



BASELINE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

MCGOVERN-DOLE INTERNATIONAL FOOD FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAM

Photo: CRS

PROGRAM GOAL

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 1) improve the literacy of school-aged children and 2) increase the use of health and dietary best practices in six disadvantaged districts in Savannakhet province in Lao PDR. LEAPS III builds on the successes from LEAPS I (2012-2016) and LEAPS II (2016-2022) with a focus on sustainability and handover of implementation to the Government of Lao PDR.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

AIR conducted a baseline evaluation of the LEAPS III program using qualitative and quantitative methods, including a student survey, the Literacy Boost Reading Assessment (LBRA), classroom observation, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. The main objectives of the baseline performance evaluation were 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. The baseline evaluation also provided recommendations for how LEAPS III can design and implement activities to promote sustainability and efficient handover of implementation to the GOL.



66 Schools



24 Focus Groups



1,829 Students



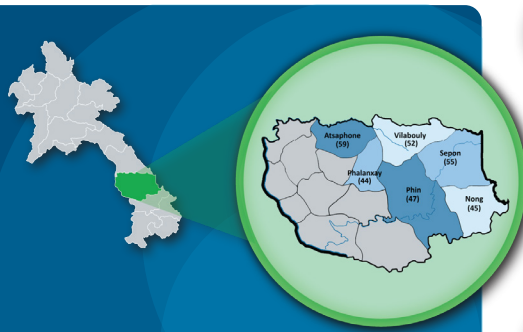
46 Key Informant Interviews



129 Classroom Observations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **Quality of literacy instruction** - Stakeholders reported a significant gap in literacy instruction quality and capacity. This was confirmed through classroom observations where it was observed that teaching approaches such as reading to the class, playing games, engaging in reading activities, and using a variety of teaching materials are not used consistently.
- **Literacy** - Reading skills of Grade 2 students were relatively low both in terms of reading comprehension and listening comprehension. In general, students whose primary language is Lao performed better than non-Lao speakers. Low literacy outcomes are likely due to several factors, the most important of which is reduced instruction time and reduced curriculum due to COVID-19.
- **Health and hygiene practices** - In general students are practicing good handwashing behavior while at school, which stakeholders noted is likely due to reinforcement from teachers and parents due to the onset of COVID-19. Latrine use at school is low which stakeholders attributed 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.
- **Safe food preparation and storage knowledge and practices** - Quantitative findings suggest that students are satisfied with the school meals. However, qualitative feedback suggested that cooks could benefit from additional training on how to make the meals more nutritious, varied, and tasty.



PROGRAM NAME

Learning and Engaging All in Primary School (LEAPS) III

EVALUATION LOCATION

Atsaphone, Nong, Phalanxay, Phine, Sepon, and Vilabouly districts in Savannakhet, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR)

TIMELINE

2021 - 2026

FUNDER

United States Department of Agriculture McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition program

IMPLEMENTER

Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

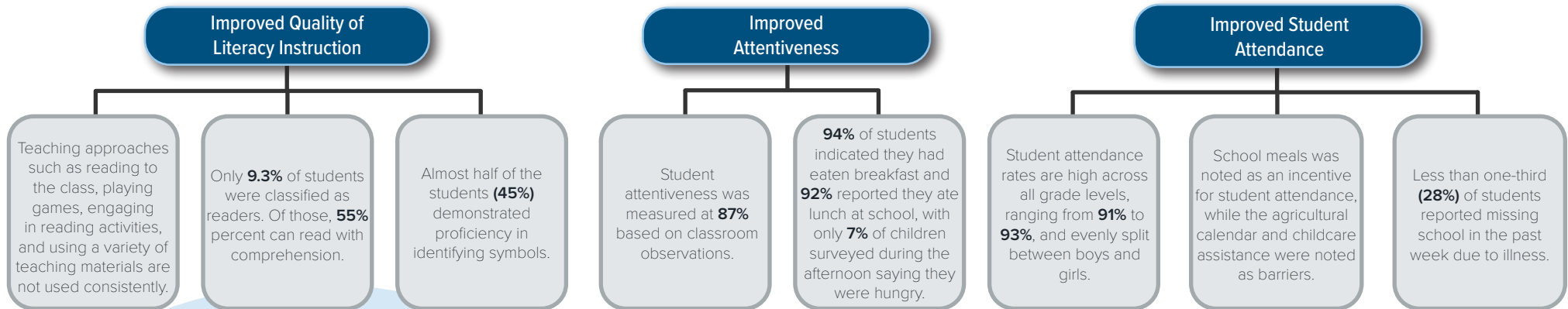
PARTNERS

- Save the Children International (SCI)
- Government of Lao PDR (GOL)

