risk of sampling bias by selecting only present students. For example, such a bias can arise from excluding information on children who were more likely to be absent from school, including children from vulnerable socioeconomic backgrounds who live farther from school and have difficulty commuting to school on muddy roads during the rainy seasons and children who have health issues.

Subjectivity of Classroom Observations and Lack of Comparability. Snapshot observations measure a specific variable or indicator—in this case, student attention—at a specific point in time. They do not support conclusive statements about whether an intervention—in this case, school meals—caused observed changes, since attention is impacted by various external factors not related to the program interventions. In addition, the subjective nature of the tool could create inconsistencies in findings due to the inherently difficult job of making observational judgments across changing settings. For example, the observers might differ at the baseline and final evaluations and make different judgments on whether students are distracted. To mitigate this limitation, AIR will provide the observers with consistent training across evaluation phases to enhance the comparability of the findings. In addition, to increase the interrater reliability of the observations, the observers will conduct the classroom observations in pairs in at least 10 percent of the sampled classrooms. This challenge could also be less of a limitation if the observational outcomes will be mainly used for learning about one point in time rather comparing two points in time.

Reduced Quantitative Sample Size. As noted in Section 2.3.1, based on ME calculations, we aimed to sample 1,980 students, including 660 Grade 2 students. However, due to extenuating circumstances, we were only able to achieve a sample of 1,829 students, including 568 Grade 2 students. There were several circumstances that contributed to the reduced sample size. The first was the impact of school closures due to COVID-19 outbreaks. The second was student absenteeism, due to sickness and to misconceptions around the presence of the data collection team. Specifically, the fieldwork for data collection was undertaken at the same time as the second COVID-19 vaccination campaign for children 6 to 12 years old. Many young students, particularly those in Grades 1 and 2 and those in Phalanxay District, misunderstood and were afraid that the data collection team were the health workers and therefore did not go to school on the day of data collection. Lastly, although our methodology specified that 10 Grade 2 students be sampled at each school, during data collection we found that there were several schools that had fewer than 10 Grade 2 students enrolled. In those instances, we surveyed all Grade 2 students, but were not able to reach the 10 student threshold. We will address this limitation at midterm and endline, adjusting our sampling approach to account for variability in Grade 2 enrollment.

Reduced Instruction Time Due to COVID-19. The total number of instruction days in a school year is 175 days between September and May. The GOL confirmed its first cases of COVID-19 on March 24, 2020. However, UNICEF and UNESCO reported that schools throughout the country were fully-closed by March 18, presumably in anticipation of the arriving pandemic.[23] After a 2-month lockdown period, the GOL reopened schools on May 18, 2020, with students returning to school in the proceeding weeks and months. That year, students received an average of 135 instruction days. At the start of the 2020–2021 school year in September 2020, the COVID-19 infection rate in Lao PDR was still quite low, which allowed the GOL to reopen schools at full capacity. Although schools shut down intermittently throughout the 2020–2021 school year due to COVID-19 outbreaks and other shocks, the academic calendar was not drastically impacted, with students on average receiving about 118 instruction days. In August 2021, COVID-19 cases in Lao PDR began rising at a consistent rate[24]. Given the increase in cases and out of an abundance of caution, the GOL made changes to the 2021–2022 academic calendar and curriculum that have likely impacted student outcomes.

During the 2021–-2022 school year, students received only 70 instructions days on average, only about 40 percent of the standard total instruction days. Students who are out of school for extended periods of time are known to experience significant learning loss, which has been explored extensively in the context of long summer holidays.[25] A study of the economic impact of school closures for those in Grades 1–12 found that school closures will lower annual GDP by an average of 1.5 percent for the remainder of the century.[26] This effect is more pronounced in a context such as Lao PDR, where students already experience low levels of academic support and resources and where reductions in instruction days are likely to decrease the already low level of academic performance. In addition to fewer instruction days during the 2021–2022 school year, the Ministry of Education and Sports condensed the primary school curriculum to 80 percent of what it was, in effect giving schools a third the amount of instruction time to cover 80 percent of the curriculum.[27] The reduced number of instruction days, in tandem with the reduced curriculum, is likely contributing to low learning outcomes, as discussed in Section 3 below.

The potential impact of the reduced number of instruction days during the baseline school year will be explored at midterm and endline. Specifically, improved reading outcomes at midterm and endline could be a function of the return to normal instruction days, assuming the standard 175 instruction days are achieved in subsequent academic years, rather than a function of the project.

Exhibit 8. Average In-Person Instruction Days During the 2019–2022 School Years[28]

	School year average days		
District	**2019–2020**	**2020–2021**	**2021–2022**
Atsaphone	134	115	66
Nong	131	119	65

[23] UNICEF & UNESCO. (2021). Lao PDR case study: Situation Analysis on the Effects of and Responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia. UNICEF and UNESCO. Retrieved from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379513

[24] https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/la

[25] Marcotte & Hemelt, 2008

[26] Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020

[27] Information provided by CRS from project monitoring activities.

[28] Data collected by CRS during project monitoring activities.

	School year average days		
District	**2019–2020**	**2020–2021**	**2021–2022**
Outhomphone	139	118	73
Phalanxay	134	124	69
Phin	137	110	68
Sepone	133	117	76
Vilabouly	136	124	73
Total average	**135**	**118**	**70**

3. Baseline Outcomes

In the following section we present the findings from the quantitative portion of the baseline evaluation. These include findings from student survey data (including the LBRA, administered only to Grade 2 students) and the classroom observation study. We examine the data by sex, grade, district, and main language spoken at home (if relevant) but highlight *only* when the differences generally exceeded about 5 percent. Lao was chosen as the language of testing due to its status as the primary language of instruction in schools and the fact that nearly half of students reported speaking Lao at home as their main language and an additional 15 percent reported speaking Lao at home as a secondary language. Self-reported data, especially those on culturally and socially sensitive topics such as food security, should be interpreted with caution due to social desirability bias. Exhibit 7 reports the baseline levels of the key McGovern-Dole evaluation performance indicators, as required by the LEAPS III terms of reference. No statistically significant differences were found for key indicators on the basis of sex.

Exhibit 9. Baseline Levels for McGovern-Dole and Custom Performance Indicators

McGovern-Dole indicators	Data source	Life of Project Target	Baseline percentage by sex	Overall baseline percentage	Number of observations	95% confidence interval
Percentage of students who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand grade-level text	LBRA	15%	Girls: 3% Boys: 2.9%	3%	568[1]	1.7%–4.6%
Average percentage of pictures/words/phrases correctly matched	LBRA	97%	Girls: 32% Boys: 34%	33%	568[1]	31%–35%
Percentage of students who were proficient in matching words/phrases to pictures	LBRA	50%	Girls: 6.8% Boys: 8.1%	7.4%	568[1]	5.2%-9.6%
Percentage of students who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate proficiency in identifying symbols (75% of symbols correctly identified)	LBRA	84%	Girls: 44.4% Boys: 45.8%	45%	568[1]	41-49%
Percent of students who are attentive in the classroom	Classroom Observation	78%		87%	1,829[2]	85%–89%
Average student attendance rate in USDA-supported classrooms/schools	Classroom Observation	97%	Girls: 92% Boys: 92%	92%	1,829	--
Percentage of schools that meet UNICEF's WASH 2-star school standard	Classroom Observation	30%	--	9%	68	2.0%–15.6%
Percentage of students reporting that they are "somewhat" or "very" hungry during their afternoon class	Student Survey	11%	Girls: 10.6% Boys: 10.5%	11%	1,829	9.2%–12%
Percentage of students in target schools reporting health-related absences	Student Survey	28%	Girls: 27.4% Boys: 28.3%	27.8%	1,819[3]	25.6%–29.8%

Note. Student survey. Statistically significant differences between sex at the 5% level highlighted in bold.

[1] Only second graders took the LBRA (568 out of 1,829 students).

[2] We observed 68 classrooms with 1,829 total students, and during each visit, each individual student was observed a total of 10 times.

[3] Excluded were students who did not know the answer or refused to answer.

3.1. Evaluation Sample

In this section we provide summary statistics on the composition and characteristics of the school sample, the composition and characteristics of the student sample, the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the student sample, and the home literacy environment of the student sample.

3.1.1. Composition and Characteristics of the School Sample

Our school sample covered all six districts in which LEAPS III will be implemented: Atsaphone, Nong, Phalanxay, Phin, Sepone, and Vilabouly. The numbers of schools and students were relatively evenly distributed across districts. Overall, our final sample covered 68 schools and 1,829 students. This included 43 literacy boost schools (1,145 students) and 25 schools that received only school feeding interventions (616 students).

Exhibit 10. Sample Distribution by District and Type of Respondent

District	Number of LB schools surveyed	Number of SF schools surveyed	Total schools surveyed	Number of students surveyed in LB schools	Number of students surveyed in SF schools	Total number of students surveyed
Atsaphone (29)	6	8	14	213	176	389
Nong (37)	9	2	11	217	60	277
Phalanxay (36)	8	2	10	198	50	248
Phine (34)	7	2	9	176	84	260
Sepone (31)	6	7	13	184	163	347
Vilabouly (29)	7	4	11	200	108	308
Total	**43**	**25**	**68**	**1,188**	**641**	**1,829**

Note. Student survey. N = *1,829. Parentheses next to district denotes total amount of project schools in the district.*

At the school level, we looked at school WASH facilities to determine the proportion of schools meeting UNICEF's WASH 2-star school standard (GIZ and UNICEF, 2013).[29] To meet this standard, schools must have the following:

- functional and accessible toilets (open, clean, and used by students),
- separate toilet stalls for boys and girls,
- functioning handwashing stations,
- soap available at handwashing stations,
- handwashing reference posters visible, and
- access to clean drinking water for students (water filters or bottled water available).

Overall, nine percent of schools meet UNICEF's 2-star standard by having all of the above WASH components. If we relax the standard by disregarding the availability of soap at handwashing stations, 10 percent of schools meet the standard. Exhibit 9 shows the proportion of schools in our sample meeting each individual criterion. 87 percent of schools have a handwashing station (functional and accessible toilets (72 percent), and access to clean drinking water (59 percent). Fewer than half have soap available

[29] http://globalhandwashing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/UNICEF_Field_Guide-3_Star-Guide1.pdf

at handwashing stations (49 percent), handwashing reference posters visible (43 percent), or separate stalls for boys and girls (38 percent).

Exhibit 11. UNICEF WASH Standards

Standard	Proportion	Number of schools
Functional and accessible toilets	72%	49
Separate stalls for boys and girls	38%	26
Functioning handwashing station	87%	59
Soap available at handwashing station	49%	33
Handwashing reference posters visible	43%	29
Access to clean drinking water for students	59%	40

Note. School profile. N = *68.*

For the classroom observation, we conducted approximately two observations per school (one in Grade 2 and one in a randomly selected grade), for a total of 129 classroom observations. Of the classes observed, 22 percent (28 classes) were multigrade classrooms, meaning more than one grade was taught by the same teacher in the same space. However, for the purposes of our observations, enumerators were instructed to only report information on the grade level intended to be observed. Overwhelmingly, enumerators observed classes during Lao language lessons (79 percent), followed by math lessons (12 percent), lessons on the world around us (six percent), and art (two percent). Most of the classes observed (95 percent) used Lao language only, while the remaining 5 percent were multilingual, using both Lao and another language (most often Leu).

With respect to the setup of classrooms, 67 percent of classes observed were in fixed-permanent structures, 27 percent were in semi-permanent structures, and five percent were in temporary structures.[30] Regardless of the type of structure, students were noted as sitting at desks with benches either in rows (77 percent) or in groups (23 percent). In a little over half of the classes (57 percent), each student had a textbook, while we observed one book for every two students in 22 percent of classes, one book for every three students in nine percent of classes, and one book for every four students in 12 percent of classes. Such findings are supported by the qualitative interviews, during which teachers and principals reported textbooks as a primary need in their efforts to support student literacy and attentiveness.

In almost three quarters of the classes (71 percent), students were mixed by sex in their positions throughout the classroom rather than separated into sections for boys and girls. Even so, boys were slightly more likely than girls to be seated in the back of the classroom, and girls were slightly more likely than boys to be seated in the front of the classroom.

[30] A fixed-permanent structure is composed of cement bricks and a cement or tiled roof. It is likely to meet national safety criteria. A semi-permanent structure is composed of natural materials such as wood or terra cotta. It protects students from sun, wind, and rain because it has complete walls and roofs. However, because of its materials, it needs to be repaired often. Finally, a temporary structure is composed of natural materials or tents. It does not provide protection against rain, wind, or sun. It likely cannot last more than one year and is not secure for the teacher or students. It is not conducive towards creating a safe learning environment.

3.1.2. Composition and Characteristics of the Student Sample

The goal of our sampling methodology was to achieve balance by sex in order to be able to disaggregate results by sex and uncover any underlying patterns in literacy outcomes and background characteristics. Overall, this goal was achieved with nearly 50-50 representation in our total sample of boys and girls (903 and 926, respectively). There were slight differences across grades, but generally the divide of students by sex and grade was close to equal.

Exhibit 12. Student Sex Distribution by Grade

	Male		Female		
Grade	**%**	**Observations**	**%**	**Observations**	**Total**
Grade 1	50.7%	173	49.3%	168	341
Grade 2	48%	273	52%	295	568
Grade 3	52.3%	174	47.7%	159	333
Grade 4	48.8%	148	51.2%	155	303
Grade 5	47.5%	135	52.5%	149	284
Total	**49.4%**	**903**	**50.6%**	**926**	**1,829**

Note. Student survey. N = *1,829.*

The average age of students for the overall sample was nine. By grade, the median age was generally close to the average age, indicating that the average age was not overly influenced by outliers. The range was similar across grades, which is slightly surprising because in principle the high-end value should be lower in earlier grades. However, no students were above the age of 16, and due to the previously mentioned fact that the median did not greatly differ from the average for any grade, no outlier values were excluded from the data analysis. Higher ages in lower grades can be at least partly explained by grade repetition and late entry.

Exhibit 13. Student Age Distribution by Grade

Grade	Mean age	Median age	Range of ages	Observations
Grade 1	7	7	5-16	165
Grade 2	8	8	5-13	525
Grade 3	9.4	9	5-15	265
Grade 4	10.5	10	6-16	293
Grade 5	11.6	11	7-16	326
Total	**9.3**	**9**	**5-16**	**1,574**

Note. Student survey. N = *1,829.*

It is worth noting that 385 students in the sample answered that they did not know their age. The distribution of these students was 146 in Grade 1, 143 in Grade 2, 58 in Grade 3, 28 in Grade 4, and 10 in Grade 5. This indicates that perhaps the question was confusing to younger children, but it does not seriously indicate bias in the results, as the mean and median ages were consistent with previous Food for Education projects in Lao PDR.

Grade Repetition. Thirty-four percent of students in the sample had repeated a grade. There were no considerable differences across specific grades or sex. Both Phalanxay and Sepone Districts featured a higher rate of students repeating a grade (40 percent) than the other four districts (30-33 percent).

Children whose main language was Tri had a slightly higher rate of repeating a grade (43.6 percent) than children using the other main languages (29.5–37.9 percent), but otherwise this value was generally constant across demographic characteristics.

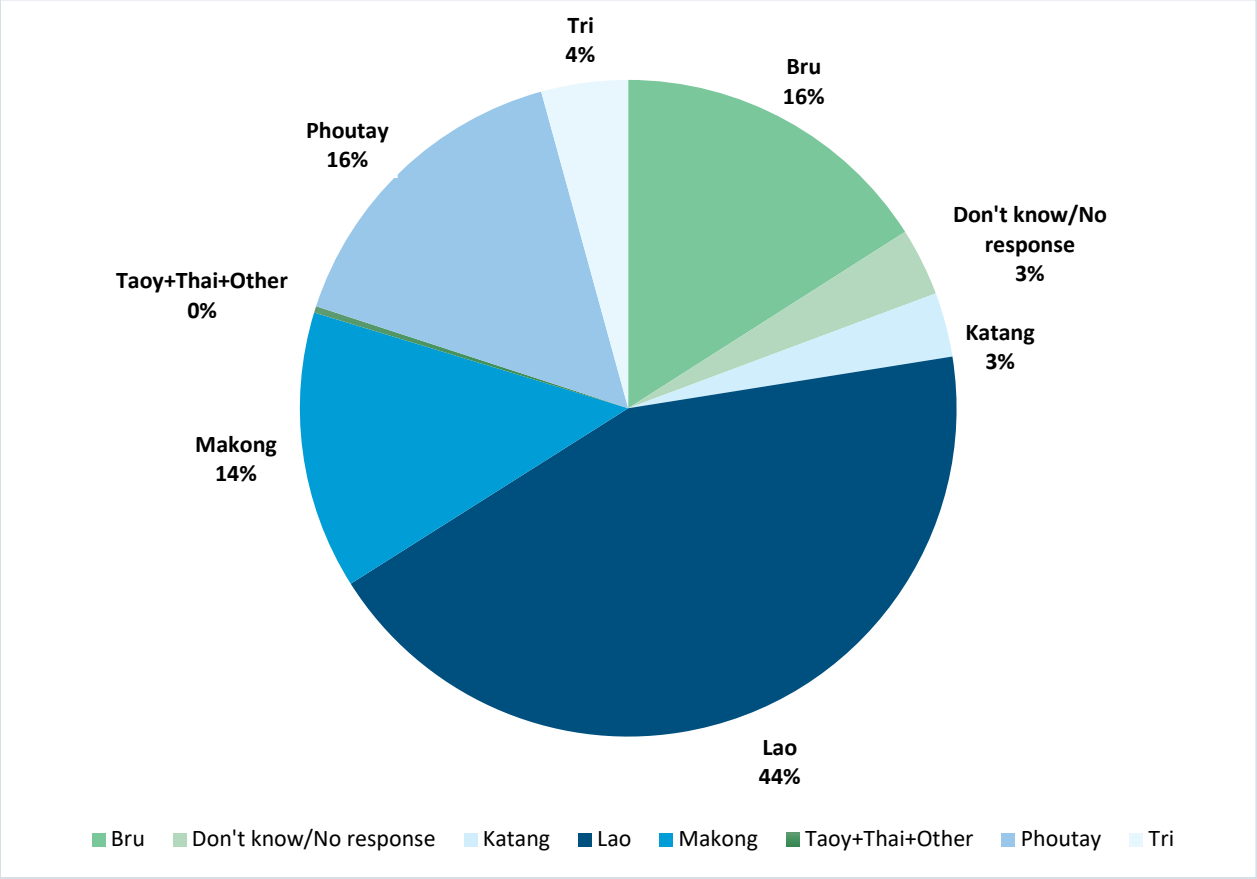
Prior Schooling. The majority of students surveyed had attended preschool (62.5 percent). There were no considerable differences in this proportion across individual grades or sex. The proportion of students who attended ECD or preschool ranged between 50 percent and 75 percent by district, with the lowest proportion reported in Sepone and the highest in Atsaphone (the other districts had similar rates of near 62 percent). Children who spoke Phoutay and Lao had the highest rates of attending ECD/preschool, at 74.9 percent and 68.6 percent, respectively. The rate drops to 57.5 percent, 51.7 percent, and 49.6 percent for Bru, Katang, and Makong speakers, respectively.

3.1.3. Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Student Sample

Household Size. The overall mean household size for the entire student sample was 6.3 people per household. This was more or less the same across the six districts covered in the study, with the mean household size ranging between 5.7 and 6.5 for five of the six districts. The notable exception is Nong District, where the mean household size was 7.3 people per household. This is still less than one standard deviation from the overall mean.

Language Spoken at Home. We asked children about their primary language and other languages, if any, they spoke at home. The diversity of languages in Lao PDR means that home language plays an important role in children's literacy outcomes, as school instruction is in Lao. Exhibit 12 shows the distribution of the main languages children reported speaking at home. If students reported their primary language as something other than those listed below, then enumerators chose "other" as a response. The main language of approximately half of the sample (44 percent) was Lao, followed by Phoutay (16 percent), Bru (16 percent), Makong (14 percent), and Katang (three percent). Less than one percent responded that the main language that they spoke at home is Taoy, Thai, or a language other than those listed by the enumerators. Only three percent responded that they did not know or did not respond, a small proportion that does not impact the overall trend. The majority of students reported that they only spoke one language at home (76.6 percent). Where a second language was spoken by students at home, in 72.6 percent of these cases students spoke Lao as the second language (14.8 percent of the total sample). The most common responses after this were Phoutay and Makong.

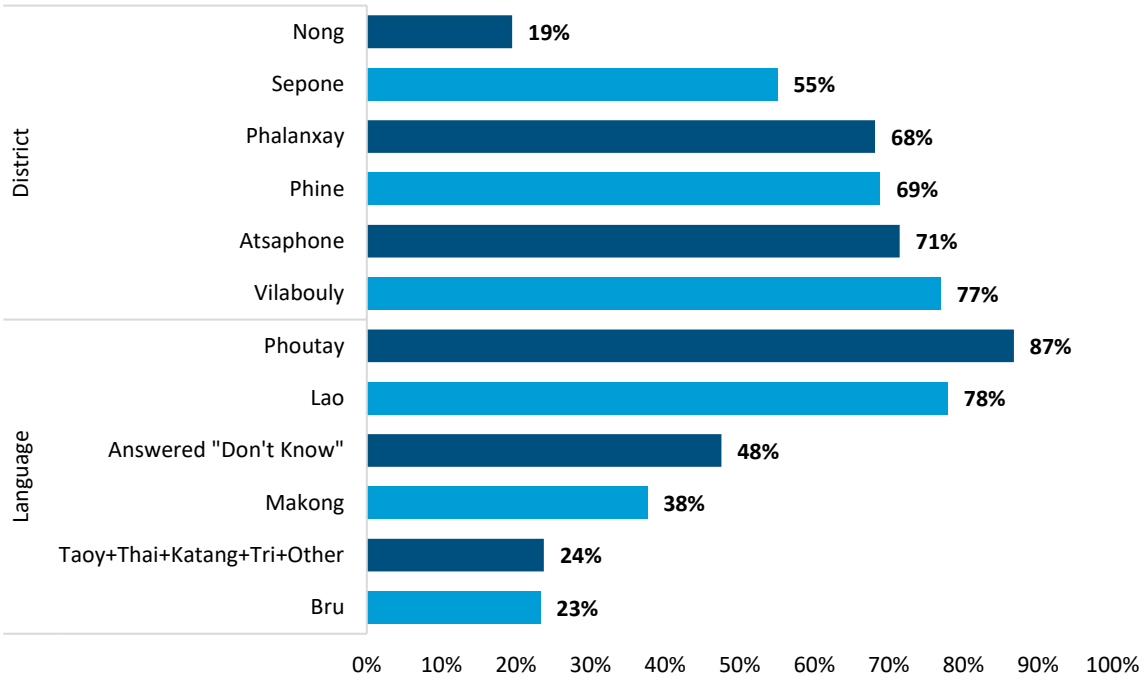
Exhibit 14. Distribution of Main Languages Spoken by Students at Home



Note. Student survey. N = *1,828.*

Socioeconomic Status: To get a sense of household socioeconomic status, the survey asked children if their household possessed any of the following eight durable goods or services: electricity, refrigerator, bicycle, motorbike, tok (tractor), television, mobile phone, and car. On average, students said their households possessed 4.8 of the eight consumer goods. Only 2.4 percent of the sample had none of the eight. A large proportion of the sample (87 percent) had electricity at home and 77 percent had a mobile phone. The vast majority of households (82 percent) use motorbikes as a form of transportation; only 13 percent indicated they had a car. When we compared the socioeconomic status of the sample across all districts, we found that households in Nong had the lowest rates of ownership of consumer goods and that Vilabouly had the highest rates (refer to Exhibit 13). We created a standardized variable of total household items in order to measure how many households had more than the mean number of items (4.8) at home. The proportions of households that met this criterion were generally similar across districts, the highest being in Vilabouly. However, the results show that very few households in Nong (19 percent) have more than the overall mean number of household items.

Exhibit 15. Percentage of Students with More Than the Mean Number of Items at Home by District and Language



Note. Student survey. N = *1,828.*

When performing this tabulation across languages, the results show that, similarly, there are certain groups who have disproportionately lower amounts of important items in their homes. Students who mainly speak Bru at home have the lowest rate of above-average ownership of household items (23 percent). This is consistent with the district breakdown, as Bru speakers are predominantly concentrated in Nong District (72 percent). Nearly all Phoutay speakers report having more than the mean number of items at home (87 percent), and they are predominantly concentrated in Vilabouly (41.1 percent), Atsaphone (28.9 percent), and Sepone (21.6 percent) districts. Lao speakers have the second highest rate of having more than the mean number of important items at home and are relatively evenly spread out across the six districts, with one exception: Less than one percent of households who mainly speak Lao at home reside in Nong.

3.1.4. Home Literacy Environment of the Student Sample

This section presents baseline outcomes regarding household literacy practices, including access to reading materials and home literacy environments. Household literacy practices can illuminate the level of children's exposure to learning outside of school. A student who is exposed to literacy activities at home is more likely to have better opportunities for literacy acquisition.[31] Having access to print reading

[31] Kim, Y. S. (2009). The relationship between home literacy practices and developmental trajectories of emergent literacy and conventional literacy skills for Korean children. *Reading and Writing, 22*(1), 57–84.

materials at home and seeing household members model literacy behaviors are characteristics of a robust home literacy environment, which in turn is significantly associated with children's literacy growth.[32]

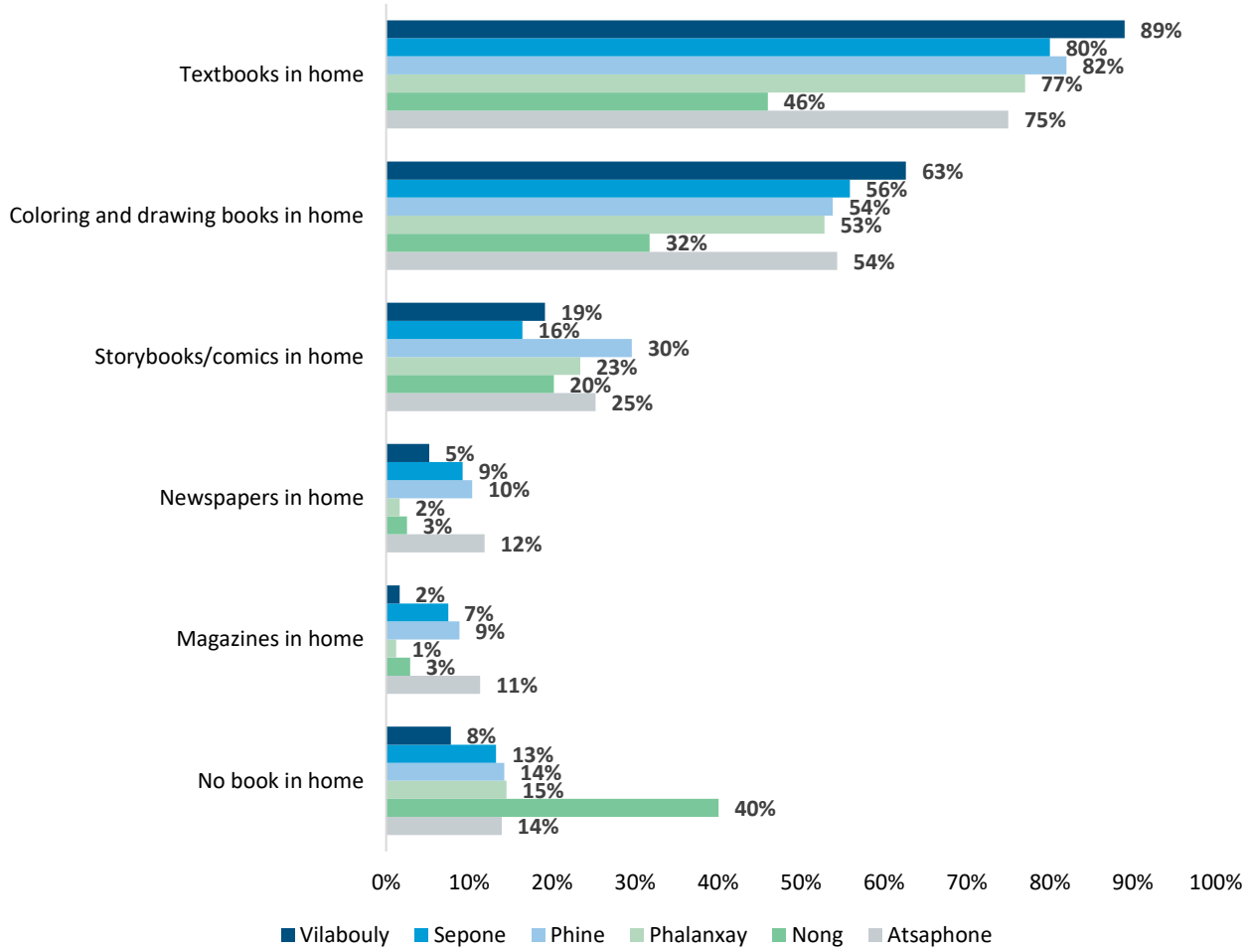
Access to Reading Materials: We asked students about reading materials that they had at home. In general, most students (83 percent) reported that they had some sort of book at home. Seventy-five percent or more of students in each district had textbooks at home, except in Nong District, where less than half of students (46 percent) had access to such materials. About half of the sample (52 percent) had drawing or coloring books, and a few (6 percent) had magazines at home. However, 16.5 percent of the sample did not have access to any reading materials at home.

Notably, school staff reported during KIIs that many students lacked textbooks and that schools struggled to purchase adequate amounts of textbooks. Thus, while the student survey indicates that primary students have textbooks at home, it is not clear whether the textbooks are up-to-date and whether students have textbooks relevant to all academic subjects. As one principal in Nong district highlighted, "I think we should focus on poor children because…they have no books and pencils. Other children have only one book for all subjects."

Exhibit 14 shows students' access to reading material at home by district. A striking take-away from this graph is the disproportionate number of students in Nong District with no books at home (40 percent); in the other five districts, the percentage ranged between 8 percent and 15 percent. Nong District also had a far lower rate of students who had coloring and drawing books at home (32 percent) than the other five districts (53 percent–63 percent). The next most common books to have at home were storybooks/comics (22.2 percent overall). The disparities between districts were lower for magazines and newspapers in the home, as these reading materials were uncommon in all districts. It is important to note that while all other districts were included in LEAPS II, Nong was not introduced to the program until LEAPS III. As such, communities in the other districts have already received some aspect of the LB intervention which may help explain some of these differences.

[32] Sénéchal, M., & LeFevre, J. (2014). Continuity and change in the home literacy environment as predictors of growth in vocabulary and reading. *Child Development, 85*, 1535–1551. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12222

Exhibit 16. Access to Reading Materials at Home by District



Note. Student survey. N = *1,828. Excluded are students who refused to answer the language question or who did not know.*

Home Literacy Environment: Following SCI suggestions, adapted from Hess et al.,[33] we captured the level of family involvement in literacy activities. We asked students if anyone in their household encourages them to study, reads to them, tells them a story, or asks them questions about the stories. We also asked if they saw anyone reading at home.

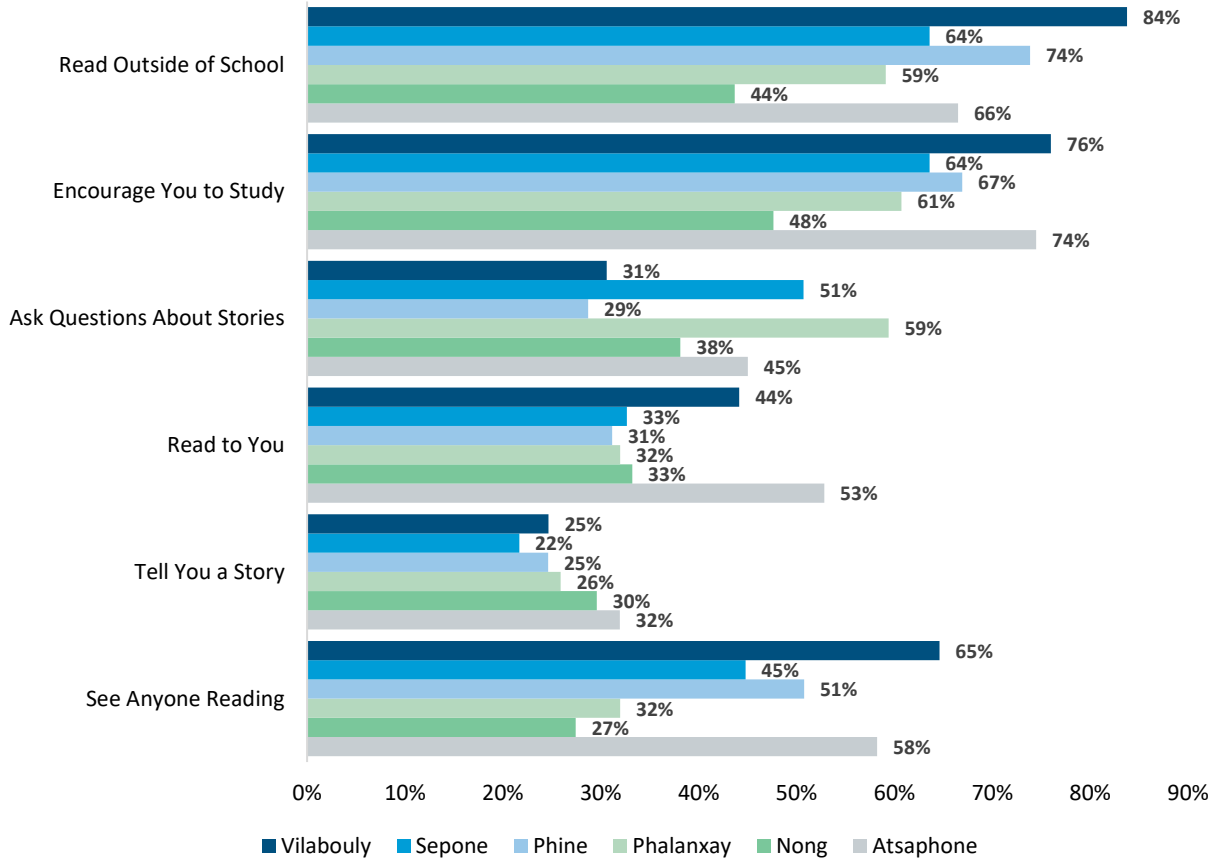
Most students, 65.7 percent, reported that at least one person in their household encouraged them to study. Fewer students reported that at least one person in their household told them a story (26.6 percent) or read to them (38.7 percent). A little less than half (42.2 percent) of the sample reported that their parents or other family members asked questions about stories that they had told or read to the children. Such findings are consistent with the qualitative data, where stakeholders noted that the literacy environment at home consists of both parents and siblings or other elder children. Indeed, even illiterate

[33] Hess, R. D., & Holloway, S. D. (1984). Family and school as educational institutions. *Review of Child Development Research, 7*, 179–222.

parents reported that their kids could study at home with the aid of siblings or neighbors who were further along in school.

Exhibit 15 shows noticeable disparity across districts for questions related to the home literacy environment. We see that Vilabouly had a very high rate of students reporting that they read outside of school (84 percent), while Nong had a much lower rate (44 percent). This trend (Vilabouly having the highest rate and Nong having the lowest rate) holds as well for students having someone at home who encourages them to study and for students seeing anyone reading at home. Across questions, Atsaphone performed well in addition to Vilabouly.

Exhibit 17. Home Literacy Environment by District

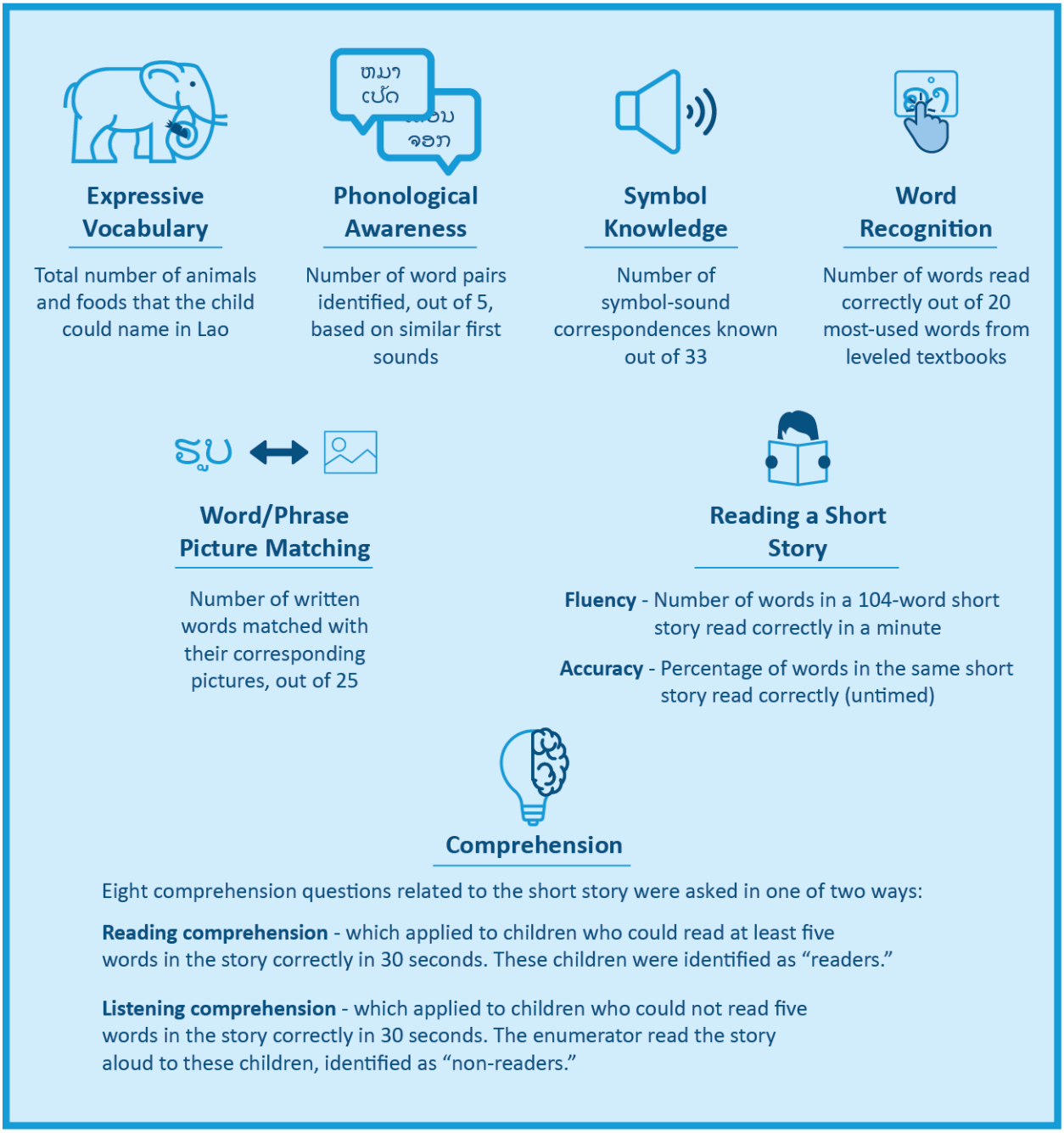


Note. Student survey. N = *1,826. Graph reports frequency of students responding to each category. Students could choose more than one option.*

3.2. Student Reading Outcomes

To measure second-grade students' literacy skills, we implemented an AIR-modified version of LBRA, itself a modified version of the EGRA developed and tested in the Lao context by SCI. This LBRA consists of seven subtests (refer to Exhibit 16). All subtests were administered in Lao, which is the official language of instruction, although instructions for completing the test were provided in the local language to assist the child as necessary.

Exhibit 18. LBRA Subtests



AIR measured the proportion of children who, by the end of two grade of primary school, demonstrated they could read and understand grade level text by identifying children as readers if they could read at least five words of the reading passage in thirty seconds. Those identified as readers were then asked to read and respond to comprehension questions. The proportion of children able to answer at least 75 percent of the comprehension questions correctly were documented as meeting the MGD indicator threshold. The LBRA captured information on various subskills important for literacy development, and analysis of children's competencies in these other areas allowed AIR to develop a more comprehensive picture of children's literacy attainment.

Exhibit 17 provides an overview of second-grade students' literacy skills at baseline. Overall, children did better in expressive vocabulary, reading comprehension, and symbol knowledge than in other subtests. However, only 9.3 percent of students were classified as readers as defined in Exhibit 16 and thus only these students were tested for reading comprehension. This is lower than endline values for the LEAPS II evaluation and will be discussed in more detail in the Conclusions section. The listening comprehension scores of the nonreaders were lower than the reading comprehension scores of the readers. In general, more students classified as readers (33 percent) were able to answer at least 75 percent of the comprehension questions and received a "passing" score than students classified as nonreaders (19 percent). As a reminder, readers read the passage to themselves and then responded to the questions (referred to as "reading comprehension" throughout this document) while nonreaders had the passage read to them before answering comprehension questions (referred to as "listening comprehension" in this document). There was no statistically significant difference in any reading outcomes when disaggregated by sex (refer to Exhibit 10-5 in Annex 10).

Exhibit 19. Second-Grade Students' Literacy Skills Overview

Literacy skills	Outcome (*M* or %)
Expressive vocabulary (# out of 20)	12.4
Expressive vocabulary (%)	61.8%
Phonological awareness (word pairs correct out of 5)	1.1
Phonological awareness (%)	21.6%
Foundational literacy skills	
Symbol knowledge (# correct out of 33)	21.5
Symbol knowledge (% correct)	61.5%
Word recognition (# correct out of 20)	3.2
Word recognition (% correct)	16.2%
Words/phrases to picture matching (# correct out of 25)	8.1
Words/phrases to picture matching (%)	32.6%
Students proficient in matching words/phrases to pictures (80% or above correct)	7.4%
Reading skills	
Students classified as readers (5+ words correct in 30 seconds)	9.3%
Accuracy (% words correct in passage), readers only	82%
Fluency (words correct per minute), readers only	25.2
Comprehension Skills	
% reading comprehension questions correct, readers only	57%
% listening comprehension questions correct, nonreaders only	43%

Note. Student survey. N *= 568; reading comprehension, n =53; listening comprehension, n = 514. There was no statistically significant difference in any reading outcomes when disaggregated by sex.*

Word/phrases to picture matching. In general, students performed better on matching words/phrases to pictures than on reading, but overall scores remained low. On average students could correctly match

32.6% of words/phrases to a picture of said word/phrase. There was no statistically significant difference by sex. Mean scores by district were relatively similar and close to the overall mean score of 32.6%, however in Atsaphone district there was an elevated rate of correctly answering these questions: on average, students correctly matched 44% of words/phrases to the corresponding picture. Not surprisingly, Lao speakers also performed better than other languages, correctly matching on average 38% percent of words/phrases to the corresponding picture. Using a threshold of 80%, only 7.4% of the total second grade sample was able to receive a "passing" score and be labeled as proficient in this subtask. There was no statistically significant difference in proficiency between boys and girls.

Symbol Knowledge[34]. To measure symbol knowledge, students were shown a chart of 33 symbols in Lao and asked to name the symbol. On average, students were able to identify the sound of 21.5 symbols (65 percent). Almost half of the sample (45 percent) identified at least 75 percent of the symbols.[35] The most difficult symbol was "ဟ"; only 20.95 percent of students identified it correctly. The easiest symbol was "ຈ"; 91 percent of students were able to identify it. In general, Lao speakers performed better than other students (refer to Exhibit 18 and Exhibit 10-4 in Annex 10).

Exhibit 20. Symbol Knowledge by Main Language of Student

Outcomes	Lao	Phoutay	Bru+Katang+Makong+Tri	Unknown
Average number of symbols identified correctly	24	22	19	19
Students who were able to identify at least 75 percent of the symbols	53%	47%	35%	38%

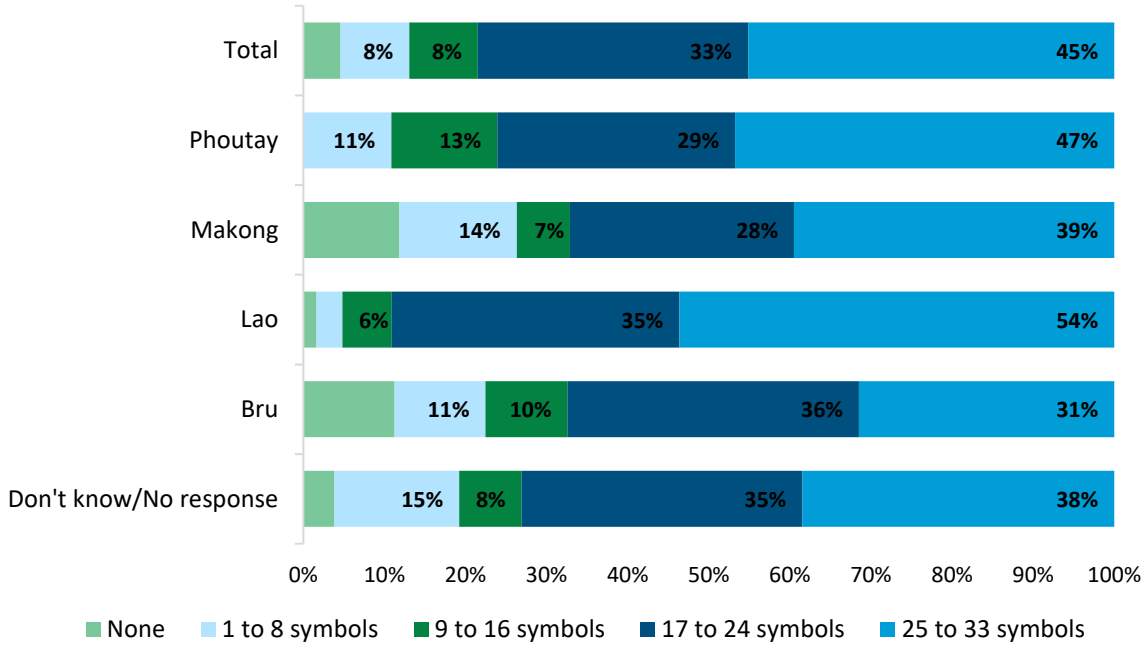
Note. Student survey. N = *496.*

A few children (4.6 percent) did not pronounce any symbols correctly, while only 6.2 percent of the sample identified all 33 symbols correctly. Exhibit 19 shows the distribution of symbol identification scores by language. The distribution is skewed to the right, showing most children were able to identify 17–33 symbols. We see that Bru speakers had the lowest rate of identifying 25–33 symbols correctly, a result that is correlated with lower socioeconomic status and books available at home. Bru speakers are mainly concentrated in Nong district. Accordingly, students in Nong district scored the lowest on symbol scores, correctly identifying an average of 44 percent of symbols. The next lowest rate was in Sepone district where students correctly identified an average of 59 percent of symbols. The highest mean scores were found in Atsaphone and Phine districts.

[34] "Phonemic" doesn't apply to alphasyllabic Lao, nor do "letters". Rather they are "symbols", with dual phonological information – phonemes and symbols, that don't allow them to be letters – which use singular phonemic information to encode language (Lew, 2012). As such, the report refers to symbols rather than letters whereas CRS uses the term letters in the indicators. Data for those indicators was calculated used the data referred to as symbols in the report.

[35] The 75 percent threshold for passing was created by SCI during the baseline round of LEAPS II based on the distribution of scores. AIR continues to use this same threshold to allow for comparisons over time with respect to the number of students meeting or exceeding this threshold.

