The Challenges of Developing Educational Leadership in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic

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An Exegesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Philosophy in Management (Research)

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1 July 2011
DECLARATION

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the exegesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledge; and ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Name: Daravone Kittiphanh

Signature: 

Date: 1 July 2011
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The aim of this project was to improve education in the Lao PDR. First and foremost I would like to acknowledge the participants. For some, this research project was an unusual experience, as they did not often encounter a researcher or official from the central level. Despite this, without their assistance and insights I would not have been able to complete this project. Although I was initially seen as a stranger I appreciated the fact that now I will be always welcome into their villages and lives.

This research project would never have begun without support from the Ministry of Education, my family and AusAID. For most of my colleagues the By Project approach was an unfamiliar academic practice, but they have been very supportive of my research. I acknowledge feedback and assistance which I received from all levels, including the Vice Minister of Education, my colleagues from the MOE, international and local consultants, Provincial Education Service officials in Champasak and Luang Namtha and District Education Bureau officials in Sing and Phonthong districts. Although they were busy, they always found time to share their thoughts and understandings of Lao education.

My research would not be a reality without three people: Dr David Hodges, Dr Bill Vistarini and Tam Vistarini. Dr David Hodges and Dr Bill Vistarini are not just supervisors. They played multiple roles in my PhD journey: as supporters, problem solvers, English teachers, friends, family members and more. Dr Hodges was the first person whom I met, when he picked me up from the airport. Since the first day of my arrival in Melbourne in 2008 he and his family have travelled with me until the end of my research journey. I knew Bill and Tam Vistarini before I started my PhD. This PhD has deeply strengthened our friendship. Whenever I visit them in Warrnambool I feel like I am coming home. Dr Hodges, Dr Vistarini and Tam, I sincerely appreciate your professional guidance, warm support, generosity and the proof-reading of the exegesis and the portfolio.

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person who owned the bungalow I lived in. However, she quickly became a firm friend. Jude, I have really appreciated your warm support, and, of course, the great eating and sight seeing. My special thanks also go to Geoff Burke, Dr David McClay, Michele Willsher, Dr John Murphy, Alison Bullock, Linda Jenkinson, Putthala and Orananh Thongkham, Pomma and Somchai Chantachak and Marikeo Sayakoummane for their friendship, support and encouragement throughout my research journey.

Finally, once again I would like to again thank AusAID for funding this research.
There are two separate components of this research:

1. An exegesis, which contains of the explanation of the project. It also documents the process of knowledge production and describes the purpose, theoretical base and development of the project.

2. A portfolio, which consists of working documents produced during the course of this research project. It consists of documents supporting research, conference papers and presentations, a journal article, workshop materials and other related project activities.
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Notes on texts
- Lao People’s Democratic Republic or Lao PDR is the official name of the country. The informal name for the country, “Laos” is widely known by outsiders and visitors and is also commonly used by insiders. As a noun, “Lao” is the language spoken by the ethnic Lao people. “Lao” is also used an adjective, as in “the Lao history”, “the Lao context”…etc.
- All Lao terms used in this exegesis are written in *italics*.
- Quotes from research participants are also written in *italics*.
- Stories from the research data or journal are in text boxes.
ACRONYMS

ABEL  Access to Basic Education in Laos
ACU   Australian Catholic University
ADB  Asian Development Bank
ALAS Australian Leadership Award Scholarship
AusAID Australian Agency for International Development
BEGP Basic Education (Girls) Project
BENC Basic Education Development in Northern Communities
BESDP Basic Education Sector Development Project
DEB District Education Bureau
DGE Department of General Education
DOF Department of Finance
DOP Department of Organization and Personnel
DPPE Department of Primary and Pre-school Education
DTE Department of Teacher Education
EC European Commission
ECD Early Childhood Development
EDP II Second Education Development Project
ELRC English Language Resource Centre
EQIP II Second Education Quality Improvement Project
ESD Education for Sustainable Development
ESDF Education Sector Development Framework
FEA Education for All National Plan of Action
FOE Faculty of Education
FTI Fast Track Initiative
GOL Government of the Lao PDR
GTZ German Agency for Technical cooperation
JICA Japan International Cooperation Agency
Lao PDR The Lao People’s Democratic Republic
LFNC Lao Front for National Construction
LFTU Lao Federation of Trade Union
LNT Luang Namtha
LPRP  Lao People’s Revolutionary Party
LPRYU  Lao People’s Revolutionary Youth Union
LVA   Lao Veterans’ Association
LWU   Lao Women’s Union
MDGs  Millennium Development Goals
MOE   Ministry of Education
NFE   Non-formal education
NGOs  Non-Government Organisations
NSEDP National Socio-Economic Development Plan
NSW   New South Wales
NTC   National Charter of Teacher Competencies
NUOL  National University of Laos
PAM   Project Administration Memorandum
PES   Provincial Education Services
PIPs  Public Investment Programmes
PIU   Project Implementation Unit
PPA   Primary Pedagogical Advisor
RMIT University Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University
SCN   Save the Children Norway
SEMEO INNOTECH Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology
SF    School Feeding
Sida  Swedish International Development Agency
SoQ   Schools of Quality
TEADC Teacher and Education Administrator Development Centre
TEIs  Teacher Education Institutions
TTEST Teacher Training Enhancement and Status of Teachers Project
UNDP  United Nations Development Program
UNESCO United Nations Educational National Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
VEDC Village Education Development Committee
WB    World Bank
WFP   World Food Program
WHO World Health Organisation
## GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Term</th>
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<tr>
<td>ai</td>
<td>older brother</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ajan</td>
<td>a title for a secondary school and university teacher/lecturer</td>
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<tr>
<td>baci/soukhuan</td>
<td>a Lao blessing ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ban</td>
<td>village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>honghien</td>
<td>school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hubsaipasasonh</td>
<td>serving people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kanbaengkhankhoumkhong</td>
<td>decentralisation; de-concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khalasakan</td>
<td>public servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khantheung</td>
<td>senior administrative level</td>
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<tr>
<td>khaopun</td>
<td>rice noodles</td>
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<tr>
<td>khobphathanakansiuksa</td>
<td>Education Sector Development Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>khortoklong</td>
<td>Ministerial Decree</td>
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<tr>
<td>khou</td>
<td>a title for a primary school teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khouhaengsaad</td>
<td>a national teacher (title)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khoupasasonh</td>
<td>a teacher of people (title)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khwaeng</td>
<td>province</td>
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<tr>
<td>kongpasum visakan</td>
<td>a meeting about technical matters</td>
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<tr>
<td>kum</td>
<td>cluster</td>
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<tr>
<td>ladthakone</td>
<td>public servant</td>
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<tr>
<td>muad</td>
<td>sub-cluster of schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muang</td>
<td>district</td>
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<tr>
<td>nayban</td>
<td>village chief</td>
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<tr>
<td>nangsiuchaengkan</td>
<td>an official announcement letter</td>
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<tr>
<td>nong</td>
<td>(someone who is) younger sister or brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ongkanchattanganousonh</td>
<td>young pioneer organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ongkanchattangxaonum</td>
<td>Lao People’s Revolutionary Youth Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ongkanchattangyaovasonh</td>
<td>scout organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pasasonh</td>
<td>people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phakhuan</td>
<td>Baci plateau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phanakgnanseubthord</td>
<td>potential leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phanakgnanlad</td>
<td>public servant</td>
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There are many versions of transliterating Lao script for linguistic and historical reasons. At the moment, the transliteration of Lao words is not standardised. The spelling used in this research is the version consistently used by MOE officials.
This research focuses on strengthening school leadership capacity in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) in the context of decentralization. The research will be significant for the Lao PDR Ministry of Education, and other educational ministries in developing countries, in their quest to develop leadership strategies at the local level. It will also inform bilateral and multilateral donors.

In the Lao educational context it is common for educational development projects to emphasise general management skills as one component of capacity building effort. This emphasis is reflected in the evaluation reports of these projects and more generally in the literature on educational development. However, the importance of leadership at the school and local level where most education policy is transformed into practice is hardly ever recognized. There is debate in the literature about the role of the school principal: manager, teacher or leaders of teaching and learning. This research project will contribute to this debate.

Management and leadership of education in the Lao PDR is characterised by complexity. This complexity emerges from the roles of donors, the changing development ideologies coupled with political developments within the country, poverty and tensions between the centre and the periphery. The complexity is exacerbated in poor districts that are remote from Vientiane. These forces are played out in a cultural milieu where hierarchy is prized and respected, at least officially.

This research project adopts a practitioner action research approach. This approach is consistent with the By Project mode of post-graduate research whose aims are not only to develop knowledge, but to improve the skills of the practitioner and to foster a change in practice. The methods include: interview and individual consultations, community consultations, a research journal, observations/field trips and textual analysis and strategies for sharing data with Lao practitioners. Like so many practitioner based research projects there is a fundamental role conflict - practitioner and researcher. Managing this conflict is paramount.
The research findings will be directly applicable to the management and development of the education sector in the Lao PDR, and will provide recommendations for improving both policy and practice. They will also help policy makers to understand the existing context of primary education management in the Lao PDR and provide important information about current approaches to primary education administration and management strategies. This will enable policy makers to make improvements in these areas. The best possible outcome would that this work might increase the effectiveness of administration and management systems as well as support the work of donors and contribute to more effective teaching and learning in the Lao PDR.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The seed for this project was sown and nurtured by my mother. I can remember, even as a child, my mother saying education is regarded as saengthian or candle light. She encouraged me to understand that the light from the candle would guide people’s lives from darkness to brightness; that education would bring success and prosperity into human lives. As I grew older my mother’s wisdom inspired me to pursue higher education so that I could bring real social benefits to other Lao people. Education is an important avenue for reducing inequality, improving health and social well-being, and laying the groundwork for sustained economic growth (United Nations Development Programme, 2008).

The immediate impetus for this project was the need to develop human resources through education and through building human capacity at the local level, especially in rural remote areas in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR.) The need to improve human capacity has consistently been a Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP) and Government priority, constantly identified since the establishment of the Lao PDR in 1975. The President of the LPRP, Khamtai Siphandone highlighted this in his speech at the Eighth LPRP Congress in 2006, saying

We (the Party) continue to consider education as the core task in human resource development and we must increase public investment and have appropriate policies to support education development. We should promote and increase public participation in education development (translated by the researcher based on the Eighth LPRP Congress documents from Valasane Alounmai, 2006, p. 57)

To support the country’s development priorities, high quality educational leadership at all levels is very important, and is fundamental for improving educational, social and economic outcomes.

This chapter outlines the research focus and justification for selecting the Research By Project Approach. The rationale for conducting this research is highlighted. It also describes the
research project locations and reasons for choosing the sites as well as the structure of the exegesis.

This chapter is divided into the following sections:

1.1 The research focus
1.2 Research By Project
1.3 Rationale of the research
1.4 The research project locations
1.5 The structure of the exegesis

1.1 Research focus

This research project focuses on strengthening school leadership capacity in the Lao PDR (Laos) in the context of decentralization so that local education needs are better addressed. Therefore, at the commencement of my research project I had four subsidiary questions:

1. What has been the impact of decentralization on school leaders? What can be done to improve school leadership?
2. What has been the impact of donors on school leadership in terms of school management? How can donor contributions be better coordinated and managed?
3. Do school clusters contribute to school leadership capacity building? How can school clusters more effectively enhance school leadership?
4. What are the challenges/constraints for school leaders to exercise their leadership in the context of decentralization? How can school leaders overcome those challenges and constraints?

The original title of my research project was “Strategies for Implementing Effective Management in Primary Education in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.” This reflected my original overall objective. I wanted to make a real improvement to the management of primary education in the Lao PDR by strengthening primary school leadership in the context of decentralization. This was an ambitious objective for it soon became clear that improvement could not occur without a deeper understanding of the educational context and practices, especially in remote areas. The work of school leaders is complex and challenging. This complexity and the accompanying challenges became a key focus of my research. In
addition, as I conducted field work it became apparent that it was important to detail the reality facing school leaders at the local level.

Too often consultants relied on their own experience and a narrow template when designing and implementing education projects. They were removed from the reality of life in the Lao community, especially those communities in remote areas. To be honest, as a person who worked at the centre in the Ministry of Education’s central office in Vientiane, I too was somewhat removed from this reality. As I gained more knowledge about the reality for education leaders my research focus became more refined. The change in the title reflected my emerging understanding. The new title for my research project became “The Challenges of Developing Educational Leadership in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.”

1.2 Research By Project

This research project adopts a practitioner action research approach. This approach is consistent with the By Project mode of post-graduate research whose aims are not only to develop knowledge, but to improve the skills of the practitioner and to foster a change in practice. Research By Project has three objectives:

- a more knowledgeable and skilled practitioner;
- a contribution to professional and scholarly knowledge;
- some body of work or change in practice (RMIT University, February 2007, p. 38).

Consistent with the By Project regulations two separate documents are submitted for examination.

- The Exegesis, which documents the process of knowledge production and describes the purpose, theoretical base and development of the project.
- The Portfolio sits alongside the Exegesis, and contains snapshots of actions that were taken during the project. It includes conference papers, a journal article and workshop presentations that were an integral part of the project. The Portfolio is in a separate volume.

The practitioner action research model applied in this research project is described as a three-step spiral of stages which consists of planning, acting and reflecting. This research project consists of three cycles or stages, each involving planning, acting and reflection. The planning
and reflecting tended to be conducted in Melbourne while the acting was carried on in the field work in the Lao PDR. A number of different data collection methods were used including: interviews and individual consultations, community consultations, a research journal, observation/field trips and textual analysis and strategies for sharing data with Lao practitioners. Details of how this research project was conducted are included in Chapter 3.

