



World Change Starts with Educated Children.®

Girls' Education Program Laos

THE NEED

When girls learn, the whole community benefits. The research demonstrating this truth is undisputed. Educated girls earn higher wages and boost economic growth, are more likely to have smaller, healthier, and better-educated families, and are less likely to contract HIV.ⁱ However, girls are still less likely to go to school than boys and more likely to drop out before completion. Gender disparity in education is particularly acute in the developing world. More than 56 percent of the 104 million out-of-school children are girls, and over two-thirds of the world's 860 million illiterate adults are women.ⁱⁱ While the number of girls in school has increased in the last decade, there are still far too many who are excluded.

Though Laos' entire population is only about 6 million people, it is highly diverse both ethnically and linguistically. The vast majority of people live in rural areas, and almost 40% of the Lao population lives below the poverty line.ⁱⁱⁱ Approximately 70% of the 11,640 villages in the country provide children with even partial schooling.^{iv} Therefore, access to primary schools and completion of primary education remain core challenges in Laos, particularly for girls and ethnic minorities. Only 33% of secondary school aged girls are enrolled in school.^v Disparity in girls' access to education varies further between urban and rural areas due to the sparse location of schools in the countryside. Additional major barriers to girls' education include gender stereotypes, household responsibilities, trafficking, and early marriage.

THE PROGRAM

Supporting the education of girls has an immediate and direct impact on their lives. Education will allow them to take control of their futures. Room to Read established the Girls' Education program in Laos to support the education of girls through secondary school. The program was started in 2007 in the context of major international development initiatives such as the commitment to Education For All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These initiatives emphasize the profound and unique evidence that investing in girls' education, growth, and development is critical to economic and social improvements throughout the world. One study concludes that providing girls with even one extra year of education further than the standard increases their eventual wages by 10-20 percent.^{vi} Another report suggests that an extra year of education for a girl can lower infant mortality by 5-10 percent. The Girls' Education program was designed with the goal to motivate, educate, and empower girls, and there are currently over 8,600 girls in the program worldwide.

First Year of Operation in Laos	2007
Number of Girls Supported in Laos through 2009	821
Number of New Girls on Program in Laos in 2010	250
Provinces in Laos where Room to Read Supports Girls	Oudomxay, Salavan, Xayabouly

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

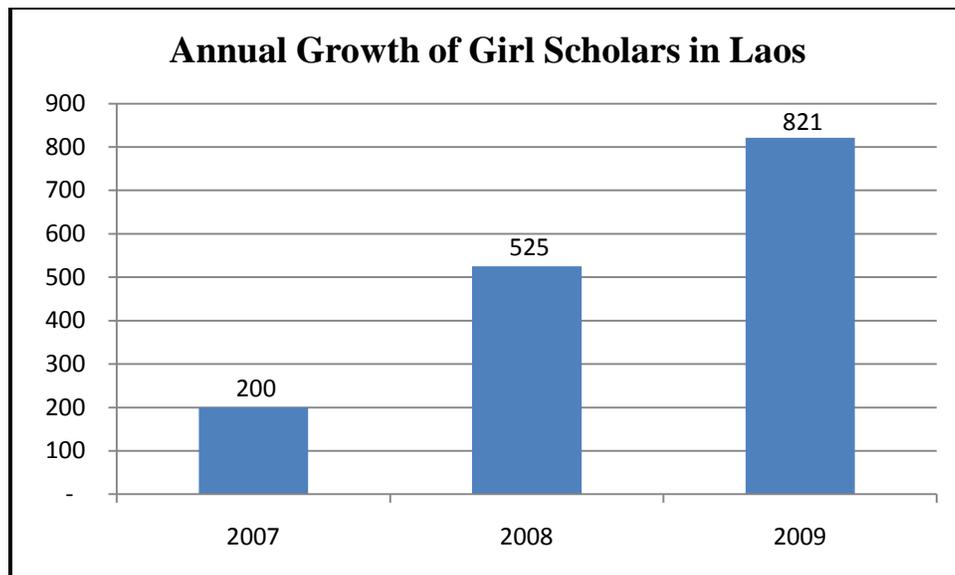
Girls' Education Program in Laos Engages Parents & Guardians

The Laos Girls' Education program team has observed that human trafficking has become an increased danger for girls transitioning from primary to secondary school. In 2009, teachers and staff members in Laos observed a frightening trend that linked the majority of dropout to human trafficking and the general need for young girls to financially support their families. This trend underscores the need for education programs that have an immediate and direct impact on the lives of girls, which not only provide the financial means for girls to stay in school, but also educates communities and families about the value of girls' education. In response to this growing danger, local teams in Xayabouly and Salavan held meetings to educate parents on the dangers associated with human trafficking.

