



Proposed 2019 Funding Opportunity: Supporting Literacy in Laos

Prepared for Ute Gebhardt

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Room to Read is pleased to submit the following proposal to support our efforts to advance gender equality in education and children's literacy skills across Asia and Africa. We truly appreciate that you have made Room to Read a part of your giving plan. This proposal highlights the potential impact of a partnership with Room to Read via a €50,000 - €55,000 investment in our Literacy Programme in Laos in 2019.

ROOM TO READ OVERVIEW

Many problems in the world can be solved through one tool: education. Room to Read's innovative model focuses on deep, systemic transformation within schools in low-income countries during two time periods which are most critical in a child's schooling: early primary school for literacy acquisition and the transition to secondary school for girls. Room to Read has created a model that can be replicated, localised and sustained by governments. We believe that World Change Starts with Educated Children® and are dedicated to improving lives for many generations to come through our innovative programs. Since its founding in 2000, Room to Read has benefited 16.8 million children across over 37,000 communities in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Grenada, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Vietnam, and Zambia.

LITERACY PROGRAMME

Quality of life, health and economic opportunity all depend on education, and at present, there remains an education crisis in low-income countries. Literacy is the foundation for all future learning, yet nearly 800 million people are illiterate and two-thirds are women and girls. Even with increased access to school, many children are not learning the basics while in primary school due to inadequate teachers, funds, and school infrastructure challenges. These barriers get worse for girls in secondary school when female student enrollment sharply drops due to societal and economic challenges.

Our Literacy Programme enables primary school children to become independent readers. Room to Read focuses its efforts on developing reading skills and the habit of reading in primary school aged children because literacy is the foundation for all future learning. We do this through:

- Establishing libraries and equipping them with age appropriate and culturally relevant reading materials (including publishing our own original children's books)
- Improving the child friendliness of the school environment
- Teacher training and support – providing teachers with the tools to teach effectively



These interventions contribute to greater reading fluency. Our reading skills evaluations show that children in the Literacy Programme read more fluently than their peers in comparable schools. By the end of grade two, students tested in program schools read twice as fast as their peers on average and, in some countries, nearly three times as fast. Children supported by our program also read with greater comprehension. When asked comprehension questions about the passages they had just read, children in Room to Read programs gave, on average, 87 percent

more correct answers than children in comparison schools. Our Literacy Programme is encouraging the development of reading habits and our libraries are a contributing factor.

OUR WORK IN LAOS

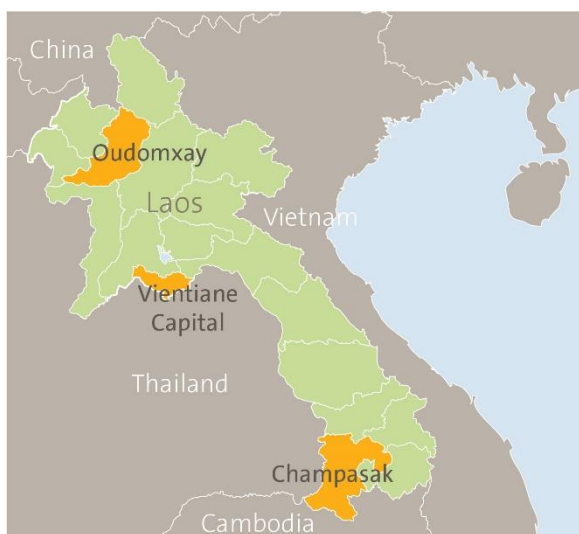
Laos has seen a large amount of political upheaval in its recent history, which has left its population impoverished and lacking access to many modern advancements. Although the country is characterized by geographic and ethnic diversity, it struggles to distribute resources and opportunities equally among distinct groups.

With half of the population of Laos below 18 years of age, the educational system is in urgent need of improvement. The inequality that exists within Laos is based on ethnicity, gender and wealth, and prevents many children from receiving equal access to education. Traditionally, only one of Lao's 49 recognized ethnic groups, the Lao Loum, relied on formal education. Many of the other groups lived without written language and only men within those groups had access to education through Buddhist temples. A secondary education system was established during the French occupation. The system used the French language and catered to the upper classes, furthering the gap between social groups. In an effort to provide a common language for the whole country, the Pathet Lao streamlined the Lao language in the 1950s and implemented it as the language of instruction nationwide. This system is still in place today and poses a major challenge for ethnic groups that do not speak the Lao language.



Although primary and secondary school are free and literacy rates are rising, students in Laos still struggle to stay in school, especially if they come from vulnerable populations. Many schools lack appropriate reading materials, and have poor quality classrooms and limited trainings for teachers.

Attending class is even more challenging for students living in rural communities, who often have to walk extremely long distances to reach the nearest school. Girls also face pressures to marry early or help with household duties, especially in poor families. These barriers to education have left Lao women with a literacy rate that is 17 percent lower than their male counterparts. In order to address these obstacles, Laos' government is trying to engage families and communities in education reform.



Room to Read has worked very closely with the government in this effort since we began our work in Laos in 2005. Our focus in the country has been on improving infrastructure, providing access to quality learning materials and supporting children at risk of dropping out of school in the most underserved areas of the country. We signed a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Lao government in 2011 that discussed our plans to continue our programs and expand our reach in the country in the coming years. Room to Read continues to be a leading organization in the effort to improve access to quality education for the boys and girls of Laos. To date, we work in five provinces in Laos and supported 148 Literacy Program schools. We project to have benefited more than half 600,000 children in more than 1,000 communities in Laos.

YOUR OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPACT

An investment of €50,000 - €55,000 would support the establishment of Room to Read's Literacy Programme at a school in need in Vientiane Prefecture and support a further 340 to 440 learners on our Literacy Programme in Laos.

Support of our comprehensive Literacy Program at a school in need in Laos over a three- to four-year intervention period requires an investment of €33,000. Your donation will establish a library filled with local language children's books designed to inspire children's imagination and a love of reading, and provide literacy instruction training for early grade teachers. The programs will operate in collaboration with the local community and provide professional development and coaching for library management as well as the creation of compelling reading and writing activities.

Given your generous interest in an investment of at least €50,000 this year, we suggest allocating the remaining funds towards general support of our Literacy Programme in Laos. It costs, on average, just €50 per year for a child to benefit from our Literacy Programme. Depending on the level at which you are comfortable investing, 340 to 440 additional children will receive the support they need to succeed.

| 2019 Laos Targets | |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| Literacy Program | |
| Schools supported | 188 |
| New children benefited | 39,600 |
| Adapted local language titles | 10 |
| Girls' Education Program | |
| Total participants | 850 |

In appreciation for your partnership, we will send you a series of reports including our Year in Review, as well as a country report detailing Room to Read's Literacy Programme and activities you are helping provide to an underserved community in Laos. In addition, we will provide you with project-specific progress reports on the initial stages of construction and a second project-specific report after construction and one year of project activities have been completed. After completion of two years of project activities you will receive a follow-up report on the project. A custom, personalized dedication plaque will be placed at the school and you will be invited to a customized field visit to experience Room to Read's work first-hand.

Thank you for considering investing in Room to Read. For further information, please do not hesitate to contact
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