Although the By Project mode of post graduate research is designed to improve both the skills of the practitioner and social outcomes, working in this framework is very challenging. First, this kind of research is not well understood in either in the Ministry of Education (MOE) or in academic circles in the Lao PDR. Second, one of the assumptions underpinning the By Project mode of research is critical reflection. The practitioner needs to be critical of their own practice and the practices in their organization. Being critical is also at the heart of action research – the methodology that I used in this project. However, to be critical in the Lao PDR setting has personal and professional risks. To facilitate a change in this social setting without being critical is impossible. Balancing the truthfulness and political sensitivities relating to the significant issues can be challenging. As in many other practitioner-based research projects there is a fundamental role conflict - practitioner and researcher. Managing these inherent tensions is also a challenge. Throughout this research project I have had to balance my reciprocal obligations to the MOE, the needs of the local communities and the responsibilities of being ethical researcher.

1.3 Rational of the Research

The By Project mode of research training emphasizes that a doctoral program has both a social and a personal dimension. Although I have had 15 years experience as a student and more than 18 years as an employee of the MOE in the Lao education system, this doctoral project provided me with the opportunity to improve my skills and knowledge.

I began my career as an English teacher at the National Polytechnic Institute, which is now the Faculty of Engineering of the National University of Laos (NUOL.) Since Laos opened the door to the west, English has become a medium of development, communication and instruction. This transition gave me an opportunity to work on two Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) funded projects, one to teach English to government...
officials in different ministries and the other to deliver a Graduate Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages to Lao English teachers. After Laos became a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) I again was selected to work on another AusAID project known as the Lao-Australia English for ASEAN Purposes Project. In this project I joined a master trainer team to develop a program for English language training of Lao government officials.

In 2002 I moved to the MOE to work on the Second Education Quality Improvement and Teacher Training Enhancement and Status of Teachers (EQIP II/TTEST) project. The EQIP II/TTEST project is co-financed between the Government of Laos, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Swedish International Development Agency (Sida.) The overall goal of this project was to assist the Government to achieve universal quality education for all. This project was a national program operating at the central, provincial and district levels (See Chapter 5 for further details.) As a Deputy Head of EQIPP/TTEST project I was assigned to be an operational counterpart working closely with the team leader of the TTEST project, an international consultant. While working on aid funded projects I had eye-opening experiences. These practical working experiences led me to delve deeper into issues associated with education improvement in Laos. I saw an opportunity when I received an Australian Leadership Award Scholarship to do my PhD. The conditions of the scholarship are consistent with the Government’s development priorities.

I was awarded an AusAID Australian Leadership Award Scholarship (ALAS) and commenced my doctoral research in June 2008. One of the development priorities of the Government of the Lao PDR and AusAID was decentralization. Therefore one of the initial objectives of the project was related to decentralization. However, as the project unfolded it became clear that decentralization was not a central concern for school leaders in remote areas in the Lao PDR. Accordingly, the emphasis changed.

A key development objective of the Government is to improve educational outcomes. One of those is achieving Education for All by 2015, one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG.) This government policy is supported by international development partners or donors such as AusAID, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), ADB, Sida, World Bank (WB), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and so on. I have worked for and have a commitment to education sector development, and this policy aim links to my scholarship. I
would like my PhD research to contribute concrete improvement to Lao education. I am not just interested in doing a PhD if it does not have some social benefits. I am committed to the social distribution of the knowledge of this project.

The focus of my research is educational leadership at the community level. There has been very little research done at this level: the voices of educational leaders in remote areas are not often heard. My research supports, and is supported by, the Government of Laos’ (GOL’s) decentralization policy in terms of improving human capacity at the local levels so that the grassroots are able to make full use of their local development potential. It seemed that often capacity building had been ineffective because local conditions have been poorly understood.

Although many well-meaning educational development projects and studies have suggested capacity building with a focus on general management skills mainly at provincial levels and some at district levels, the school level, where most education policy is transformed into practice, is hardly ever recognized (Ministry of Education, 2005).

According to White & Smoke (2005), the promise of decentralization is to ensure that local levels assume greater ownership and responsibility for their own needs because they know their own situation and have a direct interest in it. Therefore, the skilling and empowerment of school leaders becomes crucial; they are the ones who implement education policy. For example, to achieve the GOL’s policy of education for all, it is important for school leaders to understand the government policy and articulate it to their communities and put it into practice. This underlines the importance of leadership skills and shared leadership goals. The developmental assumptions are reasonably clear; the strategies for achieving these developmental goals at the local level are less clear.

This study suggests that one of the major reasons for this is the lack of understanding at higher levels about the challenges facing educational leaders at the local level. Without a more informed understanding about these issues GOL policy and strategies will face serious challenges and donor and loan funded aid projects will be hobbled from the outset.
1.4 The research project locations

The Research was undertaken in the Lao PDR at the MOE in Vientiane Capital and in two provinces: Champasak and Luang Namtha.
Map 1.1: Project research sites

Legend

CHINA.......Country
CHAMPASAK.......Province
.................Research Site

Source: David McClay
After consultations in the field in Champasak province I selected Phonthong district and focused on one cluster, which comprises five complete primary schools (grade 1-5.) In Luang Namtha I chose Sing district and conducted my research at one sub-cluster consisting of one complete primary school and four incomplete schools. (The maps of the two districts and two clusters are illustrated in Chapter 5.) I decided to conduct my research in three different locations because I have worked for the MOE at the centre in Vientiane and I needed to understand more about educational leadership at the community level.

Champasak province, in the south of Laos, is a large and reasonably wealthy province compared to Luang Namtha. This province shares borders with Thailand and Cambodia. The majority of the population is Lao Tai or Tai-Kadai where minority groups make up only 13.9 percent of the population (EQIP II/TTEST Project, 2003.) Phonthong is located on the western side of the Mekong River and is only 30 km from the Thai border and is the researcher’s parents’ hometown. A friend and colleague and fellow RMIT doctoral student was also planning to conduct her research in Champasak province. It was planned that we could support each other and compare data. I gained significant insights into my research in terms of the educational context in rural remote communities and the important role of the school principal in making a difference to a school and its community.

On the other hand, Luang Namtha is a small, poor province located in the north of Laos. It is situated in a mountainous area, sharing a border with China to the north. There are also many ethnic groups including Tai Dam, Tai Lue, Khmu, Akha, and Hmong which comprise 67.9 percent of the population (EQIP II/TTEST Project, 2003). Sing district in the Luang Namtha province is a small district located in a high mountainous area with considerable ethnic and language diversity. I had not visited this district before and decided I would like to learn more about this educational context.

1.5  The structure of the exegesis

The exegesis consists of six chapters. The aim of Chapter 2 is to provide an overview of the research context. It highlights key features of the socio-political context as well as the education management situation and its issues and challenges. It also outlines a picture of the education system and its management structure.
Chapter 3 articulates the practitioner action research approach that I used during this research project. The typical action research project is composed of four steps: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. When combined these steps form a cycle. Action research is often presented diagrammatically as a series of spiralling cycles. I used this approach in practice in this exegesis however in the writing of this exegesis I have combined Step 2 (Acting) and Step 3 (observing.) The action/observation component took place in the Lao PDR whilst the planning and reflection were usually conducted in Melbourne.

Chapter 4 turns its attention to the issues of educational leadership and management. One of the problems discussed is the challenge of appropriate and relevant literature. This chapter could be considered as the literature chapter on leadership and management. Chapter 4 was compiled in two periods between 2008 and 2010. This chapter was to serve as a foundation for the first field trip.

Chapter 5 is the heart of the exegesis. It outlines the challenges and progress of the practitioner action research. It is divided into three stages which mirror the action cycles discussed in Chapter 3. The key focus of Stage 1 is to establish contacts and gain formal permission to work in the field, developing an initial understanding of the research context, gaining some preliminary understanding of the roles of school leaders and donors. The major aim of Stage 2 is to develop greater understanding of the roles of school leaders and donors while the prime focus of Stage 3 is to provide feedback to research informants on preliminary research findings and to highlight the significance of the social distribution of knowledge.

Chapter 6 is the final chapter. It discusses the significance of the research findings that were revealed in Chapter 5.

This introductory chapter has outlined my research focus and the justification for my research. It also explains how this research project was conducted. The rationale of the research project is also emphasized. The chapter then outlines the structure of the exegesis. The following chapter, Chapter 2, will discuss the broad context of my research which includes my initial understandings of education management and its issues and challenges.
CHAPTER 2

LAOS AND THE MANAGEMENT OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

This chapter has two purposes. The first purpose is to enable me, as a practitioner researcher, to develop a considered understanding of the educational context in the Lao PDR. This initial research of the educational context was conducted in preparation for my first field trip (Dec 2008-April 2009.) Although, as a Lao citizen, I was aware of the general characteristics of the education system and the key features of recent Lao history, the process of research and reflection enabled me to identify the broad trends and themes that would probably affect my research project.

The second purpose is to assist the reader, especially those who are not so familiar with the Lao context, to develop an understanding of the broad context of this research project.

During this period of research and reflection it became clear that Lao education had been heavily influenced by outside forces and ideas: colonial ideology with the French and later the USA; socialist ideology especially from the former USSR and the Eastern Bloc countries and later socialist systems closer to home; and now recently and simultaneously, a dynamic development ideology instigated by donors and loan providers, and also consultants working within the system. One indicator of these outside influences was the funding and destination of education scholarships – for example, France, USA, USSR and under the development system, a variety of donor countries. As an outcome of this initial research I prepared a paper which I presented at two RMIT seminars (see Portfolio Exhibit item 2).

This project is concerned with how education is managed. Leadership and management of education have also been influenced by outside ideas. Decentralization and centralization have featured prominently in Lao education since 1975. The tension between decentralization and centralization is the focus of this chapter as it is important to understanding the context in which school leaders operate. However as the research progressed this particular aspect of the
context became less relevant and moved into the background and more pressing issues for local educational leaders assumed greater importance. This change in emphasis is consistent with the ethic of participation and responsiveness that underpins this research project. This chapter is divided into five sections:

2.1 Country snapshot
2.2 Centralised and decentralized management of education
2.3 The organisational structure
2.4 The education system
2.5 Issues in education management

2.1 A country snapshot

The Lao People’s Democratic Republic was constituted in 1975 when it was proclaimed that the nation would follow the socialist pathway. However, the country can trace its history as far back as the mid-14th century when it was unified as the Kingdom of Lan Xang (literally, the Kingdom of a Million Elephants) under King Fa Ngum after the arrival of Buddhism (Evans, 2002; Stuart-Fox, 1997). Today, the country has a market-economy and privatization implanted into a heritage of colonialism and a socialist revolution. At the same time life in the more remote areas, including the districts that are the focus of this research, has not changed dramatically. Many people in the remote rural areas are still subsistence farmers.

The Lao PDR is a small, mountainous, sparsely populated landlocked country in mainland Southeast Asia. It covers an area of approximately 236,800 square kilometres and shares borders with Cambodia to the South, China to the North, Myanmar and Thailand to the West and Vietnam to the East (see Map 1.1 in Chapter 1). Extensive mountain ranges cover most of the country. This restricts both the quantity and quality of agricultural land and creates difficulties for trade, social infrastructure, transportation and communication links. It also makes the management of education difficult.

The population of the Lao PDR was estimated in 2005 at 5.62 million (National Statistics Centre, 2005). Under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (2006), it is ranked 133 out of 177 countries. Approximately 73 percent of the population lives on less than US$2 per day, and 25 percent on less US$1. Eighty
percent of the population lives in rural areas, many of which are distant and isolated from roads (United Nations Development Programme, 2007). Poverty is present throughout the country, but it is higher in provinces in the North and in the South of the country – the central part of the country along the Mekong valley and the border with Thailand to the west is generally less poor. Poverty at the regional level is manifested in various dimensions including shortfalls in educational infrastructure and educational outcomes.

Approximately three quarters of the population of the Lao PDR is rural. The Lao population is diverse in terms of ethnicity and languages. According to the Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC), the government recognises 49 main ethnic groups or categories, and over 160 subgroups. The ethnic groups are widely categorized into four major ethno linguistic families: (i) Lao-Tai (also referred to as Tai-Kadai), (ii) Austro-Asiatic, (iii) Hmong-Yu mien and (iv) Sino-Tibetan.

**Table 2.1: Ethnicity of population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethno-Linguistic</th>
<th>No. Of Ethnic Groups</th>
<th>Proportion of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lao-Tai or Tai Kadai</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austro-Asiatic</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong -Yu Mien</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sino- Tibetan</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As indicated in Article 3 of the Constitution, the rights of the people are exercised and ensured through the functioning of the political system, with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) as its leading nucleus (National Assembly No.25/NA, 6 May 2003). The LPRP is a communist political party that has governed Laos since 1975. The role of the LPRP is to formulate strategic policies to address the short and long-term needs of the Lao people (United Nations Development Programme, 2003). The LPRP is headed by the Party Central Committee. The Central Party Committee is represented by the Politburo, headed by the President of the Party. The Party Central Committee and the Politburo are the chief policy-making organs. The Politburo is the centre of political power in the Party with its membership drawn from and chosen by the Central Committee. A Party Congress, which elects members to the Politburo and Central Committee, is held every five years. The LPRP operates throughout the country at four levels, namely central, provincial/municipal/ministerial, district and village (The Lao People's Revolutionary Party, 2006).
The LPRP is usually represented at the provincial level by the Provincial Governor, who is also the chairperson of the Provincial Party Committee. In the same way District Governors and Village Heads are also responsible for chairing District and Village Party Committees.

There are also eight mass organisations that play an important role in conveying the Party’s directives and policies and the government’s regulations and laws, and involving people in the political life of the nation. However, the first three are directly relevant to school leaders and management of education. These organizations are:

- Lao Federation of Trade Unions (LFTU)
- Lao People’s Revolutionary Youth Union (LPRYU)
- Lao Women’s Union (LWU)
- Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization
- Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC)
- Lao Veterans’ Association (LVA)
- Lao Committee for Peace and Solidarity
- Lao Friendship Association with Foreign countries (Ministry of Information and Culture of Laos).

The Head of State is the President of the Lao PDR, elected by the National Assembly for a five year term. The President is responsible for promulgating the constitution and laws, and for appointing individuals to leadership positions within the government, including the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister/s, provincial governors, mayors of municipalities, and ambassadors of the Lao PDR. The government consists of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers, ministers and chairmen of the ministry- equivalent organisations. The term of office of the government is the same term as the office of the National Assembly (National Assembly No.25/NA, 6 May 2003). There are 14 ministries and 3 ministry-equivalent organisations.