Exhibit 21. Distribution of Symbol Scores by Language



Note. Student survey. N = *568.*

Reading Outcomes: Of the 568 second graders who took the LBRA, only 9.3 percent were classified as readers (i.e., students who could read at least five words in the story correctly in 30 seconds). When disaggregated by language, a higher proportion of Lao speakers (13 percent) were classified as readers than speakers of other languages. However, these results should be read with caution due to the small sample size (53) of readers and the large marginal difference one reader can have on overall proportions. There was little difference when disaggregated by sex. The difference in the proportion of readers was more pronounced across districts: In Atsaphone and Vilabouly, 16 percent and 15 percent of students qualified as readers, whereas this proportion drops to two percent in Nong and Phine.

The readers generally performed well on reading comprehension questions, answering 57 percent of questions correctly, a higher proportion than nonreaders who had the passage read to them (43 percent). We defined grade-level reading competency on this assessment as the reader's ability to answer at least 75 percent of the reading comprehension questions correctly, and very few readers (18 total) achieved a "passing" grade by answering that percentage of questions correctly. Only 3.2 percent of the entire Grade 2 sample qualified as readers with comprehension proficiency.

The same passage was used to measure the fluency and accuracy of students classified as readers. On average, these students read 33 words per minute with 82 percent accuracy. There was no significant difference by sex, and mean accuracy differed relatively little by district. Boys seemed to perform slightly better (28 words per minute) than girls (22 words per minute) in reading with fluency, but this difference was not statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

Comprehension. After readers read or nonreaders listened to the whole passage, they were asked four types of comprehension questions:

1. **Summary (one question).** Summary questions tested students' ability to identify the main ideas of a reading passage. Enumerators asked students to recall what happened in the story. AIR defined the passing rate as whether the student could point to at least three out of four main events in the passage.
2. **Literal (five questions).** The literal questions assessed whether students could recall information stated explicitly in the text.
3. **Inferential (one question).** The inferential question tested students' ability to identify information implied in the passage.
4. **Evaluative (one question).** This type of question required cognitive and/or emotional judgment on the part of the students, and they needed to use their own opinions to answer.

Readers performed better on the reading comprehension questions than nonreaders performed on listening comprehension. They answered, on average, 57.7 percent of the reading comprehension questions correctly, while listeners answered 43 percent of listening comprehension questions correctly. Exhibit 20 shows that readers did better across all comprehension question categories than listeners.

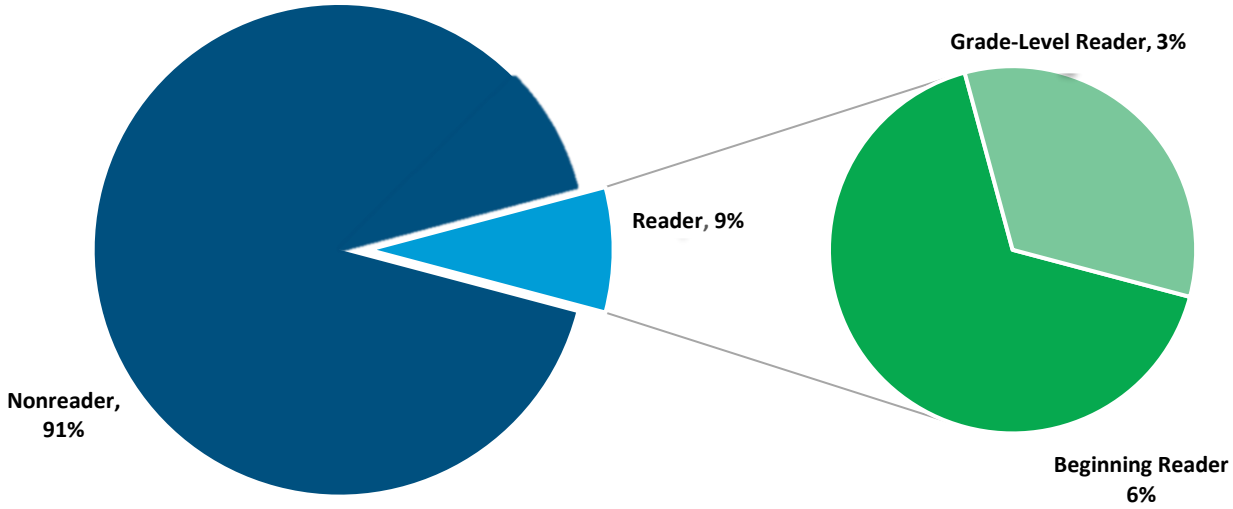
Exhibit 22. Comprehension Questions Answered Correctly

Comprehension	Summary	Literal	Inferential	Evaluative
Reading comprehension (readers)	12%	49%	67%	65%
Listening comprehension (nonreaders)	6%	31%	58%	36%

Note. Student survey. N = *568 total (*N = *53 for readers and* N =*515 for nonreaders).*

In our sample, 91 percent of students were nonreaders and only nine percent of students were readers. Of the nine percent of students classified as readers, 66 percent (six percent of the total Grade 2 sample) are beginning readers, which means they scored less than 75 percent on the reading comprehension questions, and 34 percent (3 percent of the total Grade 2 sample) are grade-level readers, which means they score at least 75 percent (refer to Exhibit 21).

Exhibit 23. Overall Grade 2 Student Reading Levels



Note. Student survey. N = *568.*

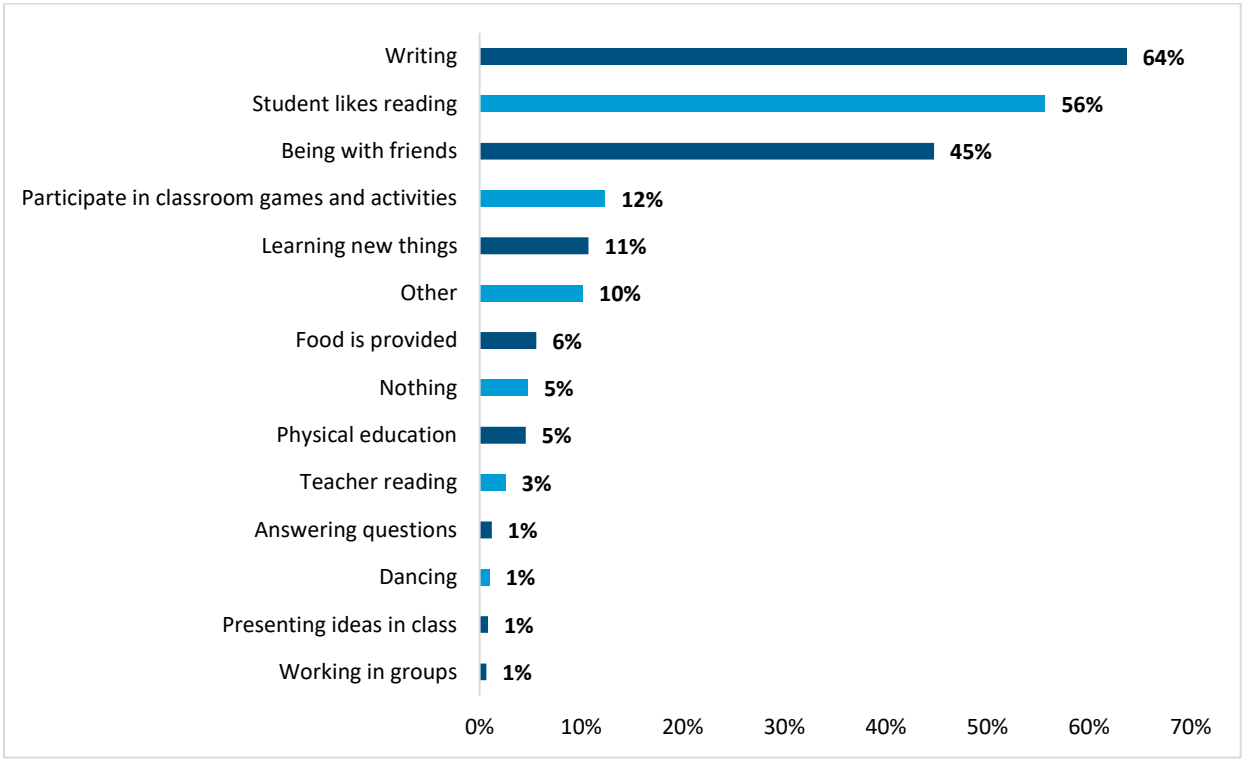
3.3. Other Key Student Outcomes

In this section, we describe relevant outcomes from the remainder of the student survey given to all students in Grades 1–5. These factors also play an important role in student well-being and learning outcomes. This includes modules on student perceptions of the school environment, student attendance, student attentiveness, student hunger, and health.

3.3.1. Student Perceptions of the School Environment

Overall, the vast majority of students reported that they enjoy going to school (96.5 percent). Exhibit 22 shows that there were several common reasons that students enjoyed school. Overwhelmingly, students responded that they enjoyed going to school so that they could be with their friends. This was followed by "participating in classroom games" and "learning new things." All of these results were similar across sex.

Exhibit 24. Aspects of School That Students Like Most



Note. Student survey. N = *1,826. Graph reports percentage of students who responded "yes" to each category regarding what they enjoy about school. Students could choose more than one option.*

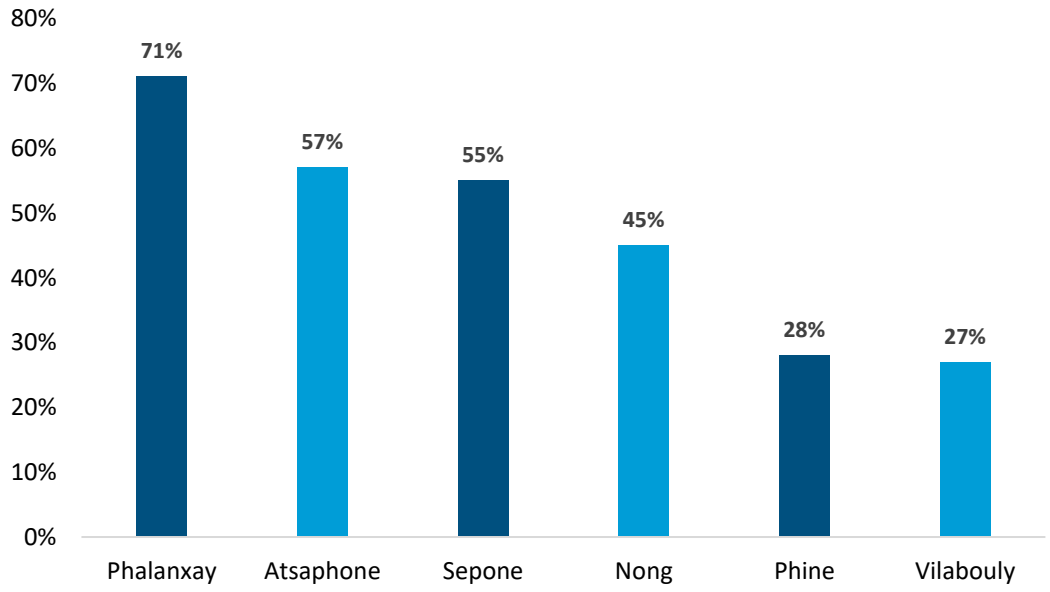
Teacher Engagement. Generally, teachers were found to read to their students in school (67.5 percent of students indicated that they were read to at least once during the week by their teacher). Still, 32.5 percent of students reported that their teacher never reads to them in class. This was reported to happen most frequently in Sepone District (40 percent) and Nong District (38 percent). Less than two percent of students reported that their teachers read to them every day. Other outcomes were relatively constant across districts. In addition, relatively few students reported that their teachers never asked them questions about the stories that they read (16 percent). The most frequent response was that teachers asked students "often" about the stories that they read (35.3 percent).

Qualitative data highlights that teachers face barriers related to training, materials, and literacy when it comes to classroom engagement. While pedagogical advisors and principals noted the need for technical training to improve teaching methods, teachers themselves emphasized that they lack the materials to engage students using a variety of methods. In a few cases, teachers also mentioned that they themselves lacked confidence in speaking Lao, making it difficult for them to use the language confidently with students.

Symbol Games and Reading Activities. About half of students (41.5 percent) reported that they never played symbol games or did reading activities in school. This rate was highest in Nong district (50 percent) and lowest in Phalanxay (30 percent). The next most frequent response was "A few times during the week" (38 percent overall), which was most common in Phalanxay (53 percent) and lowest in Nong (27 percent).

Borrowing Books. Slightly less than half (46 percent) of students reported that they were able to borrow books from their school. Exhibit 23 shows that this value varies by district, with as many as 71 percent of students reporting that they can borrow books from school in Phalanxay District and as few as 27 percent in Vilabouly District. This could help explain why few students report borrowing books from school: Overall, more than half of students never borrow books from school, 21 percent borrow books once per week, and 30 percent borrow books a few times a week. Higher access to books did not necessarily translate to higher rates of borrowing books, as would be expected. Rather, frequency of borrowing books was relatively constant across districts. However, girls were 7.4 percentage points more likely to borrow books a few times per week ($p < .05$) and 10 percentage points less likely to report never borrowing books than boys ($p < .01$).

Exhibit 25. Percentage of Students Who Can Borrow Books from Schools by District



Note. Student survey. N = *1,776.*

3.3.2. Student Attendance

To measure student attendance, enumerators reviewed teachers' classroom attendance logs at each of the sampled schools. They recorded both the number of students enrolled in each grade level, disaggregated by boys and girls, as well as the average student attendance over a four-month period (October 2021–February 2022) excluding the times schools were closed due to COVID-19.[36] We then averaged the attendance rates across the four months to determine an average student attendance rate for baseline. We also calculated these rates separately for boys and girls to obtain sex-disaggregated rates.

Exhibit 24 shows the four-month average student attendance rate by student sex and grade level. Attendance rates are relatively high across all grade levels, ranging from 91 percent to 93 percent. For all

[36] We excluded attendance data from January 2022, as schools were in session less than the entire month, and the number of allotted school days in January varied by district.

grades, we observe an even split between boys and girls with respect to attendance, suggesting that on average neither boys nor girls are facing any sex-specific obstacles to attending school.

Exhibit 26. Average Student Attendance Rates by Grade Level and Sex

Grade	Overall average attendance rate	Average boys' attendance rate	Average no. of boys enrolled	Average girls' attendance rate	Average no. of girls enrolled
Grade 1	92%	91%	8	93%	8
Grade 2	91%	91%	8	91%	8
Grade 3	92%	91%	8	93%	7
Grade 4	93%	94%	11	91%	11
Grade 5	93%	91%	12	94%	12

Note. Classroom observation tool. N = *68 schools.*

While we do not find evidence of differences in attendance by grade or sex, we do find variation in attendance by district. Exhibit 25 shows the four-month average student attendance rate by district. As shown, attendance rates vary from 100 percent or close to 100 percent in Vilabouly, Phine, and Nong to less than 80 percent in Phalanxay and right around 80 percent in Sepone. In FGDs with parents from Phalanxay respondents mentioned that they tend to take their children out of school during the farming season, specifically noting that they need older children to help with childcare for younger children while the parents are working. This could be contributing to the lower attendance rates observed in that district.

Exhibit 27. Average Student Attendance Rates by Grade Level and District

Grade	Atsaphone	Nong	Phalanxay	Phine	Sepone	Vilabouly
Grade 1	97%	98%	74%	98%	83%	100%
Grade 2	97%	98%	73%	98%	79%	100%
Grade 3	94%	98%	79%	98%	80%	100%
Grade 4	99%	99%	78%	99%	81%	100%
Grade 5	98%	99%	78%	98%	81%	100%

Note. Classroom observation tool. N = *68 schools. The total includes 14 schools in Atsaphone, 10 schools in Nong, 10 schools in Phalanxay, 11 schools in Phine, 12 schools in Sepone, and 11 schools in Vilabouly.*

3.3.3. Student Attentiveness

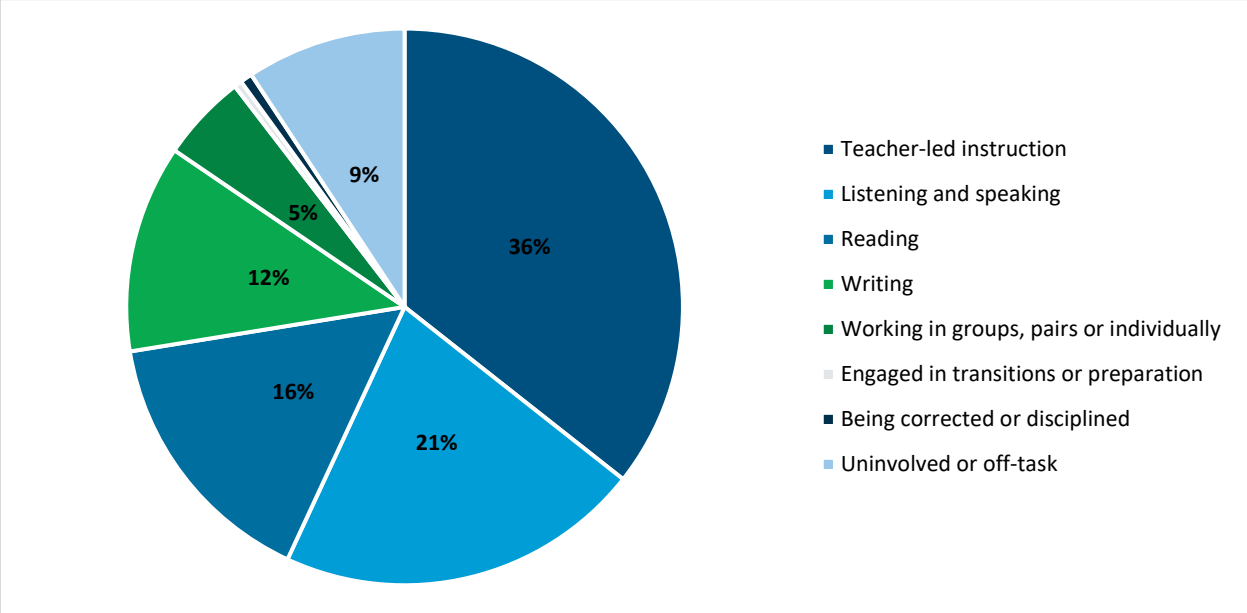
We observed classrooms in each of the 68 schools in our sample to assess students' attentiveness. Every two minutes, we captured the number of attentive students and the number of distracted students in the room. For the purposes of this study, attentive students were those who were observed to be actively involved in the classroom task at the time of the snapshot, be it listening to the teacher's instructions, doing independent work in class, or working with a partner or group on an activity. Relatedly, students were marked as being distracted if they were observed being involved in activities unrelated to the lesson plan, including having side conversations, bullying or teasing others, staring out the window, or sleeping. We did this for 30 minutes total, leading to 10 "snapshots" of attentiveness for each classroom. To calculate the attentiveness rate, we divided the total number of attentive students by the total number of students in the classroom. For multigrade classrooms, we focused only on the students in the specific grade level of interest for that observation. Overall, 87 percent of students were observed to be attentive during lessons across all classes observed (refer to Exhibit 26). The attentiveness percentages ranged from 81 percent in Grade 1 to 91 percent in Grade 2 (refer to Exhibit 30), with little variation in attentiveness

between students in single-grade classrooms (88%) and multigrade classrooms (85%). For the attentiveness measure, we did not collect disaggregated data by sex of the student.

Exhibits 27–31 show student attentiveness by student activity, teacher activity, subject, grade level, and district.

Most students were observed during teacher-led instruction or listening and speaking exercises (refer to Exhibit 26). We also observed variation in attentiveness based on the classroom activity, with students being more attentive during teacher instructions and transitions and while reading, writing, and working in pairs or groups. When there was no clear task for students to work on or pay attention to, they were more likely to be distracted.

Exhibit 28. Student Activities Observed



Note. Classroom observations tool. N = *680 (10 snapshot observations in each of 68 classrooms).*

Exhibit 29. Student Attentiveness by Student Activity

Student activity	Observations	Students paying attention (%)
Engaged in teacher-led instruction	738	91%
Listening and speaking	375	89%
Reading	303	92%
Writing	250	91%
Working in groups, pairs, or individually	101	91%
Engaged in transitions or preparation	10	93%
Being corrected or disciplined	19	76%
Uninvolved or off-task	128	61%

Note. Classroom observation tool. N = *1,290 (10 snapshot observations in each of 129 classrooms).*
Note: For "Uninvolved or off-task" the table indicates that 61% of students were "uninvolved or off-task".

There was also slight variation in attentiveness based on the teacher's activity. Students were most attentive when the teacher was disciplining a child in the classroom (refer to Exhibit 28). They were also relatively attentive when the teacher was providing instructions to the class, assisting students with their work, or preparing activities during a transition period. Students were least attentive when the teacher was involved in activities unrelated the to the lesson plan (such as by being distracted).

Exhibit 30. Student Attentiveness by Teacher Activity

Teacher activity	Number of observations	Students paying attention (%)
Providing instruction	541	91%
Guided reading to class or small group	313	88%
Modeling or monitoring writing	132	89%
Assisting students	108	93%
Classroom management (transitioning or preparing activities)	12	93%
Classroom discipline	3	100%
Involved in activities unrelated to the lesson plan (social interactions, sleeping, out of classroom)	181	68%

Note. Classroom observation tool. N = *1,290 (10 snapshot observations in each of 129 classrooms).*

Exhibit 29 shows that students were most attentive during Lao language lessons and least attentive during art lessons. Attentiveness was still relatively high during math and lessons on the world around us.

Exhibit 31. Student Attentiveness by Subject

Subject	Number of observations	Students paying attention (%)
Lao language	102	88%
Math	16	84%
The world around us	8	81%
Art (song and dance)	2	67%

Note. Classroom observation tool. N = *1,290 (10 snapshot observations in each of 129 classrooms).*

Grade 2 students were observed to be the most attentive, while students in Grade 1 were found to be the least attentive (refer to Exhibit 30). However, the spread of attentiveness across grades was relatively low, ranging from 81 percent in Grade 1 to 91 percent in Grade 2. Also, while similar, children were slightly more attentive in single-grade classrooms (88 percent) than multigrade classes (85 percent), however, attentiveness in the latter still relatively high.

Exhibit 32. Student Attentiveness by Grade Level

Subject	Number of observations	Students paying attention (%)
Grade 1	180	81%
Grade 2	610	91%

Subject	Number of observations	Students paying attention (%)
Grade 3	140	86%
Grade 4	170	84%
Grade 5	190	85%
Multigrade Classes	470	85%
Single-grade Classes	820	88%

Note. Classroom observation tool; N = *1,290 (10 snapshot observations in each of 129 classrooms).*

Lastly, we observed large variation in attentiveness by district, with students in Nong being fully attentive during the snapshot observations while only 79 percent and 77 percent of students were attentive during lessons in Sepone and Phalanxay, respectively (Exhibit 31). Students in Atsaphone were also highly attentive (97 percent), and there was moderate attentiveness in Vilabouly (87 percent) and Phine (85 percent).

Exhibit 33. Student Attentiveness by District

Subject	Number of observations	Students paying attention (%)
Atsaphone	250	97%
Nong	170	100%
Phalanxay	220	77%
Phine	240	85%
Sepone	210	79%
Vilabouly	200	87%

Note. Classroom observation tool. N = *1,290 (10 snapshot observations in each of 129 classrooms).*

3.3.4. Student Hunger

To measure students' hunger during school, we asked about their food intake in the morning and afternoon. We asked all students whether they ate breakfast and felt full after consuming it. The surveys varied by time of day, but all students were asked whether or not they had eaten lunch, including if they ate the school meal and if they liked it or not. The majority of surveys took place in the morning (65 percent), while around six percent took place at lunchtime and 29 percent took place in the afternoon. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting results related to lunches.

As Exhibit 32 shows, almost all of the students said they had eaten breakfast (94.3 percent). Of those, only 1.3 percent said that they could have eaten more. Of the children surveyed after noon, 87 percent reported that they ate lunch; 65 percent stated that the school lunch had already been served that day. The lowest rates of students responding that the school lunch had been served were in Nong and Atsaphone districts, where 71 and 47 percent of students surveyed after noon responded that the school lunch had not been served, respectively. Almost all of the students (96 percent) who were served lunch ate the school meal, and they generally liked its taste; only three percent reported that they did not like the meal's taste at all, and two thirds reported that they liked the taste very much. Only seven percent of children surveyed in the afternoon reported that they were at all hungry. Six percent of students that reported both eating lunch, and in particular the school lunch, were hungry at all.

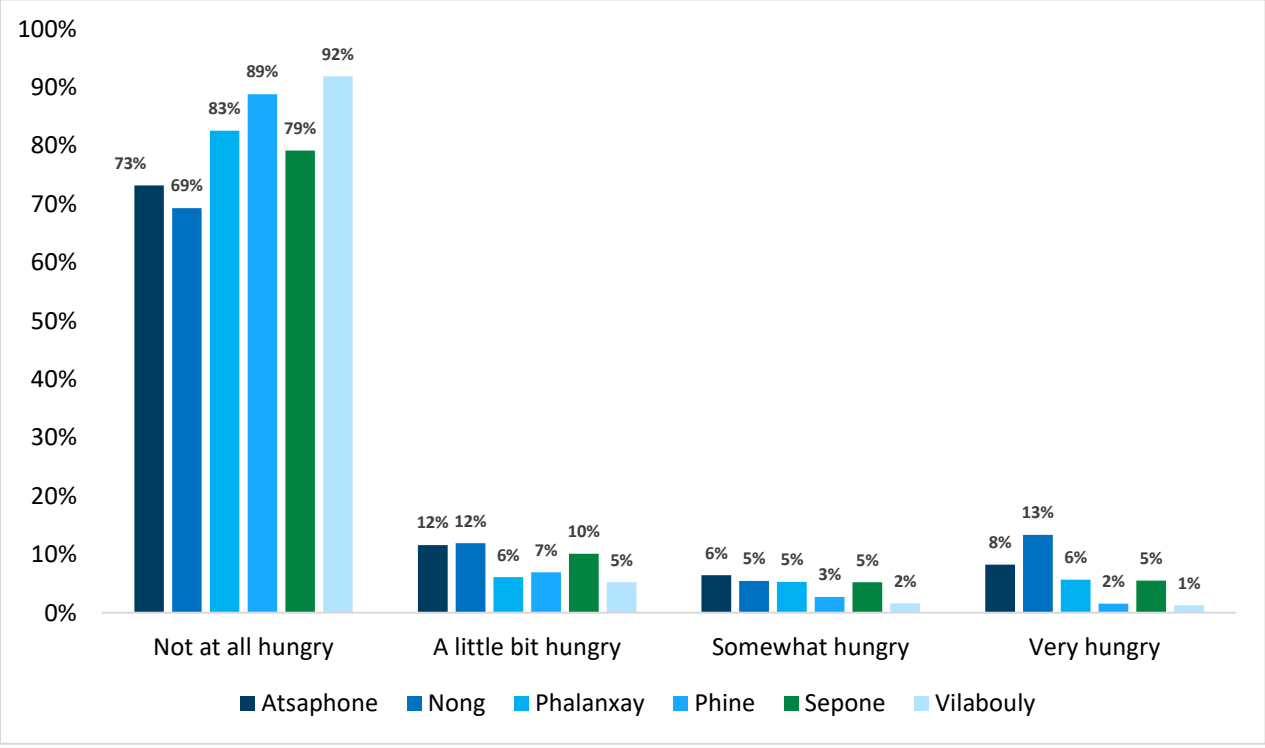
Exhibit 34. Student Self-Reported Food Intake

Food intake	Percentage by sex	Percentage total	Observations
Children ate breakfast.	Girls: 94.4%	94.3%	1,829
	Boys: 94.1%		
Children could have eaten more after eating breakfast.	Girls: 1%	1.3%	1,724[a]
	Boys: 2%		
Children enjoyed school lunch.	Girls: 72%	66.9%	523[b]
	Boys: 62%		
Children were "somewhat" or "very" hungry at the time of the survey.	Girls: 10.6%	10.6%	1,829
	Boys: 10.5%		

Note. Student survey. N = 1,829.
[a] This indicator is only available for those who indicated eating breakfast.
[b] This indicator is available for those who ate the school lunch.

When the data are disaggregated by district, we see that levels of hunger are low across all districts and that the most frequent response in all districts was "Not at all hungry." However, it should be noted that Atsaphone and Nong had lower rates of the "Not at all hungry" response (73 percent and 69 percent, respectively) than other districts as well as higher rates of the "Very hungry" response (eight percent and 13 percent, respectively) and the "A little bit hungry" response (12 percent in both districts).

Exhibit 35. Student Levels of Hunger at Time of Survey by District

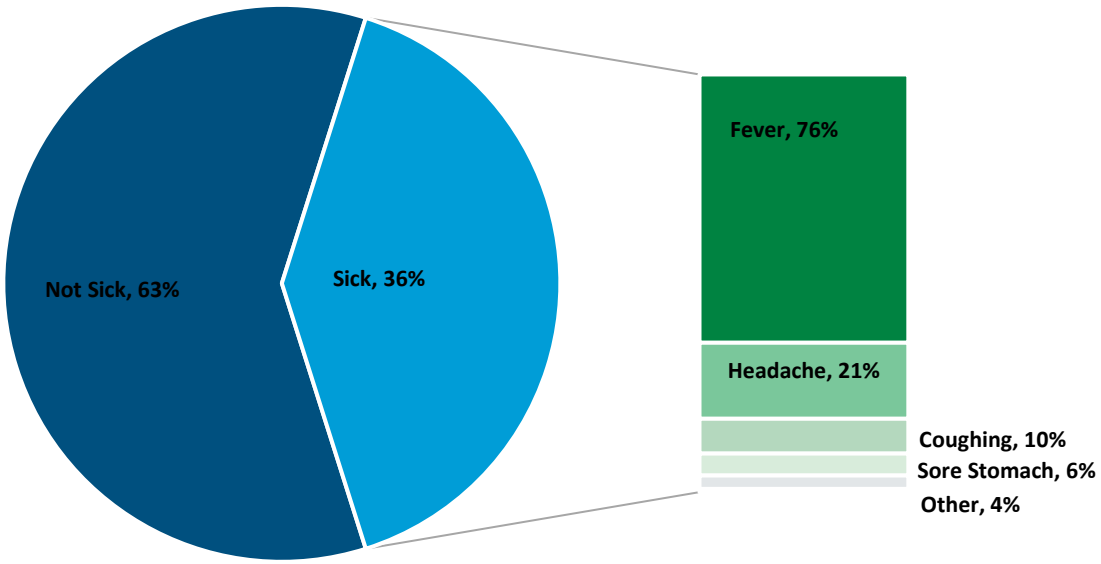


Note. Student survey. N = *1,829.*

3.3.5. Health

Sickness and Absences. To capture information on students' health and the effects on school attendance, we asked students whether they had fallen ill in the past week and, if so, whether they missed school because of their illness. Of the students surveyed, 36 percent said they were sick in the past week. The most cited illness was fever, followed by headaches (refer to Exhibit 34). Less than one third (28 percent) of all students surveyed said they missed school because of illness, but 77 percent of students who reported that they were sick missed school because of it. Of those who missed school, over 80 percent said they missed between 1 and 3 days of school (2.4 days on average). In addition, 26 percent of all students reported missing school in the past week for a reason other than being sick. In focus groups, parents reaffirmed that sickness was one of two reasons that they allowed their children to miss school, and when students became ill, most parents cited that they took the child to a local healthcare facility. This self-reported data from students and parents seemingly misaligns with the attendance data captured from classroom records, which indicates that student attendance is quite high ranging from 73 to 100 percent (refer to Exhibit 25). We are unable to disentangle these nuanced differences in reporting with our current data, but can look into clarifying at midline using LEAPS III school spot checks and attendance monitoring data.

Exhibit 36. Proportion of Sick Students and Their Illnesses



Note. Student survey. N = *1,826 for graph on left;* N = *661 for graph on right. Excluded students were those who did not know the answer or refused to answer. Students could have listed more than one symptom, so illness percentages do not add up to 100%.*

Handwashing and Latrine Use. Nearly all students reported that they washed their hands at school (92 percent) and with soap (80 percent). These percentages were generally the same across districts and by sex, except for Nong, which had lower percentages of students reporting that they washed their hands at

school (84 percent) and with soap (66 percent). A far lower proportion of students overall reported that they used the latrine at school (43 percent). The rate for girls was about 6 percentage points higher than the rate for boys (46 percent vs. 40 percent, $p < .05$). Nong had the lowest rate of students reporting that they used the latrine at school (15 percent), notably lower than the next lowest rate, which was in Phalanxay (36 percent). Parents and teachers, when interviewed about WASH practices, explained that they attribute low latrine usage at school to the fact that many households lack latrines. Students who do not have the habit of using latrines at home are unaccustomed to using them at school.

3.4. Teacher Pedagogy

During classroom observations, enumerators also noted teacher behaviors and pedagogical skills related to positive pedagogy[37] and inclusive education (defined here as gender inclusivity rather than inclusivity for other vulnerable groups such as students with a disability), use of teaching and learning materials, and literacy instruction. In this section, we report the baseline results related to teachers' skills in these areas. Of the teachers observed, 60 percent were male and 40 percent were female, and they had been teaching an average of 15 years (ranging from two years to 38 years).

Importantly, the GOL rolled out a new primary curriculum in 2019, which promotes positive pedagogy as a standard throughout the education system. However, as many education-sector respondents pointed out in qualitative interviews, the uptake of the new curriculum at the level of schools and teachers has been slow and fraught with barriers (e.g., lack of resources and training, delays in roll out due to COVID-19, etc.). The data in this section thus provides a snapshot of progress towards the learner-centric pedagogy prescribed in the new curriculum.

Positive Pedagogy and Inclusive Education. Enumerators rated teachers on a scale ranging from *not at all true* to *very true* for seven key aspects of positive pedagogy and gender inclusive education, including whether teachers' feedback on students' work is accompanied by positive comments, whether teachers redirect students who are not paying attention, whether students participate in class, and whether teachers use a variety of teaching methods. Exhibit 35 presents the proportion of teachers we observed exhibiting each of the positive and inclusive pedagogical skills. As seen, teachers are providing similar attention to, feedback to, and allowing equal participation of boys and girls in the classroom. However, teachers' feedback on students' work was only observed to be positive about one third of the time, and teachers were rarely observed redirecting students' attention back to lessons or instructions (approximately nine percent for girls and 11 percent for boys).

With respect to teaching methods and accessibility of materials in the classroom, only eight percent of teachers used a variety of teaching and learning methods in the classroom, even though teaching and learning materials were used in almost 20 percent of the classes observed. Enumerators observed a reading corner in only 12 percent of classes observed but did note that environmental prints were accessible to children in a little over one third of the classes (36 percent).

[37] Positive pedagogy refers to gender-responsive and learner-centered pedagogy intended to create positive learning environments for all students. Positive pedagogy ensures that each student is valued in the classroom regardless of gender or other characteristics and that a variety of learning activities and materials are used to support the development of different learning styles and intelligences (FAWE, 2018). https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/6726/file/GRP-A-Toolkit-for-Teachers-and-Schools-2020.pdf

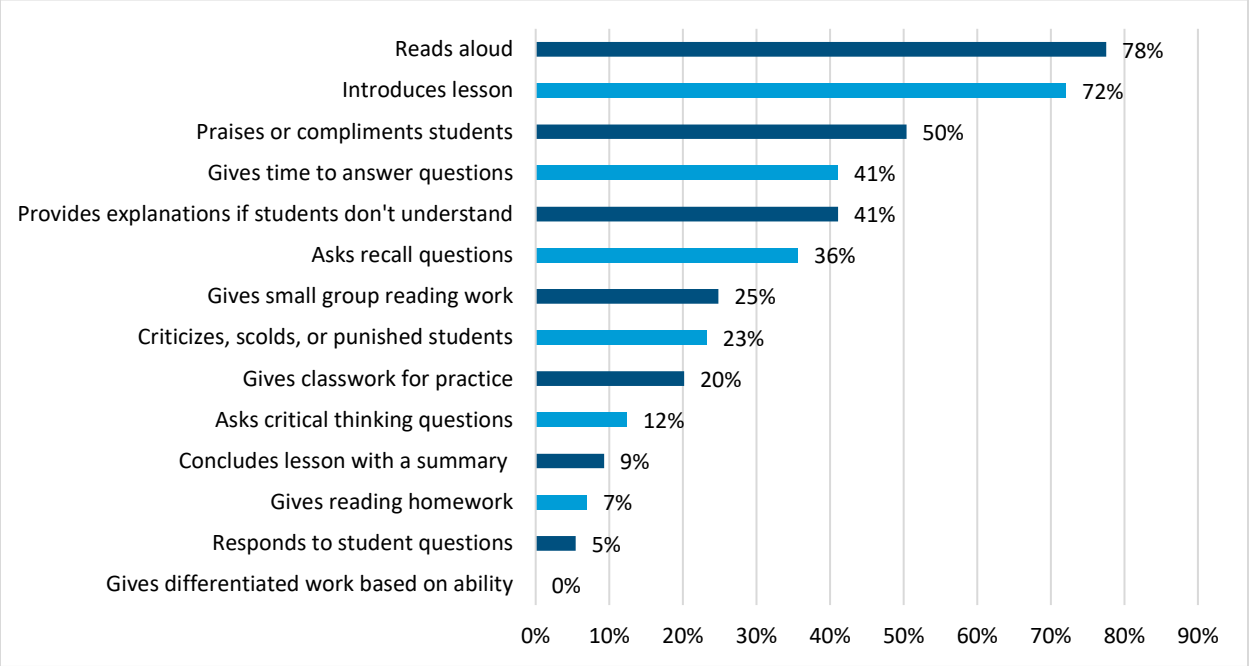
Exhibit 37. Positive Pedagogy and Inclusive Education in the Classroom

Aspect of positive pedagogy and inclusive education	Percentage
Teacher feedback is accompanied by positive comments	For Girls: 29.5%
	For Boys: 29.5%
Teacher redirects students who are not paying attention to instructions or lessons	For Girls: 8.5%
	For Boys: 10.9%
Students participate in class	Girls: 55.0%
	Boys: 54.3%
The teacher uses a variety of ways of teaching or gives students a variety of activities during the observation period	7.8%
Environmental prints are visible in the classroom at the child's level	35.7%
Teaching and learning materials are being used throughout the lesson	18.6%
A reading corner is in use in the classroom	11.6%

Note. Classroom observation tool. N *= 129.*
Note: Disaggregation between LB and non-LB is based on whether or not the school has received any LB interventions, not whether the specific teacher who was observed received any LB trainings/coaching, this data was not collected.

General Pedagogical Skills. In addition to observing positive pedagogy and inclusive education practices in the classroom, enumerators also recorded the specific teaching methods, teaching materials, feedback mechanisms, and positions that teachers used throughout the observation period. Exhibit 36 shows the proportion of teaching methods used in the classroom throughout the observation period. Each different method used by the teacher was recorded. Most teachers were observed reading aloud to students (78 percent) and introducing the lesson to the students (72 percent). Conversely, teachers were never observed providing differentiated work to students based on ability level.

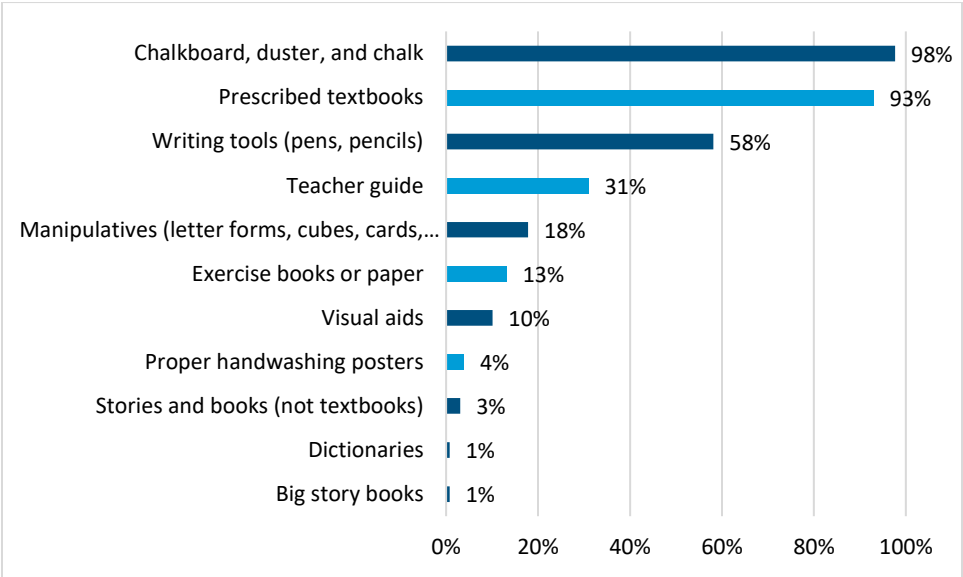
Exhibit 36. Teaching Methods Used in Classroom



Note. Classroom observation tool. N = *129.*

Exhibit 37 presents the proportion of teachers using each of the various teaching and learning materials throughout the observation period. Chalkboards were the most commonly used teaching implements in classrooms (98 percent), followed by prescribed textbooks (93 percent). Teachers were observed using dictionaries and big story books in less than one percent of all classes.

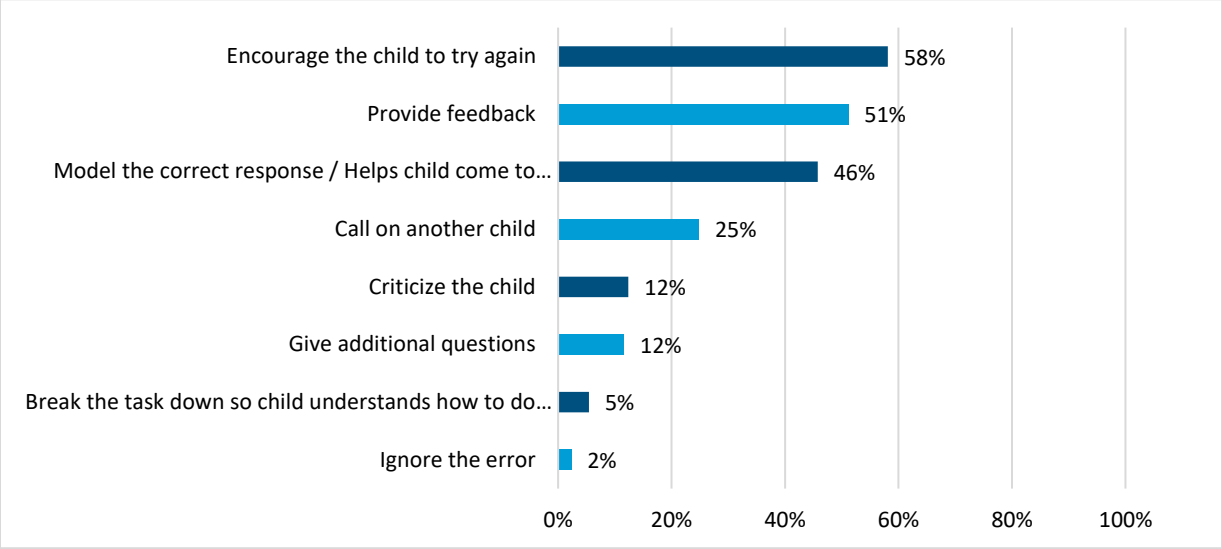
Exhibit 38. Teaching and Learning Materials Used in the Classroom



Note. Classroom observation tool. N = *129.*

Enumerators also observed the type of mechanisms and methods teachers used to provide feedback to students when they answered a question incorrectly or did not provide any response. Teachers were most often observed encouraging students to try to answer the question again (58 percent), providing feedback to the students on their response (51 percent), and helping the students come to the correct response (46 percent). Even so, these positive feedback mechanisms were only observed in about half of the classes observed. In 12 percent of classes, teachers criticized students for getting the answer wrong, and in two percent of classes the teacher just ignored the error.

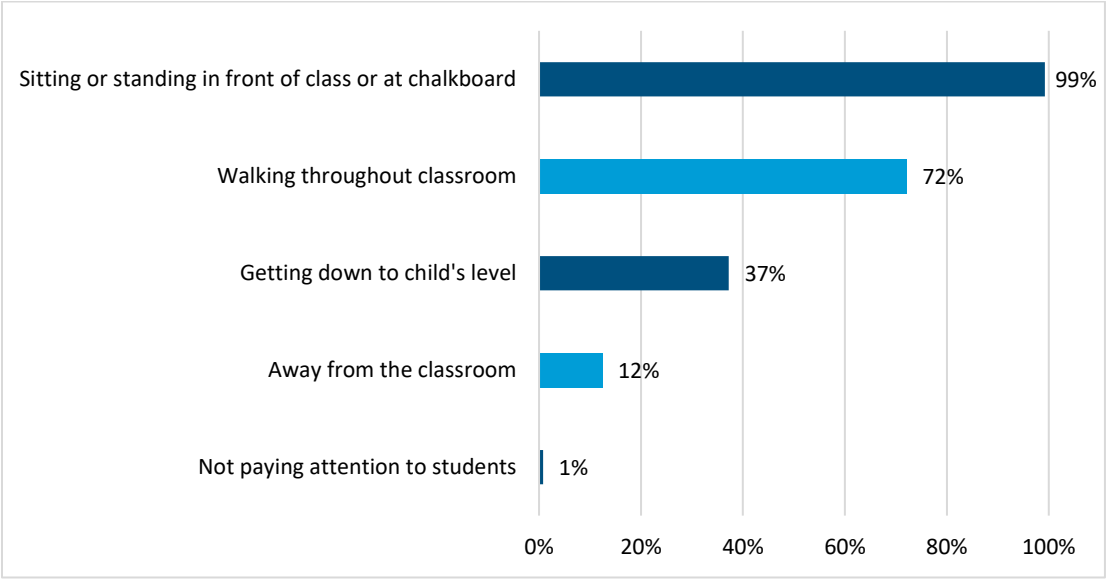
Exhibit 39. Feedback Mechanisms Used in the Classroom



Note. Classroom observation tool. N = *129.*

Lastly, enumerators noted the position of the teacher in the classroom throughout the observed lesson. In most classes, the teacher was sitting or standing in the front of the class or at the chalkboard most of the time (99 percent). In 72 percent of the classes, the teacher was observed walking throughout the classroom at some point during the lesson. In about one third of the classes, enumerators noted that the teacher got down to the child's level to assist during lessons. The teacher stepped away from the classroom at some point in 12 percent of the classes observed and was not paying attention to students or the class at all in only one percent of the classes. Overall, these data suggest teachers are fairly focused and attentive to students in the classroom.

Exhibit 40. Teacher's Position in the Classroom



Note. Classroom observation tool. *N* = 129.

