



World Change Starts with Educated Children.®

Reading Room Laos

THE NEED

Although literacy is on the rise in Laos, the lack of available reading materials means that literacy is often short-lived. It is still rare to see any books in rural villages. In addition, teachers are paid irregularly which means they must work additional jobs for more income and therefore often provide only a few hours of instruction a day. Educational indicators in Laos are dramatically low and represent one of the main bottlenecks in sustainable development and poverty reduction for the country. Insufficient classrooms, the lack of textbooks, educational supplies, teachers' books, and the lack of libraries are the main constraints in basic primary education. According to government policy, the state provides free education through secondary school. The lack of schools and trained teachers, however, hampers this effort. In addition, parents often require their children to work on their family's farms rather than attend school regularly, as families in most of the areas we work in rely on agriculture and subsistence farming for their income and survival. Girls are particularly vulnerable to illiteracy. Currently, 77% of Laotian men are literate, while only 60% of women can read and write¹. Access to education and materials that allow children to practice and engage with reading are critical factors in Laos' overall development.

THE PROGRAM

Total Libraries Established in 2009	160
Total Libraries Established from 2005—2009	706
2010 Library Target	165
Total Libraries Supported by RtR in 2010	719

The Laos Reading Room team will implement a total of 165 libraries in the Phongsaly, Xayabouly, Bolikhamxay, and Oudomxay provinces in 2010. The Reading Room Program in Laos establishes two different types of libraries, or implementation variants. These variants are outlined below, with the 2010 target number for each in parentheses.

Separate Libraries (155)

For Separate Libraries, schools provide a room to house the library, and students may come to access library resources during their library period, before school, after school, and when teachers bring them to use the library during class periods.

Constructed Libraries (10)

In some of the communities with which we work in Laos, schools are overcrowded and unable to provide an empty room for a library. In these cases, the Laos School Room team works with the community to construct a separate building adjacent to the school to house the library. Special care is taken to construct these buildings as exemplary facilities, so that the children have enhanced

¹ Human Development Report - Lao

educational experiences and the school takes good care of the new building. The Laos Reading Room team then fills the room with the same child-friendly materials that are used in all Room to Read libraries in Laos.

Number of Libraries by Region and Variant

	Separate	Constructed	Total
Phongsaly Province	32	2	34
Oudomxay Province	33	8	41
Xayabouly Province	44	0	44
Bolikhamxay Province	46	0	46
Total	155	10	165

In addition to the 165 new libraries that Room to Read Laos is establishing in 2009, the team will continue to support the 554 libraries that were established in 2007, 2008 and 2009 by providing additional trainings, monitoring, and materials to help maintain student interest, build teacher and librarian capacity, and promote sustainability.

THE APPROACH

The Reading Room Program in Laos consists of a four-pronged approach to providing educational resources and support. This approach includes:

- Supplying the resources necessary to establish a library and improve educational opportunities;
- Enlisting community co-investment to ensure long-term sustainability of the project;
- Building the capacity of librarians to manage and maintain the libraries, in addition to providing activities for students and library users; and
- Ongoing monitoring and support.

Supplying Necessary Resources

Room to Read Laos provides between 500 and 2,000 books in Lao and English to libraries, depending on school and library size (more books for Constructed Libraries and fewer for Separate Libraries). In addition, Room to Read provides games, puzzles, posters and other educational materials to enhance the library, as well as library furniture (such as shelving) and stationery (accession register, check out cards, etc.). Due to the severe shortage of textbooks in government schools, where an average of 3 children share 1 textbook, Room to Read Laos also provides some textbooks and teacher resource books to the libraries. In kindergarten libraries, Room to Read Laos focuses on enhancing children's exposure to creative materials, including toys and books.

Seeking Community Co-investment

To ensure the long-term sustainability of the library, Room to Read seeks community and school co-investment from the very beginning of the project. One of the most vital contributions the school makes is dedicating one to two school staff or volunteers to serve as librarians. In addition, Room to Read Laos is working to advocate for a library period in the school schedule with each project site administration and the local government.

In addition, schools may contribute to the physical location and layout of the library by providing an existing room to house the library, renovating an existing room, or, for Constructed Library projects,

providing physical labor and supervision for the construction of a new building. In addition, schools and communities may raise some funds for library construction and resources. In the case of CRR projects, the community is also responsible for completing an Unexploded Ordinance Clearance task to certify that the construction site is free of explosives.

Building Capacity

In Laos, all teachers and librarians involved in libraries receive three days of trainings a year for three years. These trainings build on each other and serve as refresher courses and venues for working through problems that have arisen over the year. Year 1 trainings focus on ensuring the educators have adequate knowledge and skills to organize and manage the library, conduct activities with books, and motivate and support children in reading. Year 2 trainings reinforce the previous training topics and provide strategies on how to engage fellow teachers in utilizing library resources. Year 3 trainings emphasize continuing to improve use of library resources and engaging the community in helping to maintain and ensure library sustainability.

The Reading Room Program also conducts Training of Trainers workshops. These trainings are for trainers who are often government officials who conduct the above-mentioned trainings in local venues close to the project sites. This allows for small, more specialized and interactive trainings and reduces the need for educators to travel great distances to receive trainings.

Ongoing Monitoring and Support

Our monitoring approach is focused on providing support to librarians, teachers and principals; we are not focused on inspection. Monitoring visits occur over the whole length of Room to Read support, beginning at site selection and ending with the conclusion of the third year. They provide an opportunity for informal, on-the-spot trainings. In the case of the Reading Room Program, our Laotian staff and partners visit program sites once a month and gather information about program effectiveness using a variety of methods, including interviews and surveys with students, teachers and administrators. Through this monitoring, our staff is able to provide regular feedback to highlight areas for future improvement and the community is able to give us feedback as well.

Over the three years of monitoring, we oversee and support the establishment of the library, provide additional support following trainings, and mobilize the library management committee to maintain the library resources. We also support the educator by providing coaching and program implementation feedback, including support on conducting book activities, how to collaborate with other teachers, and the sustainability of the library.

PHOTOS



SEPARATE LIBRARY



STUDENTS READING IN THE LIBRARY



STUDENTS PLAYING WITH GAMES
PROVIDED BY ROOM TO READ



STUDENTS PICKING OUT BOOKS FROM THE DISPLAY



A STUDENT ENJOYS A ROOM TO READ LLP BOOK