Currently the country is divided into 16 provinces and one Capital City (see Map 1.1 in Chapter 1), 142 districts, 10,500 villages (Ministry of Education, October 2008). According to Article 75 of the Constitution, the Lao PDR is divided into three levels of local administration, namely provinces, districts and villages (National Assembly No.25/NA, 6 May 2003). The province or khwaeng is divided into districts or muang and villages or ban.
At the provincial and capital level the administration is run by a governor, the district by a chief of district and the village by a village chief. Governors have deputy governors and district chiefs have deputy district chiefs as assistants. In villages with a large population or high population density, village chiefs have deputy village chiefs as assistants.

2.2 Centralised and decentralised management of education

Decentralization has gained some popularity in many developing countries, including the Lao PDR. The process of decentralization is largely driven by donors and the banks (World Bank and Asian Development Bank.) Hawkins (2000) defines decentralization as the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility and tasks from higher to lower organization level or between organizations. White & Smoke (2005) claim that the process of decentralization has become important for intergovernmental reforms because they inevitably affect broader country performance in three significant areas: the economy, service delivery and governance. The promise of decentralization is that it gives more voice and power to local leaders and school personnel, who probably know more about local educational problems than central officials (King & Guerra, 2005). Another selling point for decentralization is that it allows stronger local participation in government in shaping and implementing policy that directly affects them (Duncan, 2007). But for decentralization to be successful, policies need to be implemented under the guidance of the central government and in accordance with national rules and regulations. Successfully facilitating a decentralization effort requires knowing where the politicians and policy makers want to go with it and why (Hanson, 1998).

Decentralization is divided into three basic types: (i) deconcentration- transfer of tasks and work but not authority; (ii) delegation-transfer of decision-making authority from higher to lower levels, but authority can be withdrawn by the centre; and (iii) devolution- transfer of authority to an autonomous unit which can act independently without permission from the centre. Welsh and McGinn (1999) argue that in the long run, devolution is the more effective method because it provides for continuity in the change process.

The above literature has direct implications for my research focus, which is concerned with bringing education service delivery as close as possible to local community needs. In order to do so, local educational leaders need to have adequate capacity and authority to apply
education policy. Capacity development for local education leaders is certainly one of the most important challenges and a fundamental component for implementing effective decentralized education management. Its effectiveness is crucial for the sustainability of the government’s decentralization policy.

In 1975, the constitution placed policy-making in the hands of the central government in Vientiane. Local governments were not involved in drafting plans and policies. Their role was to implement the guidelines and programs initiated by the central government (Francisco, 2002). The administration was centralized in 1975, decentralized in 1986, to be recentralized in 1991. The 1986 decentralization was inadequately planned, making revenue generation and management problematic. Richer provinces did not subsidize poor ones under decentralization. Recentralization brought strategic planning and the fiscal functions of the administration back under the central government. Later, in 1999, in response to difficulties encountered in establishing a fully centralized system, the government moved toward a more de-concentrated approach to general administration (Ministry of Education, 2000). Since that time, there have been gradual moves towards reinstating decentralization, or de-concentration (kanbaengkhankhoumkhong) as the Lao government prefers to call it. Decentralization or kanbaengkhankhoumkhong means responsibilities and decision-making power are transferred to lower levels within the unified government system (Asian Development Bank, 2003).

Kanbaengkhankhoumkhong took on a new impetus in March 2000 with the issuing of the Prime Minister’s Decree No. 01/PM (11 Mar 2000) “On Decentralization”. This outlines the long term objectives of de-concentration, which involve: (i) strengthening the rights and developing the responsibilities of communities; (ii) supporting continuous socio-economic development of localities and regions; and (iii) bringing Party directives and Government policy to organizations at the grassroots level, as well as promoting “bottom-up” planning and budgeting (Asian Development Bank, 2003).

Since 2000, supported by the Prime Minister’s Decree on Decentralization, the central government has been steadily devolving decision-making and financial management powers to the provinces, districts, and villages. Accordingly, the new roles and responsibilities for provinces, districts and villages are as follows: (a) Provinces become strategic units for development: they will prepare long, medium and short term socio-economic development plans; (b) Districts become planning and budgeting units; and (c) Villages become basic
implementation units (Prime Minister Decree No 01/PM, 11 Mar 2000). This gave the provincial governments a high degree of autonomy over resources, expenditure, and services.

Under the government’s decentralization process, initiated in 2000, the MOE shares responsibilities with the Provincial Education Services (PES) and District Education Bureau (DEB.) The decentralization process covers planning, budgeting and financial, management, personnel and human resources management, academic management and properties and procurement (including school construction) management (Ministerial Directive No1500/MOE.DoP.02, 03 Sep 2002). However, control by the MOE may also be implemented through national examinations and school-level supervision. Examinations in primary education are set by the DEBs while examinations in lower and upper secondary schools are established by the PESs and the MOE. The MOE is entitled to supervise and inspect PESs, DEBs, schools and educational institutions. Theoretically, the MOE has authority for establishing or abolishing grassroots educational organizations, defining the organization and role of the PES and DEB, appointing and discharging education officers at all levels, and issuing, as necessary, various education decisions, rules, orders, regulations and notices.

In practice, it has been observed that the MOE does not have a high level of control in provinces and districts (Asian Development Bank, 2003; World Bank, 2008). The governors and Party organizations at these levels have retained considerable power over some activities, such as senior personnel appointments, and to some extent planning and finance (Asian Development Bank, 2003). This suggests that provincial governors and the Party organizations have great autonomy in decision-making as well as the administration and implementation of education policy. In the Lao PDR, policy is centrally determined based on the principle of democratic centralism reinforcing the concept of bottom up consultation, but top down decision-making. Provincial governors are senior party members and share the same rank as ministers who are centrally appointed.

In sum, the current decentralized public finance management practices along with inadequate accountability and control has led to (i) an unequal application of national policies, (ii) an accumulation of debts which remain unpaid on goods and services; (iii) a funds shortfall for deficit provinces and (iv) an inability for the central government to ensure execution of the budget, as approved by the National Assembly (World Bank, 2008). To address the tensions
in the current intergovernmental fiscal relations, a new Budget Law was approved by the
government in 2007 to fundamentally transform intergovernmental fiscal relations. It
centralizes the Treasury, tax and the Customs Department and develops a new revenue
sharing framework that will better align policies with the budget. The effective
implementation of the Budget Law is very significant for improving the public financial
management system. In the future, the government hopes that budget allocation will be much
clearly aligned with policies, so that the government will be able to uniformly implement
policies throughout the country. By doing so, the government will be able to ensure that
budgeted funds get spent on those items as well as to improve reporting and monitoring of
budget expenditure.

However, implementing the Budget Law effectively takes time and effort. Therefore, it is
vital to have continued political support, development of information systems, human
resource management skills and greater harmonization of donor support (World Bank, 2008).
The critical task for the education sector is then to define financial transfer arrangements from
the centre, because provincial and district levels of government have an obligation for
education (with corresponding expenditure requirements) (EQIP II/TTEST Project, 2003).
When this occurs the ability for the Lao PDR to reach the target of education for all becomes
a more realistic possibility.

2.3 Organisational structure
The MOE manages the largest civilian workforce in the Lao PDR. The education sector
employed more than 56,000 staff in 2006-2007 (Ministry of Education, April 2008.) The
MOE is also complex because of various lines of communication and authority. The MOE is
hierarchically structured at both central, province and district levels. The MOE is the
government’s central education organisation. It has a secretariat role and function for the
Party Central Committee and government in educational matters, in planning and determining
policy, as well as supervising, leading, implementing and controlling the educational tasks
nationwide. Therefore, the MOE is responsible for formal and non-formal education at all
levels, and for both public and private education, for which the MOE has oversight and
responsibility.
Specifically, the responsibilities of the MOE and its associated organizations include teacher recruitment and employment, curriculum development, textbook writing and publication, teacher education, vocational education, higher education, planning and co-operation, education finance (including development of the national education budget by setting the budgetary and regulatory framework so that provincial and district can operate within the framework) and overall personnel management in the system as well as establishing school standards and education quality assurance.

In 2008, the MOE conducted an organizational audit and restructured its organization supported by the Prime Minister’s Decree on MOE’s Organisation and Function No 62/PM/07 (07 April 2008). The reorganization of education administration and management is made up of two levels: the macro (the MOE) and local levels (the PESs and DEBs – with no mention of the community level.)

2.3.1 The macro level or ministry level

There are 12 departments, one cabinet, one commission and one institution. There are also some centres and enterprises which are responsible for the supervision of the ministry levels (see the MOE organization Chart below). Each department has its own responsibilities, administrative arrangements and relationship with the provincial and district services. Although universities are considered to be autonomous institutions, they are still under supervision of the MOE at the macro level.
Chart 2.1: The organisational structure at the macro level

Source: Educational Statistics and Information Technology Centre (2009) and interviews with the MOE officials.
2.3.2 The local level

The local level comprises PESs and DEBs. The PES and the DEB largely have operational responsibility for implementing primary and secondary education. However under the Government’s de-concentration process, initiated in 2000, the MOE shares responsibilities with the PES and the DEB as stated in Article 62 of the new Education Law 2007 on education administration and management organisation.

The government has centralised responsibilities of education management, ensuring the national education system is delivered nationwide. The MOE is directly in charge of the education administration and management. Educational administration and management organizations comprise the MOE, PES, Capital Education Services, DEB and Prefectures (translated by the researcher based on the Education Law article 62, National Assembly No.25/NA, 6 May 2003).

2.3.3 The Provincial Education Services

Based on the Ministerial Decree No. 1584/MoE.DoP.09 (03 Jul 2009) on the organization and function of PES, the PES is the vertical administration and management organization for the MOE at the provincial level. The PES’s role is to provide guidance and leadership, implement, inspect and evaluate education administration, management and development within its province in accordance with the government and the Party policy. The PES is regarded as an arm of the MOE but it also reports to the governor or, in the case of municipality, to the mayor. The governor, technically equivalent to a minister in rank, has considerable power in determining inter-sectoral priorities and appointments of PES personnel. The PES is responsible for (i) secondary schools and (ii) technical and vocational schools which are not under the control of the MOE. The PES consists of 11 sections, which have their own responsibilities, administrative arrangements and relationship to the MOE departments and units in the DEB.
Chart 2.2: The organisational structure of the Provincial Educational Services

(Drawn by the researcher based on the Ministerial Decree No. 1584/MoE.DoP.09 dated 3 July 2009 and interviews with PES officials. This organisation diagram varies from province to province. When I conducted my field work I realised that this organisation chart was not entirely accurate. For example in Champasak province there were one director and three deputy directors. Usually the director supervises administration, organisation and personnel and education inspection and assessment sections)

2.3.4 The District Education Bureau

The DEB is the lowest local office of the national education administration. According to the Ministerial Decree No 1572/MoE.DoP.09 (03 Jul 2009), the DEB is a vertical administration and management organization for the MOE at the district level. The DEB’s role is to provide guidance and leadership, implement, inspect, monitor and evaluate education development within its district. The DEB is regarded as an arm of the PES but it also reports to the district chief. The district chief has considerable power in determining inter-sectoral priorities and appointments of DEB personnel. The DEB comprises 8 units (see the DEB organization chart below). Each unit has its own responsibility and administrative arrangements and relationships with sections in the PES and schools. The DEB assists schools and communities
in their planning of primary and pre-school education and prepares a district plan for each academic year and each school semester. The DEB is responsible for pre-schools, primary schools and non-formal education institutions in its own district.

Chart 2.3: The organisational structure of the District Education Bureau

![Organisational structure diagram]

(Drawn by the researcher based on the Ministerial Decree No. 1572/MoE.DoP.09 dated 3 July 2009 and interviews with DEB officials. This diagram is a general model of the DEB organisation chart. During my field work I also found that the DEB organisation diagram varies from district to district. For example, in Phonthong district, the district combines education and sport bureau so it becomes District Education and Sport Bureau. Like the PES director, the DEB director usually supervises Administration, Organisation and Personnel and Education inspection and assessment units.)

2.4 The education system

The formal education system in the Lao PDR consists of general education, technical and vocational education and training (including teacher education), and higher education. In addition, non-formal education is offered predominantly to out-of-school youth and adults. The divisions for general education are:

(a) pre-school - crèche for children ages 0-2, and kindergarten for children ages 3-5;
(b) primary - five years of schooling (Grades 1-5) for children of ages 6-10;
(c) lower secondary - three years of schooling (Grades 6-8) for ages 11-13;
(d) upper secondary - three years of schooling (Grades 9-11) for ages 14-16.

Under its Five Year Education Development Plan 2006-2010 and the approved National Education System Reform Strategy 2006-2015, the Government of Lao (GOL) plans to increase the length of schooling in general education from 11 years (5 years primary + 3 years lower secondary + 3 years upper secondary) to 12 years (5+4+3.) This will be done by shifting Grade 9 into lower secondary education so that Grades 6-9 are covered at this level. The three years of upper secondary education will then cover Grades 10-12 for students of ages 15-17. This reform will bring the general education system in the Lao PDR in line with the international norm of a 12-year school cycle.
Chart 2.4: The education system in the Lao PDR

Source: Education for All mid-decade assessment, Ministry of Education (2008.)
2.5 Issues in educational management

Given the challenges outlined above there are many issues that limit the MOE’s ability to implement effective education decentralization. The following issues are significant:

2.5.1 Low public funding of schools

The low level and inequitable allocation of public education funding are major constraints in the Lao PDR. Under the government’s decentralization management, education in Laos is financed mainly through government expenditure, with responsibility in theory shared between the central and 16 provincial governments. Revenue for education comes from different sources such as the central government, the provincial governments, communities and other domestic sources and foreign agencies (EQIP II/TTEST Project, 2003). According to a study on Educational Financing in the Lao PDR by a foreign consultant (EQIP II/TTEST Project, 2003), after 1995-1996 government spending on education fell dramatically, and this was worsened by the effects of the Asian economic crisis 1997. By 1999-2000 both the economic situation and the education budget had improved, but education spending in the country was still far below the Asian average. Public education spending as a share of overall government spending was about 11 percent in 2004-2005 compared to about 15 percent in the mid-1990s (World Bank, 2008). In the early 1990s, a period of decentralized financing, the central government was responsible for less than a quarter of consolidated spending on education. During the mid-1990s, a period of centralization, central spending grew to the point of sometimes exceeding spending by the provinces. At the beginning of next period of decentralization in the late 1990s the central government share fell back to around one-third of the consolidated budget (EQIP II/TTEST Project, 2003).