Literacy-Specific Pedagogical Skills. In Grade 1 and Grade 2 classrooms, when Lao language lessons were observed, we collected data on the teachers' literacy-specific pedagogical methods. These methods are specific to each literacy subskill: phonological awareness, decoding, vocabulary, fluency, reading comprehension, and writing. Exhibit 40 shows the proportion of teachers using each method by literacy subskill in the 73 Grade 1 and Grade 2 classes observed. Each of the methods is a best practice for early grade literacy instruction. Consequently, we would expect teachers with strong literacy-specific pedagogical skills to exhibit these behaviors during Lao language lessons. While it is clear that some teachers are using these methods to teach Lao literacy in Grades 1 and 2, there is wide variation both across and within subskills. For instance, most teachers are using best practices for reading fluency instruction (ranging from 45 percent to 86 percent), but few teachers are using best practices for vocabulary instruction (ranging from seven percent to 26 percent). Further, we looked at averages for schools receiving LB programming as well as SF and schools only receiving SF separately. On the whole, teachers in LB+SF schools were more likely to be observed using best practices for literacy instruction. However, the reverse is true for almost all fluency pedagogical skills whereby we observe teachers in SF only schools more likely to exhibit best practices. In LEAPS II, none of the schools in Nong received LB programming and in this third iteration of LEAPS, all Nong schools will receive LB programming. Therefore, none of the teachers In Nong have received LB training or support previously unlike teachers at schools in all the other districts which partook in LEAPS II programming. Therefore, the literacy-specific pedagogical skills observed in Nong are likely pulling down the average across all methods.

Exhibit 41. Literacy-Specific Pedagogy in the Classroom

Pedagogical method	Overall Percentage	LB + SF Schools	SF Only Schools
Phonological awareness			
Teacher clearly and accurately pronounces individual sounds and tones that are the focus of the lesson with enough volume for students to hear.	88%	90%	84%
Teacher guides students to identify differences and similarities of sounds.	40%	40%	39%
Teacher uses oral activities that include manipulating sounds in words (ex.: breaking down a word into its smaller parts).	42%	45%	39%
Teacher uses engaging activities and materials to support instruction (ex.: hand motions, clapping, flash cards).	21%	31%	6%
Decoding			
Teacher uses activities/games/manipulatives/materials, such as letter tiles or flash cards, to help make the explicit connection between sounds (and tones) and symbols.	32%	38%	23%
Teacher uses textbook information to explain connection between sounds and symbols.	33%	36%	29%
Students are applying symbol/sound knowledge in reading and writing activities.	14%	17%	10%
Vocabulary			
Teacher puts unfamiliar words in stories read orally to students into context by using student-friendly explanations.	14%	14%	13%
Explicit vocabulary instruction is purposeful and ongoing as evidenced by lists of vocabulary words, word walls, word sorts, etc.	26%	29%	23%
Teacher relates new vocabulary to prior knowledge through questioning and other instructional activities.	8%	7%	10%
Students are actively involved with thinking about and using words in multiple contexts.	7%	10%	3%
Teacher explicitly teaches word parts (ex.: past tense, plural markers).	11%	7%	16%

Pedagogical method	Overall Percentage	LB + SF Schools	SF Only Schools
Fluency			
Teacher models fluent reading (i.e., with speed, accuracy, and correct rhythm and intonation) during read-aloud and shared readings.	86%	90%	81%
Teacher and students are academically engaged in shared reading activities (ex.: big books, choral readings, poems, songs).	45%	40%	52%
Oral reading takes place in whole and small groups.	73%	69%	77%
Oral reading takes place individually (ex.: choral reading, partner reading, individual reading, repeated reading).	73%	71%	74%
Reading comprehension			
Teacher models and encourages students to make predictions about text content using pictures, background knowledge, and text features (ex.: title, subheading, captions, illustrations).	40%	40%	39%
Teacher models and encourages students to use prior knowledge and supporting details from text to make connections with the reading selection.	15%	19%	10%
Teacher models and encourages students to retell the main idea of a story or text.	12%	17%	6%
Teacher models and encourages students to identify supporting details (ex.: who, what, where, when, why, how) of a story or text.	11%	10%	13%
Students and teachers discuss answers to higher level questions (not factual questions from the text but questions that require the students to make inferences and think critically) about shared readings and selections read.	3%	5%	3%
Writing			
Teacher asks students to create or write their own texts.	10%	7%	13%
Teacher asks students to write words or sentence as dictated.	30%	33%	26%
Teacher checks students' spelling or asks them to spell words.	18%	17%	19%
Teacher asks students to copy what is written on the board/wall.	38%	36%	42%

Note. Classroom observation tool. N = *73.*

4. Qualitative Findings

To better understand and contextualize the findings of the baseline evaluation, the AIR team gathered and analyzed qualitative data related to the design of LEAPS III activities and the perceived influence of those activities on students' literacy, nutrition, and hygiene outcomes. Through KIIs with teachers, school administrators, cooks, implementing partners, and GOL staff and through FGDs with parents and teachers, the research team sought to verify project design assumptions, identify potential barriers to implementation, provide feedback on planned activities and potential opportunities to expand or enhance activity design, and identify and assess plans for sustainability. Exhibit 41 summarizes the main findings, which we then describe in detail in the rest of this section. The baseline findings highlight the strengths and weaknesses of project design and its alignment with national government goals, current attitudes and practices related to the two strategic objectives to better understand LEAPS III's effectiveness at midterm and endline, steps taken to ensure the efficiency of project options, expectations for LEAPS III's impacts, and plans for sustainability.

Exhibit 42. Summary of Qualitative Findings

Relevance
▪ The program design is well aligned with the needs of key stakeholders, specifically teachers' need for additional training and schools' need for improved water access. ▪ Capacity-building activities aimed at local government partners are highly relevant given the planned handover of activities to the local government. ▪ Stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the provision of school meals; however, variability of community contributions to the school meals remains a significant challenge to sustainability.
Effectiveness
▪ Literacy activities are supported by positive parental attitudes toward education and school-level coordination capacities; however, additional teacher training and the provision of learning materials are needed to enable effectiveness. ▪ Although desired by parents, the lack of teachers and school resources for ECE poses a challenge for implementation. ▪ Parents and teachers are well suited to support the school meals program, but continuing to provide targeted and intentional training to VEDCs and government officials in preparation for handover of the school meals program is necessary to ensure effectiveness. ▪ District government officials and VEDCs are available to support agricultural, nutrition, and WASH-related activities within the community; however, improved district-level coordination is necessary to ensure success and overcome household constraints and barriers. ▪ Natural and epidemiological shocks may continue to disrupt project delivery, but their effect can be mitigated by supporting materials for at-home learning.
Efficiency
▪ Effective communication with stakeholders, particularly those in remote areas and non-Lao speakers, was noted as a potential challenge to addressing feedback in a timely manner. ▪ Challenges around WASH facilities, including lack of clarity around maintenance, persist. ▪ Monitoring and evaluation systems put in place during LEAPS II meet the needs of project staff but are too complex to hand off to the local government for future use
Expected Impact
▪ Additional teacher training and capacity building, including around management of multi-grade classrooms, is anticipated to result in improved teaching quality and student literacy outcomes.

- Stakeholders expect the continued provision of school meals to have a positive impact on student attendance, attentiveness, and nutritional diversity, and they cite it as a motivating factor for parents to send children to school.
- Continuing to promote proper WASH practices is expected to reinforce students' behaviors around handwashing and toothbrushing; however, students' limited access to latrines at home will likely impact changes in that domain.

Sustainability

- Factors that will facilitate sustainability of project activities include community capacity to contribute time and labor to the school meals program; existing relationships between district-, community-, and school-level stakeholders to coordinate activities; and the GOL's budgetary commitment to school meals.
- Barriers to sustainability include lack of community resources to contribute to school meals, lack of advocacy and management skills within VEDCs to manage the school meals, complex monitoring and evaluation systems and lack of government capacity to monitor activities, and potential volatility in GOL funding after handover.
- The project can support sustainability by building the capacity of VEDCs, simplifying monitoring and evaluation procedures, piloting a better community feedback procedure, and transferring institutional knowledge to government partners before handover.

4.1. Relevance

Through interviews with teachers, school administrators, local government partners, and project staff, the research team assessed the relevance of LEAPS III interventions. Interview topics focus on key stakeholder needs, challenges in education both in schools and in the broader community, school meals, and WASH activities.

4.1.1. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project Design

Strengths of the Project Design

Alignment With Needs of Key Stakeholders. With respect to core elements of the project that have remained consistent across the LEAPS project phases, stakeholders expressed a high degree of satisfaction, and we observed a strong alignment between activity design and stakeholder needs.

Teachers expressed needs that mostly revolve around insufficient student to teacher ratios leading to challenging multi-grade classroom scenarios. Additionally, some teachers found it challenging to use new teaching materials, referencing the new teaching guidebooks in particular. The need for additional training is well aligned with planned project activities around teacher training, though the program is unable to address the overall lack of teachers, due to the GOL not hiring to replace retiring teachers or teachers leaving the profession for other reasons, and the unreliability of salaries.

> I teach grades 1 and 2. Teaching multi-grade is the biggest challenge for me. I cannot follow my lesson plans. When I focus on teaching grade 2, I cannot spend enough time teaching grade 1. I feel the time of each lesson is too short to teach 2 grades together. —Teacher, Vilabouly

CRS' plan to make water access points more usable via piping, electric pumps, and solar arrays in local schools is well aligned with stakeholder feedback on issues with WASH activities in schools. Feedback consistently pointed to lack of a supply of or easy access to fresh water to use for WASH activities and for cooking school meals. Inadequate access to fresh water was observed to limit children's willingness to wash their hands and practice cleanliness activities that they are taught in school. This was also highlighted as a particular challenge during the dry season, when water becomes even less accessible.

As discussed below, parents and other community stakeholders expressed a high degree of satisfaction with school meals, indicating that school meals are well aligned with their needs. This is corroborated by school-level stakeholders, who report that many parents are happy to send their children to school in order to receive a meal, as it lessens food costs borne by the household.

Government Handover Preparations. Handover to the local government is a key priority for the current iteration of the LEAPS project. Accordingly, for this iteration of the project, the implementers have planned significant capacity-building activities specifically focused on local ownership of activities. Local government partners will be expected to run certain project activities, meetings, and local monitoring visits while accompanied by project staff charged with providing assistance and guidance. Local government stakeholders such as DESB officers expressed a high degree of confidence that the local government structures will be prepared to take over the school meals component of the program in the event of a project handoff. Stakeholders referenced the government allotment of 800 LAK per student[38] that will be provided for food, in addition to community contributions that will sustain the school meals program in the future.

Satisfaction with School Meals. A majority of stakeholders expressed satisfaction with school meals, including the quantities of food, the impact of the food on children's behavior, and the take-home rations. As the core elements of the school meals program will remain unchanged, the project remains well aligned with stakeholder needs. Stakeholders additionally expressed some concerns around the variety and quantity of food being provided in school settings. Particular reference was made to provision of vegetables and other high-nutrition foods that are not currently included. Given that the current phase of the program includes plans for local procurement of a variety of foods from local farmers, in addition to the school gardens component, we believe the school meals to be well aligned with stakeholder needs.

Weaknesses of the Project Design

Respondents also identified weaknesses in the project design that may impede progress toward the project goals and objectives. According to school administrators, cooks, and parents, weaknesses include limited food contributions to school meals, low teaching quality in schools linked to a variety of issues, and a lack of means of providing feedback for non-Lao speakers.

Variability of Community Contributions to School Meals. In preparation for a complete handover, stakeholders expressed the growing need for greater community participation and contribution of food and cooking supplies to school meals. Many parents and other community-level stakeholders said that they simply cannot contribute to the school meals because they do not have a surplus of food. While the project aims to deal with this issue by sourcing food from a variety of places, including by piloting a program to connect local farmers to schools and supporting school gardens as demonstration tools to

[38] As of June 2022, the GoL is working to increase this per student amount.

promote at home production, the issue of community contributions is something that will need to be addressed if the GOL model is to be viable.

Variability in Teaching Quality. Teaching quality was consistently identified as an issue by key stakeholders. Local principals in particular noted that teachers continued to use old techniques in the classroom despite recent updates to government standards and curricula, due to a lack of understanding or an unwillingness to change. This issue is compounded by the aforementioned issues around multi-grade classrooms. Some teachers also referenced difficulty with teaching the Lao language in the classroom given their personal lack of ability with the Lao language. Additionally, given the low national government budget for teaching salaries, the short supply of new teachers will continue to contribute to variability in teaching quality and the number of multi-grade classrooms.

Community Feedback Mechanisms. In conversations with key stakeholders, the vast majority stated that they had heard of the mechanisms put in place to provide feedback and express concerns to project staff, including a hotline and village meetings. Many stated that though they had heard of the hotline, they were more comfortable passing on their concerns to a village leader or elder who would then interface with LEAPS project staff directly. This observation was echoed by project staff interviewed by AIR, who noted that while they felt that CRS's practice of maintaining a project hotline, which has been in place since 2019, was a good practice, stakeholders seldom reached out to the project to provide feedback. This lack of feedback means that information regarding challenges and opportunities may get stuck at the field level and never reach senior project staff and motivate action. Of particular note is a gap in communications for more remote villages that do not speak the Lao language. Several stakeholders said that it would be too challenging for them to reach out to CRS to express their needs and concerns given their inability to speak Lao fluently. It is worth noting that this gap in communication is particularly concerning because of the relative vulnerability of non-Lao-speaking populations in Savannakhet Province. These weaknesses in community feedback mechanisms represent a threat to the design of the project, as feedback from key community stakeholders may never receive appropriate attention from senior project staff.

4.1.2. Alignment With Economic, Cultural, and Political Contexts

In general, respondents felt that the project gives consideration to the specific economic, cultural, and political context of Savannakhet Province. Most notably, respondents felt that the agricultural activities, particularly the introduction of the school gardens, were well aligned with the economic context in target communities. Additionally, given the hesitance in some local communities toward international donor intervention, respondents felt that the project's approach to working with VEDCs was beneficial and provided local credibility to and ownership of project activities.

Respondents did note a few caveats where the project may not be well aligned with the economic, cultural, and political context. Selection of the food offered by the school meals was a topic brought up frequently across interviews. Parents, teachers, and other community-level stakeholders referenced a preference for local sticky rice over other varieties of rice being provided by the project. The small difference between the locally preferred variety and the offered varieties is believed by respondents to lead to unnecessary food waste, when children do not eat the provided rice, and a reduced interest in school meals by children who are used to eating sticky rice at home. This finding does differ from the quantitative data which found that 96 percent of students reported being satisfied by the school meals, however desirability bias could be influencing students' responses.

Additionally, non-Lao speakers, particularly teachers and parents, reported facing challenges with some project activities. While the project has given consideration to non-Lao-speaking children—who comprise 56 percent of the quantitative sample—in the classroom by providing training and updated classroom materials for teaching the Lao language, many teachers reported not feeling well equipped to teach children who do not speak Lao. Other teachers reported that they felt challenged to teach the Lao language because they do not speak it fluently themselves.

4.1.3. Alignment With Government of Lao PDR and U.S. Government Priorities

The short- and long-term goals of the project are well aligned with the priorities of the GOL and the U.S. Government. Project implementers described the short-term project goals as consistent with the LEAPS II goals: providing high-quality school meals to children, increasing overall school attendance, and providing training and support to local teachers and school administrators to enhance learning outcomes. The long-term project goals are particularly well aligned with the U.S. Government's priorities of local ownership and sustainability, including a complete handover of school feeding activities to local government partners and community stakeholders. Project implementers said that they are focused on increasing local government and community capacity to maintain the project after the completion of LEAPS III. Project staff also expressed the opinion that upcoming activities around teacher training and working with local government to improve monitoring are well aligned with the GOL educational priorities and recently reformed curricula.[39]

4.2. Effectiveness

To facilitate evaluation of the effectiveness of LEAPS III interventions at midterm and endline, the baseline study examined the existing capacities and resources as well as the anticipated needs and challenges that the project will face in implementing activities under the six core program areas: literacy, early childhood education, school meals, agriculture, nutrition, and WASH. The research team found that LEAPS III project stakeholders are, in a number of ways, equipped to ensure effective implementation of the program, but there are a number of situational and capacity-related challenges across activities that the project should take into consideration to ensure effectiveness.

[39] https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/lao_education_development_plan_2011-2025_en.pdf

4.2.1. Literacy Activities

Capacity and Resources

Parents unanimously reported that they want their children to get an education, saying that they want their children to grow up and get well-paying jobs, which require education and literacy skills. To support literacy at home, literate parents support their children's studies by looking over their notes or textbooks together. While some parents are able to directly support their children's studies, most feel unable to do so because of their own lack of literacy skills. As the quantitative sample showed, only 44 percent of students speak Lao at home. Indeed, a majority of parents stated that they cannot support their children's education because of literacy barriers or because they do not have the time. In such cases, parents rely on others within the household or community, usually other students, to play a role in supporting literacy. Thus, even if parents are unable to directly support their children, the literacy activities of LEAPS III will be reinforced by an existing community network whereby students can get learning and literacy support outside of school.

> "For my family, both myself and my husband cannot read or write, so we could not teach our children. But they have to learn with their brothers/sisters and their friends who are neighbors. —Mother, Phine

Principals are also a key resource for coordinating literacy efforts in schools. As government staff whose role involves aligning school operations with ministerial goals, principals can ensure that literacy activities are coordinated with other school-level initiatives and activities. As noted by a pedagogical advisor (PA) in Vilabouly District, "In my opinion, the principals are able to help the government to reach its goals…because the district level has set a working plan for each school by cooperating with the principals. On the other hand, the teachers' side is not able to help because the majority of the teachers are volunteers." By virtue of their job description and tenure, principals have the capacity to play a strategic coordination role at the school level, both for literacy activities and other components of LEAPS III.

Challenges and Needs

While illiteracy is one challenge parents face in supporting their children's learning, many parents also said that they face a tradeoff between completing their agricultural work and sending their children to school. While quantitative data on student attendance indicates that students miss school rarely (refer to Section 3.3.2: Student Attendance), qualitative interviews offered a different picture: teachers, principals, and parents all reported that student absenteeism posed a key barrier to their academic success.

The research team will follow-up on this divergence at mid-line; however, the baseline qualitative data does suggest that the agricultural calendar, in particular, impacts attendance levels. Parents tend to pull their boys and girls out of school—especially during harvesting seasons (October–December and May–June)—to get needed help, a trend that disproportionately affects girls, as they are more likely to look after younger siblings while their parents are working in the fields. These practices illustrate the difficulties that parents experience in supporting the attendance, learning, and literacy of their children.

At schools, teachers and principals noted a variety of issues that obstruct the literacy activities of LEAPS III. Teaching quality plays a key role in achieving positive academic outcomes, but teachers and principals in Lao PDR schools lack resources. As noted by a principal in Phalanxay, "One of the reasons students do not want to come to school is the teachers do not have … interesting teaching activities. This is because

we do not have enough teachers to teach in every class and some teachers teach multi grades." Respondents said that they lack pedagogical training, including training on methods for teaching multi-grade classrooms and for teaching students whose primary language is not Lao. While teachers had some training in managing multi-grade classrooms, these respondents said they still lacked the confidence to implement the training. However, many more teachers said they had no training on these topics and did not know where to get such training. While principals are well positioned to connect teachers to resources and training, higher-level project staff argued that most principals themselves lack the training and technical support to meet the needs of their teachers. LEAPS III is planning to address this issue through learning circles and coaching, however, the lack of technical capacity in schools could reduce the effectiveness of the LEAPS III literacy activities if not addressed adequately through program activities.

Importantly, teachers and principals also cited the lack materials such as paper, pens, pencils, textbooks, and literacy cards, all of which are needed to instruct a class using diverse and engaging methods. Like capacity needs, resource needs must be addressed to ensure the effectiveness of LEAPS III program activities.

4.2.2. Early Childhood Education Activities

Capacity and Resources

Among the primary challenges parents face in supporting their children's attendance in school is the lack of childcare for younger children. Thus, the anticipated LEAPS III ECE activity will be especially welcomed by parents. In villages where there is no pre-primary school—about half of villages, according to the officer of the District Education and Sports Bureau (DESB) for one of the LEAPS III target districts—it is often the case that young children are brought to school with elder siblings or that elder siblings are made to stay home to care for the younger ones. This trend particularly affects poor families and girl siblings. A mother in Phalanxay District noted, "Since we have babies at home, sometimes we need our children who are studying at the primary school to help us to take care of the babies in case we need to go to field work. So, it means that our children need to miss class sometimes." Across LEAPS III communities, parents expressed the need for access to pre-primary education and explained how childcare can improve the future achievement of the enrolled children as well as the attendance and performance of their elder siblings.

In support of ECE activities, VEDCs will be a valuable partner in community enrollment efforts. VEDCs have the unique capacity to coordinate an array of stakeholders, both at the local and district level. This capacity depends on a crucial resource possessed by VEDCs: community trust. Because of this trust, VEDCs can mobilize community members, a fact noted by principals, implementing staff, and government officers alike. As one school principal offered, "The VEDC is very useful and supportive. For example, they encourage the parents to send their children to school. … Besides that, VEDC members are the people who gather the villagers to repair the school building, tables, and benches. Moreover, because of them, the villagers come to clean the schoolyard and school building before a new term starts every year." VEDCs play a vital role in all target communities, and their trustworthiness, if maintained, will facilitate the awareness and enrollment efforts in the ECE activities of LEAPS III.

Challenges and Needs

Despite community interest in and support for ECE, respondents in VEDCs, communities, and schools highlighted that the lack of trained teachers and teaching facilities will act as an obstacle to ECE efforts in target communities. Several communities that currently have pre-primary classrooms mentioned that the

teachers were poorly trained and often absent. Moreover, many schools already face multi-grade classrooms and do not have the human resources to provide ECE without additional support from the project or the government.

Because LEAPS III will take a non-formal approach to ECE, for instance by recruiting classroom facilitators from among community members, the lack of formally trained personnel is unlikely to inhibit the project activities. However, such capacity and resource issues reflect the long-term challenges to meeting the ECE needs of the target communities.

4.2.3. School Meal Activities

Capacity and Resources

Parents primarily support school meal activities in their role as cooks. Most project communities rely on a rotation of village women, generally mothers of students, to cook school meals. The system is imperfect, and there were some reports of cooks being absent during harvesting seasons. However, cooks themselves expressed their willingness or desire to support students in this role. In most communities, VEDCs were responsible for mobilizing parents to serve as cooks. When given notice for their assigned cooking days by VEDCs, mothers have the motivation and often the availability to serve the in school meals program as cooks.

> We like to cook and prepare the food. We feel happy to see the students having lunch at the school. When they are full, they play at the schools without going back home. —Cook, Phalanxay

School staff can also aid the effectiveness of the school meals activities in several ways. Teachers and principals divide their duties differently from school to school, but generally teachers seem to play a more direct oversight role in school meal activities, whereas principals tend to work at a higher level to coordinate with the VEDC, the community, and government partners. In terms of capacity, many teachers and principals have the literacy and numeracy skills to manage the accounting aspects of the school meals program at the local level. As one teacher explained, “Every day I report the number of children coming to school to the storage manager, and I also calculate the number of rice, lentils, and cooking oil for making lunch for those children.” Teachers and principals not only help with day-to-day operations by calculating quantities of food to prepare but also play a monitoring role by tracking student attendance and school meal operations, data that are reported to CRS.

Challenges and Needs

At the level of cooks, LEAPS III will have to overcome several key challenges. In particular, cooks need new equipment, additional training, and improved water sources. Across the target schools, stakeholders reported that they lacked serving equipment (e.g., bowls and spoons) for school meals. Many also mentioned the need for cleaning equipment such as buckets and washing liquid. Missing equipment is linked to lack or disrepair of a school meals storage room. Thus, many VEDCs, cooks, and principals pointed to the need for materials to build or repair storage space. LEAPS III will seek to address this issue at the beginning of the project by working with communities to support rehabilitation of cooking facilities.

Cooks also need additional training on preparing school meals, as there was notable feedback that children did not enjoy the food. While survey data with students showed high satisfaction with school meals—three percent said that they disliked the meal’s taste—interviewed parents and cooks highlighted

that some students preferred the food they ate at home, which differed from the school meals in their ingredients; or they grew tired of eating the same food every day.

Cooks themselves took responsibility for some of these issues, noting how they simply did not know how to prepare the food well. These cooks said that the food preparation training in prior phases of LEAPS failed to be passed down to newer cooks and to the large group of women in the community who helped cook school meals. As one principal noted, “There were three cooks who participated in the cooking training provided at the beginning of the project. However, all of them are no longer cooks, they are too old to be cooks. And the new cooks don’t know how to cook. No one teaches them which results in the food not being tasty.”

Moreover, while VEDCs are well-positioned to identify the emerging needs of the school meals program, they generally lack the financial resources to address such needs. For instance, VEDCs in several villages recognized the above-mentioned issues with school meal storage facilities, and some were able to raise the funds for construction materials. Many VEDCs have failed to do so, however, relaying that they were stalled by a lack of materials and funding, “The villagers and VEDC can share the labor for building the huts and building the solar system. But we would like the project to support us with the budget and tank, zinc, cement, and nails because we don't have money to buy them.” In short, VEDCs require financial and material resources to support immediate implementation of the school meals program as well as a long-term strategy to address these issues after handover to ensure sustainability of the program beyond the life of the project.

Further, those working with VEDCs recognize their ability to mobilize the community but believe that they themselves could benefit from technical and literacy training. If trained on community engagement and organizing, as well as literacy and numeracy, VEDCs could more effectively oversee school meal operations during LEAPS III and beyond.

4.2.4. Agricultural Activities

Capacity and Resources

The ability of District Agriculture and Forestry Officers (DAFOs) to provide technical support to communities, as well as their ability to network with farmers, will enhance the agricultural activities of LEAPS III. With sector-specific skills, DAFOs can offer technical support to the school garden activities envisioned for LEAPS III. Moreover, DAFOs bring district-specific knowledge to the project, having worked throughout the district on LEAPS and other projects, and can assist the project staff and communities in networking with farmers in the district.

At the community level, VEDCs have the unique capacity to coordinate between stakeholders at the local and district level. Some DAFOs said that they always notified VEDCs before coming to communities and relied on them to gather community members for agricultural trainings and activities. Many DAFOs said that they lacked good communication with communities, and though coordination may be deficient, VEDCs are a key asset for bridging technical knowledge at the district level and community resources and needs.

Challenges and Needs

DAFOs noted that they and other project stakeholders lack effective coordination, preventing the DAFOs from monitoring community needs and collaborating with other ministry partners, such as District Health Officers (DHOs). In the past, coordination has hinged on DESB officers, which meant that DAFOs were

often not involved in creating work plans for schools, nor included in DESB visits to schools. One DESB officer explained how coordination can fall apart in practice: "Sometimes I have problems with communication with other stakeholders. And sometimes, I tell them late for a working plan. So, sometimes agriculture and health people may not visit the village many times." A more formalized mode of coordination between district-level actors is therefore needed to ensure full participation by all relevant ministries.

Beyond coordination, agricultural activities intended to obtain school meal inputs from local farmers will face several challenges. Respondents generally expressed skepticism that local farmers will have surplus crops to contribute to the program. Several said that decreasing yields and recurring floods threaten the consistency of local food supplies and will complicate efforts to source school meal foods locally during LEAPS III.

4.2.5. Nutrition Activities

Capacity and Resources

As with agricultural activities, the technical skills of DAFOs and DHOs will support the nutritional activities of LEAPS III. District-level officers use their localized knowledge to tailor nutrition activities to the unique challenges and resources faced by each district. VEDCs can once again play a coordination role when it comes to nutrition activities by mobilizing community members, parents, and cooks to attend trainings.

Challenges and Needs

Households struggle to provide adequate nutrition for children, largely due to economic constraints. Parents reported that they often feed their children sticky rice alongside one or more seasonal vegetables. Sources of protein like fish, frogs, crab, and eggs are rare in children's diets; one set of mothers said that the family will have eggs or meat only a few times per year. For this reason, communities asked that school meals be diversified (e.g., by adding eggs, meat, and fish) to contribute more substantially to children's diets. Whether trying to improve childhood nutrition through school meals or through nutritional training, LEAPS III implementers will need to be cognizant of household feeding practices.

4.2.6. WASH Activities

Capacity and Resources

As the survey data showed, schools are generally well-equipped with latrines and handwashing stations. Key to promoting hygienic practices are DHOs, the primary district-level resource for WASH activities in LEAPS III. DHOs are well-equipped to conduct school-based trainings on latrine use and handwashing, but the efficacy of these trainings has been varied: While teachers and principals reported that students often wash their hands at school, most students do not use latrines because they are not accustomed to them.

Meanwhile, at home, many parents encourage hygienic practices such as handwashing and daily baths. Other practices such as boiling water and brushing teeth were occasionally reported but are less likely to be practiced at home. Nonetheless, there is notable awareness among parents of WASH best practices.

Challenges and Needs

The largest challenge to the effectiveness of WASH activities is the lack of infrastructure. Respondents report that most households lack latrines and improved sources of drinking water. At school, water supply issues also arise, as cooks note that they struggle to source water for school meals. Frequently, freshwater sources were far away from the school, and where there was a water pump in the village, it was broken and had not been repaired. While broken pumps forced some cooks to turn to freshwater sources, lack of a working pump halted school meal operations in a couple of schools.

> I think children cannot be completely clean because we often do not have water at school. Children bring drinking water from home, and they go to the forest for toilet purposes.
>
> —VEDC member, Nong

CRS-provided water filters seem to be working well in some schools, and survey data indicated that 59 percent of schools reported having access to clean drinking water for students. Nonetheless, a sizable subset of schools reported that their filter had broken or had gone missing, perhaps explaining the lack of clean water in 41 percent of schools. Even in those with working water filters, principals and teachers asked for additional filters to meet the demand for drinking water in the school and community.

DHOs generally said that they feel well equipped to do more trainings in communities, but they highlighted that they lacked certain materials that could help them with this task. In particular, respondents suggested the project provide informational books and posters about WASH practices (e.g., handwashing) and new equipment for schools, including soap, washbasins, and water filters. In addition, they need the materials to repair broken wells.

4.2.7. Anticipating Shocks

The arrival of COVID-19 had a severe impact on the education system in Lao PDR and therefore on the implementation of LEAPS II. In anticipation of future community-level shocks, this section examines how future shocks may affect LEAPS III and ways in which the project can prepare to achieve the intended outcomes despite any shocks.

In past years, COVID-19 outbreaks led to school closures; administrators would close the school for weeks on end when an outbreak occurred. However, the current education policy is to keep schools open amid outbreaks. Students who are positive with COVID-19 are sent home to recover, and as long as teachers are not sick, they continue their work in the classroom.

The educational effects of COVID-19 on students are not unlike the effects of other environmental shocks. Indeed, some communities saw extreme floods within the past year, forcing some students to stay home for days or weeks until the water receded and they could safely make their way to school. Both during COVID-19 closures and floods, parents reported that students simply did not study. Moreover, these shocks can increase household poverty. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, market prices rose and reduced the ability of families to cover their basic expenses, such as food and education. Because of the floods, families reported that their crop yields declined, constricting their primary source of income. Altogether, primary school–age children lost valuable time in the classroom while their households have suffered deteriorating conditions.

As for the potential impact on LEAPS III, shocks like these and the resulting school closures impede project activities, a phenomenon that led LEAPS II to offer take-home food rations to families during the COVID-19 pandemic. In LEAPS III, the anticipated shocks, whether natural or biological, are also likely to be characterized by short-term student absences. Thus, the project can support student learning by training teachers on how to support at-home learning and literacy. Respondents suggested that teachers give students homework, instruct them on how to study with textbooks, or even make at-home visits to check on student learning, when possible. Because most schools lack adequate textbooks for the student population, this too will help schools support learning amid shocks. Other project activities, such as those pertaining to agriculture, nutrition, and WASH, must respond flexibly to school closures and other natural disasters, but trainings and activities should be able to be carried out with only minor delays. Lastly, LEAPS III can prepare to support nutritional outcomes amid shocks by establishing procedures for take-home food rations that can be activated should the need arise.

4.3. Efficiency

Through interviews conducted with CRS project staff, government partners, and key stakeholders in project schools, the research team assessed challenges and lessons learned from previous project phases, potential internal and external threats to successful program implementation, and planned actions to help promote efficiency during LEAPS III implementation. The AIR team identified the following challenges and areas for consideration to ensure efficient implementation of LEAPS III activities.

> We don't know what to talk about with the project staff. If we have anything, we just tell the village head. This is because we are not good in Lao and don't get used to talking with other people or strangers. —Cook, Vilabouly

Communication With Project Stakeholders. Project staff have gone to great lengths to set up lines of communication with stakeholders in the field, including monthly project meetings in stakeholder villages and the project hotline that anyone can use to provide feedback. However, one particular obstacle noted was communication with stakeholders, particularly those in remote areas, as well as receiving timely and relevant feedback from project beneficiaries on their concerns. Several stakeholders, including parents and teachers, reported that they were aware of mechanisms in place to provide feedback to the project, such as the hotline number, but that they did not feel comfortable using this means of communication. This was a particular challenge for non-Lao speakers who expressed discomfort with the idea of making a phone call to project staff in the Lao language. Community-level stakeholders said that they would prefer to provide feedback at official village meetings and to communicate through village leaders. Conversely, government level partners felt that they had ample opportunity to communicate with project staff via regular calls and joint monitoring visits.

Community Contributions to School Meals. Although community members appear eager to contribute to the school meals program, project stakeholders reported a number of issues that limited community contributions to school meals that would otherwise diversify the school meals with local food sources. Primary among them was poverty. Village leaders and school administrators request community members to contribute to the school meals, but parents report not having sufficient food at home to begin with, let alone extra to give to the school and the community. Stakeholders also reported that local farmers often do not have sufficient harvest to be able to contribute to school meals.It is expected that lack of meal diversity could have an impact on school meals. In the opinion of one parent interviewed: "Some children don't eat the school meal because the project only provides rice, cooking oil and lentils but no meat and fish or eggs. The taste of school meals is not good. The children are bored. Even if the school cook every day, no children eat." Given that the project design takes community contributions into consideration in the distribution of food, this lack of community food causes a shortfall in supplies during particularly hard time or poor harvests. Current project plans to implement school gardens may help with this potential shortfall.

> "Water filters in some schools cannot be used. Some schools also have problems with people entering school at night without permission and break school property…Today there are only 9 schools still using water filters regularly. – DESB, Nong

WASH Challenges. Many stakeholders interviewed reported consistent challenges with WASH facilities around maintenance and access to water. Government partners reported that monitored schools often lack enough water filters. Others reported that their school did not have enough water for their needs, as the water came from a single underground source. Both WASH activities and a school capacity to cook meals depend on having a reliable fresh water supply.

MEAL System Adaptations. LEAPS III project staff said that the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems put in place during LEAPS II provide relevant and timely data to assess implementation progress and inform necessary program adaptations. While this system has been useful to project staff, the system is considered too complex to be handed off to government-level stakeholders when the project ends. The project has plans in place to adapt and simplify the MEAL system to create a tool better suited to the needs of local stakeholders after the project is handed off.

4.4. Expected Impact

At the baseline stage of the evaluation, the findings on impact relate to stakeholders' expectations of the project as a whole and their specific expectations for education and health outcomes. This information will be helpful in understanding stakeholders' perceptions of impact after project implementation begins.

4.4.1. Strategic Objective 1: Improved Literacy of School-Age Children

Quality of Literacy Instruction. Government partners, particularly PAs and school principals, reported feeling a significant gap in literacy instruction quality and capacity. This was often reported as a lack of teaching capacity due to a lack of training or to challenging circumstances in multi-grade classrooms. Government partners generally expect that additional training for teachers on classroom management will have an impact on the quality of overall literacy instruction by providing teachers with the tools and strategies necessary to better engage their students. Similarly, teachers reported that they frequently felt

overwhelmed by multi-grade classrooms and that they do not have the tools and strategies necessary to deal with students with competing needs at the same time. They expressed a desire for additional specific training on how to handle multi-grade classrooms and for improved learning materials and school supplies so that students do not need to share textbooks. Teachers expect that additional materials and training on classroom management will have a large impact on their capacity to teach literacy concepts.

Student Attentiveness. Many teachers and principals reported that they expect the provision of school meals to have a positive impact on student attentiveness in the classroom. They feel that when students attend school more regularly because of the meals, they are more likely to actively participate in the learning process and feel more confident in their own abilities. Stakeholders also indicated that they anticipated that improved teaching techniques and learning materials would have an impact on student attentiveness because students would be more engaged by the updated lessons and visual aids. Teachers expect that additional training and the provision of updated materials will also have an impact on student attentiveness.

Student Attendance. Many respondents said that they expect the school meals program to continue improving student attendance rates. Government partners, school administrators, and parents all feel that the provision of school meals is a highly motivating factor and causes parents to send their children to school more frequently, both because the children feel greater motivation to attend and because the parents see the school meals as a cost saving measure. Some respondents indicated that they thought that the school meals program has a greater impact on children from poorer families because the prospect of a free daily meal for their children is especially motivating. Teachers also indicated that children are more likely to stay at school for the entire school day because of the school meals; if they were to leave for lunch, they would be tempted not to return for the second half of the day.

> We think that the school meals program has a good impact on the students' attendance and performance. The students have more understanding of their learning. They are healthy and clever. —Mother, Phine

Capacity of Local Government. A majority of officers from the local government reported having participated in some kind of training provided by CRS in the past. One consistent issue reported by respondents was a lack of understanding of new educational standards and curricula coming from the national government. Government partners expect that additional future trainings will have an impact on their capacity to execute their duties, including training local schools and teachers and conducting monitoring activities.

Both health and agriculture officers reported that not only do they need additional training, they need additional funds to conduct monitoring properly and to coordinate with other education-focused government partners and with the LEAPS III project. While additional training will better help these officers to understand their role in the school meals program post-handover, their lack of an adequate budget threatens their overall impact.

4.4.2. Strategic Objective 2: Increased Use of Health and Dietary Practices

WASH Practices in Schools. Teachers and school administrators reported having frequently worked with their students to promote the use of proper WASH practices during the school day. Respondents expect

that this teaching will result in increased handwashing and toothbrushing and proper latrine use. One principal reported that since the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and students in their school are paying much more attention to handwashing and sanitation activities in general. Other teachers reported that they did not expect the WASH activities in the school to have much impact on proper latrine use because the children do not have access to latrines in their everyday life. While they reported teaching WASH practices, they felt the overall impact on out-of-school behavior would be minimal. Another potential limitation on the expected impact of WASH activities in school was ease of access to water, with some schools mentioning that water was either not easy to access or not accessible at all.

WASH Practices in the Home. Parents reported that children wash their hands more frequently at home and before meals because they have become used to the practice in school and during lessons. They expected that further practice in school will continue to improve WASH practices in the home. One limitation mentioned was a lack of soap in the home to use during WASH activities. While many families reported having access to a nearby well or other village water source, very few reported having access to soap or sanitation supplies.

Improved Nutrition. Parents and cooks reported that children ate more nutritious and filling foods as a result of the school meals program. These community members mentioned that children had access not just to the standard supply of rice and lentils but to vegetables that were from the community gardens, brought from home, or otherwise donated by community members. One cook noted, "The school meals are addressing needs and help the children and families in the community. This is because the school meals have provided rice, lentils, and cooking oil. This can help the students have lunch at school. The people in the village also get this support. Besides that, in the last couple of years, there were also some activities in the school such as catfish culture and vegetable gardens that were supported by the CRS project. These products have been used for the food ingredients."

4.5. Sustainability

The sustainability of LEAPS activities will depend on the capacity of current stakeholders to support the project in the long term, the barriers making it difficult to provide such support, and the ability of LEAPS III to mitigate key barriers. By focusing on the handover of school meal activities, this section provides a snapshot of sustainability considerations that must be at the fore of LEAPS III implementation. Notably, resources and barriers at the government level will impact the sustainability of agriculture, nutrition, and WASH activities.

4.5.1. Foundations for Sustainability

Beneficiary communities and the GOL can support the handover of LEAPS school meal activities in several important ways. While respondents were skeptical of community members' ability to contribute food or money to the school meals program after handover, communities are likely to continue offering their support to the school meals program through their time and labor. As one DAFO summarized, "I think villagers cannot provide food to school. However, they can take part in other activities such as making school fences, building fish tanks, and repairing schools." These sentiments were echoed by some school staff and parents, who noted that while most

> Budget is important, and there has been a lot of progress. There is actually a budget line now.
> – Implementing Partner Staff

families lack surplus food and money to contribute to the program, they are able and willing to offer their labor and time to carry on school feeding activities.

At the level of the district government, respondents indicated how established channels of coordination between district officers, VEDCs, and communities strengthen the potential sustainability of LEAPS III activities. Respondents made suggestions to improve coordination (refer to Section 4.2: Effectiveness), but they generally expressed comfort with working alongside one another after project handover to carry on school feeding, agriculture, nutrition, and other project activities. In addition, the commitment of the national government, which is evident in the budget allocated to sustaining school feeding programs, will undoubtedly enhance the likelihood of the project's sustainability.

4.5.2. Barriers to Sustainability

Despite these foundations for sustainability, LEAPS stakeholders will have to overcome a number of barriers in order to continue school feeding operations and other project activities in the long run.

Barriers for Communities

Across all project activities, sustainability will depend on the involvement and support of communities; however, respondents highlighted three main obstacles to supporting school meals—obstacles that exemplify the community-level barriers that will hinder the sustainability of LEAPS. First, communities will struggle to provide contributions of food and money for school meals program. As a cook pointed out, "Some families do not have enough rice for their consumption the whole year, especially during September and October." Even with the government funding, some communities will rely on community contributions of rice to run school meals after handover. This barrier is one that must be addressed if the GOL's model for the school meals program is to be viable in the long run. LEAPS III will seek to address this issue by piloting a program to connect local farmers to schools and supporting school gardens as demonstration tools to promote at home production.

Second, although previous phases on LEAPS have been successful in building the capacity of VEDC members, VEDC members across interviewed communities reported that they lack the specific skills needed to properly manage a school meals budget. At present, VEDCs know that they will receive a lump sum for school meal operations after handover, but respondents explained that they lack the skills to create a budget and manage the money to continue offering school meals. Therefore, more training of VEDC members is needed to build these capacities. LEAPS III will seek to address this issue by providing targeted capacity building to VEDCs to manage school-based initiatives.

Third, various project staff noted the project may lack the community support to continue the school meals program in the long run. While many parents expressed their satisfaction with current school meal operations, it is unclear if they will support the project after handover. Stakeholders suggested the need to "persuade" parents further over the course of LEAPS III by showing them the impact that school meals have had on their children's learning. Because local participation will be key to sustainability, implementers will need to develop strategies to ensure community buy-in.

Barriers for Government Partners

Within the GOL, potential barriers to sustainability relate to the lack of capacity to carry out M&E activities and the precarity of government funding. DESB officers currently charged with monitoring LEAPS III activities highlighted that they visit schools once per month, usually to monitor teaching quality and student performance and also to check on school feeding operations. While equipped to handle these

activities, DESBs have limited time to devote to the LEAPS M&E activities, leading them to suggest that monitoring duties be shared among district officers such as DAFOs, DHOs, and PAs. At the moment, these non-DESB officers say that they rarely visit schools; most had not visited a LEAPS school within the past year or had visited one only once or twice. One DHO officer commented, "I think the project should support the budget for DESB, agriculture and health people visiting schools to monitor public school meals. I think the government may have limited money for monitoring activities."

Higher-level project staff echoed this conclusion, stating that monitoring capacity was strained at the district level and that LEAPS monitoring tasks were added to a long list of pre-existing DESB responsibilities. This issue is compounded by the fact that the current M&E procedures are complex and rigorous. While this has served implementers well during the phases of LEAPS, implementing partner staff indicated that M&E procedures would need to be simplified and streamlined in order to be sustained after handover.

Further, the survival of LEAPS will depend on a seamless transition from CRS implementation to government ownership. Any delays in government funding threaten to halt school feeding and other project activities, potentially stalling the momentum of the past years. Some project staff worry that the GOL's intention to rely on external funding to support the project may make project funding volatile.

Barriers for LEAPS III Implementers

Importantly, some barriers to sustainability are pertinent to the implementation of LEAPS III. For instance, COVID-19 was mentioned by project staff as a sustainability concern. Because LEAPS III will ramp up efforts to build capacity for the project handover, any disruption of project activities by COVID-19 may hamper the viability of the project in the long run.

Moreover, project staff will need to address the lack of an effective community feedback mechanism in this phase of LEAPS. In the past, CRS has relied on a feedback hotline as a mechanism for soliciting community reactions to the project activities. However, one staff explained that "anyone can provide feedback and ask questions via the hotline, but we don't get very many calls, and it's not the preferred means of communication. Some of the feedback gets stuck at the field level and doesn't make it up the chain to senior management." Community stakeholders suggested that they would be more willing to provide feedback through regular face-to-face meetings with project staff or through WhatsApp, a platform with which they are more comfortable. Government officials echoed these suggestions and added that they prefer to provide feedback through government channels (e.g., communication with district and provincial officials). The project will need to identify, pilot, and train stakeholders on an improved community feedback mechanism prior to handover in order to strengthen community buy-in during LEAPS III and beyond.

4.5.3. Recommended Strategies for Sustainability

The following recommendations made by the project stakeholders offer guidance for addressing some of the barriers to sustainability outlined above.

Strategies for Community Barriers

- **Establish school meal supports.** Because communities will struggle to contribute to the school meals program, LEAPS III must examine other methods for schools to fund and resource the program in the long run. Many stakeholders pointed out the potential usefulness of school gardens and school livestock operations (e.g., raising fish) for this purpose, but so far these

activities have not been widely adopted within communities. Indeed, school-level agricultural activities can be hindered by difficulties sourcing water as well as the lack of maintenance during school breaks. LEAPS III will therefore need to take a contextualized approach to establishing school meal supports in each beneficiary community.

- **Train VEDCs.** Respondents agree that the school meal budget should be handled at the local level, but the project will need to train VEDCs and teachers on managing the funds in order to continue operations after the handover. Moreover, VEDCs can benefit from additional, more targeted project and financial management training to enable their role in coordinating agriculture, nutrition, and WASH activities.

Strategies for Governmental Barriers

- **Extend M&E resources.** Handover of M&E activities to district officers will require both training on the simplified procedures and a budget provision to carry out M&E tasks. DESBs said that they need a budget to make visits to communities and to add monitoring capacity to their office. Meanwhile, if M&E procedures are to be simplified and streamlined through the course of LEAPS III, DESB staff and other district officers will need training to ensure that they can take over these activities after the handover. Also, modifying the M&E components appropriately will depend on finding a suitable and effective method for strengthening community feedback.
- **Make arrangements at the national level.** To enhance the integration of the school meals program into the operations of the national government, LEAPS staff made two suggestions. First, the project's national strategy, drafted in 2015, should be updated in preparation for the handover and aligned with the national government's goals for the program. Second, the national school feeding program budget should be codified in legislation to the extent possible.

Strategies for LEAPS III Implementation Barriers

- **Transfer knowledge.** The transfer of knowledge and skills to local stakeholders is crucial to the sustainability of LEAPS. In particular, LEAPS III should focus on transferring M&E systems to government partners and building local capacity to attract and manage funds. One implementing partner staff member usefully suggested that the GOL can be equipped to attract donor funds in support of the school meals program: "One of the things the project can do is to provide the government with skills training on how to manage funds coming from outside the country—managing finances, preparing reports—giving them the skills to meet donor requirements."

> Within CRS … there is a focus on transferability of our knowledge, technology, and skills to promote sustainability.
> —Implementing Partner Staff

- **Prepare for shocks.** Because COVID-19 is a key threat to the sustainability of LEAPS, project staff indicated the need to anticipate and prepare for the interruption of program activities by this and other shocks (refer to Section 4.2.7: Anticipating Shocks). Pertinent recommendations include exploring digital platforms for project activities and building capacity in communities to support the project outcomes amid interruptions in schooling.

5. Conclusions

In this section, we summarize the key findings organized by key program components within each LEAPS III strategic objective and by OECD Development Assistance Committee criteria.