Three parent workshops were held in August 2009 in Salavan, Xayabouly, and Oudomxay Provinces. To encourage parent participation, the workshops coincided with the annual Handover Ceremonies, which marks the beginning of the academic year when girls receive new school supplies, uniforms, shoes, and books. Representatives from the Local Lao Women's Union and the Asia Regional Trafficking in Persons Project (ARTPP) presented ways in which parents and their children can avoid human trafficking and discussed the importance of keeping girls in school. Parents or guardians of all the 821 girls who are currently on scholarship attended the parent workshops. The objectives of the workshop were to improve parents' perception of girls' education, and to strengthen ties between the parents, the community and Room to Read. Teams noted active and enthusiastic participation from parents in all three provinces.

The Laos Girls' Education program team has made it a priority to increase parents' participation and awareness of girls' education in 2010. They have plans to strengthen the content of parents' workshops by adding topics of human trafficking (using the workshop manual and VCD of UNICEF) and others that are associated with creating a safe and supporting living environment for girls, so that girls can continue to avoid the dangers of trafficking and successfully complete secondary school.

RESULTS



OBJECTIVES AND INDICATORS

Our global indicators (GIs) are a combination of quantitative program accomplishments and program performance measures that show progress towards our program objectives. We collect information on these indicators to help us assess the status of implementation and the results of our programs as well as improve future program design, planning and implementation. The five objectives below are followed by indicators that inform us of the program's progress.

Increase girls' access to school	
a) Number of scholars on scholarship in calendar year 2009	821
Increase girls' retention in school (retention means staying in school)	
a) Percentage of scholars who dropped the program in calendar year 2009	1%
b) Percentage of existing scholars who advanced to the next grade in 2009 school year	100%
c) Percentage of existing scholars who transitioned school levels in 2009 school year	100%
Increase girls' educational opportunities	
a) Number of scholars who received tutoring in 2009 school year	514
b) Number of scholars who attended life skills training in 2009 school year	324
Increase guardian awareness about the value of girls' education	
a) Percentage of scholars whose guardian(s) has participated in Girls Education meeting(s) in 2009 school year	90%
Increase school completion of girl scholars	
a) Number of scholars who completed the final year of the Girls Education program in calendar year 2009	0

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The components or package that a girl receives varies depending on her grade level. In general, program components are divided into Material Inputs and Activities. Girls on the program in Laos benefit from the following program components:

Material Inputs

- Stationery supplies
- School uniform
- Shoes
- Backpack
- Exam fees
- School admission fee (as required)
- Monthly tuition fee
- Extra-curricular activities fee
- Textbooks
- Transportation (bicycle or bus fare)
- Medical (checkups as required for school)
- Boarders fee (includes food)

Activities

- **Award ceremony** – Special event to welcome girl scholars to the program and provide school supplies at the start of the school year.

- **Life skills training** – Customized workshops for several age ranges that equip girls with important life skills, such as health and hygiene, self-awareness, communication, critical thinking and decision making.
- **Tutoring** – Academic guidance for scholars who are in need of extra subject-based support from teachers and Room to Read mentors.
- **Camps** – Single and multi-day events that incorporate life skills training, tutoring, and community-building activities.
- **Girls’ (peer) groups** – Gatherings that provide an opportunity for older scholars to mentor and provide feedback to younger scholars on gender-related topics and leadership.
- **Bridge course to enable out of school girls to transition into school** – Academic remediation course to help scholars build the skills needed for the appropriate grade level.
- **Parent workshops and meetings** – Sessions held for parents on the value of girls’ education and other locally-relevant topics (e.g. human trafficking).
- **Gender sensitization training for teachers** – Educator-specific trainings that help teachers develop strategies for addressing gender inequity in the classroom.
- **Social Mobilizer (mentor) training** – Support for Social Mobilizers (also known as community organizers) who mentor scholars, their families, and their communities.
- **Women’s groups to promote value of girls’ education** – Gatherings for scholars, teachers, and community members to come together and discuss gender-related topics.
- **Special activities at school level** – Events held on Women’s Day, Children’s Day, Literacy Day and Teacher’s Day to promote the event and allow space for scholars to showcase their abilities.



ⁱ Herz, B. and Sperling, G. (2004). What Works in Girls’ Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World. Council on Foreign Relations.

ⁱⁱ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2003). Gender and Education for All, The Leap to Equality: Summary Report. *Education For All Global Monitoring Report, 2003/4*. Retrieved on March 10, 2008, from http://www.unesco.org/education/efa_report/summary_en.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2003). Gender and Ethnicity in the Context of Equality and Access in Lao Education. Retrieved on March 6, 2008, from http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/appeal/gender/LaoReport.pdf.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2005). UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data Centre. Retrieved on March 7, 2008 from http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=198&IF_Language=eng.

^{vi} Herz, B. and Sperling, G. (2004). What Works in Girls’ Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World. Council on Foreign Relations.