



Evaluation Summaries

National Programme for the prevention and elimination of child labour in the Lao PDR

Quick Facts

Countries: *Lao PDR*

Final Evaluation: *November 2004*

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Extracted from the Executive Summary Summary of Findings and Recommendations

The ILO-IPEC National Programme for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labour in the Lao PDR (Country Programme) was carried out over 34 months, beginning in September 2000 and ending in June 2004. It had three sets of sub-programmes, each of which tackled a different aspect of the child labour (CL) problem.

1. One set of sub-programmes attempted to raise awareness of CL and advocacy for child workers among various actors, and build local capacity to deal with the CL problem.
2. A second set of sub-programmes involved doing research and gathering documentation on CL in the Lao PDR.
3. A third set of sub-programme involved direct action with children and their families.

The Country Programme had two objectives:

- ⌚ **Objective #1:** Governmental agencies, including Department of Labour, Employers' and Workers' organizations and non-governmental organizations will have been made capable to initiate, implement, monitor, evaluate and report on action to combat CL.
- ⌚ **Objective #2:** Models and modules of interventions will be tested and made available for the prevention of child labour, withdrawal of child labour from work with a focus on the worst forms, rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-working children.

Three sites were selected by the National Steering Committee on Child Labour (commonly referred to as the NSC) for Country Programme activities. These were Thakek District, Khammouane Province, where there are 13 sawmills; Hatsaifong District, Vientiane Municipality with 3 garment factories; and Khanthaboury District, Savannakhet Province with another 3 garment factories.

Child labour is a very new concept in the Lao PDR. There is, however, a long tradition of children working at home and in the rice fields, and a view of that tradition as right and proper -- a child's duty to his or her parents. Increasingly both factory work and work in small enterprises in urban areas, whether here in Laos or in nearby Thailand, have become optional ways for children to fulfill their duty. In all of these workplaces, including their own homes, children may fall into situations of child labour, defined as "work for children below the age of 18 which subjects them to mental, physical or social harm".

The Lao Government has demonstrated its concern with CL by ratifying the Convention on

the Rights of the Child, and by writing laws that specify the ages at which children can work, their hours of work, and the work they can do. The government has appointed a body to oversee programmes concerning CL, the above-mentioned NSC. Finally, ILO Conventions 182 and 138 are nearing ratification.

The Country Programme has striven to raise awareness of child labour at the central, provincial, district and village level, to include among employers and children themselves. The children targeted were those below the legal age of 18, working 8 or more hours a day in factories and sawmills at 3 project sites, the majority of such children being girls, almost all being ethnic Lao. Of particular concern were children who had withdrawn from school to work.

The first objective of the programme was as follows: "Governmental agencies, including Department of Labour, Employers' and Workers' organizations and non-governmental organizations will have been made capable to initiate, implement, monitor, evaluate and report on action to combat CL."

Toward this end all partners were provided with training, and some were provided with equipment. At central level and at two of the three programme sites, partners took advantage of the new opportunity, struggling to learn new ideas and tasks, and to do CL work in addition to their regular work. Though all partners say they could benefit from additional technical help and expertise, including computer skills, personnel at two of the programme sites plan to incorporate CL awareness-raising into their regular work.

The capacity of the programme's main partner, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions (TU), was improved greatly. It is interested to claim responsibility for fighting CL, and seems only to be waiting for permission from higher up to assume this new role. The programme not only provided skills to a number of TU personnel, it also occasioned an expansion in TU membership, in the form of the TU member "watchdogs" trained in each of the 19 programme worksites.

Not knowing to whom the government will "give" CL, and not knowing whether there will be a new phase of funding from ILO, TU has not yet taken steps to actively claim ownership of the issue. It has neither set up units whose

specific task is to deal with CL, nor has it facilitated the incorporation of CL work into the normal workload of existing units. No other agency of government has yet been assigned specific responsibility for monitoring CL either, and in the end the interest in and capacity for dealing with CL may well fade.