The decentralized fiscal structure is based on an upward revenue sharing system in which most revenue is collected by provinces. Provinces with a surplus are supposed to transfer surplus revenues to the centre to fund both central government expenditures and transfers to provinces with a deficit. However, surplus provinces have little incentive to transfer their surplus to deficit provinces (Ministry of Education, April 2008). Given limited public funding, it is not surprising that the education system has to operate very efficiently, especially in deficit provinces. Nine of ten schools have to rely on off-budget resources from donors, non-government organisations (NGOs), parents and communities to cover their operating costs (World Bank, 2008). Decentralization has left the social sector without
adequate safeguards to ensure that minimum needs in the poor areas of the country, or among the poorest segment of the population are being met (Asian Development Bank, 2003).

In looking at the history of educational financing, it is apparent that educational budget support is by no means guaranteed. As a result, school budgets are stripped to a bare minimum. Many remote communities assume the entire operation and maintenance burden. Teachers and students have been severely affected, especially those who are in less well-off areas. More than 90 percent of teachers surveyed reported that their salary is inadequate to cover minimum household living expenses (World Bank, 2008). Most teachers hold multiple jobs to make ends meet. For example, if they are English, Maths or Lao language teachers and live in urban areas, they can teach extra classes in the evening to make a living. Other primary school teachers sell food in the market. If teachers live in rural areas, they can do agricultural jobs.

In addition, schools have few teaching and learning resources. Because of low public funding most schools are poorly equipped. The disparities are especially pronounced between urban and rural areas where many schools lack basic facilities and teaching materials and an adequate supply of textbooks. For example, at the national level, there are 3-4 students for each Lao Language and Mathematics text and 10 for each ‘World Around Us’ texts (Ministry of Education, April 2008). The picture is even worse when looking at the availability of textbooks provided by the schools. There are more textbooks available in well-off areas than in the poorer districts.

Because of the ineffectively implemented roles and responsibilities of the MOE, PES and DEB, individual communities often take the initiative in supporting their local schools by supporting school budgets through collected funds and provision of in-kind support. Contributions may come from individuals, enterprises and such groups as parent associations and school support organizations. Sometimes the support extends to construction and maintenance of school facilities, topping up teacher salaries, and providing food and accommodation for teachers as well as the contribution of local materials or the use of village labour or land for construction of a classroom or DEB office, latrine or fence around school. Such contributions are often essential to sustaining local schooling.
Although community contributions are sometimes reported to the PES, they do not at present constitute a major source of reported revenue. “Many communities support education, especially primary schooling, but such contributions are not usually reported to higher administrative level and are therefore rarely included in administrative statistics” (EQIP II/TTEST Project, 2003, p. 33). This analysis recommends that local community participation must maintain strong support in the management of local education services. However, officially their contributions appear to be minimal. This may be because of the reporting system problem or it could possibly mean that local educational leaders do not know how to quantify their contribution. In addition, it could suggest that only cash contributions can be reported.

Leadership capacity at the community level as well as in the centre is a necessary ingredient for success in education management. In addition, improved local educational leadership will facilitate better relationships between schools and communities.

2.5.2 Conflicting lines of decision making and coordination at PES and DEB levels

Conflicting lines of decision making and coordination at PES and DEB are another fundamental constraint to decentralization and more effective education policy, planning and management. One possible factor contributing to this issue is the lack of clear planning processes, systems, roles and responsibilities for sharing decentralized management between central and local levels starting from the MOE, to the PES, DEB and schools. Decentralization of political structures in 2000 vested responsibility for education planning, budget allocation and service delivery with provincial and district administrations (UNESCO, 2007). The MOE lost control over key elements including overall budget preparation and expenditure, management and monitoring and evaluation of the public education (Asian Development Bank, 2003). This issue indicates unclear lines of authority between PES, DEB and provincial and district administration relations. It has been observed that provincial governors play a crucial role in public financial management, and budget allocations depend mainly on the negotiations between provincial governors and the central government instead of on explicit regulations (World Bank, 2008). The provincial and district governments manage a large percentage of the centrally assigned taxes. Provinces have authority to negotiate how much tax revenue they will transfer to the central government and how much they will save. As a result, the budget process is ambiguous and does not effectively link national educational objectives to the allocation and disbursement of public funding (Ministry
of Education, April 2008). The Lao PDR is viewed as one of the most decentralized countries in the world and provincial authorities have the power to transfer funds within and across expenditure items; they also have the authority to determine spending at the sectoral level (World Bank, 2008). National priority sectors, such as education, do not always get the same funding priority at the sub-national levels that they are supposed to. As a consequence the education sector often faces tight resource constraints. This situation also has a significant impact on schools because there seems to be an unclear responsibility for school funding.

2.5.3 Weak management and low staff capacity

Inadequate management and low staff capacity is another challenge for the implementation of decentralization. Under the government’s decentralization process, the MOE has recognized that education management at all levels are inadequate to implement the education decentralization strategy effectively (Ministry of Education, 2005). One major challenge is limited competent and capable human resources. At the central level, there is a less than adequate number of competent and dedicated staff, and they are usually overloaded with regular work and additional commitments relating to the implementation of major donor projects. It is also observed by the researcher that many of the best trained and most competent staff are more than 50 years old, some of whom may retire in a few years, while there are fewer well trained younger staff who need to take over the jobs from those who will retire in the coming years. At provincial level, once staff members have been trained, especially in technical areas, they often leave for more rewarding jobs, which leads to a shortage of trained technical staff. A similar situation tends to exist at the district level. This research suggests that low salaries and incentives as well as limited opportunities for upward mobility in the public sector do not keep or attract capable and competent personnel to work in the education sector.

Another cause for inadequate management is lack of staff training. A majority of PES and DEB officials are former teachers and some of them only completed primary and lower secondary education (Asian Development Bank, 2003). In addition, PES and DEB staff have little opportunity for effective training to help them to take on new responsibilities under decentralization. This results in weak institutional capacity for planning, management, and delivery of education at all levels, which is an obstacle to implementing education reforms, especially at provincial and district level (UNESCO, 2007).
In addition to the limited capacity at the PES and DEB levels, there are very limited financial resources to collect and analyse data and influence policy or government allocation and limited opportunity or skills to engage in policy dialogue or advocate for increased budgets (Ministry of Education, 2005). Due to the lack of sufficient numbers of PES and DEB technical staff, the inadequate quality of PES and DEB technical staff in terms of educational and managerial capabilities and a shortage of funds there are problems with monitoring and supervision. This results in the lack of regular monitoring and supervision and support from the PES and DEB for staff at the school level. This is holding back the government’s aim of improving the quality of education.

In order to address the above problems, attention has been given to educational leadership and management capacity building at all levels. However, in the past, donors supported decentralization through short-term project funding, and projects such as EQIP II and Basic Education for Girls project (BEGP) tended to focus on strengthening management capacity at MOE, PES and DEB to manage project tasks. Building capacity to manage and deliver donor-designed projects is very different from developing capacities within government to facilitate good quality public service delivery. A number of current and earlier short-term projects have included institutional development and in particular, capacity building in their plans. However, there has been confusion between building the capacity to implement the specific project and that needed to build systems and capacity for the education system. While large amounts of money have been spent on institutional development and capacity building, it has not often resulted in lasting improvement of organizations performance. Reasons for this include a non-systemic approach towards capacity building, too much emphasis on training (via series of workshops in foreign languages), a lack of organizational ownership and leadership, a fragmented overview of organizational purpose, uncoordinated capacity building plans and activities, and overlap between development partners interventions (Ministry of Education, April 2008). As a result, there is need for the education capacity development framework to strengthen educational leadership and management at central, provincial, district, and school levels to improve education service delivery.

This discussion has outlined the broad context of my research. It also demonstrates my preliminary understanding of education management and its issues and challenges. The following chapter, Chapter 3, will detail my research methodology and methods adopted in
this research project. It will also highlight some issues and challenges which were faced during this research project.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter describes the methodology used in this research project. As a practitioner action approach was adopted, the rationale underpinning the selection, and the common features of the action research are emphasized. A summary of key stages of this action research is also outlined. In addition, the chapter explains the methods used throughout the research project and highlights the key issues, challenges and ethical concerns which were encountered.

This chapter has been divided into four sections:

3.1 Methodology
3.2 Stages of the Action Research Project
3.3 Methods
3.4 Issues and challenges

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Action research

Action research was first developed in the English-speaking world (Cherry, 1999). It has its roots in the work of Kurt Lewin in 1946, who is often referred to as the ‘father’ of action research, and in Paolo Freire's work on consciousness raising, and in various schools of liberation thought, most notably Marxist and feminist (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Kurt Lewin's early contributions linked action research with organizational change processes. Facilitating a change to the social setting is at the heart of action research (Rowley, 2003). It is an approach to research, which is based on a collaborative problem-solving relationships between researcher and client that aims at both solving a problem and creating new knowledge (Coghlan, 2003; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

Action research is an umbrella term that covers many forms of action oriented research, including participatory action research, action learning and reflective practice. Action research as defined and developed by Kemmis & McTaggart (1988) is a form of collective,
self-reflective inquiry that participants in social situation undertake to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and situations. They suggest that the approach is only action research when it is collaborative through the critically examined action of individual group members. Altrichter et al (2002) suggest “…action research does not have one neat, widely accepted definition.” It is underpinned by diversity in theory and practice, so providing a wide choice regarding what approach might be appropriate for any particular research inquiry (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). The distinctions between different forms of action research indicate the different roles for the researcher in action and other research, as well as the cyclical nature of action research, as demonstrated in the action research cycle (Rowley, 2003).

In this project, the overarching term practitioner action research approach will be used. “The practitioner approaches the practice problem as a unique case (Schön, 1983, p. 129)”. As a member of the Lao PDR’s MOE carrying out an action research project within my organization, I view myself as a practitioner using action research in an attempt to facilitate change. Practitioners are confronted with the problem of either staying “on the high ground to solve problems that are relatively unimportant or descending into the swamp of important problems and non-rigorous inquiry (Schön, 1987, p. 3)” I seem to have spent some time in the swamp. The dual role of a practitioner researcher will undoubtedly pose a few challenges for me.

Action research undertaken by practitioners into their own practices is regarded as a participatory and democratic form of educational research for educational improvement in the process of collaborative work (Scott & Usher, 1999). The participatory action research carried out by practitioners into their own practices is appropriate for the type of research being undertaken. Within insider research, action research has a particular contribution to make to organizational research because it generates useful knowledge about how organizations manage change and how key actors perceive and perform their roles with regards to change (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

3.1.2 Common features of action research
Despite the diversity of views, action research has some defining characteristics (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; McDermott, Coghlan, & Keating, 2008). First, action research concentrates on research in action, rather than research on action. Second, it is participative and
Democratic. Third, it is research simultaneous with action. Finally, action research is both a cycle of events and an approach to problem solving. Other key elements of action research are provided by Altrichter et al (2002). They claim that there are three consistent aspects in the definition of action research demonstrating that action research is about people reflecting upon and improving their own practice; by tightly inter-linking their reflection and action; and making their experiences public to other people concerned by and interested in the respective practice.

Coghlan & Brannick’s four characteristics are ideal but are challenging to implement. For example, while it is easy to claim to be democratic and participative, it is difficult to achieve in practice. Western literature would depict the Lao PDR as a one party state. (However, most Lao would see their country as being a socialist state.) As a Lao researcher it would probably be more accurate to say that priority is placed on harmony, social cohesion and reciprocal obligations. Overt questioning and criticism tends to be seen as culturally and socially inappropriate. At the same time I realized that Lao culture is hierarchical and power relations are not equal. Lao education staff tend to wait for instructions from their superiors. This could inhibit real participation.

It is common to present action research as a series of successive research cycles which, when connected, becomes a spiral. Each cycle has four features: planning, action, observing and reflection. The results of the researcher’s reflections in one cycle may result in the planning stage of the following cycle actually being one of replanning; to ensure alignment between the most recent (reflective) learning and the next actions to be taken (Nogete, 2008). Therefore, the nature of action research process creates a cyclical motion of increasing knowledge and understanding and then implementing change based on data findings. This idealized view might not be as neat as this spiral of self-contained cycles of planning, acting and observing and reflecting suggests Kemmis & McTaggart (2005). The steps overlap and initial plans quickly become outdated in the light of learning from experience. In reality the process is likely to be more adaptable, open and responsive.

However, the practitioner action research model used in this research project is described as a three-step spiral of steps which includes planning, acting and reflecting. It is a cyclical process because similar steps recur in each of the three cycles or stages of the research project. Although particular actions occurred in each stage of the project, the stages
themselves were not mirror reflections of each other. Action research is never static – it is a dynamic process. In this research project:

1. Planning includes identifying objectives, problems or concerns within the immediate and wider contexts, analysing the situation, and considering carefully the most appropriate options for taking action.

2. Acting means field work, which includes collecting data including by interviews, consultations and observations, reading relevant literature, making recommendations, and conducting workshops.

3. Reflecting is about sense-making (See Cherry, 1999). Although Kemmis & McTaggart’s action research model mentioned earlier, in common with many others, separate out reflection as part of the cycle: plan, act, observe and reflect, the role of reflection is significant in the whole process (Cherry, 1999). This research project supports Cherry’s view of reflection. There are two types of reflection (See Moon, 1999) including reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action occurs at the time of action while reflection-on-action occurs after action.