5.1. Key Findings and Implications for the Main Strategic Objectives

5.1.1. Strategic Objective 1: Improved Literacy of School-Age Children

Literacy. At baseline, the reading skills of Grade 2 students are at relatively low levels, with only 9.3 percent of students classified as readers. Of those classified as readers, 66 percent were classified as beginning readers and only 34 percent were classified as grade-level readers. A little more than half of those classified as readers can read with comprehension (57 percent), compared to fewer than half of nonreaders who can listen with comprehension (43 percent). Scores were slightly better for word/phrases to picture matching but remained generally low: students could correctly match, on average, 32.6 percent of words/phrases to a corresponding picture. This rate was similar across sexes, while Lao speakers and students in Atsaphone district performed better than students speaking another main language and hailing from other districts. With regards to expressive vocabulary knowledge and symbol knowledge, almost two thirds (62 percent for both) of Grade 2 students boast sufficient knowledge of these concepts. In general, students who indicated that Lao was their primary language performed better than non-Lao speakers except for a couple of small exceptions (reading and listening comprehension, and symbol knowledge comprehension). Similarly, students in Atsaphone and Vilabouly performed better than students in other districts, most notably students in Nong and Phine, which appear to be lagging behind. This may be related to the fact that 98 percent of students in Nong and 47 percent of students in Phine indicated that the primary language spoken at home is not Lao.

In reviewing the literacy outcomes at baseline, we noted that the reading levels of Grade 2 students, are lower than the endline values for the LEAPS II evaluation, which classified 10 percent of Grade 2 students as readers. This deviation is likely due to a number of factors, the most important of which is reduced instruction time and reduced curriculum due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, schools have experienced intermittent closures that have resulted in fewer instruction days than the GOL standard of 175 instruction days between September and May. The most significant reduction in instruction days was during the 2021–2022 academic calendar, when on average schools were open for 70 instructions days, only about 40 percent of the total instruction days required by the GOL. Secondary research indicates that students who are out of school for extended periods of time experience significant learning loss, and this effect is more pronounced in a context such as Lao PDR, where students already experience low levels of academic support at home. Given that we are looking at Grade 2 students, due to school closures and fewer instruction days over the past two years, students may not have even acquired foundational skills necessary for literacy. Looking at the average instruction days over the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years (118 and 70 instruction days respectively), the instruction days in those two years combined barely exceeds the standard number of instruction days (188 instruction days over two years versus the standard 175 instruction days). As such, it is reasonable to expect that these Grade 2 students may have only acquired the equivalent of Grade 1 skills, further compounding issues of learning loss. In addition to fewer instruction days during the 2021–2022 school year, the MOES condensed the primary school curriculum to 80 percent, in effect giving schools a third of the normal amount of

instruction time to cover 70 percent of the curriculum. The reduced number instruction days in tandem with the reduce curriculum is likely contributing to low learning outcomes. The potential impact of the reduced number of instruction days during the baseline school year will be explored at midterm and endline, as improved reading outcomes at midterm and endline could be a function of the return to normal instruction days rather a function of the project.

Quality of Literacy Instruction. Overall, teachers differed in their ability to teach literacy concepts. While the majority of teachers were found to be reading to students in school, 32.5 percent of students still reported that their teacher never reads to them in class. Similarly, about half of the students reported that they never played symbol games or engaged in reading activities in school. Only eight percent of teachers used a variety of teaching and learning methods in the classroom even though teaching and learning materials were used in almost 20 percent of the classes observed. Consistent with the findings on student literacy outcomes, Nong appears to lag behind other districts in teacher performance, however this is to be expected given that Nong has not revied LB programming previously but will in the third phase of LEAPS.

With regards to gender-inclusive teaching approaches, in general teachers appear to be practicing such approaches, paying similar attention to, providing similar feedback to, and allowing equal participation of boys and girls in the classroom. However, when it comes to positive pedagogy, positive feedback mechanisms were only observed in about half of the classes. In 12 percent of classes, teachers criticized the child for getting the answer wrong, and in two percent of classes the teacher just ignored the error.

Student Attendance. Student attendance rates are relatively high across all grade levels, ranging from 91 percent to 93 percent. For all grades, we observe an even split between boys and girls with respect to attendance, suggesting that on average neither boys nor girls are facing any particular sex-specific obstacles to attending school. However, we did observe differences in attendance between districts, with Vilabouly, Phine, and Nong boasting the highest attendance rates (100 percent or almost 100 percent) and Phalanxay and Sepone boasting the lowest rates (around 80 percent). Of those who did miss school, about one half indicated that they missed school because of an illness, and the other half reported missing school in the past week for another reason. Of those who had missed school, over 80 percent said they missed between 1 and 3 days of school (2.4 days on average).

One possible explanation for high attendance rates mentioned by key stakeholders during interviews was the school meals program. Stakeholders, in particular parents, noted that the school meals were an incentive for sending students to school, as it meant the parents had to provide one less meal. However, we did notice some further discrepancy between self-reported attendance data form children and their parents compared to the classroom records of attendance. The latter suggests students attend school more often than self-reports which mentioned an average of two days of school missed for illness which would necessitate lower attendance rates than reported by classroom records.

Student Attentiveness. Student attentiveness varied based on subject area and classroom activity. Students were most attentive during Lao language lessons and least attentive during art lessons. They were also most attentive while the teacher was giving instructions, during transitions, and while they were reading, writing, and working in pairs or groups. As with literacy outcomes, we observed large variation in attentiveness across districts. Interestingly, although Nong has the lowest literacy outcomes, students in Nong were more attentive during the snapshot observations than students in other districts.

5.1.2. Strategic Objective 2: Increased Use of Health and Dietary Practices

Food Security. In general, food security appears to be high, with 94.3 percent of students indicating that they had eaten breakfast and 92 percent of students who were surveyed in the afternoon reporting that they ate lunch at school. Of those who were served lunch, two thirds said that they enjoyed the lunch provided. Only seven percent of children surveyed during afternoon classes said they were hungry. There were no significant differences between boys and girls with regards to food intake, suggesting there are no gender-related discrepancies in food allocation. When disaggregated by district, we see that levels of hunger are low across all districts, with most students reporting that they are "Not at all hungry." However, it should be noted that Atsaphone and Nong districts had lower rates of students responding "Not at all hungry" (73 percent and 69 percent, respectively) than other districts, as well as higher rates of responding "Very hungry."

Health and Hygiene Practices. Overall, students appear to be practicing good health and hygiene behaviors. Nearly all students reported that they wash their hands at school (92 percent), and 80 percent of those indicated that they used soap to wash their hands. Students seem to understand fairly well that washing hands before eating is an important health practice, with about half (47.9 percent) of students responding that they wash their hands before meals. Many also wash their hands when they arrive at school (38.7 percent), but the rate drops very low for students washing their hands on their way home from school (14 percent) and even lower for students washing their hands after using the latrine (2 percent). These findings are generally consistent across districts and by sex, except for Nong District, which had lower proportions of students reporting that they wash their hands at school (84 percent) and wash their hands with soap (66 percent). However, school observations noted that few schools had soap available at handwashing stations, suggested a disconnect between what students reported and the situation on the ground. While handwashing behaviors are prevalent, overall latrine use is low, with only 43 percent of students indicating they use a latrine. There is variation by sex and district: Girls are more likely to report using a latrine at school than boys, and Nong District has a notably low rate of latrine use.

5.2. Key Findings With Respect to Evaluation Criteria

5.2.1. Relevance

Overall, the program is well aligned with stakeholder needs, and planned program activities are appropriate for addressing priority concerns across the core elements of the project. Specifically, the project's focus on building teacher capacity, improving access to WASH facilities, and strengthening the ability of the government and community partners to manage the school meals program is well aligned with stakeholder needs and current capacity gaps. Although the program is well aligned with stakeholder needs, there are several challenges related to internal and external factors that could impede progress toward the project's goals and objectives. Specifically, the inability of local communities to contribute to the school meals due to the limited resources of households may impede the sustainability of the school meals program after handover. Similarly, challenging teaching conditions, including the prevalence of multi-grade classrooms and inconsistent salary payments to teachers, have negatively affected the supply of teachers and led to substantial variability in teaching quality. Lastly, underutilized community feedback mechanisms may limit the project's ability to continuously identify and address challenges and opportunities facing communities over the implementation period, particularly for non-Lao language-speaking populations.

The project design takes into consideration the specific economic, cultural, and political context of Savannakhet, with some caveats. The project's focus on agricultural activities, particularly the introduction of the school gardens, and its approach to working through VEDCs to gain local buy-in and support for activities are highly relevant to the context. However, the selection of food for the school meals, specifically the inclusion of non-sticky rice varietals, is somewhat misaligned with the cultural context and local preferences. Additionally, while the GoL is expanding its policies towards the inclusion of second language pedagogy, because the project is limited in its ability to address the specific needs of non-Lao language learners, there is a gap in support to these students. .

The short- and long-term goals of the project are well aligned with both the priorities of the GOL and the U.S. Government. Specifically, the project's focus on providing high-quality school meals to children, increasing overall formal school attendance, and providing training and support to local teachers and school administrators to enhance learning outcomes is well aligned with the GOL's educational priorities and recent curriculum reform efforts. Similarly, the project's focus on capacity building and handover of the school meals program to the GOL is well aligned with the U.S. Government's objectives of shifting to local ownership and supporting sustainability.

5.2.2. Effectiveness

LEAPS III project stakeholders have the resources and capacities to ensure effective implementation across the program's six core program areas: literacy, early childhood education, school meals, agriculture, nutrition, and WASH. However, there are a number of situational and capacity-related challenges that the project should take into consideration to ensure effectiveness.

Parents are supportive of children's education and where possible directly support learning at home or tap into community networks and structures for support outside of the classroom. Parents desire and are interested in supporting early childhood education, both as a way to support foundational learning and to remove barriers that may prevent older learners from attending school, such as needing to care for siblings. However, the low literacy skills of parents and household economic constraints often limit their ability to fully support students in achieving academic and attendance outcomes. Teachers and principals are similarly constrained by a lack of training and capacity to address issues such as multi-grade classrooms and teaching non-Lao-speaking learners and also by resource limitations, including a lack of teaching and learning materials.

VEDCs play a critical role in the community, serving as trusted partners to help coordinate and implement the school meals program. Parents, teachers, and principals are also happy to support the school meals program, including by serving as cooks and monitoring food distribution. However, issues with community contributions, upkeep and maintenance of storage facilities and cooking equipment, food preparation, and financial management could reduce the effectiveness of the program. Additionally, a lack of coordination with DAFOs, DHOs, and other key stakeholders limits the ability of other ministries to help plan for and source school meal inputs from local farmers, ensure that the school meals are appropriate to local nutritional needs, and ensure proper WASH infrastructure is available to support school meal operations and meet general WASH needs.

5.2.3. Efficiency

Based on lessons learned from LEAPS II implementation and from project stakeholder feedback, AIR identified a number of challenges that could affect project efficiency. Specifically, timely and effective

communication with project stakeholders, particularly those in remote areas, was noted as a challenge that could limit the project's ability to adjust programming in response to community feedback and changing needs and priorities. Similarly, the complexity of the M&E system could make the handover of monitoring activities to the government challenging and threaten their sustainability.

5.2.4. Expected Impacts

Building off foundations laid during previous LEAPS phases, project stakeholders, including government partners, principals, teachers, and parents, indicated that they believe that continued LEAPS III support, including additional training and capacity building for teachers and government staff, will continue to improve the quality of literacy instruction and in turn improve student attentiveness, attendance, and literacy outcomes. Similarly, the continuation of the school meals program is expected to further contribute to improved student attendance, particularly for poorer families, as well as improved nutrition among students. Finally, stakeholders believe that reiterating WASH messages in schools will help reinforce their use both at school and at home, although stakeholders noted that practices around latrine use will continue to be an issue due to the limited availability of latrines at students' homes.

5.2.5. Sustainability

Beneficiary communities and the GOL, at the district, provincial, and national level, have certain capacities, resources, and motivations enabling them to support the sustainability of LEAPS III activities. However, stakeholders will need to overcome a number of barriers to ensure the sustainability of LEAPS III initiatives in the long term. Specifically, stakeholders will need to identify ways to address community challenges to contributing to the school meals program, simplify a complex M&E system that does not align with the government's capacity and resources, and prepare for unanticipated natural and biological shocks.

6. Recommendations

Below, AIR presents recommendations pertaining to the main project components—literacy, WASH, and school meals—in addition to overall recommendations for program operations and learning questions.

6.1.1. Literacy

Improve access to at-home learning materials to better support learning during times of shock. In addition to school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, communities in Savannakhet routinely experience other unanticipated shocks, including floods, that cause students to miss school. During times when students are not at school, stakeholders noted that learning completely stops, resulting in significant learning loss. This learning loss is due to a number of reasons, including parents' inability to support learning at home and students' lack of access to learning materials such as textbooks. Given the frequency of these unanticipated shocks, LEAPS III should consider improving access to at-home learning materials to support learning when students are not able to be at school. At-home learning materials could take the form of physical books or virtual learning materials and recorded lessons, depending on internet connectivity and cell phone penetration. Given families' reliance on literate community members to support at-home learning, LEAPS III may also consider community-based models to support group learning during times of crisis.

Build teachers' capacity to manage multi-grade classrooms. Teachers, principals, government officials, and implementing partner staff frequently cited challenges related to teachers' capacity to manage multi-grade classrooms. Given the high rates of multi-grade classrooms and the increasing potential of learning loss due to shocks, including past and future COVID-19 school closures, LEAPS III should consider providing additional training and developing associated training materials to provide teachers with the tools and skills needed to effectively manage multi-grade classrooms, including classroom management techniques. As this is a national level issue, LEAPS III can also work with the MOES to revise the multi-grade classroom guidelines to better equip teachers and address student need.

Capture lessons from the implementation of informal early childhood education in pilot villages to help advocate to the government for its inclusion at the district and national levels. Although there is broad support for the inclusion of formal ECE, the limited capacity of teachers to deliver ECE content and the frequency of multi-grade classrooms are barriers that could reduce the success of such initiatives. LEAPS III should devote resources and attention to capture lessons learned from the informal ECE pilot to help demonstrate the importance and utility of such initiatives. Specifically, LEAPS III should attempt monitor how lessons learnt from informal ECE activities may be transferrable to formal ECE and can contribute to student attentiveness, attendance, and learning outcomes for primary school students. Particular attention should be paid to whether and how ECE activities affect students differently depending on their gender, socioeconomic status, and primary language, as well as the formal nature of the ECE programming.

Support MOES in creating guidelines for instruction and support to teachers for early Lao language development, and establishing interventions targeting ethnic areas and early Lao language development for non-Lao-speaking communities. Quantitative data revealed that non-Lao-speaking students are falling behind other students. Although LEAPS has taken these students into consideration when developing materials, many teachers confirmed that they do not feel equipped to teach non-Lao-speaking students. The difficulty is compounded by that fact that these students also tend to have parents

with lower literacy levels as well as more limited access to at-home reading materials. These disparities are particularly apparent in Nong District. LEAPS III should pay special attention to non-Lao speakers, perhaps by conducting outreach and engagement with non-Lao-speaking communities, starting in Nong, to get a better sense of the unmet needs and ways the project can help address those needs. Further, LEAPS III should consider supporting the MOES in material and training development for teachers in schools with larger populations of non-Lao-speaking students to provide techniques and methods for engaging the students in the classroom and helping them learn Lao.

Consider adaptations to the literacy measurement tool. Two critical adaptions should be considered for the literacy measurement tool. First, in line with the research that children need to understand 90 percent to 98 percent of the words in a passage to comprehend it, significantly increasing the number of words read correctly (from 5 out of 104 to closer to 90 out of 104) for classifying someone as a "reader" would be appropriate.[40] Second, the breakdown between readers and listeners seems misaligned with the literature.[41] Because all readers are also listeners but not all listeners are readers—at least given the definition of "listener" as someone with listening comprehension skills and the definition of "reader" as someone with reading comprehension skills—it would be useful to measure listening comprehension in all participants and reading comprehension only in those who have the requisite thresholds in the subskills predictive of reading comprehension (listening comprehension, vocabulary, and decoding).

6.1.2. School Meals Program

Strengthen the management and advocacy capacity of VEDCs. Given their role within communities, each VEDC has the potential to serve as a strong community advocate and a resource for supporting the LEAPS III initiative in the long term. Specifically, as a trusted community partner, each VEDC has the potential to address community complaints and manage community-based programs such as the school meals program, school-based learning initiatives, and WASH resources. Although previous phases on LEAPS have been successful in building the capacity of VEDC members, the majority of VEDCs currently lack the specific management and advocacy skills needed to support the transition and handover of the school meals program. LEAPS III should consider additional, more targeted management, particularly financial management, training to VEDC members so that they can help plan and manage school-based initiatives such as the school meals program and maintenance of school WASH facilities. The training may also include training on how to develop community-based funds to support long-term initiatives. LEAPS III should also consider providing VEDC members with advocacy skills so that they can receive community feedback and advocate for their communities and schools at the district level. Providing training and strengthening VEDCs' capacities has the potential improve conditions both at the school and community level.

Improve coordination among district-level government officials. Despite the role that they could play, DAFOs and DHOs noted that they are not routinely involved in the planning and implementation of school meal activities. DAFOs noted that if they were more involved in the planning, then they could assist with connecting farmers to schools to ensure that cooks have access to consistent and reliable agriculture inputs. Similarly, DHOs noted that they could work with the farmers and cooks to ensure that the school meals address community-specific nutritional gaps and concerns. Improving coordination among district-

[40] Laufer, 1989; Hu & Nation, 2000; Schmitt, Jiang, & Grabe, 2011.
[41] Hoover & Tunmer, 2020

level government officials would help ensure that the school meals program receives the attention and resources needed to continue operating after the LEAPS project ends.

Collaborate with community and GOL to support mechanisms that promote community contributions to school meals. Although communities expressed interest in supporting the continuation of the school meals program, they noted that community contributions are a challenge, as households often lack enough food or resources to meet their own needs. Given that community contributions are essential to ensuring the sustainability of the school meals program, LEAPS III should collaborate with community mechanisms and the GOL to address the key barriers that are limiting food availability within communities. This could include, working with VEDCs to create community contribution models that consider household economic status as well as household agricultural production to determine what contributions each household could make. It could also include community-wide initiatives such as fundraising fairs or campaigns, association efforts with contributions coming from groups' income generating activities, and private-public partnerships, among other. LEAPS III could work with the GOL to help farmers increase their yields, including providing additional technical support or incentives to farmers to produce food for school meals.

6.1.3. WASH

Improve WASH facilities at schools. While a high percentage of students reported washing their hands at school (92 percent) and washing their hands with soap (80 percent), the school observations suggested that schools do not actually provide consistent access to soap at handwashing stations (soap was available in 43 percent of schools). Further, use of the latrine at school remains low (43 percent overall), and few schools (38 percent) have separate stalls for boys and girls. In light of these resource constraints, LEAPS III should consider finding a sustainable soap source for schools and improving sanitation, especially latrine, conditions to meet UNICEF's safety standards by including separate, safe facilities for boys and girls. LEAPS III should also consider working with schools to budget small portions in the school block grants for WASH sustainability efforts. Further, behavior change around the provision of soap at handwashing stations as well as the use of safe latrines at school is paramount to improving overall sanitation, hygiene, and health.

6.1.4. Program Operations

Simplify the M&E system and processes to ensure efficient handover to the local government. As noted by implementing partner staff and government stakeholders, local government officials have limited resources, both human and financial, to conduct monitoring visits to schools on a regular basis. While the LEAPS II M&E system was effective in providing the project with information needed to routinely inform and adapt programming, stakeholders are skeptical that it would be beneficial to hand over the system to the local government. Given government resource constraints, LEAPS III should consider developing simple user-friendly M&E processes and procedures that can be easily adopted by local government officials. LEAPS III could do this through a co-design process, working with government stakeholder to define what data is more critical, what approach or system is feasible within the GOL's constating, and which stakeholders should be engaged in the monitoring process. Following the co-design process, LEAPS III should ensure that local government officials are properly trained on using the proposed system, including conducting joint monitoring efforts with local government staff to ensure understanding of the tools. Lastly, if and where possible, LEAPS III should advocate for increased budget to allow local government officials to conduct more frequent monitoring efforts.

Develop more interactive and localized community feedback mechanisms. As noted by local stakeholders, while many community members are aware of the project hotline, few feel comfortable using the hotline to provide feedback. Instead, local stakeholders said they prefer to provide feedback to their local leaders or in community meetings with LEAPS staff. Non-Lao speakers noted that the hotline was a particular barrier for them because they did not feel comfortable providing feedback in Lao. LEAPS III should consider developing more interactive and localized community feedback mechanisms that allow stakeholders to provide feedback in the language and via a modality that they prefer (i.e., written or spoken). Such mechanisms could include face-to-face community feedback meetings and a WhatsApp feedback channel.

6.1.5. Learning Questions

Based on the analysis, AIR recommends that LEAPS III consider investigating the following learning questions throughout implementation:

- What models or approaches are most effective for enhancing community contributions to school meals? How can households be best supported to enhance their contributions? How can suppliers (i.e. farmers/producers, store keepers, etc.) be best supported to enhance their contributions?
- What conditions or community characteristics promote or hinder handover of the school meals program? How can LEAPS III promote positive conditions within each district to facilitate successful handover?
- In what ways, if any, do informal ECE activities effect student attentiveness, attendance, and learning outcomes for primary school students? In what ways, if any, do ECE activities affect students differently depending on their gender, socioeconomic status, and primary language? What differences, if any, do we observe between those who receive formal versus informal ECE programming?

Annex 1: Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Question	Data Collection Source	Quantitative or Qualitative
Relevance		
1.1 Do/did stakeholders feel that their voices are/were heard and their needs considered throughout the project? Are/were stakeholders aware of how to share information with CRS?	FGDs with teachers, parents, cooks and storekeepers, VEDCs, community facilitators, youth literacy champion interns, and farmers KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, PAs, DHOs, DAFOs, and program and partner staff	Qualitative
1.2 How well do LEAPS III's literacy ECE trainings address the issues that teachers and principals face in their schools and communities? Are the topics offered relevant to their needs?	FGDs with teachers KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, Pedagogical Advisors (PAs), and program and partner staff	Qualitative
1.3 How well did project staff/government identify priority needs of schools and communities before handover? To what extent has the program design and intervention met the needs of the participants, including students, teachers, school administrators, and parents?	FGDs with teachers, parents, cooks and storekeepers, VEDCs, community facilitators, youth literacy champion interns, and farmers KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, Pedagogical Advisors (PAs), farmers, and program and partner staff	Qualitative
1.4 To what extent are project activities aligned with Lao government priorities and policies? If they contrast, why?	KIIs with MOES representatives, and program and partner staff	Qualitative
Effectiveness		
2.1 How well were the project objectives and outputs achieved across the project timeline? What were the contributing factors to success? What were the challenges?	Student Survey LBRA FGDs with teachers, parents, storekeepers and cooks, VEDCS, community facilitators, youth literacy champion interns, and farmers KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, Pedagogical Advisors (PAs), program and partner staff, and USDA	Qualitative and Quantitative

Evaluation Question	Data Collection Source	Quantitative or Qualitative
2.2 Is there evidence that the training of teachers led to improved teaching practices? To what degree are objectives related to improved quality of instruction likely to be achieved by the end of the project?	Classroom Observation FGDs with teachers and VEDCS KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, PAs, and program and partner staff	Qualitative and Quantitative
2.3 How has school feeding affected student attendance and student attentiveness in the classroom?	Attendance Records Classroom Observation Student Survey	Quantitative
2.4 In what ways is the project increasing the capacities of the MoES at various levels, including national, provincial, district, and VEDC/communities?	FGDs with teachers, parents, VEDCS, community facilitators, and youth literacy champion interns KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, PAs, program and partner staff, and USDA	Qualitative
2.5 To what degree was the LRP component successful in delivering additional nutrition to students participating in the school meals program? What challenges did it encounter?	Student Survey FGDs with teachers, parents, VEDCS, community facilitators, and storekeepers and cooks KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, PAs, DHOs, DAFOs, program and partner staff, farmers, and USDA	Qualitative and Quantitative
2.6 How has COVID-19 impacted project activities, and how did the project respond (if applicable)?	Student Survey FGDs with teachers, parents, VEDCS, community facilitators, storekeepers and cooks, and youth literacy champion interns KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, PAs, DHOs, DAFOs, program and partner staff, farmers, and USDA	Qualitative and Quantitative
Efficiency		
3.1 How efficient are the management and staffing structures for project implementation, monitoring, learning, and timely decision making?	KIIs with program and partner staff and USDA	Qualitative
3.2 Was the monitoring system designed efficiently to meet the needs and requirements of the project?	KIIs with program and partner staff and USDA	Qualitative

Evaluation Question	Data Collection Source	Quantitative or Qualitative
3.3 What was the level of implementation of the recommendations in the baseline and midterm evaluations? How did this level contribute to the improvement of project implementation?	FGDs with teachers, parents, VEDCS, community facilitators, storekeepers and cooks, and youth literacy champion interns KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, PAs, DHOs, DAFOs, program and partner staff, farmers, and USDA	Qualitative
Impact		
4.1 What have been the consequences of the program, in terms of both intended and unintended results and changes? Did these results vary for different groups, communities, schools, or households (e.g., boys vs. girls, ethnic vs. Lao communities, etc.) within the targeted areas? If so, why?	Student Survey LBRA Classroom Observation Attendance Records FGDs with teachers, parents, VEDCS, community facilitators, storekeepers and cooks, and youth literacy champion interns KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, PAs, DHOs, DAFOs, program and partner staff, farmers, and USDA	Qualitative and Quantitative
4.1.a Has post-handover continuation of activities or support varied for different groups, communities, schools, or households (e.g., boys vs. girls, ethnic vs. Lao communities, etc.) within the targeted areas? If so, why? [post-handover question]	Student Survey LBRA Classroom Observation Attendance Records	Quantitative
4.2 What changes in dropout, attendance, and repetition rates have been observed as a result of the school meals program?	Student Survey Classroom Observation Attendance Records	Quantitative
4.3 Did school feeding and educational quality interventions have the intended impact on attendance, attentiveness, quality of instruction, and literacy of school-age children?	Student Survey LBRA Classroom Observation Attendance Records	Quantitative
4.4 In what ways did the project increase the capacities of the Ministry of Education and Sports and Lao government at various levels (national, provincial, district, VEDC/communities)?	FGDs with teachers, parents, VEDCS, and community facilitators KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, PAs, DHOs, DAFOs, program and partner staff, farmers, and USDA	Qualitative

Evaluation Question	Data Collection Source	Quantitative or Qualitative
Sustainability		
5.1 Which school meals components have demonstrated the greatest potential for continuation and sustainability? Why? Which school meals components have been least successful in this regard? Why?	Student Survey Attendance Records FGDs with teachers, parents, VEDCS, community facilitators, and storekeepers and cooks KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, PAs, DAFOs, program and partner staff, farmers, and USDA	Qualitative and Quantitative
5.2 What types of support do communities, including parents and VEDC members, provide to schools, including school meals? Based on current practice, which type(s) of support are most commonly provided by communities?	FGDs with teachers, parents, VEDCS, community facilitators, storekeepers and cooks, and youth literacy champion interns KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, DAFOs, program and partner staff, farmers, and USDA	Qualitative
5.3 What mechanisms are in place for the local stakeholders (including VEDCs) to continue school feeding after the duration of the project and with high standards for health/dietary practices? How well did the VEDCs and cooks incorporate locally available foods into school meals? What mechanisms are and/or need to be in place for MoES staff to support and scale up literacy education in LB schools upon completion of project support?	FGDs with teachers, parents, VEDCS, community facilitators, and storekeepers and cooks KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, DAFOs, program and partner staff, farmers, and USDA	Qualitative
5.4 How prepared/equipped does the government feel to continue school feeding after handover at national, provincial, district, and community levels? What factors have strengthened or inhibited government preparedness for the transition at each level? Which capacity-building trainings have been most relevant to government staff as they prepare to manage and manage school meals?	FGDs with teachers, parents, VEDCS, community facilitators, and storekeepers and cooks KIIs with school administrators/principals, DESB, PESS, DAFOs, program and partner staff, farmers, and USDA	Qualitative

Annex 2: Sampling and Power Calculations

We conducted initial power calculations for the performance evaluation based on assumptions from the USAID Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Toolkit. The formula yielded a desired sample size of 820 Grade 2 students. However, resource constraints necessitated a statistically similar, but reduced sample size for this evaluation. Therefore, we calculated the margin of error (ME) of the original sample to enable us to determine a reduced sample yielding a statistically similar ME.

Using the following formula, we calculated the ME for the original sample of 820 Grade 2 students:

$$ME = z_{\alpha\backslash 2} * \sqrt{\left(\frac{1 + (m-1) * ICC}{mJD}\right)}$$

where m denotes the number of students per school, J the average number of schools selected for each district, and D the number of districts in the province. In our case, m = 10, J = 10, and D = 6. We also set α = 0.05, which is related to the level of confidence that we are using to calculate the ME, and use an intra-cluster correlation of 0.45 based on previous EGRA studies. The ME enables us to be 95 percent confident that an estimate from our analysis will not differ from the true value by more than the ME.

Using the assumptions above, we estimate a ME for the original sample size of 0.08 (or eight percent). That is, based on our sample, we can be 95 percent certain that the estimates we obtain for key literacy outcomes for Grade 2 students will not differ from the true value by more than eight percent. Then, keeping everything but number of schools the same, we manipulated the calculations to find a solution which yielded a qualitatively similar ME while working within the resource constraints. Ultimately, we found that 660 Grade 2 students across 66 schools (approximately 11 schools per district) resulted in a ME of 0.085 (or 8.5 percent).

AIR applied two sampling schemes for two distinct target populations: the 302 LEAPS III schools that will receive the school feeding (SF) component, and the 196 schools that will receive the additional Literacy Boost (LB) component. Therefore, we proportionally selected a representative sample of schools from these distinct samples across the six project districts (Atsaphone, Nong, Phalanxay, Phine, Sepone, and Vilabouly) in accordance with the relative number of project schools in each district to include in our quantitative sample. In the first stage, we selected schools to be sampled using the proportion of LEAPS III schools in each district to determine the total number of LEAPS III schools per district to include in our sample. We also factored in the proportion of LB schools in each district and proportionally sampled those such that our final sample included the same proportion of LB schools as in the total LEAPS III project.

In the second stage, we selected students to be surveyed within each selected school. At each sampled school, we selected a sample of students by physically lining up boys and girls separately for each grade in their classrooms, and identifying the nth student for random selection (refer to Exhibit 1 for the composition of the schools and their sampling). We randomly selected 10 students (five girls and five boys) from each Grade 2 classroom and five students from each of the other grade levels across all sampled school.

Annex 3: LEAPS III Evaluation Indicators

The table below provides the LEAPS III performances indicators, data collection methods, data sources, baseline values, and fiscal year (FY) and life of project targets for each indicator. Fiscal year targets are annual targets, not cumulative targets. AIR has also included comments and recommendations for if the targets are appropriate based on the baseline evaluation findings.

McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
Percent of students who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade level text	MGD #1	AIR Evaluation	Literacy Boost Reading Assessment (LBRA) G2	3%	13%	15%	15%	Lower this given the learning loss children experienced. Maybe this should be closer to 9 or 10%
Average student attendance rate in USDA supported classrooms/schools	MGD #2	AIR Evaluation	Review of attendance records	92%	97%	97%	97%	In light of the discrepancies between class records and self-report data, may consider lowering this. However, if just basing off of class records (as we did at baseline), probably fine. A more conservative estimate for midline would be 95%

McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
Number of teaching and learning materials provided as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #3	CRS / Monitoring	Distribution records, Waybills	0	0	30	76	
Number of teachers/educators/teaching assistants in target schools who demonstrate use of new and quality teaching techniques or tools as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #4	CRS / Monitoring	LB Classroom Observation form, SCI Reports, Annual Teacher Competency Self-Assessment	0	287	149	383	
Number of teachers/educators/teaching assistants trained or certified as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #5	CRS / Monitoring	Training attendance sheets and Training Tracking Database	0	410	212	546	
Number of school administrators and officials in target schools who demonstrate use of new techniques or tools as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #6	CRS / Monitoring	PO/PM report, PA self-assessment, Learning Circles minutes	0	47	24	70	

McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
Number of school administrators and officials trained or certified as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #7	CRS / Monitoring	Training attendance sheets and Training Tracking Database; SCI Reports	0	67	34	100	
Number of educational facilities (i.e., school buildings, classrooms, improved water sources, and latrines) rehabilitated/constructed as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #8	CRS / Monitoring	Confirmation of Construction Form	0	168	0	391	
Number of students enrolled in school receiving USDA assistance	MGD #9	CRS / Monitoring	Review of enrollment records	29,797	30,809	9,548	30,809	
Number of policies, regulations, or administrative procedures in each of the following stages of development as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #10	CRS / Monitoring	Signed decree or policy by MOES	0	Stage 1 – 2	0	1	

McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
Value of new USG commitments, and new public and private sector investments leveraged by USDA to support food security and nutrition	MGD #11	CRS / Monitoring	Review of Community Contribution Ledger	0	$38,644	$28,077	$322,641.68	
Number of public-private partnerships formed as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #12	CRS / Monitoring	Review of agreement between CRS and partners	0	0	0	1	
Number of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) or similar "school" governance structures supported as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #13	CRS / Monitoring	Review of MOUs	0	199	0	302	
Quantity of take-home rations provided (in metric tons) as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #14	CRS / Monitoring	Review of stock records	0	374.77	67.27	1,114.97	
Number of individuals receiving take-home rations as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #15	CRS / Monitoring	Review of Beneficiary Profile and Commodity Form #5	0	2,168	631	2,168	

McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
Number of daily school meals (breakfast, snack, lunch) provided to school-age children as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #16	CRS / Monitoring	Review of stock records	0	2,863,557	0	8,695,143	
Number of school-age children receiving daily school meals (breakfast, snack, lunch) as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #17	CRS / Monitoring	Review of stock records	0	16,782	0	25,146	
Number of social assistance beneficiaries participating in productive safety nets as a result of USDA assistance	MGD # 18	CRS / Monitoring	Review of Beneficiary Profile Form, Student Enrollment Form, and Commodity Form #5	0	21,985	631	32,977	
Number of individuals who demonstrate use of new child health and nutrition practices as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #19	CRS / Monitoring	Monthly Hygiene Observation Form, Training Tracking Database, School	0	172	0	536	

McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
			Meals Survey					
Number of individuals who demonstrate use of new safe food preparation and storage practices as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #20	CRS / Monitoring	Monthly Hygiene Observation Form, Stockroom Observation Form, Training Tracking Database	0	500	0	777	
Number of individuals trained in safe food preparation and storage practices as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #22	CRS / Monitoring	Training attendance sheets and Training Tracking Database	0	972	327	972	
Number of individuals trained in child health and nutrition as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #23	CRS / Monitoring	Training attendance sheets and Training Tracking Database	0	215	0	670	
Number of children under five (0-59 months) reached with nutrition-specific interventions through	MGD #24	CRS / Monitoring	Review of stock records	0	3,035	0	5,663	

McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
USDA-supported programs								
Number of schools using an improved water source	MGD #27	CRS / Monitoring	Monthly Hygiene Observation Form	264	13	0	302	
Number of individuals participating in USDA food security programs	MGD #30	CRS / Monitoring	School enrollment and attendance forms, Beneficiary Profile form and teacher attendance records, Training tracking database	0	24,803	666	36,619	
Number of individuals benefiting indirectly from USDA-funded interventions	MGD #31	CRS / Monitoring	Laos census data, school enrollment forms, Beneficiary Profile Form, Training Tracking Database	0	82,677	2,220	122,063	

McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
Number of schools reached as a result of USDA assistance	MGD #32	CRS / Monitoring	Monthly Commodities Report Form, Handover Schedule, Project Work Plan, Training Tracking Database	0	302	100	302	
Percent of students who are attentive in the classroom	Custom #1	AIR Evaluation	Classroom Observation Tool	87%	77%	78%	78%	Given the high level of attentiveness, can increase these targets
Percent of students reporting that they are 'somewhat hungry' or 'very hungry' during their afternoon class	Custom #2	AIR Evaluation	Student Interview Form Student Survey (Baseline, Mid-term, Final Performance Evaluation)	11%	4%	4%	4%	This seems like a high drop, would suggest increasing target for baseline to be more conservative (for instance, 8%)
Percent of schools that regularly serve school meals one year after handover	Custom #3	CRS / Monitoring	Review of stock records	0	60%	60%	60%	

McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
Number of schools that receive school cooking kits	Custom #4	CRS / Monitoring	Distribution Records Waybills	0	30	0	91	
Number of school gardens established	Custom #5	CRS / Monitoring	Community Capacity Assessment (CCA) and School Meals Survey	0	99	0	302	
Number of steering committee visits	Custom #6	CRS / Monitoring	Trip reports	0	1	1	5	
Number of documented examples where local partner capacity was strengthened as a result of significant contributions by CRS	Custom #7	CRS / Monitoring	Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument (HOCAI)	0	1	1	3	
Percent of schools participating in the agriculture pilot that successfully source food from local farmer groups	Custom #8	CRS / Monitoring	MOES school meals ledger	0	70%	70%	70%	
Percent of students participating in CBSR programs in target communities who	Custom #9	CRS / Monitoring	CBSR database	0	90%	0%	90%	

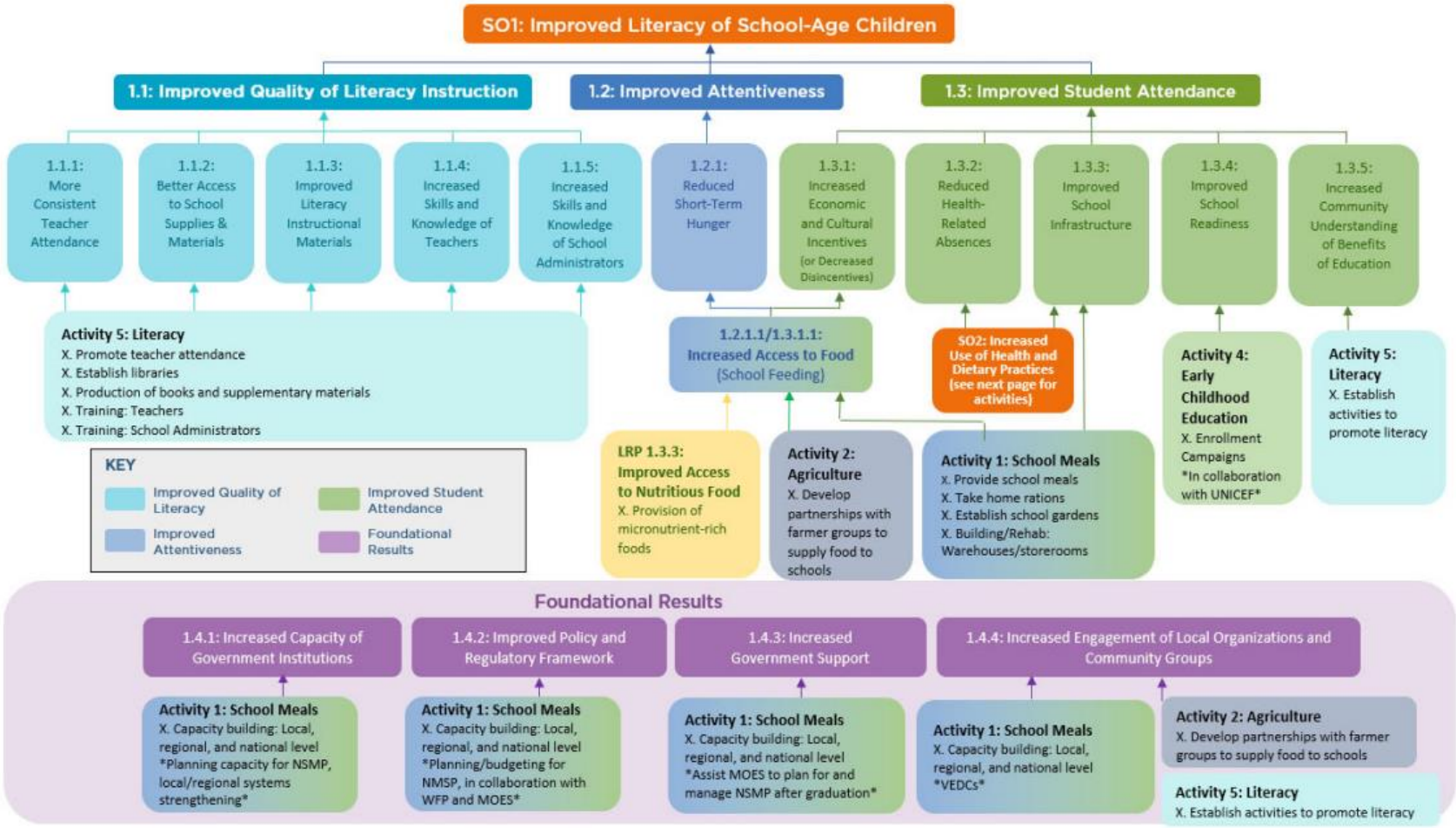
McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
successfully enroll in G1.								
Percent of students participating in CBSR programs in target communities who transition from G1 to G2	Custom #10	CRS / Monitoring	CBSR database	0	90%	0%	90%	
Number of schools with improved literacy instructional materials as a result of USDA assistance	Custom #11	CRS / Monitoring	Distribution records, Waybills	0	0	0	198	
Number of libraries established	Custom #12	CRS / Monitoring	Distribution records	0	0	0	216	
Number of books and supplementary materials distributed (by type) as a result of USDA assistance	Custom #13	CRS / Monitoring	Waybills	0	0	5,260	16,656	
Percent of students who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate proficiency in identifying letters	Custom #14	AIR Evaluation	Literacy Boost Reading Assessment (LBRA) G2	45%	80%	84%	84%	Due to learning loss, we suggest lowering midline targets to be more realistic.

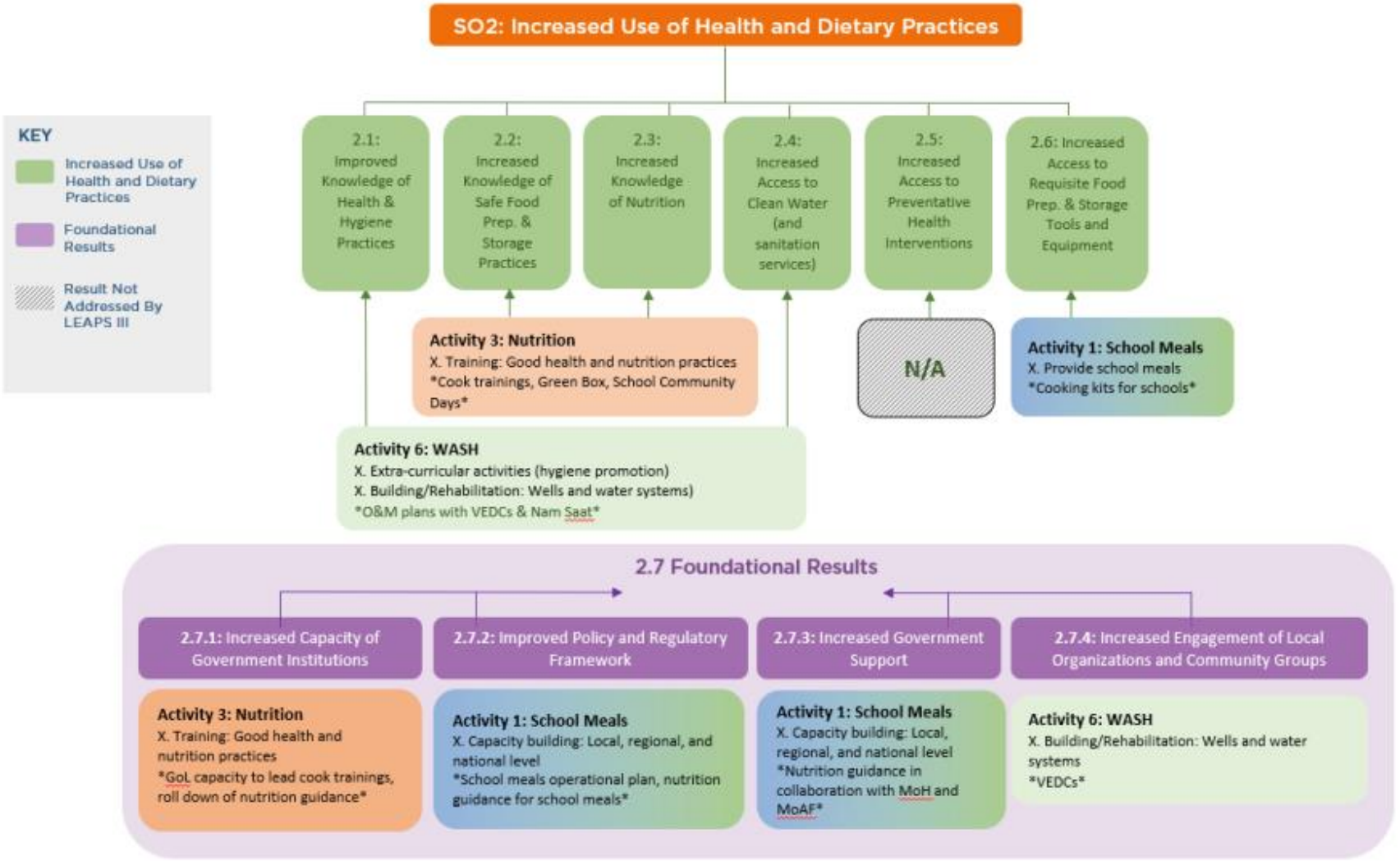
McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
Percent of students who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of phrase & sentence in the Literacy Boost Reading Assessment	Custom #15	AIR Evaluation	Literacy Boost Reading Assessment (LBRA) G2	7%	47%	50%	50%	Same as other LBRA outcomes. Revise lower.
Percent of teachers in attendance on day of school visit at USDA supported schools	Custom #16	CRS / Monitoring	Teacher Attendance Spot Check form	0	85%	90%	90%	
Number of parents in target communities trained on literacy	Custom #17	CRS / Monitoring	Training attendance sheets and Training Tracking Database; SCI Reports	0	1,020	680	5,480	
Number of School Community Day events hosted in target schools	Custom #18	CRS / Monitoring	Trip reports Trip liquidations (community mobilizers)	0	398	0	1,202	

McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
Percent of schools that meet UNICEF's WASH 2-star School Standard	Custom #19	AIR Evaluation CRS/ Monitoring	Monthly hygiene form	9%	25%	30%	30%	Lower targets across the board. Since the main determinant of the low proportion of schools meeting this standard is the lack of separate bathrooms for girls and boys, and LEAPS III is not building facilities, this is unlikely to change very much over the life of the project.
Percent of students in target schools with health-related absences in the last week	Custom #20	AIR Evaluation	Annual Student Interview	28%	28%	28%	28%	Given the baseline value, would suggest lowering the targets to aim for some improvement.
Cost of commodity procured as a result of USDA assistance (Total)	LRP #5	CRS / Monitoring	Purchase orders / financial invoices / financial reports for LRP POET	0	$268,196	$0	$1,620,614.51	
Quantity of commodity procured (MT) as a result of USDA assistance (Total)	LRP #6	CRS / Monitoring	Purchase orders / warehouse receiving	0	137.97	0	869.52	

McGovern-Dole Performance Indicator	Indicator Number	Data Collection Method	Data Source	Baseline	TARGETS			Comments from AIR
					Midterm (Target for FY 2024)	Final (Target for FY 2026)	Life of Project	
			documentation					

Annex 4: LEAPS III Results Framework




KEY
Increased Use of Health and Dietary Practices
Foundational Results
Result Not Addressed By LEAPS III
SO2: Increased Use of Health and Dietary Practices
2.1: Improved Knowledge of Health & Hygiene Practices
2.2: Increased Knowledge of Safe Food Prep. & Storage Practices
2.3: Increased Knowledge of Nutrition
2.4: Increased Access to Clean Water (and sanitation services)
2.5: Increased Access to Preventative Health Interventions
2.6: Increased Access to Requisite Food Prep. & Storage Tools and Equipment
Activity 3: Nutrition
X. Training: Good health and nutrition practices
Cook trainings, Green Box, School Community Days
N/A
Activity 1: School Meals
X. Provide school meals
Cooking kits for schools
Activity 6: WASH
X. Extra-curricular activities (hygiene promotion)
X. Building/Rehabilitation: Wells and water systems)
O&M plans with VEDCs & Nam Saat
2.7 Foundational Results
2.7.1: Increased Capacity of Government Institutions
2.7.2: Improved Policy and Regulatory Framework
2.7.3: Increased Government Support
2.7.4: Increased Engagement of Local Organizations and Community Groups
Activity 3: Nutrition
X. Training: Good health and nutrition practices
GoL capacity to lead cook trainings, roll down of nutrition guidance
Activity 1: School Meals
X. Capacity building: Local, regional, and national level
School meals operational plan, nutrition guidance for school meals
Activity 1: School Meals
X. Capacity building: Local, regional, and national level
Nutrition guidance in collaboration with MoH and MoAF
Activity 6: WASH
X. Building/Rehabilitation: Wells and water systems
VEDCs

Annex 5: Student Survey Instrument

Literacy Boost Reading Assessment (LEAPS lll)

Key accommodations to consider include:

- **Additional wait time:** if the child has difficulty concentrating or remembering, wait at least 10 seconds before repeating a question.
- **Step-by-step instructions:** If the child has difficulty concentrating or remembering, divide up longer instructions to pause between each step and ensure they are following before continuing.
- **Using the child's name:** if the child has difficulty focusing, add their name to the beginning of a sentence when you are speaking to them (for example: "okay Sarah, I want you to look at each picture…").
- **Additional breaks:** if the child seems to becoming frustrated or demotivated, recommend taking a break, and ensure that the child has access to multiple breaks throughout the session.
- **Interpretation through teacher:** if the child is not able to hear or speak, ask if the teacher is able to help interpret the questions or answers using their preferred communication method with the child.