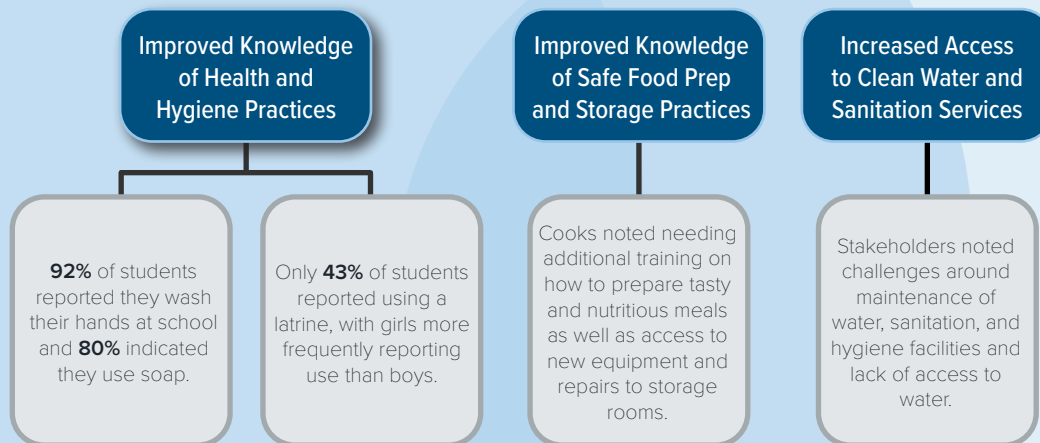
INDEPENDENT EVALUATOR

American Institutes for Research (AIR)

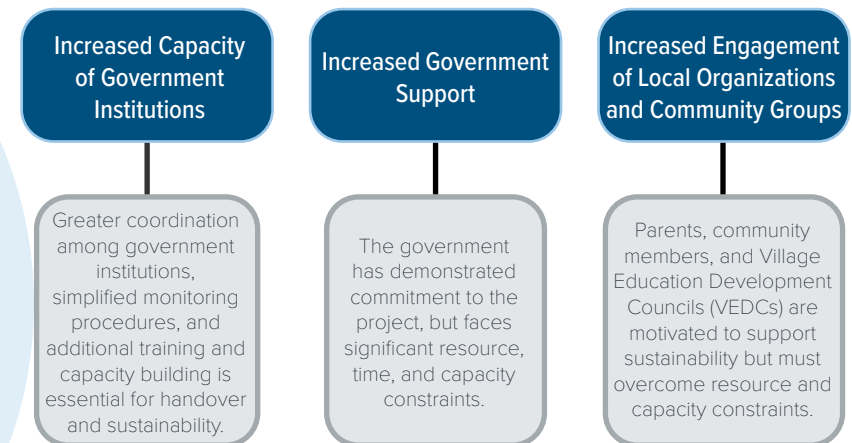
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: IMPROVED LITERACY OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: INCREASED USE OF HEALTH AND DIETARY PRACTICES



FOUNDATIONAL RESULTS



“

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



RECOMMENDATIONS

Build teacher capacity and improve mechanisms to support quality instruction.



Teachers continue to face challenges implementing positive pedagogy approaches, managing multi-grade classrooms, instructing non-Lao language students, and dealing with student learning loss due to school closures. LEAPS III should provide additional training and capacity building to teachers on teaching approaches and classroom management techniques. LEAPS III should also consider working with teachers and schools to improve access to at home learning to as well as using community-based models to support group learning during times of school closure.

Strengthen the management and advocacy capacity of VEDCs.

VEDCs could serve as a strong community advocate and sustainable resource for LEAPS 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 VEDC members with targeted project management, financial management, and advocacy training so the VEDCs can better support and manage school-based initiatives.



Promote sustainability through targeted support to the GOL.



Given LEAPS III focus on handover and sustainability, there is a need to provide targeted capacity building support to the GOL to overcome potential barriers to sustainability. Specifically, LEAPS III should work with the GOL to improve coordination among district-level government officials to ensure that school-based initiatives are properly planned and resourced. LEAPS III should also co-create a simple, user-friendly monitoring and evaluation system that accommodates the GOL's time and resource constraints while providing relevant and timely information. Lastly, LEAPS III should support the GOL in developing guidelines and policies for dealing with national level challenges such managing multi-grade classrooms, addressing the needs of non-Lao language speakers, and promoting at home learning.