3.2 The Stages of the Action Research Project

As stated above, action research is often presented as a series of cycles that combine to form a spiral. However this is an idealized view of the reality of action research. This research project was divided into three stages. The following table outlines the key features of these three stages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Australia Jun –Nov 2008</td>
<td>Australia May-Nov 2009</td>
<td>Australia Mar-Dec 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Critiques of relevant literature</td>
<td>- Role of school leaders</td>
<td>- Distribution of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reading on methodology especially action approaches</td>
<td>- Role of donors</td>
<td>- Feedback and clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Context analysis – analysis of the role of multilateral and international non-government organizations who have an impact on the local capacity building</td>
<td>- Read relevant literature</td>
<td>- Read relevant literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Presentation of research project at research forum in Hamilton, Victoria (see Portfolio Exhibit 2).</td>
<td>- Clarification and justification of research objectives; narrow and refine</td>
<td>- Joint conference paper on “Unhusking rice: the process of tapping into intercultural perspectives from South East Asian educational leaders” (see Portfolio Exhibit 9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Plan for data gathering at MOE, Champasak and Luang Namtha PES, 2 selected DEB and a selected cluster and sub-cluster or muads in the 2 selected districts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Presentation at 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Australian Leadership Award Fellowship Program, ACU Sydney, Australia (see Portfolio Exhibit item 5).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Joint presentation at the International Conference on New Metaphors for Leadership in Schools. Melbourne, Australia (see Portfolio Exhibit item 4).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A joint publication on “Leadership is a Sacred House: South East Asian Cultural Metaphors on Educational Leadership” (see Portfolio Exhibit item 10).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting</td>
<td>Preliminary field visit (Lao PDR Dec 2008-Apr 2009) - research context and permission - role of school leaders - role of donors - Presentation at the international conference at SEMEO INNOTECH, Philippines (see Portfolio Exhibit 6).</td>
<td>Field visit (Lao PDR Nov 2009-Mar 2010) - Role of school leaders - Role of donors</td>
<td>Field visit (Lao PDR Jan-Mar 2011) - distribution of knowledge - Feedback and clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td>Australia May-Nov 2009 - Completion of the candidature review - Completion of ethics - Analysis of preliminary field notes - Read relevant literature - Continue to work on exegesis</td>
<td>Australia Mar-Dec 2010 - Analysis of interview and field visit notes - Reflect on research outcomes - Read relevant literature - A panel discussion: Leaders to Leadership-Driving the Process of Development, AusAID Leadership Development Conference (see Portfolio Exhibit 7). - AusAID Leadership Development Internship placement (see Portfolio Exhibit 12). - Presentation at 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Australian Leadership</td>
<td>Australia Mar-Jun 2011 - Analysis of feedback from the workshops - Reflection on research outcomes - Presentation at the completion seminar - Finalize research project and complete exegesis for submission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the course of this project I spent a total of 12 months in the field in the Lao PDR at three different stages.

**Table 3.2: Overview of the actions taken in the field in the Lao PDR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Key focus</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Actions taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1     | 5 months       | - Research context and permission | - Establish a research relationship with research participants  
- Develop an understanding of educational context of Sing & Phonthong districts  
- Develop a preliminary understanding of the role of school leaders  
- develop an understanding of the role of donors (This objective emerged during Stage 1 field work) | Informal discussions with key research stakeholders: 9 MOE, 7 PES & 7 DEB officials, 14 school and 24 community leaders and 2 consultants |
|       | (Dec 2008-Apr  | Role of school leaders  
- Role of donors                                                                                                                                  | - maintain and develop research relationships  
- continue to develop a deeper understanding of the research context  
- gain a greater understanding of the role of school leaders in leading and managing school effectively  
- gain a better understanding of the roles of donors in contributing to the uneven development of school leaders and schools. | - Interviews: 11 MOE senior officials; 9 consultants; 6 PES and 9 DEB officials; 17 school leaders, 5 school teachers  
- community consultations: 15 community leaders in Sing and Phonthong districts |
|       | 2009)          |                                  |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                |
| 2     | 4 months       | - Role of school leaders  
- Role of donors                                                                                                                                  | - fill some minor gaps in my existing data, especially about the school leaders and donors  
- verify preliminary findings and clarify some possible cross-cultural and language misunderstandings  
- report back on preliminary findings and invite feedback about tentative conclusion and recommendations | 3 workshops: MOE (52), Phonthong (21) & Sing (13.)  
Participants: MOE, PES & DEB senior officials, NUOL lecturers, consultants, school & community leaders |
|       | (Nov 2009-Feb  |                                  |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                |
| 3     | 3 months       | - distribution of knowledge  
- Feedback and clarification                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                |
|       | (Jan-Mar 2011) |                                  |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                |
3.3 Methods

In this research project several different data collection methods were used: interviews and individual consultations, community consultations, informal discussions, field trips and observations, action research journals, and literature. Triangulation of methods and sources are employed in this research project. Methods triangulation is the checking of the consistency of findings by using different data collection methods. Source triangulation is the cross-checking for consistency of the information obtained at different times and from different people (Williamson, Burstein, & Mckemmish, 2000).

3.3.1 Interview and individual consultations

In this research project 57 participants were formally interviewed. The participants included 11 MOE officials, 9 education consultants, 6 PES officials, 9 DEB officials, and 17 school leaders (7 principals, 7 deputy principals and 3 school teachers who are based in three incomplete schools) and 5 teachers. Initially, I did not intend to interview teachers. However in three schools I was approached by the teachers as they had seen the principal being interviewed. They requested an interview and I agreed to informal discussions. In addition, I was often given useful information after formal meetings, at festivals, markets and so on. Coghlan & Brannick (2005) argue that asking someone a question or a series of questions is not only a tool for collecting data but is also a data generating intervention for both the researcher and the individual.

Typical of an action research project there were multiple contacts with key participants. During Stages 1, 2 and 3 there was at least one formal interview and numerous informal and incidental consultations. During reflection in Australia for each stage there were email and telephone contacts to establish and maintain key relationships and clarify, verify or ‘fill-in’ gaps in the data.

I took notes during the interviews/meetings in Lao and, if appropriate, took more detailed notes after the conclusion of the interview/meetings. I did not use either audio or video recordings as it would intimidate participants who were often unfamiliar with this technology or who were concerned about being quoted or identified as information sources. The notes taken during the interviews/meetings served as a road map for me so that I could fill in the blanks as soon as possible after the actual interview (Mills, 2003). The important and relevant
notes were translated into English. Field notes were kept on a password protected laptop. All hard data were kept in a locked filing cabinet and soft data in a password protected computer in my office in the School of Management at RMIT University or in the Ministry of Education in Vientiane. Data was saved on the University Network System where practicable (as the system provides a high level of manageable security and data integrity, could provide secure remote access, and was backed up on a regular basis.) Information was also shared with my supervisors in Melbourne.

3.3.2 Community consultations
In the south of Laos people tend to volunteer data. Although this also happened in the north of the country it was not so pronounced. Perhaps it could be attributed to the fact that my first visit to the north was during the harvest season. However, my meetings with community members in both districts invariably resulted in community discussions. At times I was swamped by people wanting to meet with me and share their experiences and views.

In Phonthong district the community leaders were very interested in education so they generally arrived in a group. This group tended to include a village chief, head of the elderly citizens, a representative of the village women’s union, a village security guard, and a member of the parents’ association committee. On the other hand, in Sing district, only a few community members showed up. This group was likely to be village chiefs and deputy village chiefs and a few representative of the village women’s union. To interview community leaders in this district was difficult at this time because my research was in poor communities and the sugar cane harvest was in full swing. The only time they were available was at night, but it was hard for me as a woman, to go to remote ethnic villages in the mountains where there was no electricity or local transportation. Therefore, this led to a follow up visit.

3.3.3 Observations
Ethnographic techniques were used especially to achieve the second objective of this research project: a deeper understanding of the context. As Mills (2003) argues, action research gives us a systematic and rigorous way to view the process of observation as a qualitative data collection technique. The purpose of the observation was to gain a greater understanding of the activities, people, and physical aspects of a situation such as:
the state of education facilities and resources: school buildings and physical conditions, student and teaching resources including teaching reference materials and equipment
- distances (travel time) between schools, villages and district education bureaus
- community activities in contributing to education development such as building roads, school gates and other school construction, installing water pumps, parent association committees and village education development committee organization
- donor activities at the school, such as materials and equipment provided to schools,
- school organization such as school programs, school leadership teams, organizational charts, school regulations, student data.
- school leaders’ activities including organizing school and cluster meetings, attending meetings at the DEB and village offices, and working with the community.

Some observations were made in formal settings such as talking to people and attending public meetings and workshops. I attended seven workshops and three formal meetings funded by different donors including ADB, Sida, UNICEF and JICA. At the local level I attended one principals’ meeting organized by the DEB, a cluster meeting and a principals’ meeting arranged by a cluster head, and three school meetings. Many observations were also made in informal settings such as informal or daily conversations with PES, DEB staff, school leadership team and teachers. Teachers who were interested in my visits invited me to join their casual conversations during the breaks because they had some more personal/private concerns and inquires. For example, some were very curious about my salary and my living conditions in Australia. Others wanted to know why I returned to their school this year. Some teachers wanted me to explain the new textbook that they were using. I was often seen as a resource and a link to the MOE and the outside world. Photographs and a journal were used to record observational data.

As outlined above, in the first instance I recorded information in Lao. The field notes were later sorted and translated into English on a regular basis during my time in the field. When revising my field notes I also reflected on what I saw or encountered or what I learnt from my action and what I needed to do next. “Reflection-in-action occurs at the time of the action (Moon, 1999, p. 42). According to Schön (1987) reflection-in-action only happens in situations where the action brings in unexpected consequences and is not part of actions that go according to plan.
3.3.4 Research journal

During the field work I used a journal. The journal served two dimensions: narrative and analytical. The narrative I used for recording actions, observation, experience, emotions and reflection in associated with the research project. The analytical part was a critical analysis of the implication in terms of the research objectives (See Cherry, 1999). According to Cherry (1999) journal writing is not only a means of recording experience, but assists in making sense of it in a variety of ways. Cherry continues to argue that journal writing can assist the development of understanding and changed behaviour, and extends beyond the recording of experience to include an active role in double circle learning. The use of a journal in this project supported Cherry’s contention and proved to be instrumental in capturing not only the experiences, but also the emotions and the reflections associated with this research.

During this project I kept two types of research journal:

The Lao version was hand written in my notebooks recording during discussions and interviews. This allowed me to:

- Record various dialogues, meetings, interview and observations
- Record discussion of events, actions and strategies
- Note insights, identify issues and possibilities
- Record frustrations and related feelings
- Record what I did in my project
- Record initial reflections
- Note thoughts and plans for possible future activities

Based on the Lao version I also kept a journal in English. I used my laptop to keep my journal entries, which provided the opportunity to:

- Translate important field notes
- Record my reflections about what I did and the results of what I did
- Assist me in planning future activity
- Record my reflection in action
- Identify emerging issues and possibilities
- Share data with supervisors
The journals were saved on my personal laptop as well as the computer in my office at RMIT University in a password protected system. The journals were also shared with my supervisors for comments and suggestions.

3.3.5 Literature
As a practitioner at the MOE I had the advantage of access to written materials and documents (especially to the plethora of consultants’ reports held in the Ministry) to gather information for my research. As Coghlan & Brannick (2005) suggest, studying relevant documentation can be an important part of organizational research. A number of texts, relevant to the research, in both Lao and English were examined. The fact that I had access to material in the Lao language was obviously an advantage. My position gave me privileged access to important data. It would be very hard for outsiders, (particularly foreigners) either to obtain or to understand information written and spoken in Lao or to gain ready access to Ministry documents. A number of texts were examined, including background literature, journal articles, government documents, consultants’ reports, donors’ reports and project design documents and some studies undertaken in Laos by a range of cooperative donor projects. The key areas of reading included Lao educational policy and structures, educational leadership, school leadership, roles of donors, and decentralization.

3.3.6 Data analysis
In action research it is difficult to separate data gathering from data analysis. In practice data analysis commences during the act of collecting and recording data. During the three periods of field work in the Lao PDR I recorded observational and interview data in Lao as I felt more comfortable using Lao when I was in Laos. As soon as possible afterwards, generally that night or the next day, I translated my field notes into English. I also made short comments about this data. This was consistent with reflection in action. It was conducted under the pressure of the constant demands of fieldwork. I was conscious of the time limitations, the need to learn as much as possible about the reality of educational leadership and of listening to the many people who wanted to contribute to the research. The reflection on action occurred when I returned to Melbourne. This reflection was more considered and systematic. I also had more time to consider the literature and consult with supervisors.
3.3.6.1 Stage 1

I used ‘butchers’ paper’ to identify key ideas and draw concept maps. For example, the ‘role of principal’ was placed at the centre of the large piece of paper. Data related to this theme was placed around this central idea. I then drew links between data, identifying common issues. I also had a number of discussions and discussed my data analysis with my supervisors. The key issues were then summarized according to the structure in the table below.

Table 3.3: An example of how key issues are summarised

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>MOE</th>
<th>Champasak</th>
<th>Luang Namtha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Research relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Educational context of Sing &amp; Phonthong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Role of school leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Role of donors Emerged during Stage 1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3.3.6.2 Stage 2

During Stage 2 I used similar techniques to those I had used in Stage 1. I conducted a preliminary analysis of the field notes adding comments where appropriate. This analysis included sorting the data to two main objectives (3&4) and two secondary enabling objectives (1&2.)