Remember, when speaking with people with disabilities, treat them with the same respect and empathy you would offer other individuals their age, and do not demonstrate pity or assume what the person can or cannot do.

Disability is a highly stigmatized concept, and the team must be careful not to perpetuate any stereotypes or expose (directly or indirectly) information about a child's disability status or functioning challenges. Our responsibility is to first do no harm, and children should never be put at risk of ridicule or stigma due to data collection.

Student Survey

Start Time **Date**

INTRODUCTION

districts	Enter the name of the district ----------		
school name	Enter the school name ----------		
teacherconsent	Has the teacher given consent for the child to participate in this survey? 0. No consent → thank them and terminate the survey and select the next child on your list. 1. Teacher Consented → " timeofsurvey"	I__I	
 **If teacher says No, thank them, and terminate the survey and proceed to the next child on your list.**			
timeofsurvey	Is the survey administered in the… 1. Morning (before 12 pm) 2. Noon (between 12pm and 1pm) 3. Afternoon (after 1pm)	I__I	select only one option

Dear student:

Hi, my name is ___, and I am here asking some questions from children like you to understand more about the LEAPS project also known as the Primary School Lunch Program for Small Children. Nothing you say here will be repeated to your parents or teacher will be kept a secret. There aren't any right or wrong answers. I want you to answer honestly and as best as you can. Do you have any questions for me? You can interrupt me to ask a question at any time. Also, of you don't know the answer to a question or don't want to answer it, just let me know and we can skip it. Are you ready to begin?

assent	Do you accept if I ask you some questions? 0. No → thank him/her, terminate the survey and proceed to the next child on your list. 1. Yes → continue with the background section.	I__I	

 **If child says No, thank him/her, terminate the survey and proceed to the next child on your list.**

Student Code:

Studentcode **Please get the student code from the team leader. It is very important to use the correct student code, so please enter the code twice. If you are unsure, please check again with the team leader**			
Stcode1	Please enter the student code CAREFULLY		Record student code >=1 & <=50
Stcode2	Please enter the student code CAREFULLY again		Record student code >=1 & <=50

Background information part 1

nickname	What is your nickname?		
fname	What is your first name?		
mothername	What is your mother's name? ----------		
fathername	What is your father's name? ----------		
gender	1. Male 2. Female	I__I	*Ask only if necessary
age	How old are you?	……	*RECORD AGE >=5 & <17
grade	Which grade/class are you in? 1. Grade 1 2. Grade 2 3. Grade 3 4. Grade 4 5. Grade 5	I__I	*Select only one option
reliab	Is this an individual assessment or a pair assessment? 0. Individual → "nickname Pair assessment → "reliabtype"	I__I	*Only if grade = Grade 2

reliabtype	Talking enumerator or observing enumerator? 1. Talking Watching	I__I	*Only if grade = Grade 2
everrpt	Did you repeat any grades? 0. No 1. Yes 999. Don't know	I__I	*Select only one option
If child is not in grade 2, go to second background survey the survey. If s/he is in grade two continue with expressive vocabulary			

LITERACY BOOST ASSESSMENT:

Expressive vocabulary

Now let's try a word game. Imagine you are going to the market and name some foods that you can eat. Try to name as many things as you can think of in Lao.

Record the number of items the child lists until the child has listed 15 items. You can tally on the score sheet as the child enumerates the objects.

*When the child pauses for 5 seconds or more, PROMPT ONCE by saying***, Can you think of any others?**

When the child cannot think of more items, move on to the next question and say:

Now, I want to know what animals you are familiar with. Tell me the names of some animals that you know. Try to name as many animals as you can think of and I will keep count again.

When the child pauses for 5 seconds or more, PROMPT ONCE by saying, **Can you think of any others?**

expressvocab1	Can you tell me the names of things you can eat in Lao? (Specify the number of items child says they can eat in Lao 0-15) **Local dialect accent is acceptable* 0. 0 1. 1 2. 2 3. 3 4. 4 5. 5 6. 6 7. 7 8. 8 9. 9	I__I	*Select only one option

	10. 10 11. 11 12. 12 13. 13 14. 14 15. 15		
Expressvocab2	Can you tell me the names of animals in Lao? (Specify the number of animals a child counted in Lao 0-15) **Local dialect accent is acceptable* 0. 0 1. 1 2. 2 3. 3 4. 4 5. 5 6. 6 7. 7 8. 8 9. 9 10. 10 11. 11 12. 12 13. 13 14. 14 15. 15	I__I	*Select only one option

<u>Phonological awareness</u>

Now we will play a listening game. Listen to the words I say and tell me which one starts with the sound /m/ (say the sound, not the letter name) Eg: mom, dad, chick, fish If the child gives an incorrect response, say: mom starts with /m/ .

*If the student is struggling, and hesitates at any question for five seconds, repeat the list of words **ONCE** per question.*

If the student still hesitates for five seconds, move on to the next question.

Wordpair1	I will read four words to you, which one starts with the sound "ດ" (Child matches the letter "ດ" and the correct word) 0. Not able to match/Don't know 1. Able to match 999. Did not understand the question	I__I	ໝາ, ເປັດ, ເດືອນ, ຈອກ

Wordpair2	I will read four words to you, which one starts with the sound ”ต“-child matches the letter "ต" with the correct word 0. Not able to match/Don’t know 1. Able to match 999. Did not understand the question	I__I	ไม้, ก้อย, ตั๊บ, ชย้า
Wordpair3	I will read four words to you, which one starts with the sound "ม" - Child was able to matches the letter "ม" with the correct word 0. Not able to match/Don’t know 1. Able to match 999. Did not understand the question	I__I	ไก่, ชนู, ม้า, ลิง
Wordpair4	I will read four words to you, which one starts with the sound "ป" - Child was able to matches the letter "ป" with the correct word 0. Not able to match/Don’t know 1. Able to match 999. Did not understand the question	I__I	ฉี่, ปิ, ห่าน, ลูก
Wordpair5	I will read four words to you, which one starts with the sound "อ" - Child was able to matches the letter "อ" with the correct word 0. Not able to match/Don’t know 1. Able to match 999. Did not understand the question	I__I	ติ, เอ็า, มื, ขา

Letter/Symbol Sounds

- Give the child the list of letters and say to the child:
- Say: **Let’s look at some letters. Can you start here (point to first letter) and tell me what the sounds of these letters are moving in this direction? (indicate left to right direction) Do you understand? Ok, you can begin.**
- Correct letters are:
  - the letter name in the Lao language.
  - any sound that is acceptable for the local dialect accent (as long as it is Lao)
  - a response which says “It begins like…” giving a word for which the letter is the initial letter
- If the child reads the letters out of order, then remember to bring his/her attention to the ones they might have skipped.
- Make sure you marked all of the incorrect letters
- Move to the Familiar Word Decoding section.

What to do if a student is struggling:

- *If the student is struggling, and hesitates at any letter for five seconds, ask follow up questions:* **Do you know a word that starts with this letter?**
- *If the student still hesitates for five seconds, ask:* ***Can you tell me the sound any of these letters?***
- *If the student still hesitates for five seconds, then stop and thank him/her for trying his/her best.*
- Mark letters not identified or not attempted as incorrect.
- Move to the Familiar Word Decoding section.

ຈ	ນ	ຣ	ຊ	ຝ
ມ	ຂ	ພ	ຟ	ງ
ດ	ອ	ຫ	ທ	ລ
ປ	ຍ	ກ	ວ	ຖ
ຄ	ຮ	ບ	ສ	ຜ
ຕ	ຢ	ຫວ	ຫງ	ຫຍ
ຫມ	ຫຼ	ຫນ		

Familiar word decoding

1. Give the pupil the laminated copy of the "Familiar word decoding" list.
2. Say: **I would like you to read some words to me. They are words from your textbook. Please point to and say each of these words starting here (point to first word) and moving across each line like this (indicate left to right direction). Do you understand? Ok, you can begin.**
3. Remember that pronunciations of words in local dialect accents are acceptable (as long as it is Lao).
4. If the child read the words out of order then remember to bring his/her attention to the ones they might have skipped.
5. Make sure you marked all of the incorrect words.
6. Move to the Matching Pictures section.

Stop rule: If the student is unable to correctly answer the first 5 words correctly, then stop and thank him/her for trying his/her best and go to the next section.

What to do if a student is struggling:

- If the student is struggling and hesitates at any word for five seconds, ask follow-up questions: **Are there any words on the list that you know? Point to and say the words that you know. Repeat the request to encourage the child to continue.**
- If the student still hesitates for five seconds, then stop and thank him/her for trying his/her best.
- Mark words not identified or not attempted as incorrect.
- Move to the Matching Pictures section.

Familiar word decoding section.

ນາ	ງູ	ມາ	ໄຟ
ແມ່	ຕັ້ງ	ຍຸງ	ອ້າຍ
ຈານ	ປົ້ມ	ລົດ	ໂສ້ງ
ກົບ	ເສື້ອ	ກະປູ	ອະນຸຍາດ
ຕະຫຼາດ	ອະນາໄມ	ແຂງແຮງ	ເດືອນ

Matching Pictures

Instruction to enumerator

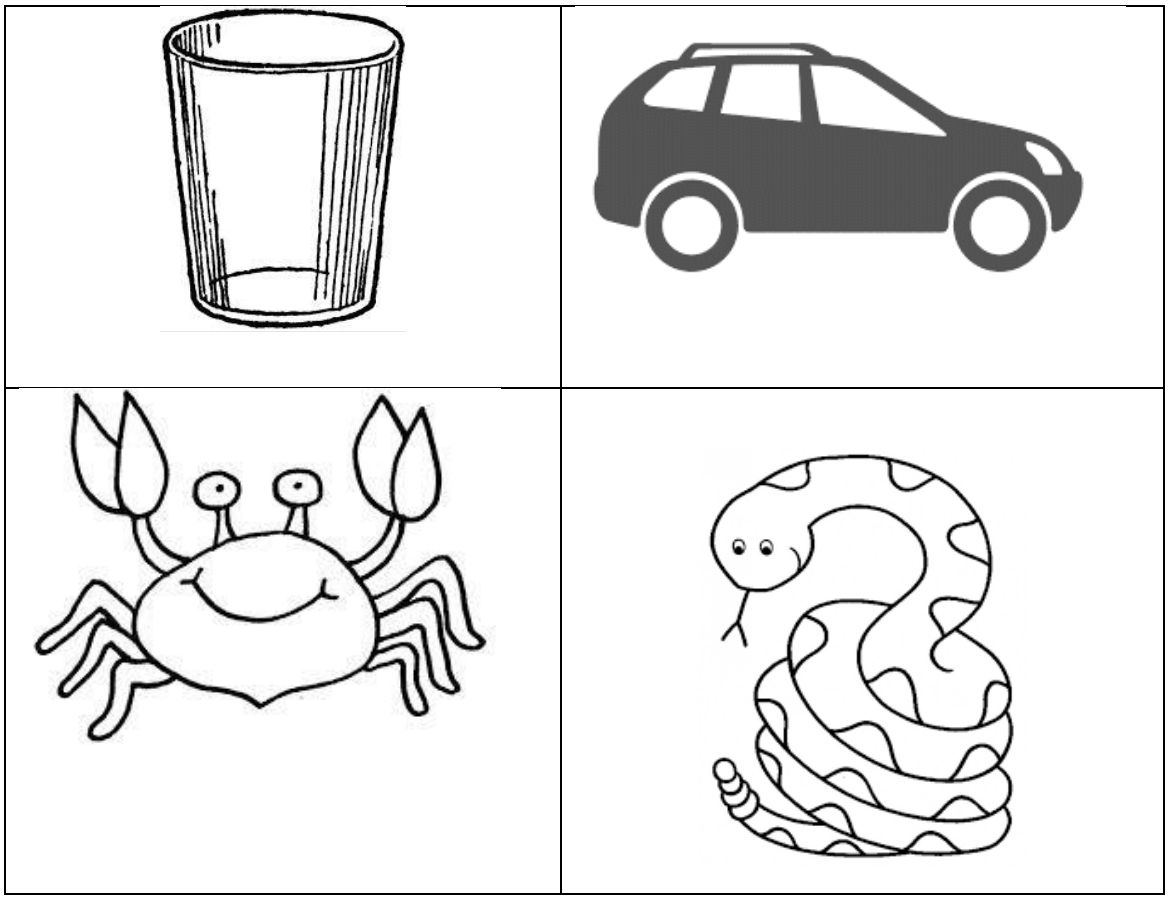
Do not read the words/phrases/sentences to the child. Instead, children must read it themselves.

Instruction to children:

- **I would like to show you some words and phrases. Please read them and point to the picture that the word/phrase describes. You don't need to read the word aloud. You can if you want to, but it isn't necessary. Just point to the picture you think matches the word/phrase/sentence.**
- **STOP RULE: If the child cannot match five words/phrases consecutively at any point, then mark everything after that incorrect and move to the next section.**
- Follow the script below for example 1 to practice with the student. **Make sure to follow the exact script below for ALL STUDENTS.** Students are not scored on example 1.

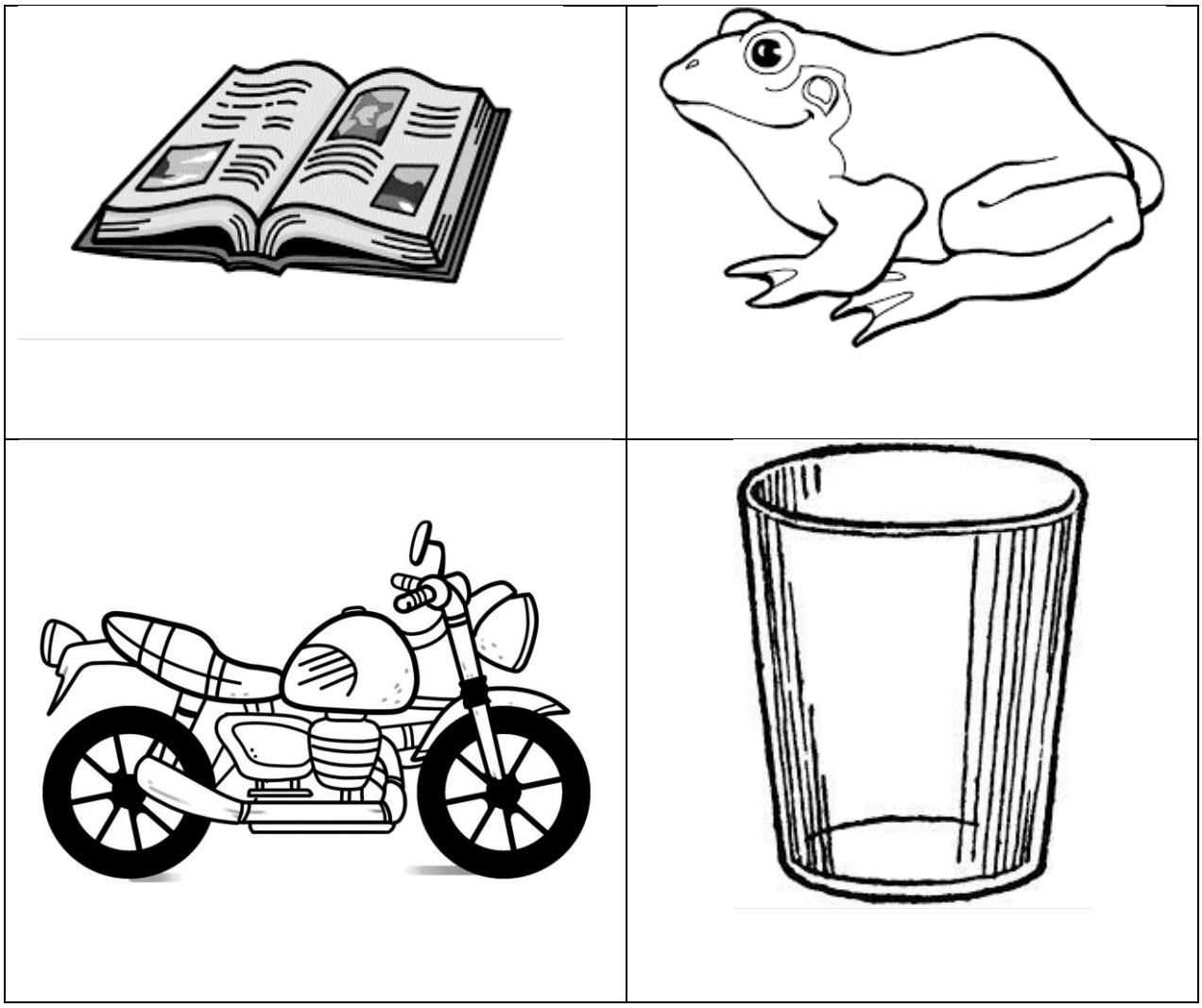
  [Example 1]
  - Show the card to the child and say to the chid **"You don't need to read the word aloud. You can if you want to, and point to the picture that the word describes".**
    - If student correctly identifies picture of the car, say "**Now you will do some more."** Go to question 1 and begin the assessment.
    - If the student points to the incorrect picture or does not respond (after 5 seconds), say **"Good try, say the word aloud (car)"** [point to picture of the car]. Say "**Now you will do some more."** Go to question 1 and begin the assessment.

Example 1. Car

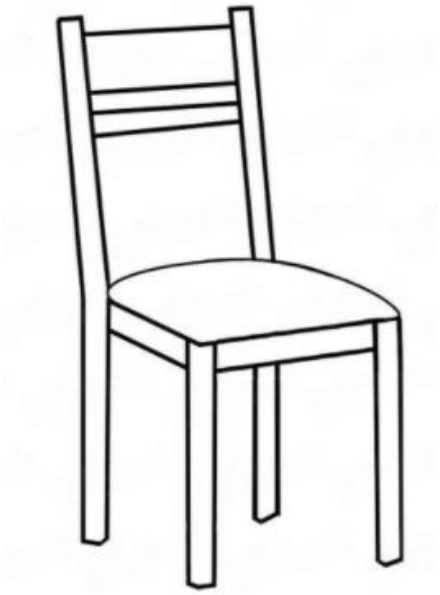


Remember: Do not read the words aloud to the child

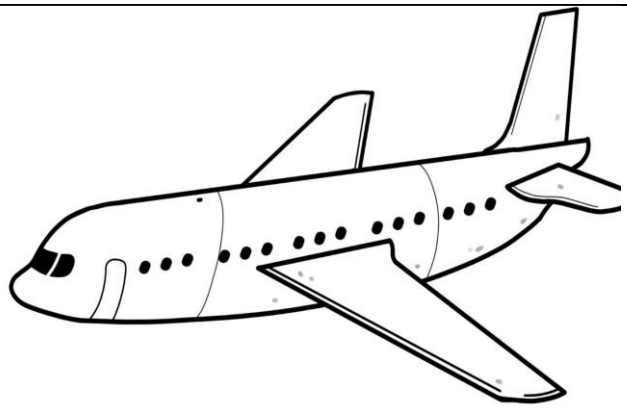
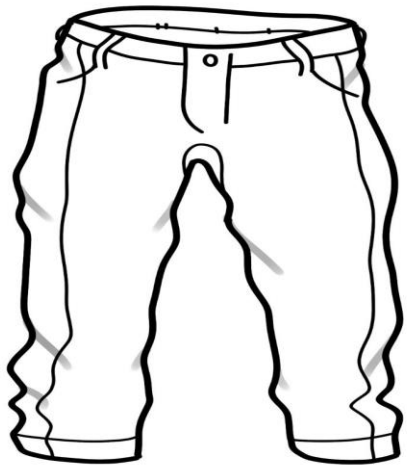
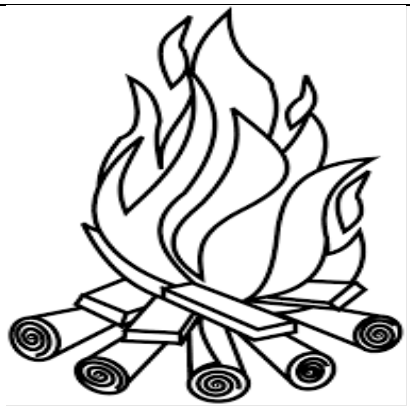
1. Frog



2. Chair

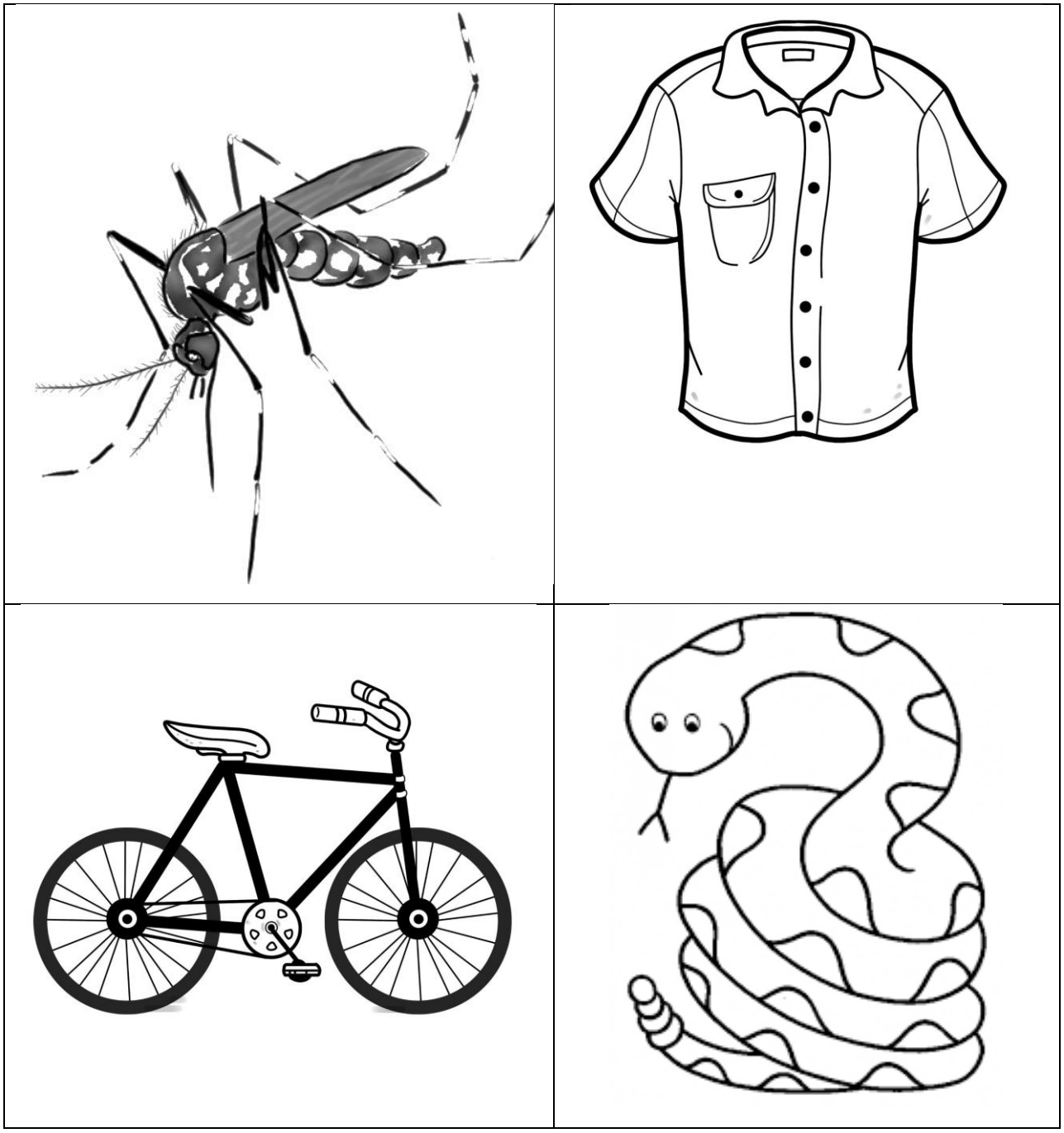


3. Shirt

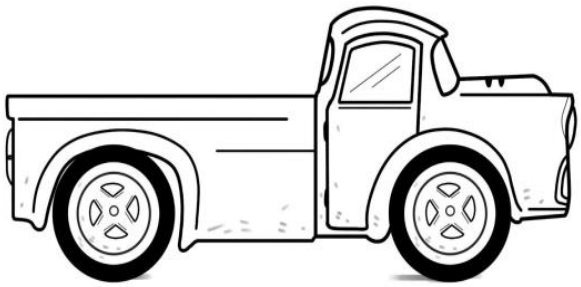
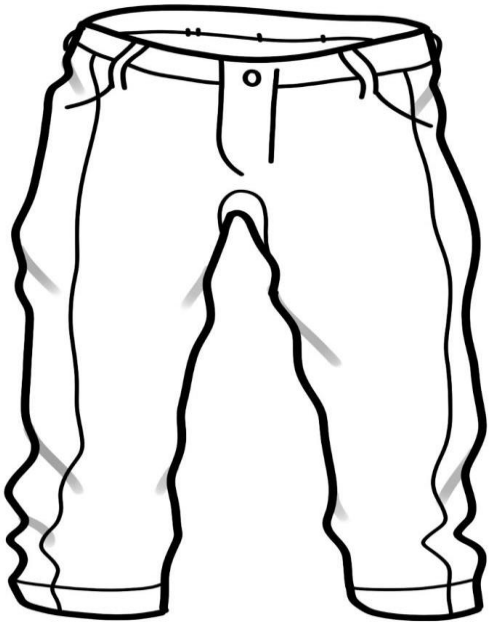
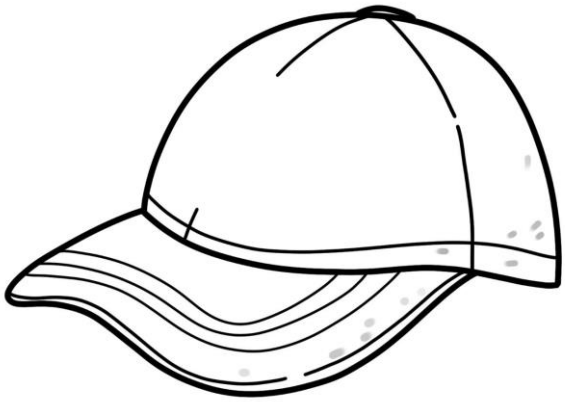
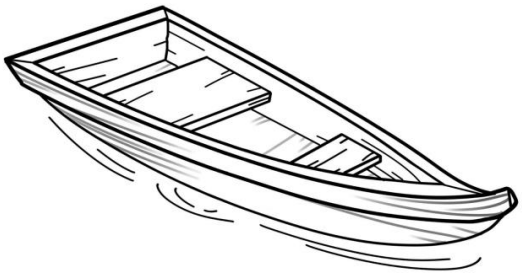
	
	

4. Boat

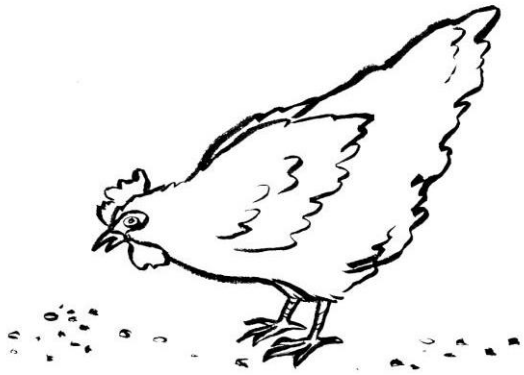
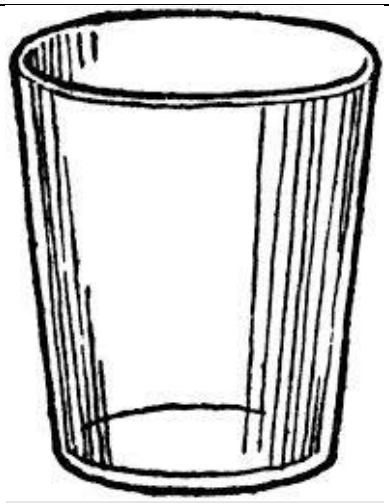
5. Snake



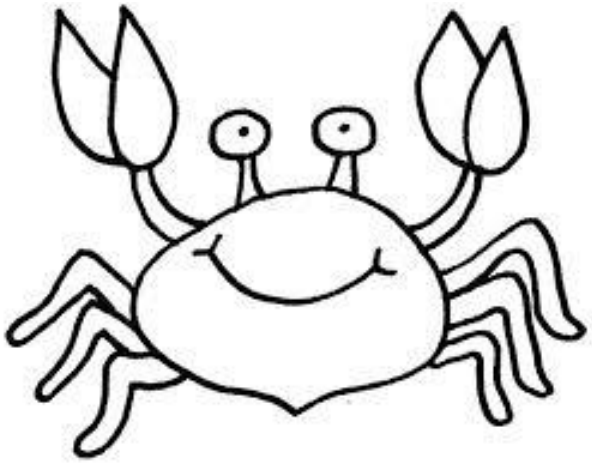
6. Pants

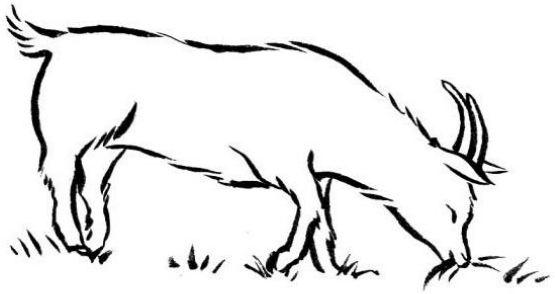
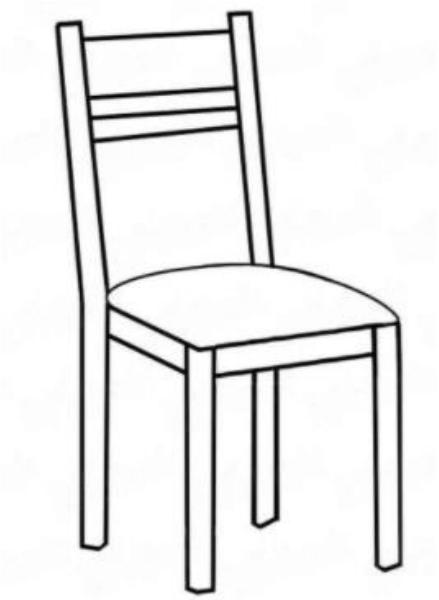
7. Chicken

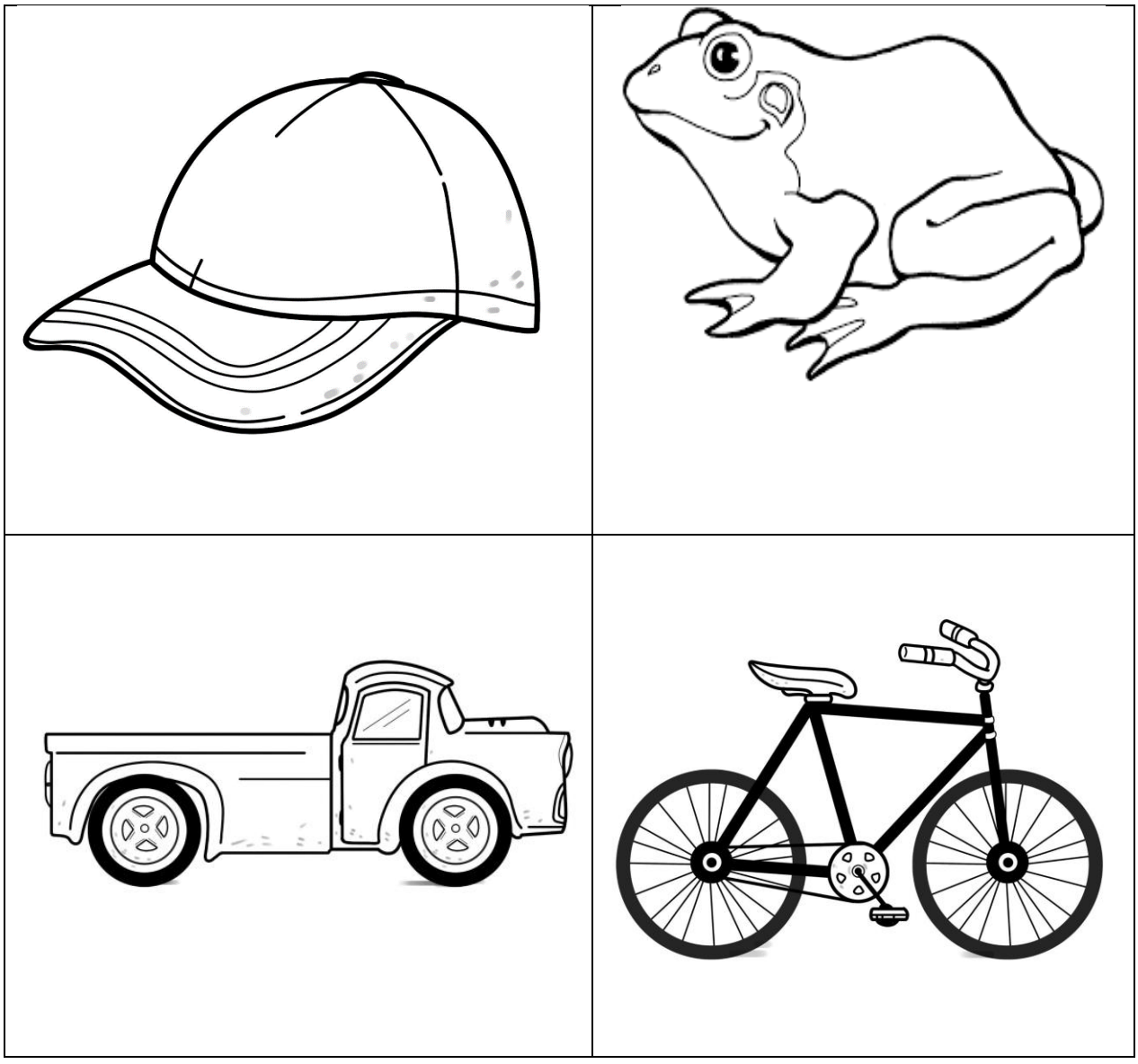
8. Fire



9. Book

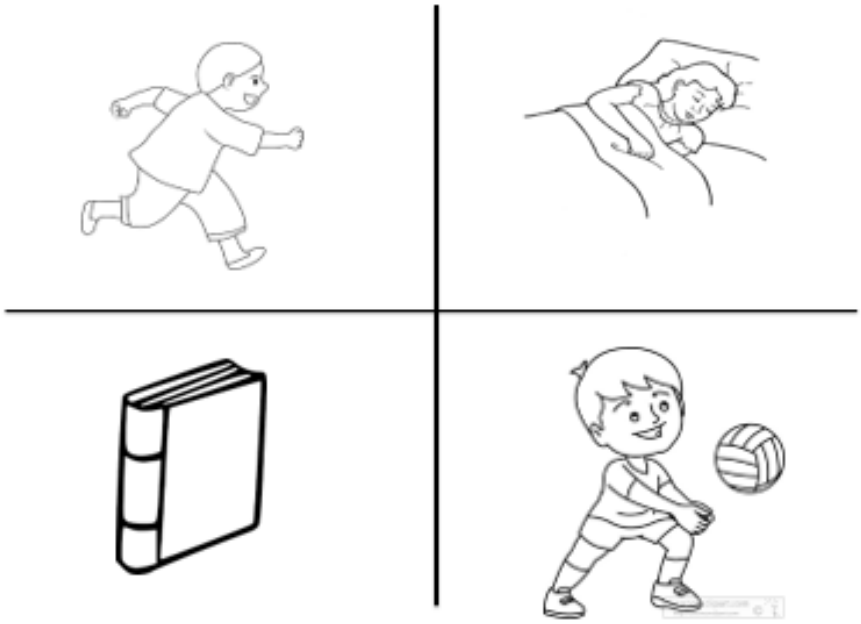
10. Bicycle



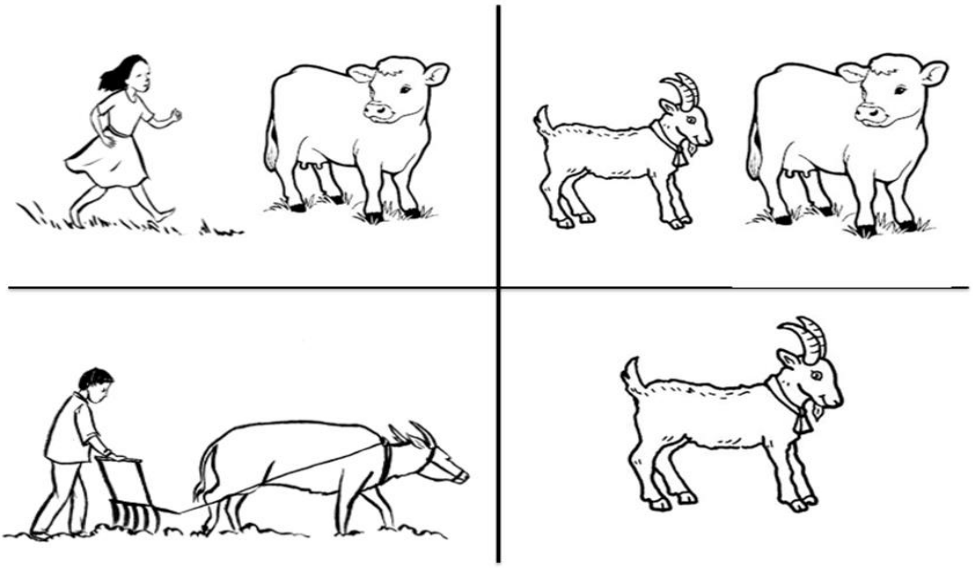
Remember: Do not read the phrases aloud to the child

11. Child jumps

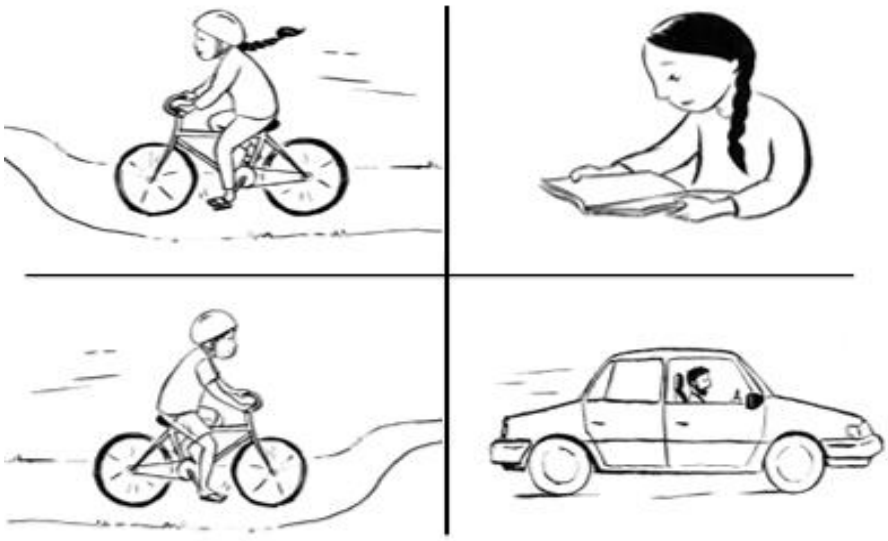
12. Child sleeps



13. Goat and cow

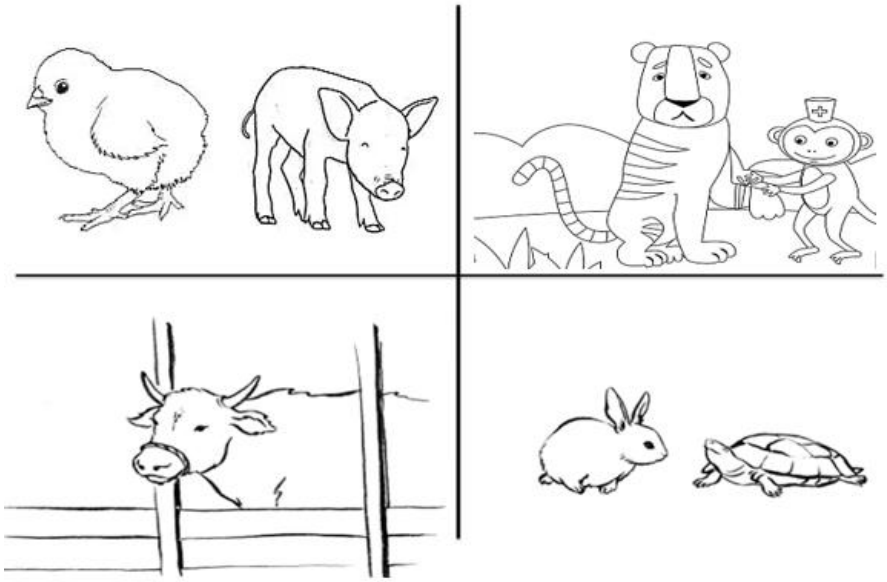


14. Child reads

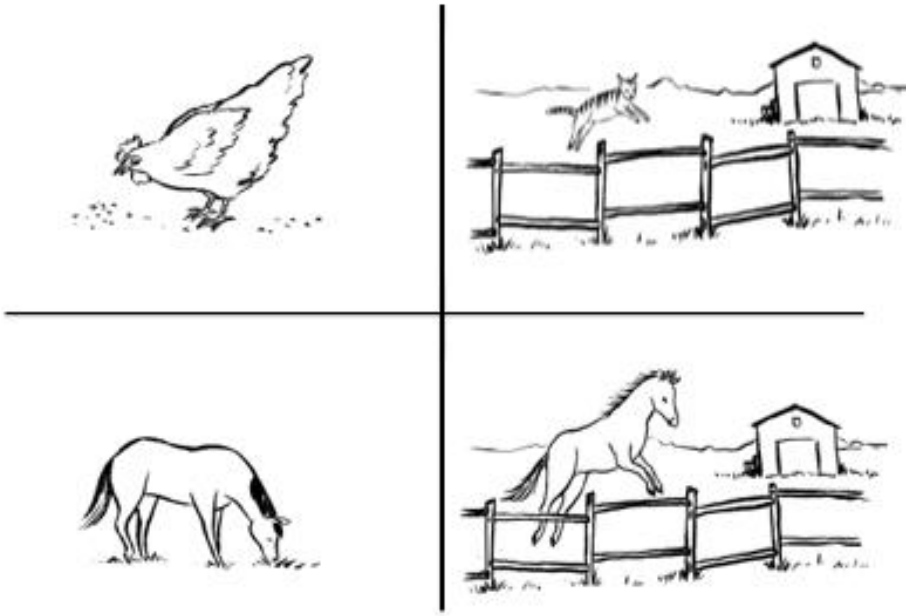


15. Children eat

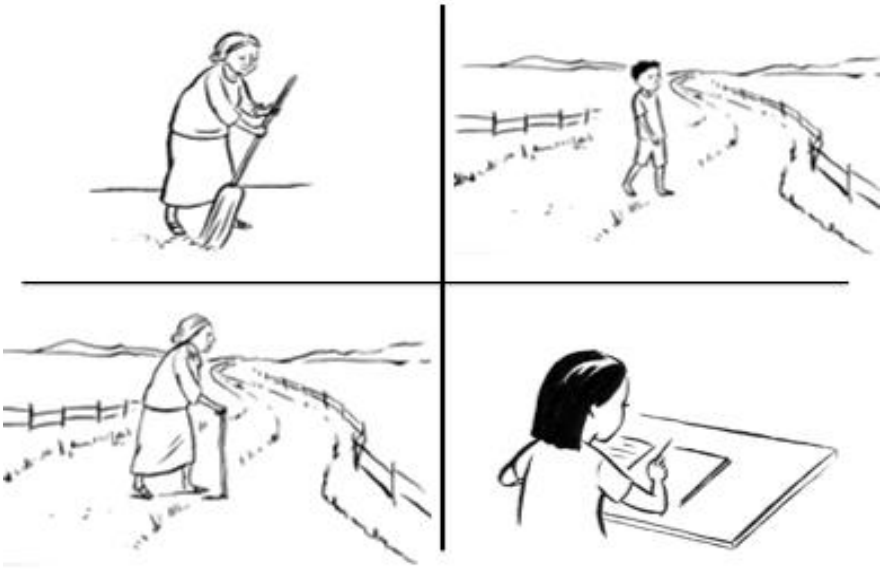
16. Rabbit and tortoise



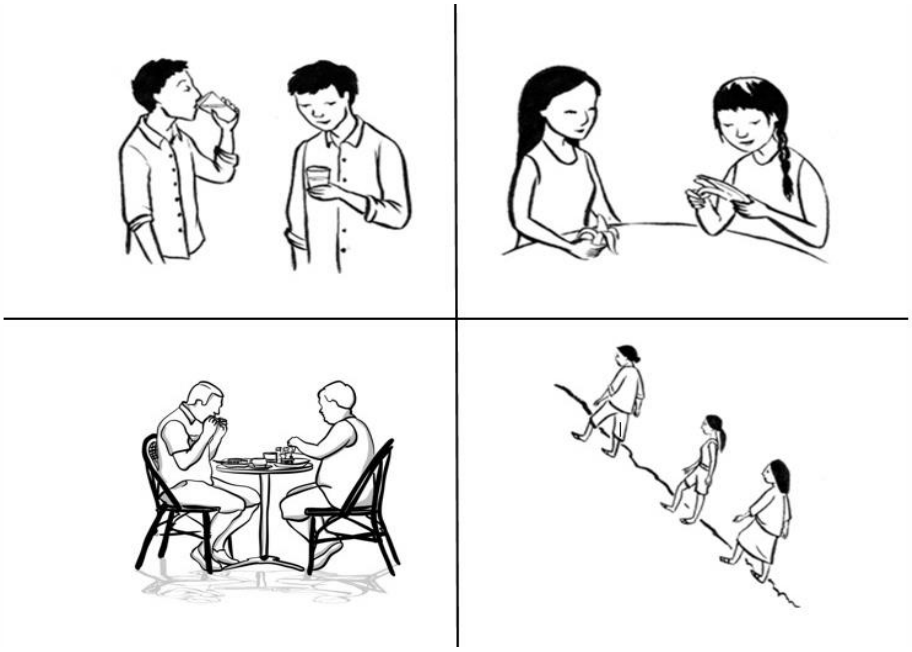
17. Horse jumps.