The programme's second objective was as follows: "Models and modules of interventions will be tested and made available for the prevention of child labour, withdrawal of child labour from work with a focus on the worst forms, rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-working children."

Realizing the role poverty plays in CL, the programme included among the prevention models it tested a revolving fund for poor families, and various income-generation activities. Popular as the revolving fund was, its effect on CL, to the extent it can be determined, was nil. The income generation activities had some positive results in terms of prevention, though the numbers were small.

School can play an important role in preventing CL by keeping the child occupied and hence unable to seek work at an inappropriately young age. Thus the programme's prevention activities included help to poor children so they could remain in school, as well as help to dropouts to return to school. For both of these activities the numbers were very small. The impact on CL of both -- but particularly of the first -- is difficult to measure.

Non-formal education (NFE) was also offered to dropouts who were working for their families. A number of children took advantage of this opportunity to return to school, but it would probably be incorrect to assume that these NFE classes prevented them from seeking factory work, as it was offered not during working hours, but in the evenings.

Of all the programme's CL prevention activities, governmental partners consider awareness-raising to be the one that had the greatest impact. Awareness of CL, starting from zero, was improved among those most important in solving the problem, to include governmental personnel at central level, province and district personnel at the three programme sites; owners

and managers of 19 factories; and village leaders, parents, teachers and children themselves in 32 villages surrounding the 19 factories. Demonstrable results followed from this programme activity, as will be noted below. Moreover, district personnel at two programme sites say they intend to continue to do CL awareness-raising around their regular duties, to the extent they are able.

The number of children withdrawn from inappropriate work situations was small, as there seem to have been few children below 15 in programme site factories and sawmills to begin with. Some children between 15-17 were moved to light and non-hazardous work. The awareness-raising with factory owners and managers seems to be discouraging them from hiring children under 15, and encouraging them to assign 15-17 year olds to light work. Ongoing surveillance by TU's factory watchdogs will be crucial to this continuing.

Rehabilitative activities included the NFE classes mentioned above. A number of children took advantage of this opportunity to continue their schooling while remaining in the factory. Other rehabilitative activities were meant to give working children an option to the factories by providing them with training for and assistance in other ways of making money. The agricultural activities -- chicken and duck raising and gardening -- were quite successful, and the children who participated in them saw them as a desirable option to factory work. The vocational training, however, had no positive results as the children, once trained, could find no market for the skills they had acquired, nor had funds been allocated to help them start a small business.

The programme ended with a final evaluation workshop, where Country Programme partners from central, provincial, district and village level came together to discuss the programme, relate their experiences and give their opinions. From this discussion, as well as the literature review and field visit, the consultant drew up a list of recommendations to different programme partners:

- *Upon Lao Government selection of an appropriate government agency to take up permanent CL monitoring responsibility, ILO/IPEC should extend the Lao Country Programme for one more year.*

- *ILO/IPEC's major objective for the additional year of funding should be to build a solid foundation of CL expertise in the agency chosen by the government for the purpose of CL monitoring.*
- *The government agency selected by the Lao Government for the purpose of CL monitoring must free up specific staff at every level to carry out that CL monitoring, unencumbered by other tasks.*
- *The Lao Country Programme must devise means for detecting incompetence and corruption early on, and procedures for then handling them.*
- *The Lao Country Programme must continue CL awareness-raising in villages, schools and factories, via cartoon booklets and lectures, and via radio and TV.*
- *The Lao Country Programme must recruit factory watchdogs in every factory, train them well, set up a system for data-gathering for them -- and then collect and analyze that data monthly.*
- *The Lao Country Programme must continue outreach with villages surrounding factories, continue to create Village Watch committees, set up a system for data-gathering for them -- and then collect and analyze that data monthly.*
- *DSCs must meet monthly to prepare progress reports, utilizing data gathered from the factory watchdogs, Village Watch committees and their own factory inspections.*