I again used ‘butcher’s paper’ to identify key ideas and draw concept maps. For example, ‘role of principal’ was placed at the centre of the large piece of paper. Data related to this theme was placed around this central idea. I then drew links between data, identifying common issues. It was at this stage that I explicitly linked the sorted data to the literature. After I sorted data I constructed a table with the following headings: challenges/constraints, MOE officials, consultants, PES officials, DEB officials, school leaders and community. Under the challenges/constraints column, I listed twenty-one challenges/constraints based on my data grouping such as shortage of recurrent funding, lack of teaching and learning materials, limited capacity, lack of decision making autonomy and so on. I checked a number of participants against each challenge to discover any contradictions and examine the
consistency of my data. I then used Reason’s (2001) action research framework to group the data into three categories: principal as a person, principal as school leader and the principal’s outside relationships. In addition I used the cultural analysis of Hofstede & Hofstede (2005) and the leadership material of Northouse (2007). The following table illustrates this analysis and sense making tool. The table became my research tool in Stage 3. I developed the table below after the Stage 2 field work.

Table 3.4: An example of how data is analysed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting lines</th>
<th>Expectations of recognition</th>
<th>Status/</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Characteristics of relationship</th>
<th>knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vertical reporting lines or saytang: DEB, PES &amp; MOE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal Reporting lines or saykhouang: local community &amp; mass organisations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(For more information regarding the vertical and horizontal lines and mass organizations see Chapter 5)

3.3.6.3 Stage 3

Stage 3 had two principal objectives: (1) to clarify issues and fill-in gaps and (2) to report interim results to the participants and gain their feedback. I used the table that I had developed in Stage 2 (See Table 3.4) both as a data gathering and reporting device. To this I added the feedback that I received from the three workshops that I conducted in February and March 2011.
3.4 Issues and challenges

3.4.1 Being a catalyst or agent of change
If action research is true to its name, it pursues both action (change) and research (understanding) simultaneously. It achieves change through its participative approach and research is achieved by being responsive to the situation. It also depends upon a collaborative problem solving relationship between the researcher and the client which aims to both solve a problem, and to generate new knowledge (Nogeste, 2008). Although I had approval from the MOE to conduct my action research project, it is not easy for me to influence ongoing action for change because I do not have real power and authority within the MOE. On the other hand, local people tended to see me as someone with power because I work for the MOE and had initiated the research. However, to bring change in school leadership is a complex issue because it involves both power and authority relationships between the central and the local levels. Therefore, I involved a wide range of participants in my research project including the MOE, PES and DEB officers, school and community leaders and donors.

3.4.2 Managing role duality: a researcher and a practitioner
Generally action research is represented in terms of a situation where an action researcher is external to an organization, who enters the organization in a temporary facilitative role, works with the members of the organization for the duration of the project and then leaves. Practitioner research undertaken by an insider action researcher has to deal with role duality: organizational and research roles (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). I was already aware that there would be tensions between the twin roles of government official and researcher while I undertook my research. As a practitioner at the MOE, I continued to be subjected to many expectations that were related to my position as a deputy head of the EQIP II/TTEST Project. (EQIP II/TTEST is a $US40million, 8 year project jointly funded by ADB and Sida.)

Some of these tensions became more apparent when I returned to Laos in January 2009 to undertake preliminary research. Despite letters from my supervisors and my superior, it was assumed by many colleagues and some of my superiors that I had returned to work and that my research was very secondary. It was expected that I would slot back into my former roles. The consequences of this can be seen in the tasks assigned to me, as outlined earlier in this section. Fortunately, in most instances, while dramatically increasing my workload, they did however, contribute to this research.
The ongoing process of reflection inherent in the cyclical process of action research as well as time spent at RMIT University involving continuing reference to literature, and discussion with my supervisors has helped me to clarify and manage my twin roles. I am aware that it is challenging to go through this process because I engage in different contexts, moving between Laos and Australia; between the workplace and home and the university and between two different research sites at the local level in Laos. Once I immersed myself in each context I often felt reluctant to return because I am empathetic and concerned about the needs of people in each context and my responsibilities to them as a member of the MOE and as a researcher.

3.4.3 Ethics

I submitted an Ethics Application to the RMIT Ethics Committee. The RMIT Ethics committee approved my application (Ethics Committee approval number 1000017.) Included in this application was a letter from the Lao PDR Ministry of Education granting me permission to undertake this research project. This letter was signed by the Director General of the Department of Teacher Education and then by the Minister of Education (Ministerial Decree No 79/MOE.DTE/2009 dated 14 Jan 2009.) The Ministerial Decree with a formal red stamp and signature is a very important piece of document to show not only permission from the Ministry but also support and cooperation from my organization.

The ethics and politics of research are closely interlinked. Ethics is about permission, both at the individual level, and at organizational and group level. Gaining access, networking, using data, representing that data in a dissertation are all political acts (Rowley, 2003). As Kemmis & Mc Taggart (2000) noted, the aim of research is to find the truth. However, balancing truthfulness with the need to respect the participants can be challenging. For example, the researcher may discover issues or problems that are not directly related to the research project or have potential local political implications. Even in the early stages of this project, teachers, principals and education officials in central and district offices have confided in me about their concerns. Some have also voiced their criticisms about the management of education in the Lao PDR. I have a responsibility to protect the participants, whoever they may be. I also need to protect myself, both as a researcher and as a practitioner within the Ministry. Therefore, I needed to be vigilant about the data and the potential impact of this data. Even if it is relevant some data cannot be used if it will cause harm to any participant, including myself.
This chapter has outlined the methodological decisions taken in this research project and has discussed the application of the chosen methods as well as some issues and challenges that the researcher encountered during the research project. As Altrichter et al (2002, p. 127) argue, action research is not some kind of panacea for all problems of social practice. It calls for intellectual clarity and honesty to develop a clear idea of what one is talking about.

The following chapter will discuss the literature on educational leadership which was read to gain an initial general understanding of the educational leadership practiced in the Lao PDR before undertaking the preliminary field work.
CHAPTER 4
LEADERSHIP IN THE LAO CONTEXT

This chapter is an outcome of the foundation and planning phase of my research journey (June-Dec 2008.) In preparation for the commencement of my field work I investigated a range of literature on educational leadership. The chapter explores the concept of educational leadership particularly in the context of the Lao PDR. The chapter is divided into five sections:

4.1 The literature challenge  
4.2 Leadership definition  
4.3 Leadership in Laos: Cultural understandings  
4.4 Education leadership and the political context  
4.5 Education leadership

4.1 The literature challenge
My initial intention was to conduct a literature review on school leadership in the Lao PDR but I faced a dilemma. There is limited reliable literature on the Lao educational leadership in the Lao PDR. Almost all of the literature on educational leadership is drawn from western sources and represents almost exclusively western views. This literature focuses on western school systems and contexts but tends to ignore the educational context in less developed countries (See Caldwell, 2006; Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Duignan, 2006; Jazzar & Algozzine, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2005).

In my opinion, it is also important to analyse local literature - not just western views because my research is going to be conducted in schools in rural remote areas in the Lao PDR. As this country is one of the few remaining one-party states, there is even less relevant literature about school leadership. Some research was done on leadership and school leadership in China (See Lai, 2008; Wang, 2007; Wong, 2005). Although the Lao PDR and China are both one party-states, it does not necessarily mean that leadership practices in China are relevant to the Lao PDR. Wang (2007) claims that leadership in China is value-based and contextualized
meaning that learning and leadership views and practices are context dependent, unavoidably influenced by particular contexts. This view on leadership also suggests that different contexts may require different types of leadership even though they occur within the same culture and political system.

There is some limited literature about Lao leadership that was written by outsiders (See Boyd, 2000; Prakoonheang, 2001). However, the views expressed were based on very short visits to Laos. For instance, Prakoonheang is a Lao refugee who lives and works in Australia. He admits that he has difficulties in understanding the new Lao language developed by the present Lao government, particularly the communist jargon and the new Lao words. In addition, he argues that the country is ruled by the Party in the name of the proletarian dictatorship and that this makes Laos a police state. This is not an accurate picture. Prakoonheang is based in Sydney and his work would benefit from a greater understanding of the current situation in Laos. Overseas Lao are not always sympathetic to the challenges facing Laos.

Other research was done by an American PhD student who is based in the US on “appropriation of leadership: an interpretive study from a transnational perspective” (Boyd, 2000). This researcher argues that it is important to do research on Lao leadership in Laos but the study is based on a single interview of one person who is a Lao refugee living in Oakland, California. The researcher travelled to Laos for just one day. The researcher testifies that,

Our conversation took place at the Oakland office of the Lao Family Community Development Organization. Unfortunately, on the research trip to Asia, the planned visit to Lao was curtailed; the Laotian government only allowed our group to visit for the day. We were not able to converse with the Laotian people except at a restaurant where I had a short conversation with the owner in French (Boyd, 2000, p. 83).

I now also appreciated my unique position in conducting my research in Laos. I am Lao and have lived in Laos almost all my life and have worked in Laos in the MOE (often with international consultants) so I have a much better understanding of the Lao education context.

There is official local documentation about leadership including reports, plans and documents published by the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party, the government, and the MOE but these documents seem to disregard educational leadership. Such documents include the “The Lao
People’s Revolutionary Party Regulations” (The Lao People's Revolutionary Party, 2006), The Eighth Party Congress Resolutions (Valasane Alounmai, 2006), and “National Education System Reform Strategy 2006-2015” (Ministry of Education, 2006). The local literature, though limited, on Lao educational leadership, does raise some useful issues. For instance, the concept of educational leadership in a western context might not have similar connotations in Laos. For example, the concept of civil society: while there is a western assumption that the concept of civil society is universal, there is no equivalent concept in the Lao or Vietnamese language (See for example Thayer, 2009).

The concept of non-government organization is another example. Lux & Straussman (2004) argue that local non-government organizations in a state-led-civil society operation do not fit the portrait of civil society usually found in western discourse and documentation of international organizations such as the ADB and the World Bank. Moreover, literature by aid agencies, donors and consultants tends to serve the aid industry’s purpose - it tends to be self serving or provide an argument for further donor activity: for example the Paris and Vientiane Declarations, Millennium Development Goals (MDG), Education for All and the many other ‘initiatives.’

This limitation in literature underscores the fact that donors and aid agencies seem to neglect local (educational) leadership capacity building. In many developing countries, the limited quality and quantity of leaders and elites with the necessary vision, knowledge and experience means that their ability to shape the strategies and institutions that will mediate the relations between private interests and the public good is seriously compromised (Leftwich & Hogg, 2007, p. 1). It is important for donors and aid agencies to recognize the need for local leadership development and to further support local research on educational leadership, in order to assist developing countries (including Laos) to build their capacity to facilitate development and the work of donors.

4.2 Leadership definition

There is no clear or universally accepted definition of leadership. In the west, leadership can be defined as a process for establishing direction, aligning people, motivating and inspiring, and accomplishing change (Caldwell, 2006). While Sergiovanni (2005, p. 123) claims that
leadership is not a given, is not an answer, is not a fixed destination. Leadership is a complex, messy, often completely non-rational, value-laden and value-driven activity (Jazzar & Algozzine, 2006, p. 226). On the contrary, Caldwell (2006, p. 6) asserts that,

Elements of leadership line up with elements of management, so that the counterpart of establishing direction (leadership) is planning and budgeting (management.) Aligning people (leadership) matches up with organizing and staff (management), motivating and inspiring (leadership) with controlling and problem solving (management), and achieving change (leadership) with producing a degree of predictability (management.)

This statement suggests that leadership and management go together (a good leader is a good manager.) The problem with the term “leadership” is that its meaning is very broad and there is no agreed definition. Leadership is a phenomenon that everyone has an opinion on but few seem to agree exactly what it really is (Jackson & Parry, 2008, p. 12). As a consequence of the universality of leadership, this also often leads to debates about the nature and importance of leadership (Lyne de Ver, 2008).

Based on my experience, reading and reflections whilst in Australia, the contexts in which leadership are to be exercised should be identified. The context will have a major influence on defining what can be achieved. Therefore, leadership has many forms in various contexts. Leftwich & Hogg (2007) also reveal that forms of leadership are everywhere, but are influenced by historical, structural, political and cultural factors. This approach provides some insights into leadership in public service management practices in the Lao PDR.

The government practices democratic centralism based on the principles of collective leadership (United Nations Development Programme, 2003). This comment by the UNDP is derived from the policy paper of the Government of Lao PDR on Governance: “Public service reform, people’s participation, rule of law and sound financial management” (United Nations Development Programme, 2003). Collective leadership (in theory) refers to the way that decisions are taken collectively by all concerned authorities on the basis of mutual consensus. In order to ensure that the decision-makers are held responsible for their decisions, the principle of collective leadership is applied hand in hand with that of unitary leadership-where one individual alone makes the decision. Once a decision is taken, each person involved in the decision should be individually responsible for the outcome - the principle of individual responsibility.
While collective leadership is officially promulgated in the Lao public sector, it is tempered by traditional practices and beliefs. For example, Stuart-Fox (2006) declares that Buddhist beliefs influence the legitimization of leadership practice in Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand in two ways. He argues that the first way is by descent, meaning that kings (leaders) are either sons or brothers of previous kings. The Buddhist notion of karma and rebirth is the second source of legitimization by propagating the belief that everyone is born into the position in society determined by their karma which, in turn, is determined by deeds committed in previous lives. This observation seems to support my earlier contention that leadership is not a universal notion and the interpretation of leadership is different across countries and generations. As noted earlier, understandings of leadership depend on factors such as religion, culture, geographical areas, history, political connection and so on. Buddhism is the predominant religion practiced in contemporary Laos. Article 9 of the Constitution of the Lao PDR states:

The State respects and protects all lawful activities of Buddhist and of followers of other religious, (and) mobilizes and encourages Buddhist monks and novices as well as the priests of other religions to participate in activities that are beneficial to the country and people. All acts creating division between religions and classes of people are prohibited (National Assembly No.25/NA, 6 May 2003).

As can been seen from the above official statement, we cannot underestimate (Theravada) Buddhist attitudes to leadership as the country claims to respect and protect Buddhism. Stuart-Fox claims that,

The conservative element in the Buddhist worldview does tend, however, to reinforce authoritarian political leadership. The notion of karma carries with it a degree of acceptance that those above one in the social and political hierarchy...somehow deserve to be where they are (Stuart-Fox, 2006, p. 8).