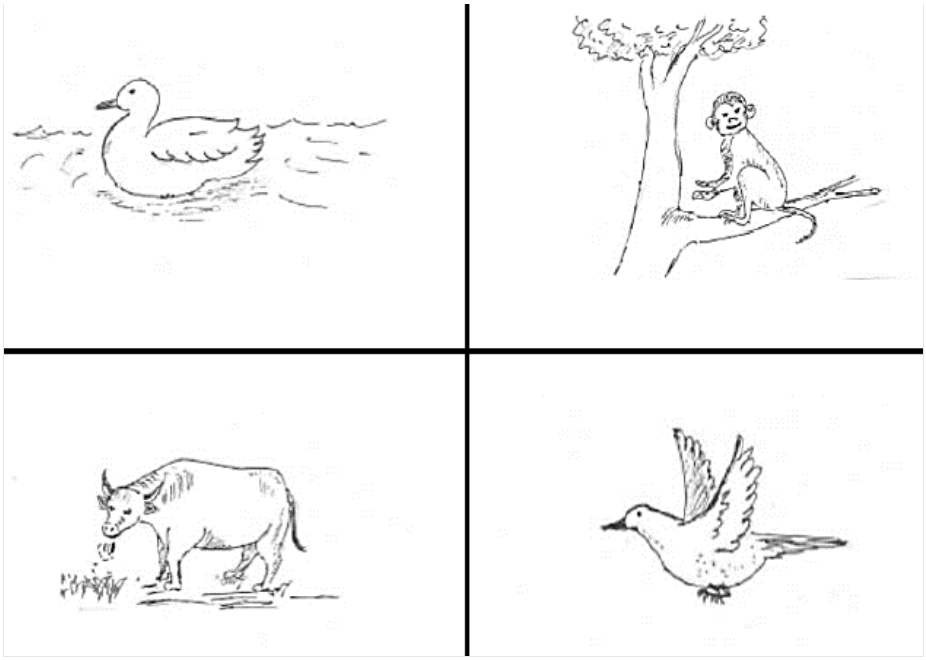
18. Child writes



19. People drink

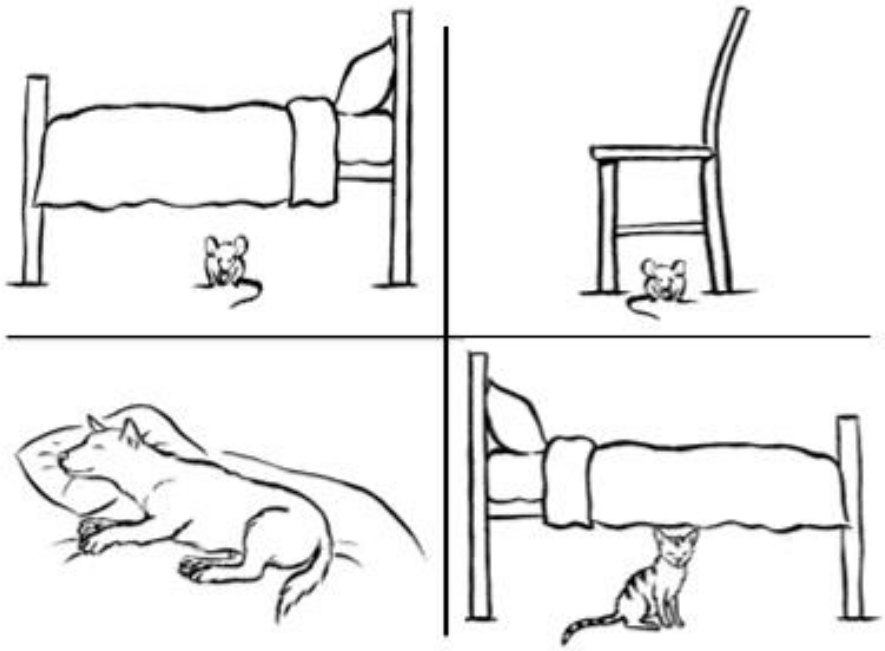


20. Bird flies

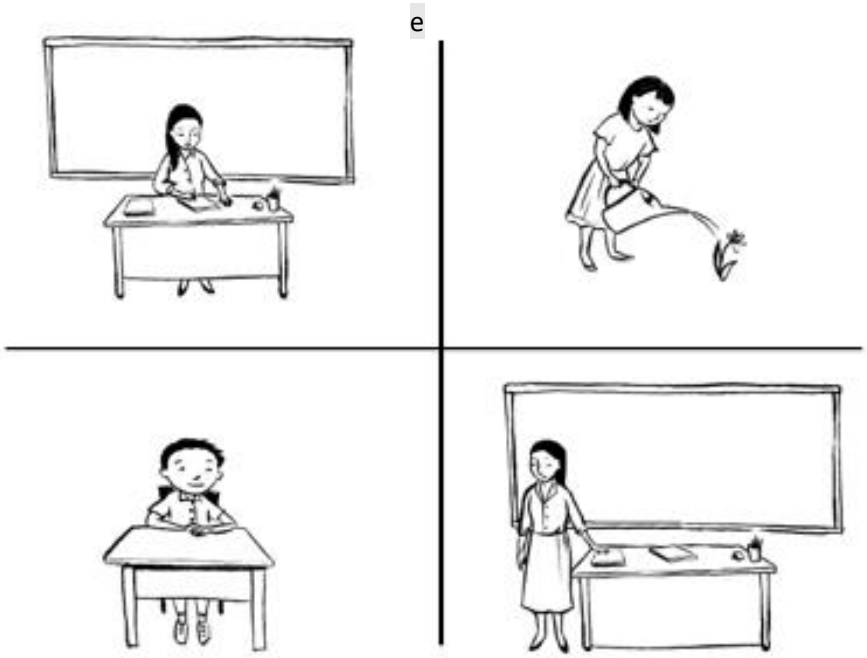


Remember: Do not read the phrases aloud to the child

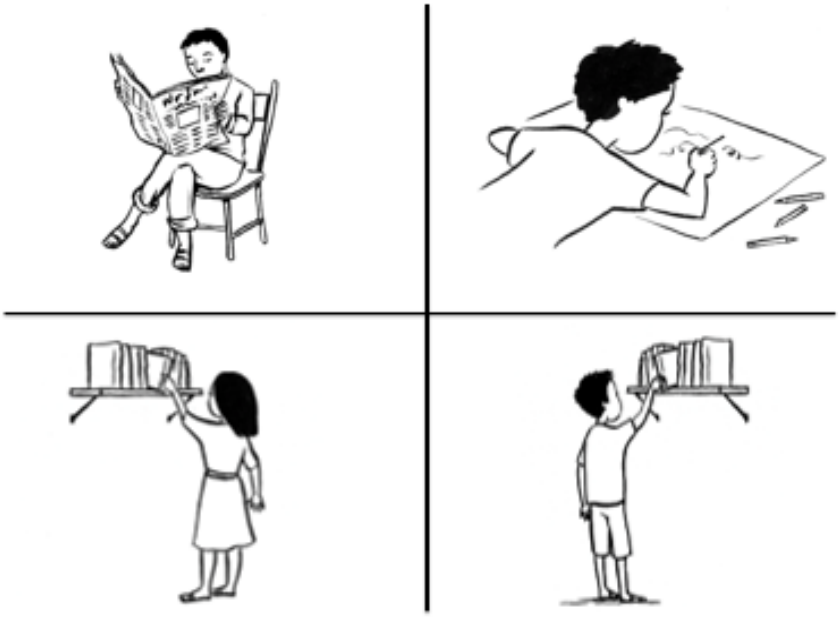
21. The mouse is under the chair



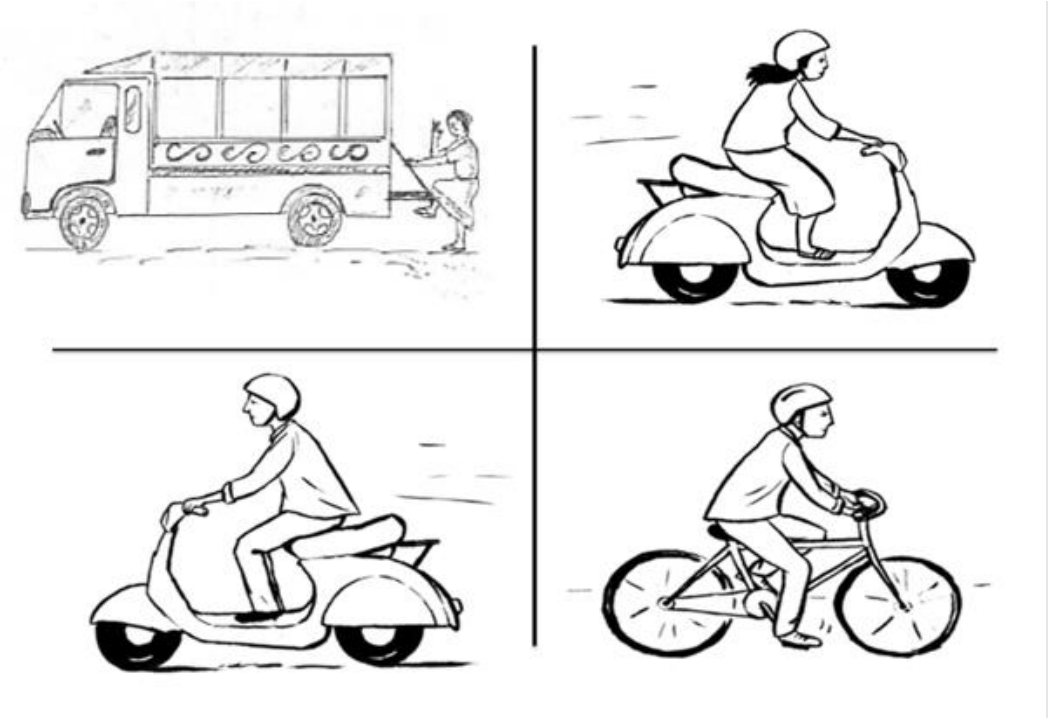
22. The teacher stands next to the desk



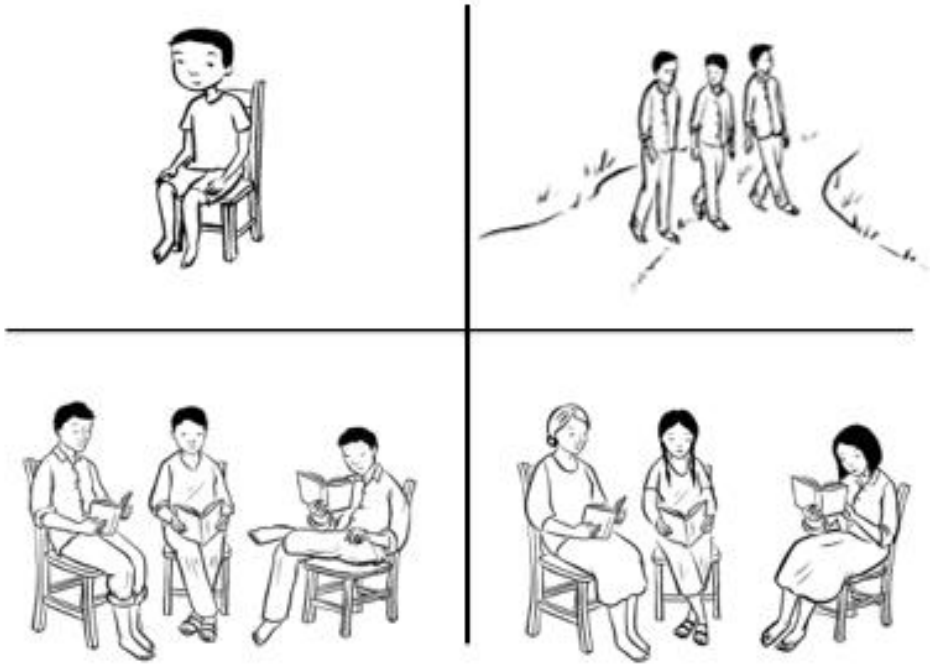
23. The child draws with a pencil



24. The person goes on the bus



25. The three men walk across the road



COMPREHENSION PASSAGES AND QUESTIONS

Instruction

1. Give the pupil the reading passage. 2. Say: W**hen I say 'begin,' start reading aloud from the title on this page. Try to read each word. If you come to a word you don't know, I'll tell it to you. Be sure to try to do your best reading. Do you understand what I want you to do**? 3. Say: '**Begin'** and when the pupil begins to say the first word of the title press START. 4. As the pupil reads, follow along on your screen. Mark the words read incorrectly (they will turn blue with a line through them). See Appendix A for instructions on how to judge words as correct or incorrect. 5. If the pupil stops reading before the end of the passage, encourage the pupil to keep reading. Show the pupil where he/she stopped, if necessary. Follow along on your copy. 6. After 30 seconds, a message will flash, "Please mark the item being attempted." Mark the word that the child was reading when the message came, and a blue box will appear around it. 7. When the screen flashes at the end of 30 seconds, do a quick count of the correct words. • If the pupil has read less than 5 words correctly, then: Politely stop the child and Press STOP. Say: **Thank you.** On the next page, mark NON-READER o • If the pupil has read 5 or more words correctly, then: • Allow the pupil to finish the passage. • Continue marking which words are read incorrectly by clicking on them. • As soon as the pupil finishes the last word of the passage, click the STOP button. Say: **Thank you.** • On the next page, for the question, 'Was the student a reader or non-reader?' mark READER. • Move to the Reading Comprehension questions

The mother chicken teaches her chick.

One day when the sky was transparent and clear, and the cool wind sometimes blew. A flock of little chicks running under their mother's tail happily went to find food in the forest. The mother chicken warned her children "Don't go far away from me because a snake will come and catch you. You won't see me again!". One of the chicks went to find food alone and became separated from the group. The chicken felt afraid and tried to call for its mother. At the same time, a snake was slithering nearby a tree branch which made the chick even more scared. Later, when the mother found the lost chick, she took all her children to safety.

reader	Is child a reader or a non-reader? 0. A non-reader read less accurate than 5 per 30 seconds) 1. A reader (read correctly 5 per 30 seconds)	I__I	Select only one option

Comprehension Questions

Comp1	What happened in the story? 1. mother chicken and her chicks go out to find food. 2. mother chicken tells the chicks to stay close to her.	I__I	mark every main point mentioned by the child

	3. one chick wanders away from the flock and is scared of the snake 4. in the end, the mother chicken finds the chick and brings the chick home safely 5. None		
Comp2	How many chicks were lost? (correct answer: one chick) 0. Wrong answer 1. Correct answer	I__I	Don't read the answer to them
Comp3	Why did the chick get lost? (correct answer: a chick went to find food alone) 0. Wrong answer 1. Correct answer	I__I	Don't read the answer to them
Comp4	Why was the lost chick frightened? (correct answers: the chick saw a snake/The chick was alone) 0. Wrong answer 1. Correct answer	I__I	Don't read the answer to them
Comp5	Did the mother chicken find the lost chick? (Yes) 0. No 1. Yes	I__I	Don't read the answer to them
Comp6	What could happen if the snake catches the chick? (correct answers: the chick could become snake's food/chick could die/ the chick couldn't find the mother) 0. Wrong answer 1. Correct answer	I__I	Don't read the answer to them
Comp7	Where did the chick find food? (correct answer: in the forest) 0. Wrong answer 1. Correct answer	I__I	Don't read the answer to them
Comp8	Why should chicks not look for food by themselves? (correct answer: the chick could get caught by the snake/ the chick could get lost) 0. Student could NOT explain their answer with information from the story 1. Student could explain their answer with information from the story	I__I	Don't read the answer to them

Background information 2 (for all Grade levels)

ecdattended	Did you attend ECD/preschool? 0. No 1. Yes 999. Don't know		*Select only one option
mainlang	What language do you often speak at home? 1. Lao 2. Phouthay 3. Makong 4. Tri 5. Taoy 6. Katang 7. Thai 8. Bru 9. Other 999 Don'tKnow/No response	I__I	*Select only one option
otherlang	At home, do you speak any other languages? 1. Lao 2. Phouthay 3. Makong 4. Tri 5. Taoy 6. Katang 7. Thai 8. Bru 9. Other 10. None 999 Don' tKnow/No response	I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I	*Select all that apply

ses	Does your home have the following: 1. Mobile 2. Electricity 3. Refrigerator 4. Bicycle 5. TV 6. Motorbike 7. Car 8. Tractor [TOK TOK]) 9. None 999. Don't know	I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I	*Please read all the options to the child and select all that apply
book	At home do you have : 1. Textbooks 2. Magazines 3. Newspapers 4. Storybooks/COMICS 5. Coloring and drawing books 6. None of these 999. Don't know	I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I	*Please read all the options to the child and select all that apply

HEALTH

Thank you! Now, I would like to ask you a few questions about your health.

health1	Have you been sick anytime **during the last week**? 0. No → "health4" 1. Yes → "health1a" 999. Don't know	I__I	*Select only one
health1a	What kind of sickness did you have? 1. Sore stomach 2. Fever 3. Headache 4. Tiredness 5. Coughing 6. Other 999. Don't Know	I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I	*If the child cannot name the sickness, ask them to describe the symptoms for you and select the right answer. *Give examples for a sore stomach such as food poisoning or diarrhoea *Select all that apply

health2	**During last week**, did you miss school because you were sick? 0. No → "health4" 1. Yes → "health3" 999. Don't know	I__I	*Explain that this means they stayed at home *Select only one
health3	How many days did you miss school because you were sick **during the last week**? 1. 1 2. 2 3. 3 4. 4 5. 5 → fs3 999. Don't Know	I__I	*Select only one
Health4	**During the last week** did you miss school for any other reasons? 0. No 1. Yes 999. Don't know	I__I	*Explain to student if necessary: When the school was open, not because the school was closed *Select only one
Health5	Do you use the latrine/toilet at school? o Yes; I am able to use it when I need to o No; I do not use the toilet.		*Select only one
Health6	Do you wash your hands at school? o Yes o No >> fs3		*Select only one
Health7	Do you wash your hands with soap at school? o Yes o No		*Select only one
Health8	When do you wash your hands at school? (check all that apply) ☐ Before eating lunch ☐ After using the latrine ☐ Between classes ☐ When I get to school ☐ When going home after classes		*multiple select *Do not read the answer choices to the student

FOOD SECURITY

Thank you! Now, I would like you to think about all the meals you had today.

fs3	Did you eat something for breakfast today? 0. No → "fs5" 1. Yes → "fs4a" 999. Don't know	I__I	*Select only one
fs4a	Did you feel full after eating breakfast? Or could you have eaten more? 0. I felt full → "fs5" 1. I could have eaten more → "fs4b"	I__I	*Select only one
fs4b	Why didn't you eat more in the morning? 1. There wasn't any more food 2. There was nothing I liked 3. Other	I__I	*Select only one
~~**The next set of questions will be asked if "time of survey" is equal to 2 or 3, else go to "fsx3".**~~			
fs5	Has the school lunch meal already been served today? 0. No 1. Yes 999. Don't know	I__I	*Select only one
fs6	Did you already eat something for lunch today? 0. No →"fsX3" 1. Yes 999. Don't know	I__I	*Select only one
fsX1	Did you already eat the school meal? 0. No → "fsX2b" 1. Yes → "fsX2" 999. Don't know	I__I	*Select only one
fsX2	Did you like the taste of the school meal? 0. Not at all 1. A little bit 2. Somewhat 3. Yes, very much	I__I	*Select only one
fsX2b	Why didn't you eat the school meal? 1. I was sick 2. I was playing 3. There was not enough food	I__I	*Don't read the options to the child *Select only one

	4. I didn't like the taste 5. Other 999. Don't know		
fsX3	How hungry do you feel right now? 0. Not at all hungry 1. A little hungry 2. Somewhat hungry 3. Very hungry 999. Don't know	I__I	*Select only one

Household Environment

Very good! We have a few more questions about your home.

nhhold	How many people are there in your household, including yourself?	**…….**	*Record the number > 0 & < 21 *Mark 999 if no response/don't know
seeread	During the last week, did you see anyone in your house reading? 0. No → "helpstudy" 1. Yes → "nseeread" 999. Don't know	I__I	*Select only one
nseeread	How many household members did you see reading last week? 1. 1 2. 2 3. 3 4. 4 5. 5 6. 6 999. Don't know	I__I	(enter the number of household members the child counted) *If the child counted more than 6 select 6
helpstudy	During the last week, did anyone in your house encourage you to study? 0. No → "story2u" 1. Yes → "nhelpstudy" 999. Don't know	I__I	Select only one option
nhelpstudy	How many household members encouraged you to study last week? 1. 1 2. 2 3. 3 4. 4 5. 5 6. 6 999. Don't know	I__I	(enter the number of household members the child counted) *If the child counted more than 6 select 6
story2u	During the last week, did anyone in your house tell you a story? 0. No → "read2u" 1. Yes → "nstory2u" 999. Don't know	I__I	Select only one option
nstory2u	How many household members told you a story in the past week? 1. 1 2. 2 3. 3	I__I	(enter the number of household members the child counted) *If the child counted more than 6 select 6

	4. 4 5. 5 6. 6 999. Don't know		
Read2u	During the last week, did anyone in your house read to you? 0. No 1. Yes 999. Don't know	I__I	*Select only one option
nread2u	How many household members read to you last week? 1. 1 2. 2 3. 3 4. 4 5. 5 6. 6 999. Don't know	I__I	(enter the number of household members the child counted) *If the child counted more than 6 select 6
Hhenviro3	Are your parents or family members asking you questions about the stories they tell you or read to you? 0. No 1. Yes 999. Don't know	I__I	Select only one option
readout	During the last week, did you read outside of school? 0. No 1. Yes 999. Don't know	I__I	select only one option *outside means not during school hours, not physically outdoors

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND PARTICIPATION

We are almost done! Now, I would like to ask you some questions about your school.

enviro1	Do you like coming to school? 1. No 2. Yes 999. Don't know	I__I	*Select only one option
enviro2	What do you like about your school? 1. Reading 2. Writing 3. Participating in class activities/games	I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I	*Don't give examples or read the list to the respondent *Select all that apply

	4. Dancing 5. Teacher reading 6. Being with my friends 7. Working in groups 8. Answering questions 9. Presenting ideas in class 10. Food is provided 11. Physical education/sports at school 12. Learning new things 13. other 14. Nothing 999. Don't know	I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I I__I	
Skip enviro 6, enviro4, and enviro7 if health3 = 5 (missed school for 5 days)			
enviro6	**How often in the last week** did the teacher tell a story or read a poem to the classroom which was not in the textbook? 1. Every day 2. A few times during the week; 3. Once during the week; 4. Never 999. Don't know	I__I	*Read the list to the respondent, but don't read 'don't know' *Select only one
enviro4	**How often in the last week** did the teacher ask you about the story s/he told or the poem s/he read during class? 1. Often 2. Sometimes 3. Rarely 4. Never 999. Don't know	I__I	*Read the list to the respondent, but don't read "don't know" *Select only one
enviro7	**How often in the last week** did you play a game in the classroom around the alphabet or a reading activity? 1. Every day 2. A few times during the week; 3. Once during the week; 4. Never 999. Don't know	I__I	*Read the list to the respondent, but don't read 'don't know' *Select only one
enviro10	Does your school have story books other than textbook for you to take home and borrow? 0. No →End the survey 1. Yes → enviro10a 999. Don't know	I__I	*Select only one

Enviro10a	**How often in the last week** did you borrow story books other than textbook from school to take home to read? 1. Every day 2. A few times during the week; 3. Once during the week; 4. Never 999. Don't know	I__I	*Read the list to the respondent, but don't read 'don't know' *Select only one

Thank you very much for answering my questions.

End Time, Date _____

Annex 6: Classroom Observation Tool

LEAPS III Classroom Observation Tool

Classroom Observation

Instructions: Arrive at least 15 minutes before the class starts, introduce yourself to the teacher and ask background questions that require teacher response. If more than one teacher is present, answer for the lead teacher or the person leading the majority of the lesson you observe. At the start of the observation, explain to the teacher that you are there to see how well the school is working, not to judge him/her as a teacher. Do not write the teacher's name on this form. Sit in the back of the room and try to not move around. Do not interact with or distract the children. Do not review children's work. At the end of the observation thank the teacher for his/her time. Do not give the teacher feedback or make any comments about his/her teaching**.**

You are to observe the class for least 30 minutes and preferably 45 minutes during active literacy lessons. You are going to perform a snap-shot observation which includes observing the teacher and students at 10 different points in time when the class is in session. The snap-shop observation should begin once you complete Questions A1-20 below. Next, you will complete a series of questions about the teacher's overall classroom management.

Start Time:

End Time:

	Background	Options	Coding	Parameters	Guidance
A1	School	[pre-populate]			
A2	Teacher gender	Male Female	1 2	Choose one	
A3	How long has teacher been teaching?		0-40	Enter integer	If it is the teachers' first year teaching, enter 0.
A4a	Grade level observed	First Second Third Fourth Fifth	1 2 3 4 5		
A4b	Grade(s)	First Second Third Fourth Fifth	1 2 3 4 5	Choose all that apply	Please indicate ALL grade levels of students present in the classroom during the observation, as some schools may have multi-grade instruction under a single teacher.
A5	Subject observed	Math English	1 2	Indicate the subject of the lesson you are about to observe (ask the teacher).	

		The World Around Us	3		
		Lao Language	4		
		Drawing	5		
		Physical Education/Sport	6		
		Art (Song and Dance)	7		
A6	Language(s)	Lao	1	Choose all that apply	Indicate the language(s) used by the teacher in the course of the observation.
		Khmu	2		
		Hmong	3		
		Leu	4		
		Other	5		
A7	Girls enrolled		[fill in #]	Any value 0-99	Ask the teacher or school head to indicate how many girls are enrolled in the class observed
A8	Boys enrolled		[fill in #]	Any value 0-99	Ask the teacher or school head to indicate how many boys are enrolled in the class observed
A9	Girls present		[fill in #]	Any value 0-99	Count the number of girls present in the class during the observation
A10	Boys present		[fill in #]	Any value 0-99	Count the number of boys present in the class during the observation
A11	Are students mixed by gender?	Yes, well mixed	1	Choose one	
		No, girls and boys sit separately	2		
A12	Girls sitting in front two rows		[fill in #]	Any value 0-99	
A13	Girls sitting in back two rows		[fill in #]	Any value 0-99	
A14	Boys sitting in front two rows		[fill in #]	Any value 0-99	
A15	Boys sitting in back two rows		[fill in #]	Any value 0-99	
A16	Girls who have a book/notebook/slate			Any value 0-99	Count the number of girls who have any kind of school book, notebook, workbook, or slate during class
A17	Boys who have a book/notebook/slate			Any value 0-99	Count the number of boys who have any kind of school book, notebook, workbook, or slate during class
A18	What is the textbook to student ratio?	Choose one	a) 1 book per student b) 1 book per 2 students		

			c) 1 book per 3 students d) 1 book per 4 or more students
A19	Learning space	Choose one	a) Fixed-permanent structure b) Semi-permanent structure c) Temporary structure
A20	Classroom arrangement	Choose one	a) Rows of desks with benches b) Grouped desks with benches c) Benches without desks d) Floor mats only e) Other, specify

Snapshot Observation

Instructions:

During this exercise you are going to observe the teacher and students at 10 different points in time when the class is in session. These snap-shot observations will be short (about 15 seconds each). For each snapshot, start by noticing what the teacher is doing and then scan the classroom in a clockwise circle to note what students are doing. If more than one teacher is present, answer for the *lead* teacher or the person leading the majority of the lesson you observe.

Include a total of ten snap-shot scans at 3-minute intervals. Each snapshot should last for about 15 seconds.

1. What is the teacher doing?

Teacher in the front of the room providing instruction. Includes lecture, student question/answer, copying from the blackboard, and choral reading.	Teacher is engaged in guided reading to the class or a small group from any suitable book, teacher is listening to students read or asking comprehension questions about a book.	Teacher is engaged in modelled writing or monitoring student writing and providing feedback.	Teacher is assisting students. For example, teacher walks through the room to attend to small groups or individuals.	Teacher is involved in classroom management: handing out reading books, changing activities, putting away materials, preparing to leave.	One or more students are being corrected or told off for poor behavior or are being sent out of the room for disciplinary reasons.	Teacher is involved in activities that are unrelated to the lesson plan. This includes social interactions (conversations, teasing, bullying) or non-social interactions (staring out the window, sleeping); also applies if the teacher have stepped out of the classroom.
Teacher-led instruction	Reading	Writing	Group work, pair work, or individual work	Transitions / preparing activities	Discipline	Uninvolved / off-task

2. What portion of the class is engaged in teacher-led instruction?

Students are responding or actively listening to teacher.

None of the students	One or a few students	Half	Almost all	All

3. What portion of the class is listening and speaking?				
Students are engaged in structured dialogue with their peers (oral vocabulary and sentences).				
None of the students	One or a few students	Half	Almost all	All
4. What portion of the class is reading?				
Individual (silent) reading, in pairs or small groups or verbally predicting and responding to texts e.g. answering questions about a book they have read. (reading vocabulary words, sentences, stories)				
None of the students	One or a few students	Half	Almost all	All
5. What portion of the class is writing?				
Students are practicing letter patterns, writing words, sentences, paragraphs or stories, handwriting, labelling, answering written comprehension questions.				
None of the students	One or a few students	Half	Almost all	All
6. What portion of the class is working in groups, pairs, or individually?				
Students are working (answering comprehension questions, practicing writing, completing spelling or vocabulary tasks, etc.) independently, either individually, in pairs, or in groups.				
None of the students	One or a few students	Half	Almost all	All
7. What portion of the class is engaged in transitions or preparation?				
Students are involved in classroom management: handing out reading books, changing activities, putting away materials, preparing to leave.				
None of the students	One or a few students	Half	Almost all	All
8. What portion of the class is being corrected or disciplined?				
One or more students are being corrected or told off for poor behavior or are being sent out of the room for disciplinary reasons.				
None of the students	One or a few students	Half	Almost all	All
9. What portion of the class is uninvolved or off-task?				
Students are involved in activities that are unrelated to the lesson plan. This includes social interactions (conversations, teasing, bullying) or non-social interactions (staring out the window, sleeping); also applies if students have stepped out of the classroom.				
None of the students	One or a few students	Half	Almost all	All
10. What is the number of distracted students?				
Students are involved in activities that are unrelated to the lesson plan. This includes social interactions (conversations, teasing, bullying) or non-social interactions (staring out the window, sleeping); also applies if students have stepped out of the classroom.				
[Insert number]				

Instruction: This section should be completed after the 10 snapshots are taken, but before you leave the classroom.

	Positive Pedagogy	Options	Coding	Parameters	Guidance
P1	Teacher feedback about **girls'** work is accompanied by positive comments. Definition: "Work" here can mean written work, verbal responses, or classroom activities. Teacher provides positive comments and encouragement regardless of whether the answers are correct. If the teacher does not make any comments on girls' work during the observation, rate "Not at all true."	Not at all true A little bit true Mostly true Very true	1 2 3 4	Choose one	10% or less of the teacher feedback about girls' work is positive. Some (11-50%) of the teacher feedback about girls' work is positive. Most (51-89%) of the teacher feedback about girls' work is positive. All or almost all (90% or more) of the teacher feedback about girls' work is positive.
P2	Teacher feedback about **boys'** work is accompanied by positive comments. Definition: "Work" here can mean written work, verbal responses, or classroom activities. Teacher provides positive comments and encouragement regardless of whether the answers are correct. If the teacher does not make any comments on boys' work during the observation, rate "Not at all true."	Not at all true A little bit true Mostly true Very true	1 2 3 4	Choose one	10% or less of the teacher feedback about boys' work is positive. Some (11-50%) of the teacher feedback about boys' work is positive. Most (51-89%) of the teacher feedback about boys' work is positive. All or almost all (90% or more) of the teacher feedback about boys' work is positive.
P3	The teacher redirects **girls** who are not paying attention to instructions or lessons. Definition: Redirecting includes, for example, adjusting tone of voice, asking questions to the students, verbally mentioning that they should pay attention, etc.	Not at all true A little bit true Mostly true Very true	1 2 3 4	Choose one	When girls are not paying attention in class, teacher redirects their attention 10% or less of the class time. When girls are not paying attention in class, teacher redirects their attention some (11-50%) of the class time. When girls are not paying attention in class, teacher redirects their attention most (51-89%) of the class time. When girls are not paying attention in class, teacher redirects their

	Positive Pedagogy	Options	Coding	Parameters	Guidance
					attention all or almost all (90% or more) of the class time.
P4	The teacher redirects **boys** who are not paying attention to instructions or lessons. Definition: Redirecting includes, for example, adjusting tone of voice, asking questions to the students, verbally mentioning that they should pay attention, etc.	Not at all true A little bit true Mostly true Very true	1 2 3 4	Choose one	When boys are not paying attention in class, teacher redirects their attention 10% or less of the class time. When boys are not paying attention in class, teacher redirects their attention some (11-50%) of the class time. When boys are not paying attention in class, teacher redirects their attention most (51-89%) of the class time. When boys are not paying attention in class, teacher redirects their attention all or almost all (90% or more) of the class time.
P5	**Girls** participate in class. Definition: Participating in class includes, for example, asking questions, carrying out an activity, or responding to teachers' questions or instructions.	Not at all true A little bit true Mostly true Very true	1 2 3 4	Choose one	None or few (10% or less) of the girls participate in class. Some girls (11-50%) participate in class. Most girls (51-89%) participate in class. All or almost all girls (90% or more) participate in class.
P6	**Boys** participate in class. Definition: Participating in class includes, for example, asking questions, carrying out an activity, or responding to teachers' questions or instructions.	Not at all true A little bit true Mostly true Very true	1 2 3 4	Choose one	None or few (10% or less) of the boys participate in class. Some boys (11-50%) participate in class. Most boys (51-89%) participate in class. All or almost all boys (90% or more) participate in class.
P7	The teacher uses a variety of ways of teaching or gives students a variety of activities during the observation period. Definition: During the observation, the teacher does not simply lecture to the children, and does not	Not at all true A little bit true	1 2	Choose one	All teaching and learning activities are based on rote learning. The teacher primarily uses rote learning plus other activities (such as singing) that children do as a group with all children doing the same thing.

	Positive Pedagogy	Options	Coding	Parameters	Guidance
	simply use rote learning. Rather, the teacher gives children a variety of ways to learn the information, such as a song, game, story, etc.	Mostly true	3		The teacher uses a roughly even mix of rote learning and activities to deliver lessons.
		Very true	4		The teacher may use some rote learning, but teaching is primarily based on activities.
P8	A reading corner is in use in the classroom. Definition: A reading corner is a location where books for children are placed in sight in a classroom (**not** put away in the teacher's desk, cabinet, etc.). The area does not need to truly be in a corner, but should be a dedicated area of the classroom where teachers and students can access books. Books can be on a shelf or table, in a hanging cloth pouch, etc.	Not at all true	1	Choose one	There is no reading corner.
		A little bit true	2		There is a reading corner but neither teachers nor students access any books during the observation.
		Mostly true	3		There is a reading corner and the teacher uses one or more books (but students do not access the books) during the observation.
		Very true	4		There is a reading corner and the students use one or more books during the observation.
P9	Environmental prints are visible in the classroom at the child's level. Definition: Environmental prints include labels, signs, logos, posters, alphabet charts, drawings, art, etc. These should be a child level meaning the children can easily see and read the signs without straining.	Not at all true	1	Choose one	There are no environmental prints.
		A little bit true	2		There are environmental prints available but they are not on display during the class period.
		Mostly true	3		There are environmental prints on display, but they are difficult to see at the child level.
		Very true	4		There are environmental prints and they are easy to see at the child's level.
	Teaching and learning materials are being used throughout the lesson.	Not at all true	1		There are no teaching and learning materials available.

	Positive Pedagogy	Options	Coding	Parameters	Guidance
P10	Definition: Teaching and learning materials include picture flip books, cards, digital devices, flash cards, etc.	A little bit true	2		There are teaching and learning materials available but they are not being used in the lesson.
		Mostly true	3		There are teaching and learning materials available, and the teacher uses at least one material during lessons (but students do not access the materials).
		Very true	4		There are teaching and learning materials available, and both the teacher and students use the materials during the lesson.

To be completed after the snapshots are finished, but before you leave the classroom. Please take notes during the snapshots as needed. Fill out on printed sheet.

Engagement: **During the entire class period:**

Which of the following teaching methods did the teacher use? (c*heck all that apply*)

_____Introduces lesson by explaining what students will learn

_____Reads aloud to students

_____Asks students literal recall questions about lesson

_____Asks students critical thinking questions about lesson

_____Gives time for children to answer questions

_____Responds to student questions

_____Provides explanation if student(s) don't understand

_____Gives classwork for students to practice

_____Gives differentiated work for students based on their ability

_____Gives small group reading related work

_____Concludes lesson with summary of what was learned

_____Gives reading homework

_____Praises or compliments students

_____Criticizes, scolds or punishes students

Teacher's position: During the lesson the teacher is: (c*heck all that apply*)

_____ Sitting or standing in front of class or at blackboard

_____ Walking throughout the classroom

_____ Getting down to the child's level

_____ Not paying attention to students or doing own work

_____ Away from the classroom

What did the teacher do when a child gave the wrong response or did not respond at all? (*check all that apply*)

_____ Call on another child

_____ Provide feedback

_____ Model for the child the correct response (helps the child come to correct response)

_____ Break the task down for the child so they understand how to do it the next time

_____ Give additional questions

_____ Criticize the child

_____ Encourage the child to try again

_____ Ignore the error

_____ Other: _____

Availability and Use of Classroom Resources:

Check all materials visible in the classroom.

_____ prescribed textbooks

_____ writing tools (pens, pencils)

_____ visual aids (Pictures, etc.)

_____ exercise books or paper

_____ stories and books that are not the textbook

_____ teacher guide

_____ chalkboard, duster & chalk

_____ big story books

_____ manipulatives (letter forms, cubes, cards, etc.)

_____ dictionaries

_____ proper hand washing posters

_____ other, specify

ONLY FOR GRADE 1 and 2 CLASSROOMS:

Reading and Writing Skills:

Phonological Awareness:

Teacher clearly and accurately pronounces individual sounds and tones that are the focus of the lesson with enough volume for students to hear. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher guides students to identify differences and similarities of sounds. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher uses oral activities that include manipulating sounds in words (For example: Breaking down a word into its smaller parts or starting with individual sounds and combining them to form a word).
❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher uses engaging activities and materials to support instruction (e.g., hand motions, clapping, flash cards, other manipulatives to represent sounds)

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Decoding

Teacher uses activities/games/manipulatives/materials, such as letter tiles or flash cards or posters, to help make the explicit connection between sounds (and tones) and letters.

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher uses textbook information to explain connection between sounds and letters

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Students are applying letter/sound knowledge in reading and writing activities.

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Vocabulary:

Teacher puts unfamiliar words in stories read orally to students into context by using student-friendly explanations.

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Explicit vocabulary instruction is purposeful and ongoing as evidenced by lists of vocabulary words, graphic organizers, word walls, word sorts, etc.

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher relates new vocabulary to prior knowledge through questioning and other instructional activities.

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Students are actively involved with thinking about and using words in multiple contexts.

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher explicitly teaches word parts (e.g. past tense, plural markers etc.) .

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Fluency:

Teacher models fluent reading (i.e., with speed, accuracy (correctness of words and pronunciation), and correct rhythm and intonation) during read-aloud and shared readings.

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher and students are academically engaged in shared reading activities (e.g., big books, choral reading, charts, poems, songs).

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Oral reading takes place in whole and small groups. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Oral reading takes place individually (e.g., choral reading, partner reading, individual reading, repeated reading). ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Reading Comprehension:

Teacher models and encourages students to make predictions about text content using pictures, background knowledge, and text features (e.g., title, subheading, captions, illustrations).

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher models and encourages students to use prior knowledge and supporting details from text to make connections with the reading selection.

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher models and encourages students to retell the main idea of a story or text.

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher models and encourages students to identify supporting details (e.g., who, what, when, where, why, how), of a story or text.

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Students and teacher discuss answers to higher-level questions (not factual questions from the text but questions that require the student to make inferences and think critically) about shared readings and selections read.

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Writing:

Teacher asks students to create or write their own texts. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher asks students to write words or sentences as dictated. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher checks students' spelling or asks them to spell words ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Teacher asks students to copy what is written on the board/wall ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Unable to determine

Annex 7: Focus Group Discussion Guides

Focus Group Discussion: Parents

Hi! Our names are XXXX, and we are here talking to parents such as yourself on behalf of CRS. CRS has been awarded phase III of the CRS school meals program in Savannakhet Province. To help inform this next phase, we are collecting information to better understand how the program has been functioning and get your opinions of what additional support could be useful. It's important that everyone here can feel comfortable to speak freely. Everything that you say here will be confidential, and we will not record your name or any personal information. The information that you provide will be consolidated and shared with CRS to inform the implementation of the next phase of the project. I want you to talk openly and freely, so please also keep everything that anyone says here private. This is a friendly discussion, and there aren't any right or wrong answers, so it's okay if you disagree with someone else. If I ask you anything that makes you uncomfortable, it's okay for you not to answer.

We want to hear about positive as well as negative stories, because hearing about things that have and haven't worked well can be really useful so we can design better programs in the future—so please do not feel 'kreng jai' [not speaking one's mind for fear of offending the listener, putting social protocol ahead of truth telling]. Your opinions will be valuable to improve the school meals program and to make sure it is responsive to your household needs. Your answers will not affect whether your children continue to receive school meals or your role with the school. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary and there are no additional benefits for participation.

Does anyone have any questions for me? You can ask me a question at any time during our talk today. [Note taker will take detailed notes. The note taker will also record if this is a male or female group, the number of participants, and notes on ethnicities, if known.]

If you have questions about the study after today, please contact Salika Khoonbarthao, the study coordinator at salika.khoonbarthao@gmail.com or Dr. Pooja Nakamura, the project director of the evaluation, at pnakamura@air.org. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant, contact AIR's Institutional Review Board at IRB@air.org, toll free at 1-800-634-0797, or by postal mail: AIR c/o IRB, 1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor, Arlington, VA 22202.

We expect the focus group discussion to last about 60-90 minutes. Are you ready to begin?

Do you accept to participate in this focus group discussion?

____ Participant consented ____ Participant did not consent

Let's start by going around and introducing ourselves. What is your name? [Interviewer begins by introducing yourself first.] Tell me about your family: How many children do you have in primary school? [if yes, number of boys, number of girls]

Drawing Exercise (5-10 minutes)

Tell participants that we are going to start with a short and fun activity. Then, facilitator will draw a picture of a young child on a large paper or poster sheet – ask participants to determine the gender – and ask them to consider him/her as child in their community. Ask the following questions:

> Does this young [girl or boy] have siblings? Who lives with them?
> Does this young [girl or boy] attend school? Do you think children need to go to school?

If the child goes to school, how does this child feel about going to school? Does it make them happy, excited afraid, worried, etc.? If the child goes to school, what do they like about school?

What kinds of lessons does this [boy or girl] learn at school if they attend?

Does this [boy or girl] have any challenges in school? What are they?

How many years will this child remain in school? Why do you think the child will remain in school for this number of years?

Does this [boy or girl] ever get sick? Does s/he go to school when sick? Do they see a doctor? Why/Why not?

Does this child eat at school? Does this child like what he/she eats at school? Does it make them full?

What does the child eat at home?

How often does the child wash their hands or their bodies at home?

How does the child get water for washing themselves?

How does this child study at home? What kind of support do parents or others in the household provide?

When children attend school, does it affect your community in any way? How? In a positive way, negative way, not at all?

Now I would like to switch from the drawing to talking about education more broadly.

1. *What are the main challenges that families in your community face in sending their children to primary school?*
    a. *How do families usually try to overcome these challenges?*
    b. *What can the school or community do to help families overcome these obstacles?*
2. *What encourages children to attend primary school or not attend? (Probe to understand if what will encourage boys and girls to go to school is the same or different)*

We will now talk about the school meals because I would like to understand more about your opinions on this topic.

3. *Do you know about the CRS school meals program? What do you know about it?*
4. *If you contribute to the school meals, what kind of help have you provided? (Example: food contributions, cooking, school repairs, etc.)*
    a. *How frequently do you contribute?*
    b. *Why did you decide to be involved in the program?*
    c. *What challenges, if any, did you have contributing to the school meals?*
    d. *What can CRS do to help you overcome those challenges?*
5. *If you do not contribute but want to contribute to the school meals program, what is preventing you from being able to contribute?*
    a. *What do you need in order to be able to contribute (if you want to)?*
6. *What do you think of the food served at school?*

a. *Is it enough food, or not enough? What do your children think about the food?*

7. *Do you think the school meals address the needs of children and families like you?*

    a. *If the school meals are addressing needs, how do school meals help your family or community? Can you give me an example?*

    b. *If the school meals are not addressing needs, can you tell us why? What can CRS do so the school meals address those needs?*

8. *What impact, if any, do you think the school meals program has on students' attendance and performance?*

We will now talk about health and hygiene practices, including handwashing, nutrition, and personal cleanliness.

9. *What do you do with your children at home to keep them clean and healthy? (Probe for handwashing, bathing, eating nutritious foods, etc.). Can you tell me how? (Potential follow ups: How often do your children wash their hands before eating? How often do your children bath? How often do your children eat meals at home?) What do the schools do to keep children clean and healthy while at school? (Probe for handwashing, provide latrines, provide clean water, etc.)*

    a. *Do you think they are able to help students be clean and healthy? Why or why not?*

10. *What assistance do you think CRS could provide to families and schools to help keep children clean and healthy? (Probe for training, capacity building, communications campaigns, etc.)*

I would like to ask a few questions now about the VEDC in your community.

11. *What kind of support does the VEDC provide your school?*

    a. *How do they support school meals?*

    b. *Are you happy with the level of support the VEDC provides? Please tell me why or why not. (Probe for what they are not happy about)*

    c. *What else does the VEDC need to do in order to help schools more, including school meals? (Pull answers from question 12b to try and solicit suggestions)*

    d. *How could CRS help the VEDCs in this task? (Pull answers from question 12b to try and solicit suggestions)*

Lastly, I am going to ask a few questions about how well equipped you feel to handle shocks to the community, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic.

12. *Can you share with us what happened to the schools, both the students and teachers, because of COVID-19? What problems, if any, did they encounter?*

13. *If schools did have to close again what support would be the most helpful so that your children can keep learning outside of the classroom?*

14. *Did your community experience any other problems or natural disasters in the past one year?*

a. *If yes, can you tell us more about these problems?*

b. *How did the school help the community in those times?*

15. *We want to make sure you have the opportunity to provide feedback to CRS if you would like. Are there times you want to communicate with CRS about the project?*

    a. *If yes, what would be the best and easiest way for you to contact CRS? (Probe for regular feedback meetings, anonymous feedback box, ad hoc feedback meetings, etc.)*

    b. *Do you know about the hotline number CRS has for questions and comments? Have you used this number why or why not?*

16. *Is there anything that I did not ask about that you would like to share with me, or do you have any additional thoughts about what we have discussed today?*

Thank you all very much for your sharing with me today, your feedback is much appreciated. Please know that you can talk to CRS if you have any additional feedback you would like to share with them through the CRS hotline numbers. There are posters available at the school. If you do not know where the CRS hotline posters are located, you may ask the school principal.

Focus Group Discussion: Village Education Development Committee (VEDC)

Hi! Our names are XXXX, and we are here talking to parents such as yourself on behalf of CRS. CRS has been awarded phase III of the CRS school meals program in Savannakhet Province. To help inform this next phase, we are collecting information to better understand how the program has been functioning and get your opinions of what additional support could be useful. It's important that everyone here can feel comfortable to speak freely. Everything that you say here will be confidential, and we will not record your name or any personal information. The information that you provide will be consolidated and shared with CRS to inform the implementation of the next phase of the project. I want you to talk openly and freely, so please also keep everything that anyone says here private. This is a friendly discussion, and there aren't any right or wrong answers, so it's okay if you disagree with someone else. If I ask you anything that makes you uncomfortable, it's okay for you not to answer.

We want to hear about positive as well as negative stories, because hearing about things that have and haven't worked well can be really useful so we can design better programs in the future—so please do not feel 'kreng jai' [not speaking one's mind for fear of offending the listener, putting social protocol ahead of truth telling]. Your opinions will be valuable to improve the school meals program and to make sure it is responsive to your household needs. Your answers will not affect whether your children continue to receive school meals or your role with the school. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary and there are no additional benefits for participation.

Does anyone have any questions for me? You can ask me a question at any time during our talk today. [Note taker will take detailed notes. The note taker will also record if this is a male or female group, the number of participants, and notes on ethnicities, if known.]

If you have questions about the study after today, please contact Salika Khoonbarthao, the study coordinator at salika.khoonbarthao@gmail.com or Dr. Pooja Nakamura, the project director of the evaluation, at pnakamura@air.org. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant, contact AIR's Institutional Review Board at IRB@air.org, toll free at 1-800-634-0797, or by postal mail: AIR c/o IRB, 1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor, Arlington, VA 22202.

We expect the focus group discussion to last about 60-90 minutes. Are you ready to begin?

Do you accept to participate in this focus group discussion?

____ Participant consented ____ Participant did not consent

Let's start by going around and introducing each other. What is your name? [Interviewer begins by introducing yourself first.]

1. *Can you tell me what the role is of the VEDC in this village? Can you give me an overview of your roles and how the members cooperate together?*
2. *Why did you decide to become a VEDC member?*
3. *What do you think are the needs of your community? (Probe for educational materials, teacher capacity, WASH facilities, food, etc.)*
    a. *What is the VEDC doing or needs to do to address the needs of your community?*

b. *How could CRS help the VEDC in these tasks? (Probe for training, capacity building, grant support, etc.)*

4. *Have you been a part of any successful activities through your work as a VEDC member?*
    a. *Why do you consider these successful? What made it successful?*
5. *Were there any activities the VEDC tried to do this year or last year to help the school and students which were not successful? Which ones were not successful?*
    a. *Why were these not successful?*
6. *At the school level, what kind of support and/or interactions do you have with the community?*
    a. *How do you engage with them?*
    b. *How often do you engage with them?*
    c. *What kinds of issues do they bring up?*
7. *Can you tell me how you and the other VEDC members work with other government staff, such as the Pedagogical Advisors, to support literacy programs?*
    a. *For the school meals program can you describe any work you have done with health or agriculture staff to support the program?*
    b. *Do you have suggestions for how health and agriculture staff can better support the program?*
8. *What assistance do you think CRS could provide so that you can coordinate/collaborate with other government staff on school development including the school meals program?*

Now, I am going to ask you about the school meals program in your community.

9. *How has your VEDC been involved with the school meals program? [Probe for mobilize cooks, oversee food distribution, mobilize community members, collect data from households, hold meetings with community to discuss progress, promote the program to the community, find safe location for storage if not mentioned.]*
    a. *What challenges if any did you face in supporting the school meals program?*
10. *Do you think the school meals address the needs of children and families in your community?*
    a. *If the school meals are addressing needs, how do school meals help the children and families in your community? Can you give me an example?*
    b. *If the school meals are not addressing needs, can you tell us why? What can CRS do so the school meals address those needs?*
11. *How engaged is your village of the school meals program? If engaged, how do they engage with the program? (Probe for contribute food, help with maintenance at the school, promote the program to the community, help identify cooks, etc.)*

12. *(QUESTION FOR ASTAPHONE AND PHALANAXAY ONLY) In the next phase of the CRS meals program, over the next few years, CRS will work with MOES to help transition the school meals program to the ministry so the school meals can continue.*
    a. *In the next few years, do you think your community will be prepared to take over the school meals program? Why or why not?*
    b. *What additional support do you think are needed from CRS, the community, or the government to help support the transition?*

I want to ask you now a few questions about water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).

13. *What do the schools do to keep children clean and healthy while at school? (Probe for handwashing, provide latrines, provide clean water, etc.)*
    a. *Do you think they are able to help students be clean and healthy? Why or why not?*
14. *What assistance do you think CRS could provide to help keep children clean and healthy? (Probe for training, capacity building, communications campaigns, etc.)*

Lastly, I am going to ask a few questions about how well equipped your VEDC feels to handle shocks to the community, such as COVID-19.

15. *Can you share with us what happened to the schools, both the students and teachers, because of COVID-19? What problems, if any, did they encounter?*
16. *If schools did have to close again what support would be the most helpful so that children can keep learning outside of the classroom?*
17. *Did your community experience any other problems or natural disasters in the past one year?*
    a. *If yes, can you tell us more about these problems?*
    b. *How did the school help the community in those times?*
18. *We want to make sure you have the opportunity to provide feedback to CRS if you would like. Are there times you want to communicate with CRS about the project?*
    a. *If yes, what would be the best and easiest way for you to contact CRS? (Probe for regular feedback meetings, anonymous feedback box, ad hoc feedback meetings, etc.)*
    b. *Do you know about the hotline number CRS has for questions and comments? Have you used this number why or why not?*
19. *Is there anything that I did not ask about that you would like to share with me, or do you have any additional thoughts about what we have discussed today?*

Thank you all very much for your sharing with me today, your feedback is much appreciated. Please know that you can talk to CRS if you have any additional feedback you would like to share with them through the CRS hotline numbers. There are posters available at the school. If you do not know where the CRS hotline posters are located, you may ask the school principal.

Focus Group Discussion: Cooks

Hi! Our names are XXXX, and we are here talking to parents such as yourself on behalf of CRS. CRS has been awarded phase III of the CRS school meals program in Savannakhet Province. To help inform this next phase, we are collecting information to better understand how the program has been functioning and get your opinions of what additional support could be useful. It's important that everyone here can feel comfortable to speak freely. Everything that you say here will be confidential, and we will not record your name or any personal information. The information that you provide will be consolidated and shared with CRS to inform the implementation of the next phase of the project. I want you to talk openly and freely, so please also keep everything that anyone says here private. This is a friendly discussion, and there aren't any right or wrong answers, so it's okay if you disagree with someone else. If I ask you anything that makes you uncomfortable, it's okay for you not to answer.

We want to hear about positive as well as negative stories, because hearing about things that have and haven't worked well can be really useful so we can design better programs in the future—so please do not feel 'kreng jai' [not speaking one's mind for fear of offending the listener, putting social protocol ahead of truth telling]. Your opinions will be valuable to improve the school meals program and to make sure it is responsive to your household needs. Your answers will not affect whether your children continue to receive school meals or your role with the school. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary and there are no additional benefits for participation.

Does anyone have any questions for me? You can ask me a question at any time during our talk today. [Note taker will take detailed notes. The note taker will also record if this is a male or female group, the number of participants, and notes on ethnicities, if known.]

If you have questions about the study after today, please contact Salika Khoonbarthao, the study coordinator at salika.khoonbarthao@gmail.com or Dr. Pooja Nakamura, the project director of the evaluation, at pnakamura@air.org. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant, contact AIR's Institutional Review Board at IRB@air.org, toll free at 1-800-634-0797, or by postal mail: AIR c/o IRB, 1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor, Arlington, VA 22202.

We expect the focus group discussion to last about 60-90 minutes. Are you ready to begin?

Do you accept to participate in this focus group discussion?

____ Participant consented ____ Participant did not consent

Let's start by going around and introducing each other. What is your name? [Interviewer begins by introducing yourself first.]

1. *How long have you been a cook with this school?*
    a. *Why did you decide to become a cook in this school?*
    b. *What is making you continue to be a cook in the school?*
2. *What is a responsibility of your work that you like most? Why?*
3. *What is a responsibility of your work that you like least? What is it about this that you find to be most challenging?*

4. *Do you think attending school is important for children? How do children benefit from school? (Probe for both immediate benefits and future benefits)*

Now, I am going to ask you about the school meals program in your community.

5. *Do you think the school meals address the needs of children and families in your community?*
    a. *If the school meals are addressing needs, how do school meals help the children and families in your community? Can you give me an example?*
    b. *If the school meals are not addressing needs, can you tell us why? What can CRS do so the school meals address those needs?*
6. *Are you using food contributed from people in the village in the school meals you cook?*
    a. *Tell me more about how often you receive those contributions, where they come from, and what they are.*
    b. *Have you faced any challenges receiving this contribution? If so, what are they?*
    c. *What do you think can be done to address these challenges?*
7. *Are you receiving any support from the VEDC for the school meals program?*
    a. *Tell me more about the type of support that they give you.*
    b. *Have you faced any challenges receiving support from the VEDC?*
    c. *What do you think can be done to address these challenges?*
8. *(QUESTION FOR ASTAPHONE AND PHALANAXAY ONLY) In the next phase of the CRS meals program, over the next few years, CRS will work with MOES to help transition the school meals program to the ministry so the school meals can continue.*
    a. *In the next few years, do you think your community will be prepared to take over the school meals program? Why or why not?*
    b. *What additional supports do you think are needed from CRS, the community, or the government to help support the transition?*
9. *What are some challenges to ensuring clean and safe food storage and preparation? (e.g., using clean water and maintaining hygienic cooking practices)*
10. *What assistance do you think CRS could provide to help improve the clean and safe food storage and preparation?*
11. *Can you tell me about the take home ration you receive?*
    a. *Would you continue to serve as a cook even without the take home ration?*
    b. *What would encourage you to continue with your work if the take home ration was not provided?*
12. *We want to make sure you have the opportunity to provide feedback to CRS if you would like. Are there times you want to communicate with CRS about the project?*

a. *If yes, what would be the best and easiest way for you to contact CRS? (Probe for regular feedback meetings, anonymous feedback box, ad hoc feedback meetings, etc.)*

b. *Do you know about the hotline number CRS has for questions and comments? Have you used this number why or why not?*

13. Is there anything that I did not ask about that you would like to share with me?

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today, your feedback is very valuable! Please know that you can talk to CRS if you have any additional feedback you would like to share with them through the CRS hotline numbers. There are posters available at the school. If you do not know where the CRS hotline posters are located, you may ask the school principal.

Focus Group Discussion: Teachers

Hi! Our names are XXXX, and we are here talking to parents such as yourself on behalf of CRS. CRS has been awarded phase III of the CRS school meals program in Savannakhet Province. To help inform this next phase, we are collecting information to better understand how the program has been functioning and get your opinions of what additional support could be useful. It's important that everyone here can feel comfortable to speak freely. Everything that you say here will be confidential, and we will not record your name or any personal information. The information that you provide will be consolidated and shared with CRS to inform the implementation of the next phase of the project. I want you to talk openly and freely, so please also keep everything that anyone says here private. This is a friendly discussion, and there aren't any right or wrong answers, so it's okay if you disagree with someone else. If I ask you anything that makes you uncomfortable, it's okay for you not to answer.

We want to hear about positive as well as negative stories, because hearing about things that have and haven't worked well can be really useful so we can design better programs in the future—so please do not feel 'kreng jai' [not speaking one's mind for fear of offending the listener, putting social protocol ahead of truth telling]. Your opinions will be valuable to improve the school meals program and to make sure it is responsive to your household needs. Your answers will not affect whether your children continue to receive school meals or your role with the school. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary and there are no additional benefits for participation.

Does anyone have any questions for me? You can ask me a question at any time during our talk today. [Note taker will take detailed notes. The note taker will also record if this is a male or female group, the number of participants, and notes on ethnicities, if known.]

If you have questions about the study after today, please contact Salika Khoonbarthao, the study coordinator at salika.khoonbarthao@gmail.com or Dr. Pooja Nakamura, the project director of the evaluation, at pnakamura@air.org. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant, contact AIR's Institutional Review Board at IRB@air.org, toll free at 1-800-634-0797, or by postal mail: AIR c/o IRB, 1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor, Arlington, VA 22202.

We expect the focus group discussion to last about 60-90 minutes. Are you ready to begin?

Do you accept to participate in this focus group discussion?

____ Participant consented ____ Participant did not consent

Let's start by talking a little bit about your background – how long have you been a teacher? How long have you been at this school?

1. *What do you think are the main challenges that this community faces as it relates to accessing good education? (Probe for differences between girls and boys)*
2. *How do these challenges affect student attendance? (Probe for differences between girls and boys)*
    a. *How can these challenges be addressed?*
3. *What do you like most about teaching? What encourages you to come to school every day?*

4. *What are the key challenges you face in your teaching? (Probe for lack of training, lack of educational materials, student attendance, student attentiveness, etc.)*
    a. *What are the key challenges you see related to teaching reading and writing?*
    b. *What are the key challenges students have when learning the Lao language in the classroom?*
5. *What assistance do you think project staff could provide to help you better address those challenges and meet the needs of students? (Probe for training, capacity building, education materials, etc.)*
    a. *Are there specific supports that would help you better teach reading and writing in the classroom?*

Now, I am going to ask you about the school meals program in your community.

6. *Can you tell me about your involvement in the school meals program?*
    a. *How do you work with cooks, storekeepers, and VEDC to make sure the school meals program works at the school?*
    b. *How do you feel about the take home ration provided to you for your support of the school meals program?*
7. *Do you think the school meals address the needs of children and families in your community?*
    a. *If the school meals are addressing needs, how do school meals help the children and families in your community? Can you give me an example?*
    b. *If the school meals are not addressing needs, can you tell us why? What can CRS do so the school meals address those needs?*
8. *How do you think the school feeding program has affected students and their behavior?*
    a. *How does this affect student attendance? (Probe for both positive and negative consequences as well as gender differences)*
    b. *How does this affect parents' motivation to send students to school?*
    c. *How does this affect how much students pay attention in the classroom?*
9. *(QUESTION FOR ASTAPHONE AND PHALANAXAY ONLY) In the next phase of the CRS meals program, over the next few years, CRS will work with MOES to help transition the school meals program to the ministry so the school meals can continue.*
    a. *In the next few years, do you think your community will be prepared to take over the school meals program? Why or why not?*
    b. *What additional supports do you think are needed from CRS, the community, or the government to help support the transition?*

I want to ask you now a few questions about water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).

10. *What do the schools do to keep children clean and healthy while at school? (Probe for handwashing, provide latrines, provide clean water, etc.)*
    a. *Do you think they are able to help students be clean and healthy? Why or why not?*
11. *What assistance do you think CRS could provide to help keep children clean and healthy? (Probe for training, capacity building, communications campaigns, etc.)*

I would like to ask a few questions now about the VEDC in your community.

12. *What kind of support have you received from them, and what do you think of the current interaction with them?*
    a. *How could the VEDC further support schools, including school meals?*
    b. *What assistance do you think CRS could provide to support coordination/collaboration with the VEDC?*

Lastly, I am going to ask a few questions about how well equipped your school feels to handle shocks to the community, such as COVID or flooding.

13. *Can you share with us what happened to the schools, both the students and teachers, because of COVID-19? What problems, if any, did they encounter?*
14. *If schools did have to close again what support would be the most helpful so that children can keep learning outside of the classroom?*
15. *Did your community experience any other problems or natural disasters s in the past one year?*
    a. *If yes, can you tell us more about these problems?*
    b. *How did the school help the community in those times?*
16. *We want to make sure you have the opportunity to provide feedback to CRS if you would like. Are there times you want to communicate with CRS about the project?*
    a. *If yes, what would be the best and easiest way for you to contact CRS? (Probe for regular feedback meetings, anonymous feedback box, ad hoc feedback meetings, etc.)*
    b. *Do you know about the hotline number CRS has for questions and comments? Have you used this number why or why not?*
17. *Is there anything that I did not ask about that you would like to share with me?*

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today, your feedback is very valuable! Please know that you can talk to CRS if you have any additional feedback you would like to share with them through the CRS hotline numbers. There are posters available at the school. If you do not know where the CRS hotline posters are located, you may ask the school principal.

Annex 8: Key Informant Interview Guides

Key Informant Interview: Principals

Hi! Our names are XXXX, and we are here talking to parents such as yourself on behalf of CRS. CRS has been awarded phase III of the CRS school meals program in Savannakhet Province. To help inform this next phase, we are collecting information to better understand how the program has been functioning and get your opinions of what additional support could be useful. It's important that everyone here can feel comfortable to speak freely. Everything that you say here will be confidential, and we will not record your name or any personal information. The information that you provide will be consolidated and shared with CRS and SCI to inform the implementation of the next phase of the project. I want you to talk openly and freely, so please also keep everything that anyone says here private. This is a friendly discussion, and there aren't any right or wrong answers, so it's okay if you disagree with someone else. If I ask you anything that makes you uncomfortable, it's okay for you not to answer.

We want to hear about positive as well as negative stories, because hearing about things that have and haven't worked well can be really useful so we can design better programs in the future—so please do not feel 'keng jai' [not speaking one's mind for fear of offending the listener, putting social protocol ahead of truth telling]. Your opinions will be valuable to improve the school meals program and to make sure it is responsive to your household needs. Your answers will not affect whether your children continue to receive school meals or your role with the school. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary and there are no additional benefits for participation.

Does anyone have any questions for me? You can ask me a question at any time during our talk today. [Note taker will take detailed notes. The note taker will also record if this is a male or female group, the number of participants, and notes on ethnicities, if known.]

If you have questions about the study after today, please contact Salika Khoonbarthao, the study coordinator at salika.khoonbarthao@gmail.com or Dr. Pooja Nakamura, the project director of the evaluation, at pnakamura@air.org. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant, contact AIR's Institutional Review Board at IRB@air.org, toll free at 1-800-634-0797, or by postal mail: AIR c/o IRB, 1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor, Arlington, VA 22202.

We expect the focus group discussion to last about 60-90 minutes. Are you ready to begin?

Do you accept to participate in this focus group discussion?

____ Participant consented ____ Participant did not consent

Let's start by talking a little bit about your background – how long have you been a principal? How long have you been at this school?

1. *What do you think are the main challenges that this community faces as it relates to accessing good education?*
2. *How do these challenges affect student attendance? How can these challenges be addressed?*
3. *What are your priorities as a principal in terms of developing the school and providing students with quality education?*

a. *Do your priorities as a principal match the goals in the schools' yearly education development plan?*

4. *What are the key challenges that you face as a principal?*
5. *What assistance do you think CRS could provide to help you better address those challenges and meet the needs of students? (Probe for training, capacity building, education materials, etc.)*

Now, I am going to ask you about the school meals program in your community.

6. *Can you tell me above your involvement in the school meals program? How do you work with cooks, storekeepers, and VEDC to make sure the school meals program works at the school?*
    a. *Do you receive a take home ration? If yes, can you tell me what you think of the ration?*
7. *Do you think the school meals address the needs of children and families in your community?*
    a. *If the school meals are addressing needs, how do school meals help the children and families in your community? Can you give me an example?*
    b. *If the school meals are not addressing needs, can you tell us why? What can CRS do so the school meals address those needs?*
8. *How do you think the school feeding program has affected students and their behavior?*
    a. *How does this effect student attendance? (Probe for both positive and negative consequences as well as gender differences)*
    b. *How does this effect parents' motivation to send students to school?*
    c. *How does this effect how much students pay attention in the classroom?*
9. *(QUESTION FOR ASTAPHONE AND PHALANAXAY ONLY) In the next phase of the CRS meals program, over the next few years, CRS will work with MOES to help transition the school meals program to the ministry so the school meals can continue.*
    a. *In the next few years, do you think your community will be prepared to take over the school meals program? Why or why not?*
    b. *What additional supports do you think are needed from CRS, the community, or the government to help support the transition?*

I want to ask you now a few questions about water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).

10. *What do the schools do to keep children clean and healthy while at school? (Probe for handwashing, provide latrines, provide clean water, etc.)*
    a. *Do you think they are able to help students be clean and healthy? Why or why not?*
11. *What assistance do you think CRS could provide to help keep children clean and healthy? (Probe for training, capacity building, communications campaigns, etc.)*

I would like to ask a few questions now about the VEDC in your community.

18. *What kind of support have you received from the VEDC? (Probe for school planning, community engagement, school meals programs, etc.)*

    c. *Are you happy with the level of support the VEDC provides? Please tell me why or why not.*

    d. *What else does the VEDC need to do in order to help schools more, including school meals?*

    e. *How could CRS help the VEDCs in this task?*

Lastly, I am going to ask a few questions about how well equipped your school feels to handle shocks to the community, such as COVID or flooding.

12. *Can you share with us what happened to the schools, both the students and teachers, because of COVID-19? What problems, if any, did they encounter?*

13. *If schools do need to close again for a period of time, how could CRS support students to learn remotely? Do you think there is an alternative way for school meals to continue even if schools are closed? If so, how could the meals be served when schools are closed?*

14. *Did your community experience any other problems or natural disasters in the past one year?*

    a. *If yes, can you tell us more about these problems?*

    b. *How did the school help the community in those times?*

15. *We want to make sure you have the opportunity to provide feedback to CRS if you would like. Are there times you want to communicate with CRS about the project?*

    a. *If yes, what would be the best and easiest way for you to contact CRS? (Probe for regular feedback meetings, anonymous feedback box, ad hoc feedback meetings, etc.)*

    b. *Do you know about the hotline number CRS has for questions and comments? Have you used this number why or why not?*

16. *Is there anything that I did not ask about that you would like to share with me?*

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today, your feedback is very valuable! Please know that you can talk to CRS if you have any additional feedback you would like to share with them through the CRS hotline numbers. There are posters available at the school. If you do not know where the CRS hotline posters are located, you may ask the school principal.

Key Informant Interview: Government Stakeholders (MoES, PESS and DESB representatives)

Hi! Our names are XXXX, and we are here talking to parents such as yourself on behalf of CRS. CRS has been awarded phase III of the CRS school meals program in Savannakhet Province. To help inform this next phase, we are collecting information to better understand how the program has been functioning and get your opinions of what additional support could be useful. It's important that everyone here can feel comfortable to speak freely. Everything that you say here will be confidential, and we will not record your name or any personal information. The information that you provide will be consolidated and shared with CRS to inform the implementation of the next phase of the project. I want you to talk openly and freely, so please also keep everything that anyone says here private. This is a friendly discussion, and there aren't any right or wrong answers, so it's okay if you disagree with someone else. If I ask you anything that makes you uncomfortable, it's okay for you not to answer.

We want to hear about positive as well as negative stories, because hearing about things that have and haven't worked well can be really useful so we can design better programs in the future—so please do not feel 'kreng jai' [not speaking one's mind for fear of offending the listener, putting social protocol ahead of truth telling]. Your opinions will be valuable to improve the school meals program and to make sure it is responsive to your household needs. Your answers will not affect whether your children continue to receive school meals or your role with the school. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary and there are no additional benefits for participation.

Does anyone have any questions for me? You can ask me a question at any time during our talk today. [Note taker will take detailed notes. The note taker will also record if this is a male or female group, the number of participants, and notes on ethnicities, if known.]

If you have questions about the study after today, please contact Salika Khoonbarthao, the study coordinator at salika.khoonbarthao@gmail.com or Dr. Pooja Nakamura, the project director of the evaluation, at pnakamura@air.org. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant, contact AIR's Institutional Review Board at IRB@air.org, toll free at 1-800-634-0797, or by postal mail: AIR c/o IRB, 1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor, Arlington, VA 22202.

We expect the focus group discussion to last about 60-90 minutes. Are you ready to begin?

Do you accept to participate in this focus group discussion?

____ Participant consented ____ Participant did not consent

1. *[For PESS representatives] Can you tell me about your responsibilities as a PESS representative? How do you coordinate and work with PESS and with MOES at the national level?*
    a. *[For DESB representatives] Can you tell me about your responsibilities as a DESB representative? How do you work with DESB and how do you work with PESS at the provincial level?*
    b. *[For MOES representative] Can you tell me about your responsibilities as a MOES representative? How do you work with PESS and DESB at the provincial and district levels?*
2. *What do you think are the main challenges that communities face as it relates to accessing quality education in the Savannakhet province/in your district?*
3. *How do these challenges affect student attendance? How can these challenges be addressed?*

4. *What are the Government of Laos' priorities over the next five years for improving education in Savannakhet province/in your district?*
    a. *Do you think school meals supports these priorities? If so, how? If not, why not?*
5. *What assistance do you think CRS could provide to help the Government of Laos address these priorities in Savannakhet province/in your district?*

Now, I am going to ask you about the school meals program.

6. *Can you tell me about your involvement/role in the school meals program? How have you worked with CRS, other government partners, and the communities on the program?*
7. *How do you think the school feeding program has affected student attendance and outcomes? (Probe for both positive and negative consequences)*
8. *Do you think the school meals address the needs of children and families in your community?*
    a. *If the school meals are addressing needs, how do school meals help the children and families in your community? Can you give me an example?*
    b. *If the school meals are not addressing needs, can you tell us why? What can CRS do so the school meals address those needs?*
9. *In the next phase of the CRS meals program, over the next few years, CRS will work with MOES to help transition the school meals program to the ministry so the school meals can continue.*
    a. *In the next few years, do you think your community will be prepared to take over the school meals program? Why or why not?*
    b. *What additional supports do you think are needed from CRS, the community, or the government to help support the transition?*

I want to ask you now a few questions about water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).

10. *In your opinion, what are the key needs as it relates to water, sanitation and hygiene at the school and community level? (Probe for latrines, water point, handwashing facilities, etc.)*
11. *What can be done to address these needs? What is the role of the government in addressing these needs?*
12. *What assistance do you think CRS could provide to the government to help ensure access to clean water and sanitation services at the school and community level? (Probe for training, capacity building, grant support, communications campaigns, etc.)*

I would like to ask a few questions now about your interaction with the VEDCs.

13. *At the school level, what kind of support and/or interactions do you have with the community and/or VEDC members?*
    a. *How do you engage with them?*
    b. *How often do you engage with them?*

c. *What kinds of issues do they bring up?*

14. *Can you tell me how you or your colleagues work with other ministries/department/district office to support education programs?*

    a. *For the school meals program can you describe any work you have done with health or agriculture staff to support the program?*

    b. *Do you have suggestions for how health and agriculture staff can better support the program?*

15. *What assistance do you think CRS could provide the government so that you can coordinate/collaborate with other line ministries, VEDCs and community members on school development, including the school meals program?*

Lastly, I am going to ask a few questions about how well equipped your school feels to handle shocks to the community, such as COVID or flooding.

16. *Can you share with us what happened to the schools, both the students and teachers, because of COVID-19? What problems, if any, did they encounter?*

17. *If schools did have to close again what support would be the most helpful so that children can keep learning outside of the classroom?*

18. *Did the communities experience any other problems or natural disasters in the past one year?*

    a. *If yes, can you tell us more about these problems?*

    b. *How did the school help the community in those times?*

19. *We want to make sure you have the opportunity to provide feedback to CRS if you would like. Are there times you want to communicate with CRS about the project?*

    a. *If yes, what would be the best and easiest way for you to contact CRS? (Probe for regular feedback meetings, anonymous feedback box, ad hoc feedback meetings, etc.)*

    b. *Do you know about the hotline number CRS has for questions and comments? Have you used this number why or why not?*

20. *Is there anything that I did not ask about that you would like to share with me?*

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today, your feedback is very valuable! Please know that you can talk to CRS if you have any additional feedback you would like to share with them through the CRS hotline numbers. There are posters available at the school. If you do not know where the CRS hotline posters are located, you may ask the school principal.

Key Informant Interview: Pedagogical Advisors (PAs)

Hi! Our names are XXXX, and we are here talking to parents such as yourself on behalf of CRS. CRS has been awarded phase III of the CRS school meals program in Savannakhet Province. To help inform this next phase, we are collecting information to better understand how the program has been functioning and get your opinions of what additional support could be useful. It's important that everyone here can feel comfortable to speak freely. Everything that you say here will be confidential, and we will not record your name or any personal information. The information that you provide will be consolidated and shared with CRS and SCI to inform the implementation of the next phase of the project. I want you to talk openly and freely, so please also keep everything that anyone says here private. This is a friendly discussion, and there aren't any right or wrong answers, so it's okay if you disagree with someone else. If I ask you anything that makes you uncomfortable, it's okay for you not to answer.

We want to hear about positive as well as negative stories, because hearing about things that have and haven't worked well can be really useful so we can design better programs in the future—so please do not feel 'kreng jai' [not speaking one's mind for fear of offending the listener, putting social protocol ahead of truth telling]. Your opinions will be valuable to improve the school meals program and to make sure it is responsive to your household needs. Your answers will not affect whether your children continue to receive school meals or your role with the school. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary and there are no additional benefits for participation.

Does anyone have any questions for me? You can ask me a question at any time during our talk today. [Note taker will take detailed notes. The note taker will also record if this is a male or female group, the number of participants, and notes on ethnicities, if known.]

If you have questions about the study after today, please contact Salika Khoonbarthao, the study coordinator at salika.khoonbarthao@gmail.com or Dr. Pooja Nakamura, the project director of the evaluation, at pnakamura@air.org. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant, contact AIR's Institutional Review Board at IRB@air.org, toll free at 1-800-634-0797, or by postal mail: AIR c/o IRB, 1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor, Arlington, VA 22202.

We expect the focus group discussion to last about 60-90 minutes. Are you ready to begin?

Do you accept to participate in this focus group discussion?

____ Participant consented ____ Participant did not consent

1. *Can you tell me about your role and responsibilities? What are the biggest challenges you face in your role as a PA?*
2. *Can you explain to me how you have been involved with the school meals and literacy components of the CRS school meals project? What do you think are the main challenges that communities (students, teachers, parents, VEDC members, etc.) face as it relates to accessing quality education in the Savannakhet province?*
3. *How do these challenges affect student attendance? How can these challenges be addressed?*
4. *What do you see as some of the key challenges related to literacy instruction in the classroom and literacy learning of students?*

5. *What are the Government of Laos' priorities over the next five years for improving education in your district?*
6. *Do you think the teachers and principals are able to help the government reach their goals? Why? Why not?*
7. *Do you feel prepared to support teachers and principals to reach the government's goals? (Probe for deliver training, conduct monitoring visits, etc.) Why? Why not?*
    a. *In which areas do you think you require additional support? (Probe for training, capacity building, relationship building, etc.)*
8. *When students struggle with attentiveness, what factors account for it?*
    a. *Has the school feeding program affected this attentiveness at all? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?*
    b. *Has the literacy boost program affected this attentiveness at all? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?*
    c. *Have you observed any changes in child performance in classrooms based on your classroom observations and monitoring visits?*
9. *Do you think the school meals address the needs of children and families in the communities you work?*
    a. *If the school meals are addressing needs, how do school meals help the children and families in the communities you work? Can you give me an example?*
    b. *If the school meals are not addressing needs, can you tell us why? What can CRS do so the school meals address those needs?*
10. *Can you describe your interactions, if any, with the community and/or VEDC?*
    a. *How do you work with them?*
    b. *How often do you work with them?*
    c. *What kinds of issues do they bring up?*
11. *Are teachers practicing and reinforcing the techniques in the literacy boost program? How? If not, why not?*
    a. *What can the project staff do to help teachers practice techniques in the literacy boost program?*

Lastly, I am going to ask a few questions about how well equipped the schools you advise feel to handle shocks to the community, such as COVID or flooding.

12. *Can you share with us what happened to the schools, both the students and teachers, because of COVID-19? What problems, if any, did they encounter?*

13. *If schools did have to close again what support would be the most helpful so that children can keep learning outside of the classroom?*
14. *Did the communities experience any other problems or natural disasters in the past one year?*
    a. *If yes, can you tell us more about these problems?*
    b. *How did the school help the community in those times?*
15. *We want to make sure you have the opportunity to provide feedback to CRS and SCI if you would like. Are there times you want to communicate with CRS about the project?*
    a. *If yes, what would be the best and easiest way for you to contact CRS and SCI? (Probe for feedback meetings, anonymous feedback box, ad hoc feedback meetings, etc.)*
    b. *Do you know about the hotline number CRS has for questions and comments? Have you used this number why or why not?*
16. *Is there anything that I did not ask about that you would like to share with me?*

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today, your feedback is very valuable! Please know that you can talk to CRS if you have any additional feedback you would like to share with them through the CRS hotline numbers. There are posters available at the school. If you do not know where the CRS hotline posters are located, you may ask the school principal.

Key Informant Interview: District Officers (Health, Agriculture)

Hi! Our names are XXXX, and we are here talking to parents such as yourself on behalf of CRS. CRS has been awarded phase III of the CRS school meals program in Savannakhet Province. To help inform this next phase, we are collecting information to better understand how the program has been functioning and get your opinions of what additional support could be useful. It's important that everyone here can feel comfortable to speak freely. Everything that you say here will be confidential, and we will not record your name or any personal information. The information that you provide will be consolidated and shared with CRS to inform the implementation of the next phase of the project. I want you to talk openly and freely, so please also keep everything that anyone says here private. This is a friendly discussion, and there aren't any right or wrong answers, so it's okay if you disagree with someone else. If I ask you anything that makes you uncomfortable, it's okay for you not to answer.

We want to hear about positive as well as negative stories, because hearing about things that have and haven't worked well can be really useful so we can design better programs in the future—so please do not feel 'kreng jai' [not speaking one's mind for fear of offending the listener, putting social protocol ahead of truth telling]. Your opinions will be valuable to improve the school meals program and to make sure it is responsive to your household needs. Your answers will not affect whether your children continue to receive school meals or your role with the school. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary and there are no additional benefits for participation.

Does anyone have any questions for me? You can ask me a question at any time during our talk today. [Note taker will take detailed notes. The note taker will also record if this is a male or female group, the number of participants, and notes on ethnicities, if known.]

If you have questions about the study after today, please contact Salika Khoonbarthao, the study coordinator at salika.khoonbarthao@gmail.com or Dr. Pooja Nakamura, the project director of the evaluation, at pnakamura@air.org. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant, contact AIR's Institutional Review Board at IRB@air.org, toll free at 1-800-634-0797, or by postal mail: AIR c/o IRB, 1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor, Arlington, VA 22202.

We expect the focus group discussion to last about 60-90 minutes. Are you ready to begin?

Do you accept to participate in this focus group discussion?

____ Participant consented ____ Participant did not consent

1. *Can you tell me about your work with the communities? What are the biggest challenges you face?*
2. *What do you think are the main challenges that communities face as it relates to accessing quality education in your district?*
3. *How do you think these challenges can be addressed?*
4. *Can you tell me how you work with the district education office, if at all? What role do you think your office could have in supporting education, if any?*
5. *How have you been involved with the school meals program?*
    a. *What kinds of daily activities in your work could help to support the school meals project?*

6. *What role do you think the [District Agriculture and Forestry Office and the District Health Office] should have in the school meals program in the local primary schools?*

7. *When students struggle with attentiveness, what factors account for it?*

    a. *Has the school feeding program affected this attentiveness at all? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?*

8. *Do you think the school meals address the needs of children and families in the communities you work?*

    a. *If the school meals are addressing needs, how do school meals help the children and families in the communities you work? Can you give me an example?*

    b. *If the school meals are not addressing needs, can you tell us why? What can CRS do so the school meals address those needs?*

9. *Can you describe your interactions, if any, with the community and/or VEDC where the school meals program is being implemented?*

    a. *How do you think communities could better assist with the school meals given the resources that they have?*

[**For the interviewer**, please explain to the officer: CRS is working with MOES to hand over the school feeding program by district. CRS started handover with Outhoumphone in 2021 and will handover implementation to the other districts from 2022-2026. MOES plans to support through school meals through block grants and the schools would need to organize cooking and food contributions. The District Agriculture Officers would be responsible for helping source products from local farmers and suppliers and ensuring schools have consistent and reliable access to those products. The District Health Officer would be responsible for ensuring the food meals are nutritious and provide dietary variety.]

10. *What kind of support would be most helpful to assist you with implementing the school meals program once the program is handed over to the government? (Probe for assistance setting up delivery mechanisms, monitoring systems, etc.)*

11. *To support the nutrition of the school meals program and to include more local food, do you have any ideas for how schools can make their meals healthier using local food?*

12. *What challenges, if any, do you think local farmers and suppliers face in providing inputs to schools to support the meals program?*

    a. *What can CRS do help address these challenges?*

13. *How well equipped do you feel to work with DESB and other government counterparts to lead the implementation of school meals?*

    a. *What additional support would you need to feel confident to lead the implementation of school meals?*

I want to ask you now a few questions about water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). [District Health Officers Only]

14. *In your opinion, what are the key needs as it relates to water, sanitation and hygiene at the school and community level? (probe for latrines, water point, handwashing facilities, etc.)*
15. *What can be done to address these needs? What is the role of the District Health Office in addressing these needs?*

Lastly, I am going to ask a few questions about how well equipped the government feels to handle shocks to the community, such as COVID or flooding.

17. *Can you share with us what happened to the schools, both the students and teachers, because of COVID-19? What problems, if any, did they encounter?*
18. *If schools did have to close again what support would be the most helpful so that children can keep learning outside of the classroom?*
19. *Did the communities experience any other problems or natural disasters in the past one year?*
    a. *If yes, can you tell us more about these problems?*
    b. *How did the school help the community in those times?*
20. *We want to make sure you have the opportunity to provide feedback to CRS if you would like. Are there times you want to communicate with CRS about the project?*
    a. *If yes, what would be the best and easiest way for you to contact CRS? (Probe for regular feedback meetings, anonymous feedback box, ad hoc feedback meetings, etc.)*
    b. *Do you know about the hotline number CRS has for questions and comments? Have you used this number why or why not?*
21. *Is there anything that I did not ask about that you would like to share with me?*

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today, your feedback is very valuable! Please know that you can talk to CRS if you have any additional feedback you would like to share with them through the CRS hotline numbers. There are posters available at the school. If you do not know where the CRS hotline posters are located, you may ask the school principal.

Key Informant Interview: Project and Partner staff

Blue Highlights = Questions for CRS and SCI staff only

Overall Context/Relevance

1. *[Introduction]*
    a. *What is your title?*
    b. *How long have you been with [organization]?*
    c. *What are your main responsibilities in your position as it relates to education, nutrition, or health?*
    d. *If you have worked with the LEAPS III project, how have you been involved with this project?*
2. *What do you think are the major challenges to supporting improved quality education in the Savannakhet province or in Laos?*
3. *How do you think these challenges can be addressed?*
4. *In your opinion, what are the priority needs of each of the following stakeholder groups as it relates to improving quality education, and what can be done to address those needs:*

Stakeholder	Priority Needs	How to Address
Students		
Teachers		
Principals/School Administrators		
VEDCS		
Pedagogical Advisors		
District Agriculture and Health Officers		
MOES (DESB and PESS)		

5. *What are the key needs as it relates to water, sanitation and hygiene at the school and community level? (probe for latrines, water point, handwashing facilities, etc.*
    a. *What can be done to address these needs?*
6. *In what ways/how well do you think the LEAPS III program goals fit with the government's educational priorities (at the national, regional, and/or local level)?*

Efficiency

7. *What monitoring systems will LEAPS III use to ensure that the activities are meeting the needs of the stakeholders? How will the project solicit feedback from stakeholders?*

Sustainability

8. *How is the LEAPS III project planning for and integrating sustainability measures into program activities?*
    a. *What role will community-based structures (e.g., schools, VEDCs) play in promoting sustainability? How will the project support these structures and build their capacity to take on ownership of LEAPS III activities?*
    b. *What role will the government play in promoting sustainability? How will the project support these structures and build their capacity to take on ownership of LEAPS III activities?*
9. *From your perspective, what are the biggest potential challenges to promoting sustainability?*
    a. *How can the project seek to address these challenges throughout implementation?*
10. *Are there any sociocultural or political aspects that the project needs to take into consideration that could affect the sustainability of initiatives? If so, what actions is CRS planning to take to sensitize local institutions and target groups to these issues?*

COVID-19

Now we would like to think about some of the questions above related to COVID-19.

11. *How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected education within the LEAPS III project areas? How will LEAPS III take these effects into account when planning activities?*
12. *In what ways, if any, do you think that COVID-19 will affect project sustainability efforts? How will LEAPS III take this into account when implementing activities?*
13. *What assistance do you think the LEAPS III project can provide to the government, schools, and communities to help them prepare for and cope with shocks?*
14. *Is there anything else that you'd like to share with me today?*

Thank you for your time and comments.