As noted above, there is very little literature on Lao leadership. As a consequence, I have included an extended discussion of a widely accepted Lao metaphor used to describe leadership. According to a paper I contributed to and co-presented at the international conference on New Metaphors for Leadership in Schools in Melbourne in Sep 2008, (Chan, et al., 2008) leadership is a thian – a candle – that is made of beeswax with a cotton string in the middle. It looks very simple but it has power (see Portfolio Exhibit 10 for a full version of this article). In Laos, people make thian by hand – they lay the beeswax in the sunlight until it is soft and then roll it up with the cotton string. When the weather is cold, thian become hard;

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**thian** are soft when the weather is hot. **Thian** has many meanings. They represent light and success for the people as well as the country. **Thian** are used in many traditional and religious events and are a symbol of Buddhist Lent at temples. Lao light **thian** to show their respect for the Buddha and to wish their ancestors peace and prosperity. Leaders tend to have access to the **thian** and the light shed by the **thian** sheds knowledge and wellbeing and reflects prestige back onto the holder.

Jackson & Parry (2008) argue that there are five elements that promote effective leadership including confidence, integrity, connection, resilience and aspiration. In the Lao metaphor, Chan et al (2008) also suggest that the light of a **thian** can be renewed as can on-going, effective leadership, but the light of the **thian** has to struggle against the wind or rain. This illustrates the hardships and obstacles that a leader has to encounter. As described earlier, **thian** can be hard or soft (depending on the environment); this shows flexibility and adaptability in a leader. The Lao believe in following the Buddhist Middle Way philosophy, avoiding extremes. Leadership is also seen as a gift to be shared. The light from one candle is not bright enough in a big dark room. If we light many candles, the room is brighter. Therefore, leadership should be shared and cooperative at all levels of an organisation in order to bring success. **Thian** are also placed on the top of **phakhuan** (baci plateau) at the highly significant **baci** or **soukhuan** ceremony. This activity is not only a blessing event, but also a collective activity where family and invited guests gather to share food and happiness. This indicates that leadership is also about relationships, caring about people and family.

### 4.3 Leadership in Laos: Cultural understandings

As can be seen from the above metaphor, in the Lao education context, leadership is mainly shaped by socio-cultural and political understandings. Leadership is essentially a cultural activity and the influence of culture is understood to enable and constrain various forms of leadership (Jackson & Parry, 2008).

As noted, culture still has strong influences on educational leadership. Lao culture is one in which people are respected because of age, position and authority. Within the family the leader is always the male (father.) In the Lao context educational leadership is also influenced by authority, position, seniority and is male dominated. The authority figure has the right to control, command and make decisions. The following descriptions demonstrate some
examples derived from my observations and experience, in which leadership is practiced in some cultural contexts.

- **Youth and age:** Respect is the glue and leadership is accepted on the basis of age. In some contexts it may be necessary to wait for or to co-opt the elders. Seniority plays an important role in educational leadership and senior officers have more official advantages than junior officers, especially in job promotion, provision of professional opportunities and upgrading. Although a young leader may have a more senior position and more authority than an older officer, he/she still has to show respect to the senior person. It is also common to see senior officers stay in educational leadership for extended periods. In addition, leadership positions tend to be rotated among the senior officials and it is rare to see them demoted. It has been observed by foreigners that this practice can become static and has de-motivated young competent and capable leaders who demonstrate leadership skills. The concept of seniority is related to leadership because it implies that strong emphasis is placed on experience for a leadership position. The emphasis of seniority is also illustrated in the selection criteria for a national teacher title or *khouhaengsad* and a teacher of people title or *khoupasasonh*. For example, to be elected as *khouhaengsad*, a teacher who works in an urban area needs to have at least 25 years of teaching experience or 20 years of working as a teacher in a remote mountainous area (See Prime Ministerial Decree No 208/PM, 30 July 2007).

- **Male roles and female roles:** These may be important and act to restrain people, especially women. Some women will seek to challenge traditional roles; other women will chose to be leaders only within ‘appropriate’ spheres. In the Lao PDR, according to GOL policy, women take priority over men for promotion, but in practice this rarely happens. For instance, during the Eighth Party Congress in 2006, one female Politburo member (out of 11) was elected and 55 members were elected to the Central Party Committee, of whom 4 are women (*Valasane Alounmai*, 2006). There is no balance between men and women in educational leadership, especially at the top level. Female leadership is not commonly seen, especially at the local level although the government emphasizes a policy of gender equity and equality so that men and women equally contribute to the national socio-economic development. This issue still remains problematic even though the government has created a space for women by establishing the Lao Women’s Union in all organizations from the central to the local levels. However, the majority of women have
been responsible for the reproductive spheres of society, having the main responsibility for providing food for the families. In addition, poverty and perceptions of the limited use of educating girls constituted another obstacle for girls’ education which continued to produce unbalanced gender patterns in Laos (Bäcktorp, 2007). Male attitudes and male-dominated political structures have prevented women from becoming equal partners in the development of the country. It has been observed that the situation has changed slightly since the government has incorporated women into production outside of domestic life. Bäcktorp (2007) claims that the women who did gain positions did so, not necessarily on account of their gender or competence, but because of their family name, which indicates the importance of social position within Lao society. This point signals the complexity of any attempt to instigate a change in women’s role and status. However, it also demonstrates how different systems of power communicate with each other and how different discourses engage and sometimes conflict with each other in the Lao situation. Bringing Lao women, including ethnic minority women into the mainstream and enhancing their roles and status, has proven to be difficult and is taking longer than expected. Despite traditional understandings and attitudes stemming from Buddhist practices and colonial attitudes, this now has more to do with lack of political will and a lack of clear strategies.

4.4 Educational leadership and the political context
(For educational structures see the organizational charts in Chapter 2.)
Leadership is exercised in a variety of contexts. They may enhance or limit the way in which leadership is exercised. In the Lao PDR, the LPRP, the major policy-making body in the country, plays an important role throughout the national educational planning process. Therefore, its decision-making has an impact on education policy and practice. In the Lao education context, leadership is mainly shaped by political contexts.

Decision-making in Laos tends to occur within a comparatively closed system where open debate is rarely possible and leaders’ decisions must be accepted. However, many problems are discussed informally. This practice can create tension for a foreign consultant or advisor who comes from an open system where information is easy to access and where debate is encouraged and leaders can be challenged. To facilitate the growth of educational leadership
in the Lao political context that reflects the work of donors, it is critical for leaders to recognise a growing openness to new ideas and exposure to political system from both east and west. Perhaps one approach worth considering is the Lao belief in following the Buddhist Middle Way, avoiding extremes and promoting compromise. Whilst Lao educational leaders must value their own attitudes and understandings, they must be ready to be more flexible and adaptable. Southworth (2005) supports this approach by suggesting that school leaders need to be adaptable in order to work and live in the changing worlds. He suggests that today school leaders need three key skills: being able to handle uncertainty and ambiguity, at the same time having a clear direction, and being adaptable to changes both inside and outside the school and responding effectively and efficiently to them.

While leaders develop, emerge and are selected in Western societies, Lao leaders tend to be appointed. According to a personal communication with the Vice Minister of Education (28 Nov 2008), there are five generic criteria for the appointment of potential leaders or *phanakgnanseubthord* in the Lao PDR, including commitment to ideological values, political knowledge and expertise in area of specialization, capacity to act in the leadership position, demonstrated commitment to the principle of collective decision making, and physical and mental capacity. In addition, upward mobility tends to be limited due to the static culture/society in political and civil spheres. This may frustrate the emergence of progressive developmental leadership and effective coalitions as well as improvements in education development. (On the other hand, it might be argued that this approach does encourage stability and continuity.) To facilitate the growth of developmental leadership in the Lao political context that acknowledges the work of donors, it is important to have a commitment to appropriate development by government as well as donors.

Education management in the Lao PDR may be seen as occurring within a hierarchical and complex system. The Education Law article 50: The Principle of Education Management states:

> Education management practices the principles of democratic centralism, lower levels reporting to upper levels, an individual reporting to the organization based on the coordination between vertical and horizontal lines (translated by the researcher based on the Education Law, National Assembly No.25/NA, 6 May 2003).
At the same time the Party guides national policy and sits behind and above all significant decision making. This hierarchical aspect may constrain people, especially those who work at the grassroots level. (However, there are clear links to the Party hierarchy at all levels, including the grassroots via the mass organizations.) Failure to understand these complexities may also create tensions for outsiders who are from a society where everybody has a more equal voice or freedom of speech.

Although the Lao educational administrative system may be hierarchically structured at central, province and district levels, it is possible to lessen these boundaries in the system by establishing good networks and relationships. In the Lao context, personal networks and relationships are critical tools because they create a relationship of trust and mutual support. Relationships are the currency of business and social life in the Lao PDR. In order to get things done, personal contacts and family relationships are drawn upon in almost all aspects of daily life, from obtaining information, finding pathways through hierarchies to finding a job. Through these relationships people become friends and colleagues and form stronger networks as they develop and share common views and values. This is a key ingredient for collective action. As noted earlier, the practice of collective decision making and building solidarity at work and in the broader community is encouraged. But in reality it is sometimes hard to bring about change because leadership is located in a cultural framework of hierarchy where the playing field is not always level.

To sum up, in the Lao PDR, leadership may sometimes require a strategic questioning of the status quo or it may require acceptance and understanding of the norm and working within its parameters. Accepting the norm does not necessarily mean weak or poor leadership. It may result in a more effective leadership system and methodology where leadership is pragmatic, accepted and adaptable. Each approach is difficult and the leadership style adopted, or that is possible, will require decisions and compromises and flexibility if development goals are to be achieved.
4.5 Educational leadership

Similarly, educational leadership is also influenced by the cultural and socio-political context. The President of the LPRP, Khamtai Siphandone emphasized in his speech at the Eighth Lao People’s Revolutionary Party Congress in 2006 that,

The best leadership is leading by example so the civil servants (party members) should always maintain a role model of the Party leadership (translated by the researcher based on the Eighth LPRP Congress documents from Valasane Alounmai, 2006, p. 74).

As educational leaders are civil servants, they are expected to be Party members. In this context, an educational leader is also expected be a role model in their organisation and community. Being a Lao educational leader means that a leader is expected to balance the educational and political roles which serve the Party’s goals and mission. Education leadership is strongly influenced by all these socio-political-cultural factors and this can cause tensions when Lao educational leaders have to work with foreign consultants. The political dimension in leadership is consistently practiced in the education sector. As noted, educational leaders must be Party members and committed to socialist ideology. This element is indicated in Prime Ministerial Decree No 208/PM (30 July 2007) on Honorific Titles for Teachers and Prime Ministerial Decree No 209/PM (30 July 2007) on Teacher Teaching Positions. The political dimension also indicates that the educational leader should have the knowledge and ability to implement the ideology of the state and the Party.

While there is a clear political dimension to Lao educational leadership, almost no western literature includes this element in discussion about effective educational leaders. This is surprising given the political nature of education. In the west there has been a close link between politics and education (See for example Dewy, 1916). For instance, Sergiovanni suggests five leadership domains: technical, human, educational, symbolic and cultural dimensions (Department of Education Victoria, 2007). These leadership domains describe the major areas of leadership practice. Within each domain there are three leadership capabilities that represent the expected knowledge, skills and dispositions required for effective leadership performance. This argues that to be an effective educational leader in Victoria is more than possessing particular knowledge, skills and the ability to do something. It means that a leader has to demonstrate that he/she can actually do it. Duignan (2006) distinguishes between competency and capability based programs. On the other hand, he argues that capability is
about imaging the future and bringing it about. Competency is about control while capability is about learning and development. Competency is about fitness for purpose but capability is about judging fitness of the purpose itself. Based on this research, there seems to be a very limited political dimension in educational leadership. Unlike educational leaders in the Australia context, in Laos educational leaders have twin roles: educational and political, where the educational leaders are expected to be able to serve the state and the Party.

However, there is an acknowledgement that leadership and management of Lao schools influences school outcomes (Dalavong, 2008). Dalavong continues to state that leadership and management approaches should be flexible (2008, p. 23). The notion of flexibility and adaptability in leadership and management fits well with the Lao leadership metaphor “a thian – a candle” proposed by Chan et al (2008). This metaphor provides a better understanding about Lao concepts of leadership, important when there is very little relevant literature written by Lao. In terms of educational leadership, a good educational leader is a good learner who is prepared to make sacrifices for the education of others. A leader needs to be knowledgeable, capable of establishing a clear vision and inspiring others and bringing light into our organizations. The light or brightness of the candle shines the way to the future, provides a pathway to knowledge, skills and abilities and can be a significant influence on people to accomplish the goals of their organization. The light of the thian shines indefinitely, as does inspiring leadership. In Lao education, leadership is seen as a caring gift to be shone across the Ministry, the broader education system, friends and family.

The discussion on education leadership in this Chapter was based on my preliminary understandings, experience, literature and basic knowledge. The following chapter will outline my action research stages through three stages of field work in the Lao PDR where I gain further understanding of school leadership in rural remote areas. Each stage contains statements of my research objectives, what I did and what I learnt in the field (actions) and outlines important reflections.
Chapter 5 is the core of the exegesis. According to Crotty (1998 p87) an exegesis is based on “a complexus of theories, principles, rules and methods”. This chapter is a critical explanation of the research project. An action research approach was adopted for this research project. There were three cycles or stages. This is reflected in the structure of the chapter which is divided into three ‘mini’ chapters. These ‘mini’ chapters capture the action, reflection and critical analysis of each stage.

During the construction of the exegesis I considered the options of constructing three separate chapters. I discussed this issue with my supervisors. Based on their recommendation I decided upon one chapter that was divided into three stages – ‘mini’ chapters. Three principal reasons shaped this decision. First and foremost, this literary structure was consistent with the action research methodology and the overarching narrative of the research project. It was an honest representation of the project. Second, this structure facilitated the distribution of knowledge especially for practitioners in similar situations. While Chapter 5 was connected to the rest of the exegesis, it could also stand alone. I have been able to use the stand alone Chapter 5 as the basis for workshops in the Lao PDR. Third, while not all action research projects adopt this structure many do; there are precedents for this type of structure.