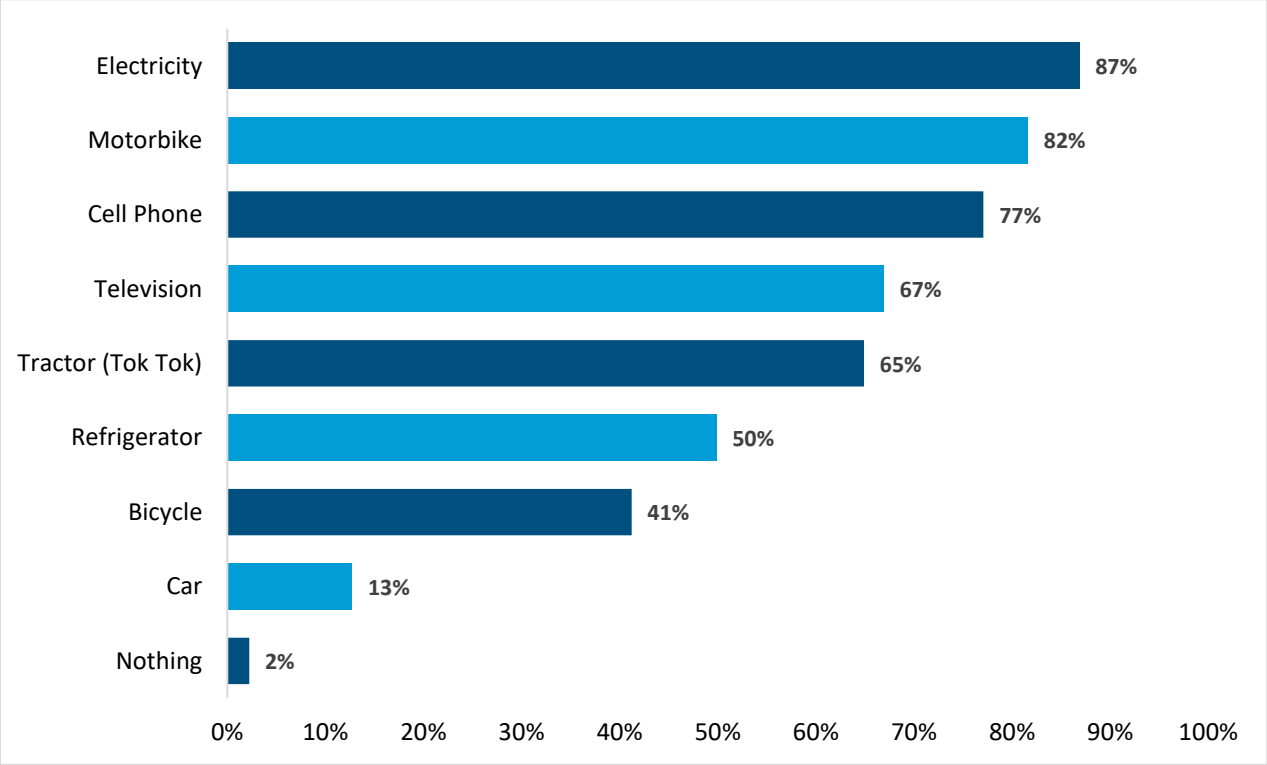
Annex 10: Additional Tables and Exhibits

Exhibit 10-1. Socioeconomic Status by District

Does your home have a…	Atsaphone	Nong	Phalanxay	Phine	Vilabouly	Sepone
Mobile	87%	50%	79%	87%	91%	67%
Electricity	84%	78%	92%	86%	94%	88%
Refrigerator	62%	18%	52%	48%	63%	50%
Bicycle	51%	17%	42%	40%	58%	35%
TV	70%	42%	79%	66%	75%	69%
Motorbike	81%	75%	78%	90%	85%	82%
Car	11%	5%	9%	21%	17%	14%
Tractor [TOK TOK]	82%	14%	92%	91%	39%	75%
None	0%	4%	0%	1%	1%	5%
Don't know	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total Observations	**389**	**277**	**248**	**260**	**308**	**347**

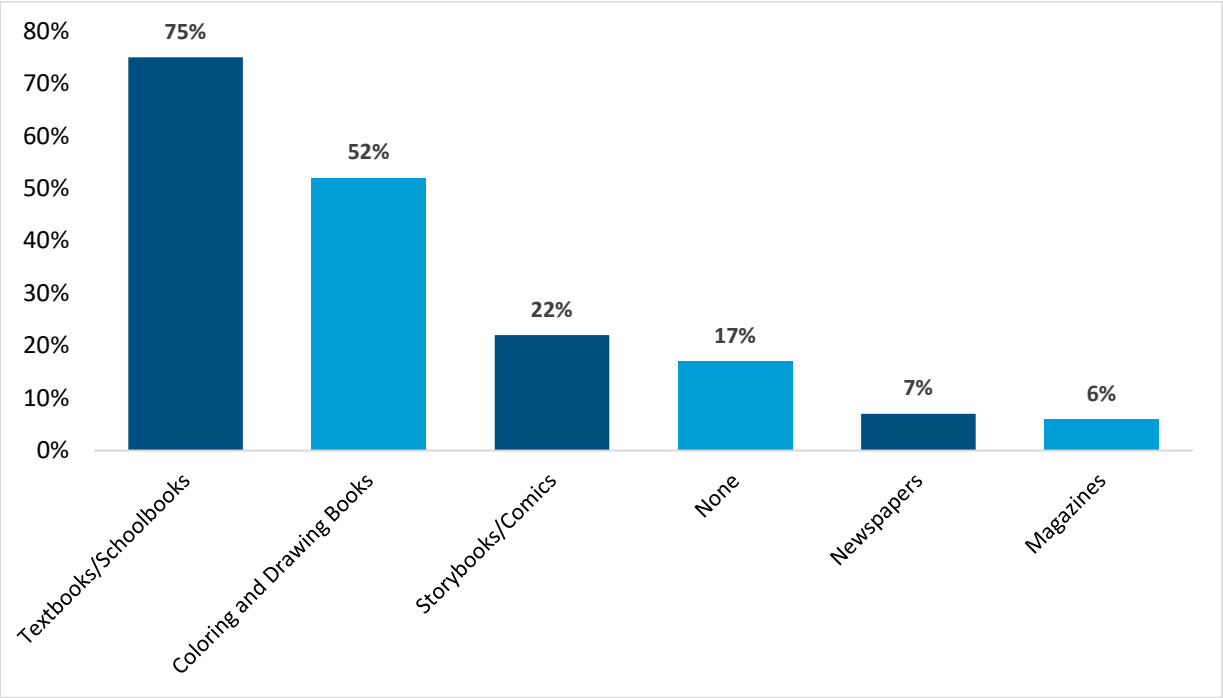
Note. Student Survey. N=1,829

Exhibit 10-2. Socioeconomic Status by Durable Consumer Goods



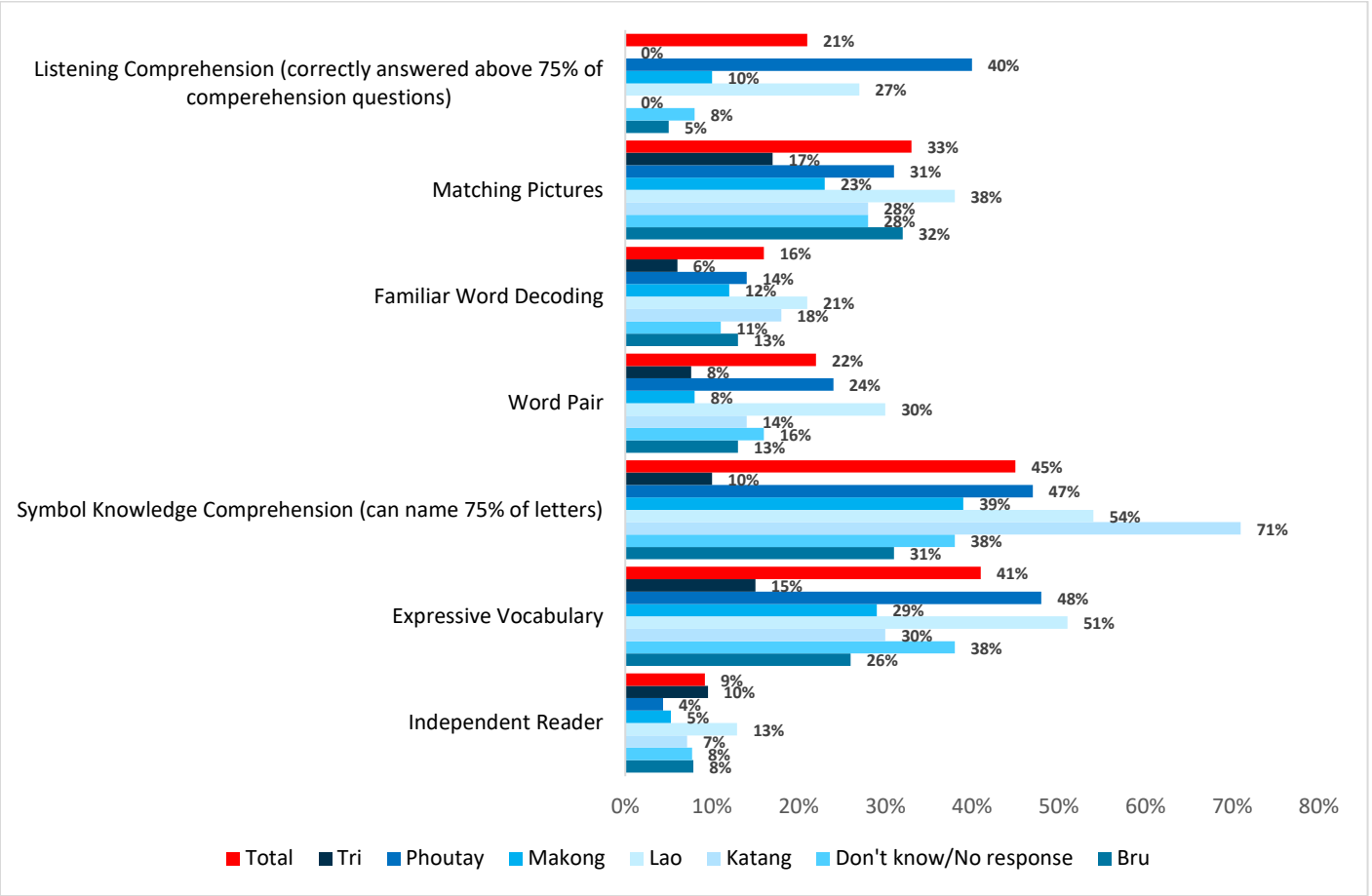
Note. Student Survey. N=1,829

Exhibit 10-3. Access to Reading Materials at Home



Note. Student Survey. N=1,829

Exhibit 10-4. Literacy Outcomes by Main Language



Note. Student Survey. N=568. Express vocabulary and word pair percentages calculated out of total possible correct answers (30 and 5, respectively). For listening comprehension, results calculated out of a total of 514 students who received the listening comprehension test.

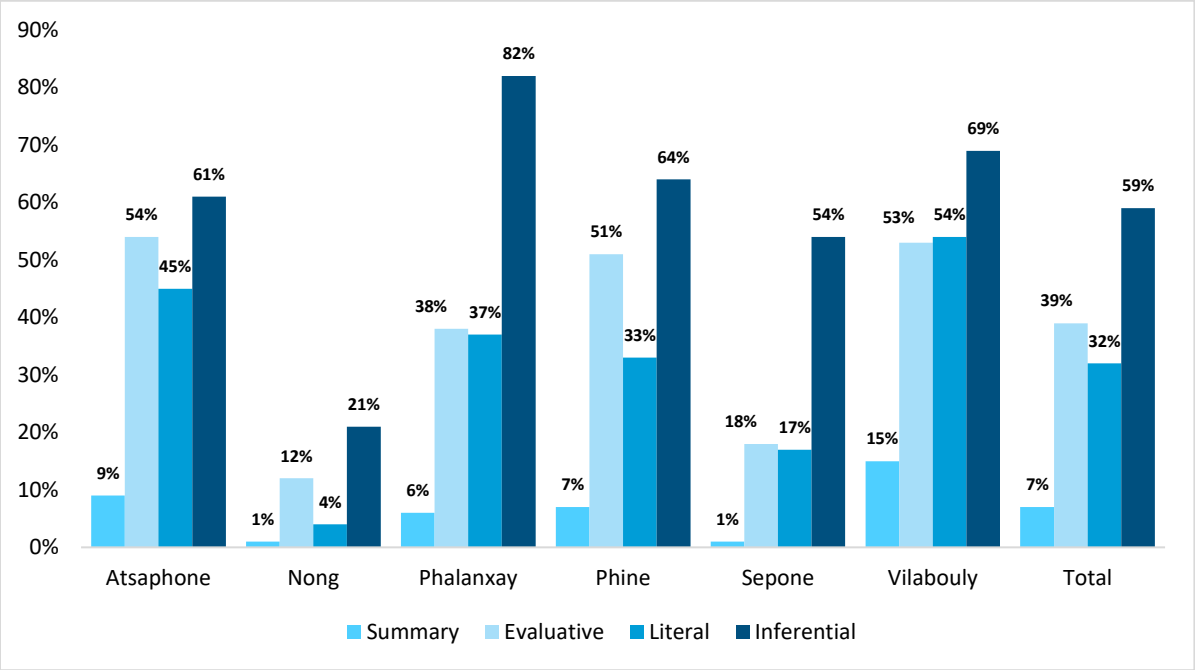
Exhibit 10-5. Literacy Outcomes by Sex

Literacy Outcome	Boys	Girls
Independent Reader	10%	9%
Expressive Vocabulary	41%	41%
Familiar Word Decoding	17%	15%
Matching Pictures	34%	31%
Reading Comprehension[a]	31%	36%
Listening Comprehension[b]	20%	21%
Symbol Knowledge (can correctly name at least 75% of symbols)	46%	44%

Literacy Outcome	Boys	Girls
Word Pair	22%	21%

Note. Student Survey. N=568. Note: reading and listening comprehension combined due to small sample size of readers. Express vocabulary and word pair percentages calculated out of total possible correct answers (30 and 5, respectively). No differences were statistically significant at the 10% level. a: N=53 for reading comprehension, b: N=514 for listening comprehension.

Exhibit 10-6. Different Types of Comprehension Questions by District



Note. Student Survey. N=568. Note: reading and listening comprehension combined due to small sample size of readers.

Exhibit 10-7. Teacher Narrating a Story/Reading a Poem in Class

Frequency	Atsaphone	Nong	Phalanxay	Phine	Vilabouly	Sepone
Every day	2%	2%	0%	2%	2%	2%
A few times during the week	47%	35%	54%	50%	40%	48%
Once during the week	16%	15%	20%	20%	22%	7%
Never	31%	38%	23%	26%	34%	40%

Note. Student survey. N=1,763. Note: does not include students who did not respond or responded "Don't Know"

Exhibit 10-8. Teachers Asking About the Story Narrated/Poem Read In Class the Past Week

Frequency	Atsaphone	Nong	Phalanxay	Phine	Vilabouly	Sepone
Often	39%	52%	48%	6%	14%	57%
Rarely	14%	11%	14%	21%	26%	6%
Sometimes	17%	8%	27%	61%	53%	26%
Never	30%	25%	10%	10%	8%	10%

Note. Student survey. N=1,119. Note: does not include students who did not respond or responded "Don't Know"

Exhibit 10-9. Students Playing a Game in the Classroom Around Symbols

Frequency	Atsaphone	Nong	Phalanxay	Phine	Vilabouly	Sepone
Every day	3%	3%	0%	0%	4%	1%
A few times during the week	44%	27%	53%	32%	29%	43%
Once during the week	14%	13%	14%	19%	20%	12%
Never	34%	50%	30%	48%	47%	42%

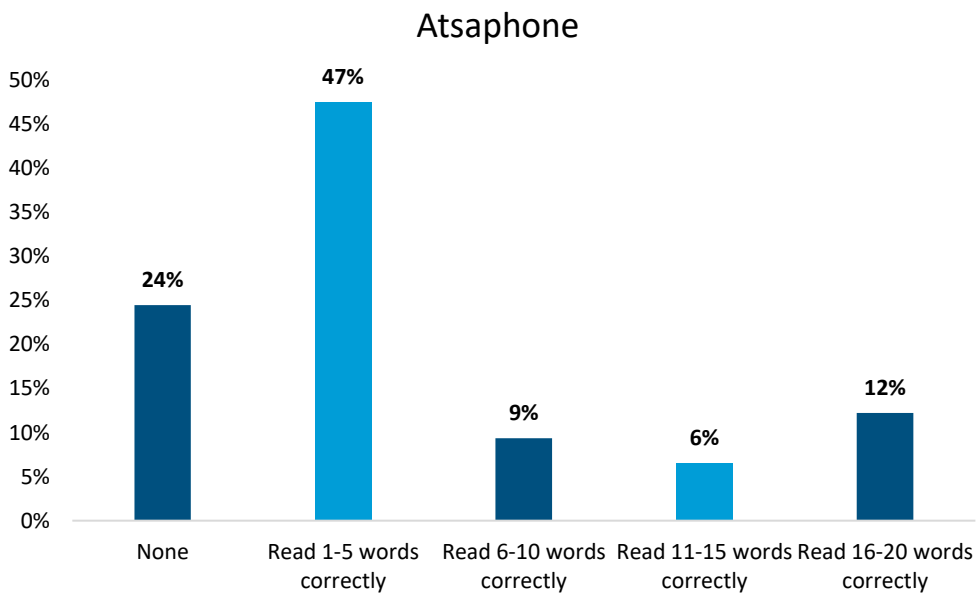
Note. Student survey. N=1,763. Note: does not include students who did not respond or responded "Don't Know"

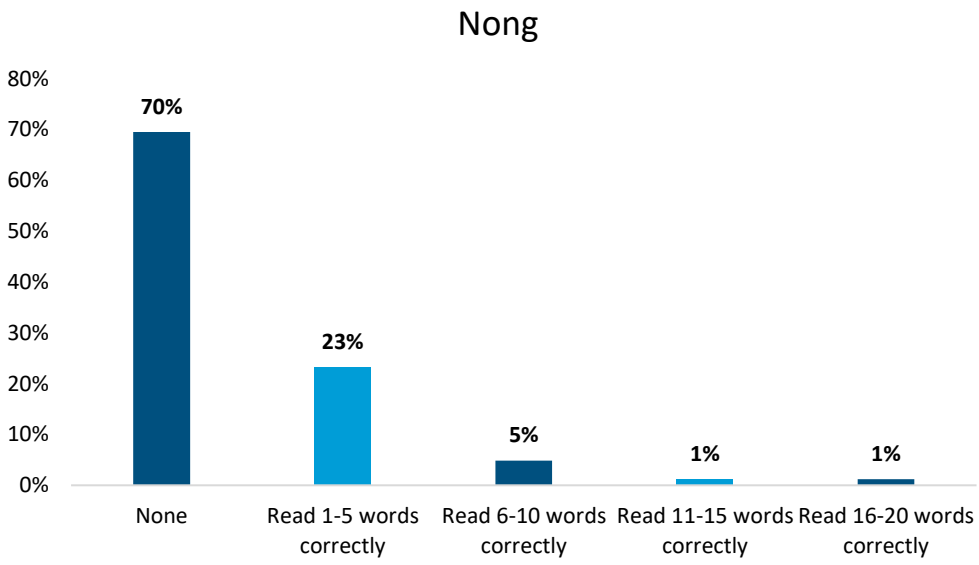
Exhibit 10-10. Access to Reading Materials by District

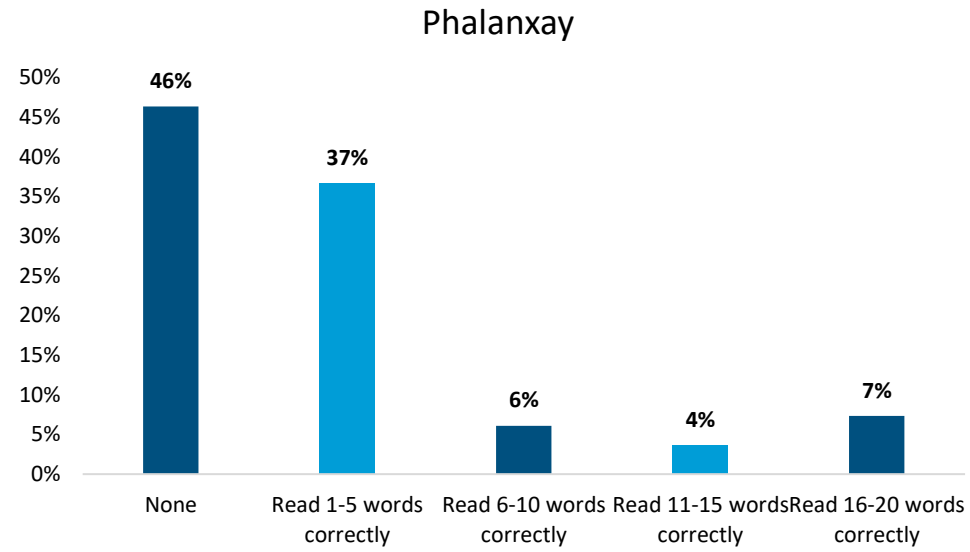
Reading Materials	Atsaphone	Nong	Phalanxay	Phine	Vilabouly	Sepone
Textbooks	75%	46%	77%	82%	89%	80%
Magazines	11%	3%	1%	9%	2%	7%
Newspapers	12%	3%	2%	10%	5%	9%
Storybooks/Comics	25%	20%	23%	30%	19%	16%
Coloring and drawing books	54%	32%	53%	54%	63%	56%
None of these	14%	40%	15%	14%	8%	13%

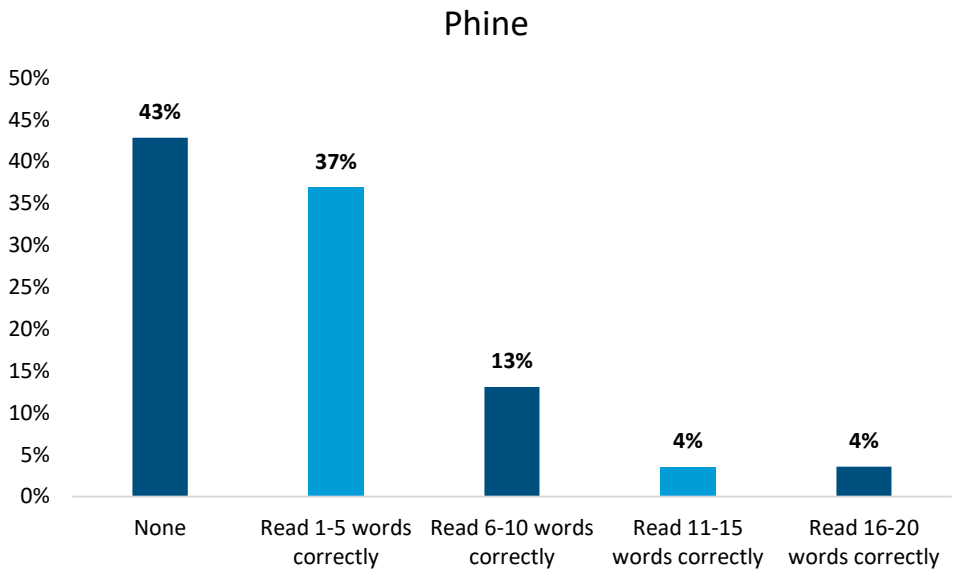
Note. Student survey. N=1,828. Note: does not include students who did not respond or responded "Don't Know"

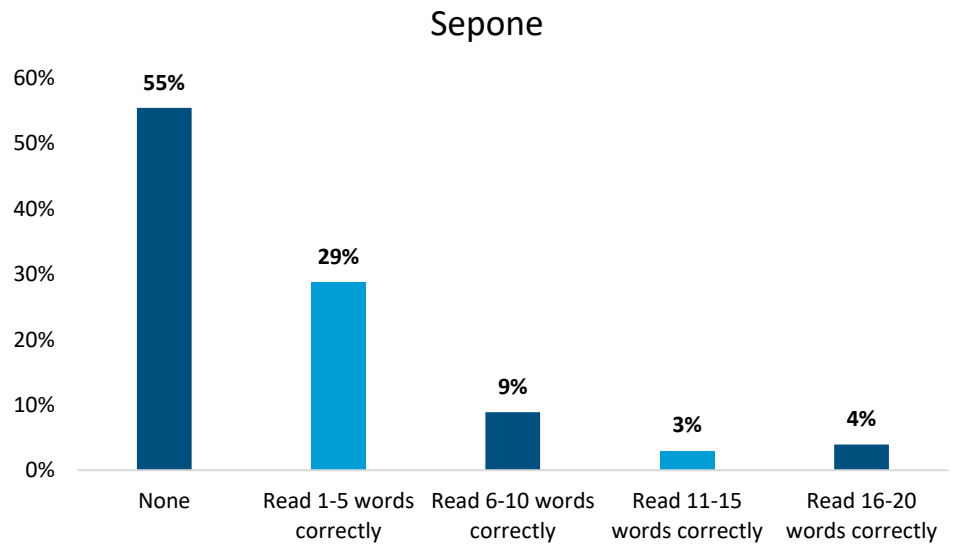
Exhibit 10-11. Distribution of Most Used Words Identified by District




Nong
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
70%
23%
5%
1%
1%
None
Read 1-5 words correctly
Read 6-10 words correctly
Read 11-15 words correctly
Read 16-20 words correctly


Phalanxay
50%
45%
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
46%
37%
6%
4%
7%
None
Read 1-5 words correctly
Read 6-10 words correctly
Read 11-15 words correctly
Read 16-20 words correctly


Phine
50%
45%
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
43%
37%
13%
4%
4%
None
Read 1-5 words correctly
Read 6-10 words correctly
Read 11-15 words correctly
Read 16-20 words correctly


Sepone
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
55%
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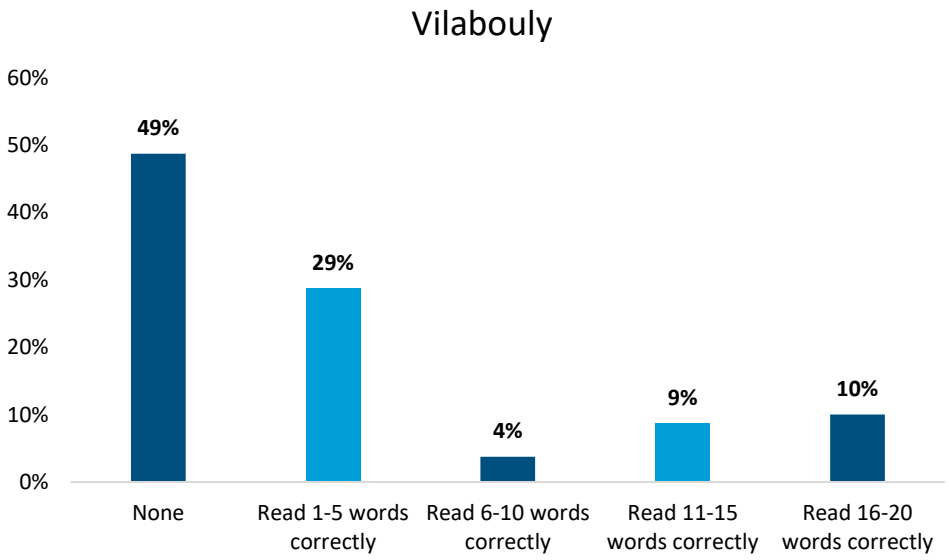
3%
4%
None
Read 1-5 words correctly
Read 6-10 words correctly
Read 11-15 words correctly
Read 16-20 words correctly


Vilabouly
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
49%
29%
4%
9%
10%
None
Read 1-5 words correctly
Read 6-10 words correctly
Read 11-15 words correctly
Read 16-20 words correctly

Annex 11. Interrater Reliability

Reading Assessment

- To measure the reliability and level of homogeneity of enumerators' scores on children's literacy skills, 13.4 percent of the overall baseline sample (76 out of 568) of Grade 2 students were assessed by two different enumerators simultaneously. Long one-way Analysis of Variance techniques, which is used to determine whether the mean of a dependent variable is the same in two or more unrelated and independent groups, were used to calculate the intra-class correlation within pairs of assessors for a measure of inter-rater reliability. Adapted from Fleiss et al. (1973), we interpreted the intra-class correlations as it follows:

Less than .40 – Poor
Between .40 and .75 – Good or fair
Greater than .75 – Excellent

- Exhibit 11-1 shows the percent of agreement between the raters, as well as inter-rater reliability ratings for the project evaluation sample. Overall, the inter-rater reliability (IRR) across the project evaluation sample was excellent for all of the literacy skills measures, except for "Fluency", showing high internal validity of the scores. This was noted to be a questionable measure due to its forcing of a low time limit on readers, so its result should be read with caution.

Exhibit 11-1. IRR by Literacy Skill Subtests for Performance Sample

Literacy Skill Sub-test	IRR	Rating
Letter Knowledge	98%	Excellent
Expressive Vocabulary	97%	Excellent
Reader	72%	Excellent
Fluency	21%	Poor
Familiar Word Decoding	79%	Excellent
Accuracy (out of the words attempted)	98%	Excellent
Word Pair	98%	Excellent
Listening and Reading Comprehension	98%	Excellent

Note. Student survey. N = 568 Grade 2 students

Annex 12: Terms of Reference/Statement of Work

Purpose

CRS is contracting an experienced, independent third-party consultant or firm to conduct the project's baseline, midterm, and final evaluations, and to organize and conduct Special Study 1, a mixed-methods study on the success rates and contributing factors to the performance of the school meals program post-handover.

As specified in US government regulations (see 7 CFR Part 1499.12 and 7 CFR Part 1599.13 the third party consultant or firm will:

- Be financially and legally separate from CRS and LEAPS II partner organizations;
- Have staff with demonstrated knowledge, analytical capacity, language skills and experience in conducting evaluations of development programs involving agriculture, education, and nutrition;
- Uses acceptable analytical frameworks such as comparison with non-project areas, surveys, involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation, and statistical analyses;
- Uses local consultants, as appropriate, to conduct portions of the evaluation; and
- Provides a detailed outline of the evaluation, major tasks, and specific schedules prior to initiating the evaluation.

CRS reserves the right to terminate its relationship with the third-party evaluator if the baseline, mid-term performance evaluation, and/or Special Study 1 are not deemed to have been completed in a manner that CRS or donor consider satisfactory. CRS will re-engage in a competitive recruitment process if the first evaluator does not meet expectations.

Background

CRS has been working in Laos since 1994 and in Savannakhet since 2012. Programming in Savannakhet, through the Learning and Engaging all in Primary School (LEAPS) program, supports high need areas and government priorities to increase equitable access to school, support quality education in the classroom, provide nutritious meals to primary age children, and improve health and sanitation at the school level.

The Learning and Engaging All in Primary School (LEAPS) III is the third phase of the LEAPS project supported by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) McGovern-Dole (MGD) Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program and will be implemented by Catholic Relief Services from September 2022 to September 2026 in Laos. LEAPS aims to improve literacy of school age children and increase the use of health and hygiene practices.[42] Over the course of LEAPS I and LEAPS II, the program has provided over 25 million meals to over 65,000 pre-primary and primary students in 350 schools in seven districts of Savannakhet province. In addition to school meals, CRS, through LEAPS, also provides a holistic package of programming to support education and health at the school level. Complementary programming has included literacy; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); inclusive education; and capacity building for both communities and partners. The LEAPS II final evaluation showed improvement

[42] These two main objectives serve as the SOs in the Results Framework of LEAPS.

in basic literacy skills, reduced hunger among students, increased use of WASH and hygiene practices, and increased access to water.

In 2021, CRS was awarded a follow-on award totaling 23 million USD to continue the work of LEAPS and sustain the gains of the project through a targeted sustainability plan in 302 schools in six of the seven original LEAPS districts (Atsaphone – 59 schools, Nong – 45, Phalanxay – 44, Phin – 47, Sepon – 55, and Vilabouly – 52). LEAPS II anticipates reaching over 36,000 beneficiaries during the course of the project. The main aims of the project remain the same: improve literacy of school age children and improve health and hygiene practices. In this phase, LEAPS III will carry forward many of the same activities – school meals, WASH, and literacy – but will also include Early Childhood Education interventions and agriculture support to school meals. LEAPS III will also integrate Local and Regional Procurement (LRP) to support the nutrition of the school meals. The LRP commodities- soymilk, chicken eggs, and sacha inchi- will complement the USDA donated commodities of fortified rice, lentils, and vitamin A fortified vegetable oil for a more nutritious school lunch designed for primary age students. Furthermore, LEAPS III is designed with sustainability in mind. Throughout the five-year project program activities, with a focus on school meals, will be transitioned to government management through a phased approach with target follow-on support post-transition. In LEAPS III, CRS will work with Save the Children who will implement the literacy component of LEAPS III, with the Government of Laos through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) as the key government partner, and with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, to support quality programming and ongoing support.

The school meals portion of the project remains the most substantial component and will be implemented in all 302 schools. CRS will distribute a food basket of USDA donated commodities: fortified rice, lentils, and vitamin A fortified oil. The food basket of donated commodities will be complemented by local and regional procurement commodities of sacha inchi powder, soy milk, and chicken eggs. CRS will work with teachers, storekeepers, cooks and government partners to ensure the functioning of the school meals program, the monitoring of school meals activities, and all commodities are correctly distributed and accounted for. As part of the sustainability efforts, CRS will implement agriculture activities to support school meals. CRS will support school gardens and roll out a pilot agriculture program with local farmers to link local agriculture production to school meals. LEAPS III will support WASH efforts by upgrading water systems and providing hygiene training and will work to increase school level nutrition knowledge through trainings and community events. Save the Children will implement literacy programming using an adapted version of their Literacy Boost methodology which has been tailored to the Lao context and further refined to align with the new MOES curriculum and the USAID funded Learn to Read project. Lastly, to ensure children have access to early childhood education in areas without pre-primary access, CRS will roll out Community Based School Readiness (CBSR) programs in a select number of schools so that children have access to early learning which is vital for success in primary school.

With this combination of activities, CRS, through LEAPS III, aims to improve the literacy and health and hygiene practices of project participants, but further, to build a strong and healthy school environment with targeted trainings and capacity building that will support the continuation of project activities beyond the life of the project.

The detailed results framework illustrating the project's objectives and intermediate and foundational results can be found in Annex A of the TOR.

Objectives

Under guidance of the Chief of Party and will close support from the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) Manager, Head of Programs, Global MEAL team Technical Advisor, Senior Technical Advisor for Education, and national Project Managers, the consultant(s) will be responsible to conduct the baseline, midterm, and final evaluations and the Special Study described in the TOR. (See TOR section- Evaluation Approach and Methodology).

(1) Baseline Evaluation: 1) to establish baseline values and measure the status of performance indicators; 2) to ensure that annual target values are applicable and realistic to measure project outcomes; and 3) to establish questions to test the project's theory of change (USDA/FAS M&E Policy, 2019).
(2) Midterm evaluation: review the project's implementing experience and the implementing environment; assess whether beneficiaries are receiving services as expected; assess whether the project is meeting its stated goals and objectives; review the project-level results frameworks and assumptions; document initial lessons learned; and discuss mid-course corrections that may be necessary to meet goals and objectives (USDA/FAS M&E Policy, 2019).
(3) Special Study 1: study the success rates and factors that strengthened or inhibited the school meals program post-handover to government management in 46 schools in Outhoumphone District. This study will assess which aspects of community readiness are most closely linked to the likelihood of school meals program success.
(4) Final evaluation: to assess whether the project has achieved the results outlined in the project-level results framework and to what extent has the handover been successful for the ongoing implementation of project activities.

Evaluation Team Qualifications

The evaluation team will comprise one international program evaluator (Team Leader), and three or more local or international consultants or members of a consulting firm selected for their technical expertise. The evaluation team should include an expert(s) in survey design, management and multivariate analyses of quantitative social science data. In addition, a team member(s) is needed with experience implementing an EGRA tool, as well as analysis of EGRA data.

The aggregate technical expertise of the evaluation team members should encompass the sectors: childhood literacy, primary education, and WASH and nutrition in the context of school feeding programs. The team should have Lao language ability and fluent English speakers. Data collectors should include individuals who can speak the local dialects that are prevalent in the project areas. Inclusion of team members with previous experience working in Lao PDR is preferred.

All evaluation team members should meet the following qualifications and experience:

- No previous involvement in the LEAPS III program design or implementation;
- Proficient in spoken and written English;
- Master's or PhD degree in a relevant field;
- 10+ years of experience in applying his/her field of expertise to program design and oversight or 8+ years' experience with program baselines and/or evaluation in his/her field in developing countries (Laos context preferred);
- Demonstrated ability to achieve results and meet deadlines in a demanding environment;

- Preferred skills: Knowledge of IRB requirements and ethical considerations when working in schools.

All evaluation team members and all baseline and evaluation data collectors are responsible for adhering to all terms and conditions stipulated in the contract with CRS, including but not limited to CRS' Code of Conduct and Policy on Protection from Abuse and Exploitation. All enumerators and evaluation team members working in schools must also complete SCI's child protection training.

The Team Leader and any other international consultants on the evaluation team are responsible for and must provide proof of emergency evacuation insurance.

a. Evaluation Team Leader Responsibilities and Qualifications

The evaluation team leader will lead the team to accomplish the studies and deliverables outlined in this TOR and SOW, ensuring that all team members fulfill assigned tasks.

The Team Leader will:

- Serve as the primary point of contact with the LEAPS II management to assure adequate logistics and good adherence to local protocols;
- Lead the timely development of appropriate study plans for the baseline performance evaluation, mid-term performance evaluation, final performance evaluation, and Special Study 1.
- Assure rational sampling of targeted schools, communities, and other key informants;
- Ensure adequate triangulation and validation of findings;
- Oversee data collection training for enumerators, including time for field testing quantitative and qualitative tools;
- Monitor and assure the quality of data collection and analyses;
- Oversee the data analyses and integration of qualitative and quantitative findings;
- Lead a presentation of preliminary findings to CRS, USDA, SCI, and other key stakeholders to be confirmed by the LEAPS II team;
- Assure timely submission of draft and final reports that flow logically and clearly separate findings, conclusions, and recommendations, and in which all conclusions and recommendations are based on evidence presented in the report;
- Assure timely submission of the deliverables to the appropriate recipients or entities; and
- Be available to respond to USDA questions on baseline and evaluation reports.

The Team Leader should have the following **qualifications and experience**:

- Master's degree required, PhD in a relevant field preferred;
- Minimum of fifteen years of experience in international development evaluation, preferably of education programs;
- Experience leading similar evaluations;
- Familiarity working with USDA and/or USAID and their project and performance management frameworks;
- Strong management, communication and administrative skills;

- Demonstrated exceptional report writing skills that emphasize logical flow and objective analyses;
- Demonstrated ability to achieve results and meet deadlines in a demanding environment;
- Previous work experience in Laos and/or proficiency in Laos language and/or indigenous Laos languages preferred.

Deliverables

All reports and deliverables should be completed in English, be free of typos or grammatical errors, and be a polished document ready for publication. This means the document contains no factual errors or inaccuracies and citations are properly used.

- CRS-approved study plans (including consultant responsibilities for identifying, interviewing, contracting, training and overseeing enumerators) for all evaluations and studies;
- Local (Lao) and/or international IRB or other ethical approval documentation, as required;
- Meet with CRS & SCI for review of Literacy Boost tools and methodology in February 2022;
- Sampling plan including the file with actual sample size calculations for all quantitative surveys and assessments associated with evaluations and studies;
- Soft copies of all quantitative and qualitative data collection tools for all evaluations and studies;
- Train enumerators and supervisors;
- Data collection guide for enumerators & supervisors;
- Completed copies of survey questionnaires, consent forms, and qualitative notes;
- Soft copies of both raw and final, clean quantitative datasets, in a readable format, with accompanying codebook/data dictionary;
- Soft copy of qualitative matrices;
- Survey implementation report: summary of issues encountered and solutions during the fielding of questionnaire, data entry and data analysis. The purpose is to: 1) document the issues that might affect the analysis (i.e. if one of the modules has failed then the analysis will show this; and 2) highlight lessons learned to improve the implementation of mid- or end-line survey;
- Final reports must not contain any proprietary or PII. PII is any information that directly or indirectly identifies an individual. This information can be used on its own or with other information to identify, contact or locate a single person, or to identify an individual in a specific situation. This may include, for example, a name, national ID number, address, birthplace, etc. PII includes both direct and indirect identifiers that, when taken together, could allow for the identification of an individual (such as village name, gender, age, name, and/or facial image).
- Final reports must contain the project's indicator table as an annex with updated values for each evaluation.
- Final reports should not allow for the identification of individual schools or communities. Any list of schools or communities provided should be included in the report as an annex, so that it can be easily removed for external sharing. CRS-approved final reports for the final performance evaluation must follow the outline and pages limits discussed;
- Final reports must be compliant with Section 508 of the United States Access Board which requires that information and services are accessible to persons with disability (See https//section 508.gov/create);

- The full report should be accompanied by a 2-3-page stand-alone brief describing the evaluation design, key findings, and other relevant considerations. It will serve to inform any interested stakeholders of the evaluations and be written in language easy to understand by non-evaluators along with appropriate graphics and tables;
- Delivery of a short webinar, with time for Q&A to the global CRS FFE and MEAL audience and USDA audience after the completion of the final performance evaluation in 2026;
- Participation in dissemination events and provision of soft copies of presentations developed and delivered during dissemination events; and

- Written responses to any questions raised by the donor on any of the final reports that require feedback from the Evaluation Team.[43]

Timeline

The dates for the baseline, midterm, special study, and final evaluations provided are illustrative and will be finalized in consultations with CRS as per donor requirements and will be revisited before each evaluation cycle.

Table 1: Baseline Study Timeline

Month	Activity
Oct-Nov 2021	Develop Baseline Study ToR
December 2021	Submit Baseline Study ToR to USDA for approval
January 2022	Finalize external consultant contract
Feb 2022	Evaluation Team submits study plan (baseline) for approval by CRS, ethical approval documentation, sampling plan, collection tools; data collection guide for enumerators. Refine evaluation methodology and data collection tools
March 2022	Conduct data collection and analysis
April 2022	Stakeholder meeting to share initial findings- The evaluation Team submits draft initial findings for review and approval by CRS prior to the stakeholder meeting
May 2022	Submit draft report for CRS review and conduct revisions
June 2022	Finalize Baseline Study report and submit to USDA
July 2022	Evaluation Team provides written responses to donor questions/comments on Baseline report. Evaluation Team submits completed survey questionnaires, consent forms, qualitative notes, final data sets, qualitative matrices, final copies of dissemination event materials.

Table 2: Timeline for key midterm evaluation activities
(Special Study will occur simultaneously with the midterm activities)

[43] Timing of donor feedback on evaluation reports cannot be estimated. The evaluation team is suggested to plan the equivalent of 0.5 day of the Team Leader's time within the 6 months following the submission of each of the 3 required evaluation reports (1.5 days total) to allow for time required to respond to donor queries on final evaluation reports.

Month	Activity
November 2023	Develop Midterm Evaluation ToR including Special Study.
December 2023	Submit updated Midterm Evaluation ToR to USDA for approval
Jan–Feb 2024	Evaluation Team submits study plan (midterm) for approval by CRS, ethical approval documentation, sampling plan, collection tools, data collection guide for enumerators. Refine evaluation methodology and data collection tools
March 2024	Conduct data collection and analysis
April 2024	Stakeholder meeting to share initial findings. The evaluation Team submits draft initial findings for review and approval by CRS prior to the stakeholder meeting
May 2024	Submit draft report for CRS review and conduct revisions (Special Study Report should be standalone)
June 2024	Finalize Midterm Evaluation report and submit to USDA. Evaluation Team provides written responses to donor questions/comments on Midterm report. Evaluation Team submits completed survey questionnaires, consent forms, qualitative notes, final data sets, qualitative matrices, final copies of dissemination event materials.
June 2024	CRS develops action plan to address findings and recommendations (within 15 days of receiving final report)

Table 3: Timeline for key final evaluation activities

Month	Activity
November 2025	Develop Final Evaluation ToR
December 2025	Submit Final Evaluation ToR to USDA for approval
Jan-Feb 2026	Evaluation Team submits study plan (endline) for approval by CRS, ethical approval documentation, sampling plan, collection tools;, data collection guide for enumerators. Refine evaluation methodology and data collection tools
March 2026	Conduct data collection and analysis
April 2026	Stakeholder meeting to share initial findings. The evaluation Team submits draft initial findings for review and approval by CRS prior to the stakeholder meeting
May 2026	Submit draft report for CRS review and conduct revisions
June 2026	Finalize Final Evaluation report and submit to USDA. Evaluation Team provides written responses to donor questions/comments on Endline report. Evaluation Team submits completed survey questionnaires, consent forms, qualitative notes, final data sets, qualitative matrices, final copies of dissemination event materials.
June 2026	Presentation of findings and recommendations to USDA, CRS, and project stakeholders

Evaluation Coordination and Management

CRS will support the contracted evaluator in a review of the final performance evaluation plans, survey and data collection instruments, sampling methods, and the development of a data analysis plan based on the project indicators.

In-country coordination of the baseline study and evaluations will be ensured by the CRS Laos LEAPS II Chief of Party, or MEAL Manager.

a. Evaluation Resources

The evaluation team will have access to the following key documents:

- Donor-approved proposal;
- Donor-approved evaluation plan;
- Donor-approved performance monitoring plan (PMP);
- Updated indicator performance tracking table (IPTT);
- Previous evaluations from phase I of the project;
- Baseline and midterm performance and impact evaluations for LEAPS II;
- Baseline and midterm data collection tools;
- Financial documents;
- Semi-annual project status reports;
- Relevant population data for calculation of survey sample sizes;
- Definition files used for digital data collecting tools used by the LEAPS team;
- Donor-approved evaluation TORs;
- Cost-Benefit Analysis of The School Meals Programmes in Lao (WFP Report)
- Market Studies conducted by a local consulting firm examining the availability and impact of commodities.
- LEAPS II Literacy Boost Reading Assessment Report (SCI Report)

CRS will facilitate introductions to government stakeholders, but the evaluation team is responsible for engaging the government to allow for their input and feedback throughout the study processes.

Ethical Standards

The evaluation team, including any enumerators or contractors that the evaluation team may hire, must ensure that the evaluation study adheres to ethical guidelines as outlined in the American Evaluation Association's (AEA) Guiding Principles for Evaluators. A summary of these guidelines is provided below:

1. Informed Consent: All participants are expected to provide informed consent following standard and pre-agreed consent protocols. As in the baseline and midterm performance evaluations, and as per the approved IRB protocols for the LBRA, teachers should provide written consent for the children to be surveyed and students must provide verbal assent. For qualitative surveys, participants are required to give verbal consent.
2. Systematic Inquiry: Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries.
3. Competence: Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.
4. Integrity/Honesty: Evaluators display honesty and integrity in their own behavior and attempt to ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.

5. Respect for People: Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of respondents, program participants, clients, and other evaluation stakeholders. It is expected that the evaluator will obtain the informed consent of participants to ensure that they can decide in a conscious, deliberate way whether they want to participate.
6. Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare: Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of general and public interests and values that may be related to the evaluation.
7. Evaluators shall provide copies of the evaluation reports that are free of personally identifiable information (PII) and proprietary information.

A link to a more detailed description of AEA's Guiding Principles for Evaluators can be found at: http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=51.

The evaluation team is responsible for ensuring all local (Lao) and international ethical review and approval processes are followed for the studies outlined in this ToR.

COVID-19 Adaptations

CRS acknowledges the unique challenges the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic in Lao PDR poses to data collection. Throughout FY21 and early FY22, many schools in Savannakhet province have delayed opening or have been temporarily closed based on guidance from National, Provincial, and District-level governments. Travel restrictions have, at various times, prevented international and inter-provincial travel without letters of approval from the COVID Task Force, and some districts have mandated 14-day quarantine periods for individuals arriving from zones or neighborhoods experiencing active community transmission of the virus. School closures and travel restrictions represent a significant barrier to in-person data collection and may require the third-party evaluator and data enumerators to adapt accordingly. In order to respond to the evolving situation, CRS will work closely with the evaluators to develop an evaluation approach that is simultaneously robust and able to achieve the objectives laid out in this TOR and the LEAPS III Evaluation Plan, and is sensitive to government mandates, public perception, and the necessity to protect project participants, community members, and evaluators from COVID-19.

At this stage, CRS envisions three possible modes of data collection depending on the COVID-19 situation in Lao PDR at the time of each planned data collection. These options will be considered by CRS and the evaluation team in consultation with USDA in the period prior to any LEAPS III evaluation event:

1. **Fully In-Person Data Collection (scenario 1)**
   This option assumes that all schools are open and government guidance allows travel to, and in-person data collection at, schools in the project areas. All evaluation activities will be carried out as described in this TOR and the LEAPS III Evaluation Plan. Quantitative and qualitative data collection will be conducted in-person as planned but will be guided by a COVID-19 Prevention Protocol developed jointly by CRS and the evaluation team. For all face-to-face activities, data enumerators will be fully vaccinated and follow the most recent guidelines provided by the Government of Laos and the WHO. Preventative measures may include, but are not limited to, wearing face masks, and providing masks and sanitizing gel to evaluation participants; maintaining physical distance of at least two meters; washing hands before and after meeting participants; and distributing questionnaires, holding focus group discussions, and conducting

interviews in outside spaces when possible, or ventilating rooms (for example, opening windows and doors) if data collection must be conducted indoors. If rapid COVID testing is available in Laos prior to and during data collection, enumerators (along with CRS staff) will be required to undergo rapid testing at regular intervals over the data collection period.

2. **Hybrid In-Person/Remote Data Collection (scenario 2)**
   This option assumes localized outbreaks, with schools in villages experiencing outbreaks closed, and schools in villages without outbreaks open. Some evaluation activities will be carried out as described in this TOR and the LEAPS III Evaluation Plan, and others will be carried out remotely. In villages with open schools, Scenario 1 will apply. In villages with closed schools, data collection logistics will depend on local restrictions and the extent of the localized outbreak. If deemed safe, allowable, and appropriate (in collaboration with local authorities and based on up-to-date transmission rates), one-on-one home visits will be considered to administer surveys and reading tests. All respondents will be asked to give consent to the in-person data collection activity and will be given the option to respond via phone if more comfortable. With consent, in-person data collection will be conducted outdoors or in a covered outdoor area, ensuring compliance with all COVID protocols mentioned above. If rapid COVID testing is available in Laos prior to and during data collection, enumerators (along with CRS staff) will be required to undergo rapid testing at regular intervals over the data collection period. Qualitative data collection (interviews and FGDs) will be conducted in-person only if allowable in the area, only in outdoor spaces, and only with consent from all participants. If small group gatherings are allowed but group size is restricted, FGDs will be either reduced to the allowable number of attendees or converted to a one-on-one key informant interview structure. In areas with localized outbreaks, caution will be at the forefront in deciding whether to conduct in-person data collection that is allowable but is not entirely necessary (for example, FGDs with adults can be conducted remotely more easily than a survey or reading test with a child.) When planning for data collection in which face-to-face communication is not essential, Scenario 3 will apply.

3. **Fully Remote Data Collection (scenario 3)**
   All evaluation activities will be carried out without face-to-face interaction. Any tools developed for in-person data collection will be reviewed and adapted as needed for a virtual environment. The evaluation team will train data enumerators remotely and data enumerators will collect data using phones and video-conferencing applications. Key informant interviews with project partners and other key stakeholders can be conducted over the phone or through video-calls without significant impact on data quality. The same is likely true for quantitative surveys with adults. However, focus group discussions with young adults and community members may need to be replaced with additional KIIs. Participant selection for these interviews can be guided by school staff in target communities in order to ensure broad representation of voices and perspectives. Because virtual data collection with minors has proved difficult in previous evaluations in Laos, student surveys and literacy assessments will require significant adaptation to generate meaningful data. If fully remote data collection is necessary, CRS and the evaluation team will identify alternate data collection strategies and will select the most appropriate option in consultation with USDA.

Ownership of the Evaluation Data, Results, and Report

All data collected for the evaluations outlined in this TOR shall remain the property of USDA and CRS as its custodian. Any work product resulting from the baseline, midterm, or final evaluations, or Special Study 1, must cite the participating NGOs and USDA. The developed Literacy Boost Assessment tool will be the property of SC and is not to be used by or shared with parties outside of this TOR and Scope of Work.

Place of Performance

Activities will be conducted in Lao PDR and the Evaluation Team's remote location of choice (e.g. home of record, headquarters, etc.).

Period of Performance

February 2022 to August 2026.

Annex 13: References

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