This chapter and this research project have three stages. Each stage is a mini chapter.

Stage 5.1: Preliminary field work: Lao PDR (December 2008-April 2009)
Stage 5.2: Field work: Lao PDR (November 2009-February 2010)
Stage 5.3: Field work: Lao PDR (January-March 2011)

As described in chapter 3, each stage of this practitioner action research project has three steps: planning, acting and reflection. To make it easier to read, each section is divided into two parts: (1) planning and acting and (2) reflection. The first part describes my plan for actions, and actions taken in the field. The reflection section discusses the analysis of the data.
gained from the field work, and describes how I make sense of the data and plan for the following stage.
Stage 5.1
Preliminary field work in the Lao PDR
(December 2008 - April 2009)

Stage 1 outlines how I conducted my first field work visits to gain initial insights into the research context before undertaking the main part of this action research project. It outlines some preliminary impressions and findings as well as some of the literature that informed my thinking in the initial stages of the action research cycle. According to Coghlan and Brannick (2005) the pre-step is the beginning of the action research project which aims to create an understanding of the context of the project. This step provides an opportunity for the researcher to assess both external and internal forces driving change and to identify the most useful focus. In addition, the pre-step should establish a collaborative relationship with participants and initiate the development of the groups with which a researcher will be working. During my first field visit I spent a total of 5 months (December 2008 –April 2009) in the Lao PDR where I gained multiple insights into the realities of education management and the challenges facing school leaders.

At the commencement of Stage 1 I had three specific objectives:

The first objective was to develop a research relationship with the MOE, and the Champasak and Luang Namtha PESs, and with the research site participants. Within this objective I expected to gain formal approval to enter my research sites to establish contacts with district officials and research participants, including school and community leaders. This necessitated obtaining official permission from the MOE and the PES.

The second objective was to develop an understanding of the educational context of the two districts in Champasak and Luang Namtha provinces. As part of this objective I needed to identify two initial clusters, one in each district, and to determine whether or not it was feasible to continue the research with these clusters. I also wanted to acquire general information about the initially selected clusters including the number of schools, their locations, their physical infrastructure, their learning facilities, and the number of students.
The third objective was to develop a preliminary understanding of the role of school leaders. I wished to learn about the school leadership teams and to identify and investigate the issues and challenges confronting them in leading and managing schools.

During Stage 1 a fourth objective emerged. My work assignments at the MOE made it apparent that there was a need to develop an understanding of the role of donors in educational decision making and practices. Although I had been granted leave to undertake this research, I maintained my position as a deputy head of the ADB/Sida funded EQIP II/TTEST project. This objective was reinforced during field visits to Champasak and Luang Namtha provinces and is described below.

This research project covers three different locations: the MOE in Vientiane, and school clusters in Champasak and Luang Namtha provinces. To make it easier to understand my research contexts, the presentation of this stage is determined by each location. However, the four objectives above served as the framework for my action at this stage. I was based in the MOE in the national capital, Vientiane but I also visited my potential research sites in Champasak in the south and in Luang Namtha in the north of the Lao PDR. I structured my analysis by writing about the three locations, starting with the MOE, followed by Champasak and Luang Namtha provinces.

My actual travel process was hectic and fragmented, moving from one research site to another. The Lao PDR is a small country but travelling between provinces is time consuming and difficult. Limited means of local transport and poor communication links, as well as the difficult terrain, very poor roads and lack of airports make travel slow, arduous and difficult, particularly in the remote and mountainous areas of the north.

5.1.1 Developing a research relationship with the Ministry of Education

My position in the MOE made my research process both easier and more difficult. Establishing relationships and gaining access to research participants at the MOE was not hard for me, as I already had personal and professional relationships with the MOE officials.

Although I was supported by MOE senior officials and colleagues, I found that the MOE had
difficulty dealing with my dual role as practitioner and researcher. A senior colleague stated that my first return to Laos was well timed because the MOE had just completed a joint annual review mission for EQIP II/TTEST project and I could now help with some of the tasks requested by the mission. Because I was still holding the same position as a deputy head of the ADB/Sida funded EQIP II/TTEST project and still received small salary payments from the Ministry it was unclear to them whether I was an employee or a RMIT doctoral candidate. They were confused about the ethics consent form from RMIT, to be signed by participants (an RMIT requirement) and the concept of Research By Project mode for post graduate research and the use of Practitioner Action Research.

My type of research (Research by Project) was a new academic practice at the MOE. Most MOE officials took long service leave for further study abroad and did not come back to their workplace during their study program. Some people came back for data collection at the workplace but not for working while they were studying. I had to explain the nature of my research to MOE officials, indicating that this research linked the development of professional practice to the workplace. I tried to make it clear that my research was going to be an important piece of work and relevant to the MOE and I did not want my research to be like a consultant’s report. I wanted my research to be practical, involving local school leaders’ voices, and contributing to the improvement of primary education in rural remote areas.

Like other insiders who conduct an action research project within their own organisations I soon encountered the challenge of managing my twin roles: the practitioner and the researcher (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Although I was a RMIT research candidate and I had a letter stating this from my supervisors, I also had to maintain my standing and loyalty to my colleagues in the MOE. In the Lao cultural context, harmony and hierarchy are very important. To maintain a harmonious relationship and to be politically and culturally responsive to the MOE hierarchy and to develop a research relationship at the MOE with my new role as an independent researcher was very challenging, especially when using a western research methodology Research by Project, conducting practitioner action research. I had to draw a distinction between the research imperatives and work obligations. Being both a researcher and a senior MOE official created some stress and tensions. I had to maintain obligations to superiors and colleagues and also meet my research imperatives.

To maintain harmonious working relationships I agreed to carry out two quite large tasks
requested by the MOE. This increased my work load and created stress and some uncertainty as these tasks took time from my research. (It also reminded me that the best plans and intentions in Laos are not always able to be implemented.) At the beginning of this stage I had only planned to establish a research relationship in the MOE and gain entry to my research locations. However, my work assignments, did allow me to develop an increased understanding of the role of donors in educational decision making and practice.

The concept of the EQIP II/TTEST networks was to use an existing cluster school system as a forum for teacher professional networks. This was linked to my research area. And therefore, this assignment provided benefits for my research. First, it gave me a broader understanding of the cluster school system, including its history, structure, issues and problems. Secondly, the exercise helped me to re-establish relationships with other key MOE technical officials in other departments and to gain access to data in the MOE.

If I was an outsider doing this type of research it would be difficult to approach MOE officials in order to obtain approval to work with the participants, especially when I had to cross different departments in the MOE to obtain access to data. This assignment provided the opportunity to cross boundaries within the MOE. Finally, the task helped me gain greater insights into the role of donors in primary education.

To develop the teacher professional networks requested by the Mission also required establishing new forms of collaboration between the Department of Teacher Education (DTE) and the Department of Primary and Pre-school Education (DPPE) and between Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), PESs, DEBs and schools as well as donors. Although the development of the teacher professional networks concept paper was carried out by Lao, the idea and the decision making was initiated by an outsider at the central (Ministry) level with limited consultation at the local level. To contribute to this assignment I had to review data about school cluster systems in the Lao PDR and examine the education management system of the MOE.

The second allocated task did not initially seem to be really productive for my research. This time I was asked to represent my country as a Lao expert attending an Experts’ Meeting on Teaching Competency Standards in Southeast Asian Countries from March 16-17 and a DACUM Workshop on the Development of a Competency Framework for Southeast Asian
Teachers of the 21st Century from 18-21 March 2009 at Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO INNOTECH) in the Philippines. This task actually created more tensions and stress as it again took a lot of time from my research. I had to prepare all the paper work for my trip including travel documents (obtaining decrees from the MOE and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and prepare the papers to be presented and submitted for the conference (a country report on Teaching Competency Standards plus power point slides and a survey form.) Fortunately my knowledge gained from the first assignment became a very useful source for the country report. In terms of my research project however, little was gained from the conference at SEAMEO INNOTECH in the Philippines.

However, writing and presenting a country report gave me additional insights into the role of donors and school leaders in primary education, such as the introduction of the national charter of teacher competency (NTC) in the Lao PDR under TTEST/EQIP II project. The development process of the NTC was led by an international consultant and the central office of the MOE, with limited involvement of the school leaders. The NTC was initially written by the international consultant in English then was translated into Lao. In terms of my personal professional development and international recognition, the trip to the Philippines gave me a good chance to share my knowledge with other experts in the region including Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. (For details, please refer to the country report and the power point presentation on Teaching Competency Standards in the Lao PDR and the insights in the Portfolio, exhibit item 6.)

A dilemma

At this early stage of my research I did not plan to conduct formal interviews because my research project was in the process of ethics application approval. I had some reasonably well-formed ideas about my research focus and the four subsidiary questions. However, once I explained the nature of my research many people approached me and volunteered information. They wanted to talk about my research and their work. I was confronted with a dilemma: should I note this information or should I ignore it? I was besieged by information because I already had formal and personal relationships as well as background information at the MOE. It was hard to pay no attention to the information that naturally came to me through my work engagement and personal relationships at the MOE. Many colleagues volunteered
their views on education, and many of these comments corresponded to my areas of interest and research objectives as well as confirming some of my preliminary understandings about the Lao education context. I used these background comments to confirm my knowledge and develop new understandings and sharpen my research focus. In doing this I have been careful not to identify or report individual comments. For instance, some people were eager to share their views on the role of donors in directing education practice and decision making. For example, one senior official said,

*In the MOE we never had a national education plan; we had to follow donors’ agendas as education development relied on external support and direction. Therefore, the MOE did not have the freedom to set its own educational goals, aligned with the government goals.*

He added, “Nowadays, we work without real plans and we are often pressured to undertake tasks (projects) determined by donors.” He continued by saying, “The MOE needs to set up its own education development goals and purposes which are aligned with the Party and the government goals.” He also argued “We jumped to an international level by using the Millennium Development Goals as an umbrella to improve our education.”

Some officials also claimed that donor funding reached the school level but donors did not have clear, coherent guidelines so they did not know what they were going to improve or where. One official claimed that each donor had its own activities and priorities and sometimes one school received support from three donors and their activities were overlapping. This information was not new to me but gave me good evidence and increased my understanding about the role of donors in the education sector. This preliminary information suggested poor donor coordination and management at the MOE. As a result, donor support in the education sector was fragmented and less effective than it could have been.

Such information and insights were not only useful for my first MOE assignment but also helped to develop my understanding about the existing cluster school system, increasing my knowledge about the context of my research as well as the role of donors. In informal discussions with many MOE officials I discovered that the school cluster system was not as “fashionable” or highly regarded as it had been in the mid 1990s. One senior official said that the donor support for the cluster school system had moved, and donors were now promoting
new concepts such as “Child Friendly Schools” and more recently the “Schools of Quality (SoQ) Program.” On the other hand, many MOE officials were fairly familiar with the school cluster system. Others claimed that the cluster system was appropriate for the Lao economic situation because, “We do not want schools to remain in isolation, especially in rural areas.” For a school with a limited budget, the cluster was a good idea for them to be able to share teaching materials. It was also a good investment if the cluster became an in-service teacher training unit at the grassroots level. We could choose the nearest location to conduct internal training for teachers where Pedagogical Advisors and Resource persons based in the cluster could provide academic support. However, the downside was lack of recurrent budget provision to support clusters to function effectively. For instance, one official stated that school clusters had to seek budget support on their own so they could keep their cluster running. From these informal conversations, I also learned that recurrent budget provision in primary education is a real issue. This information was not new to me because from my work on aid projects; I was also aware about the shortage of the recurrent funds as a result of the decentralization and other related issues identified in my preliminary reading. However, the information significantly deepened my knowledge of the education context.

It was obviously time to escape from tasks assigned by the MOE and the informal flows of opinion to investigate potential research sites.

5.1.2 Preliminary visits to Champasak province

Champasak province is my parents’ home province so I have a personal history there and am fairly familiar with the area. However, to conduct my research I needed to develop an understanding of the research context and build a research relationship with research participants at the local level. They included PES, DEB officials, school personnel and villagers. I needed to think my way into my new role as a researcher. During the preliminary field work I made two trips to Champasak province. The first trip was from 10-17 February 2009 and the second visit was from and from 30 March to 5 April 2009. During these two journeys I visited the PES, the DEB and five primary schools in the Phonthong cluster or kum Phonthong in Phonthong district. I also attended village meetings and a Cluster Trade Union Annual Meeting.
In the Lao PDR, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions is one of the three critical mass organizations that relates to school leaders and is regarded as an arm of the Party. This organization is one of the key organs that “… unites and mobilizes all strata of all ethnic groups to take part in the tasks of protection and construction of the country; to develop the right of self-determination of the people and to protect the legitimate rights and interests of members of their respective organization (National Assembly No.25/NA, 6 May 2003, pp. 2-3)”.

The following sections provide insights and findings gained from my visits which helped me to gain a deeper understanding of my research context.
5.1 The location and characteristics of the district

Map 5.1: Champasak province showing the research site of Phonthong

Source: David McClay
This district is located on the western side of the Mekong River about 15 km from Pakse, the provincial capital. The district borders Thailand and the district centre is around 30 kms from the border. The majority of inhabitants are Lao Tai speakers who share cultural and linguistic similarities with the dominant ethnic group in Thailand (Pholsena & Banomyong, 2006). The district is a significant rice growing area of the province so the main occupations for the population are rice farming and selling, with labourers working in Thailand and Pakse. Although most of the community are farmers, they value education, as is illustrated by their contributions to school infrastructure. Buddhism is the predominant religion practiced in the district and also plays an active role in supporting education.

The district market is the place where local people (including teachers) supplement their income. Here they sell fish and agricultural products.

### 5.1.2.1 The district education snapshot

To compile accurate statistics in rural areas is difficult where there is limited technology and adequate information systems are not in place.

The table below provides an overview of the education context in the district. It is based on statistics provided by the DEB officials and data obtained in this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.1: Key educational indicators in Phonthong district</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2009</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Gross enrolment rate in primary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Net enrolment rate in primary education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Officially at least, the data indicates that the district has achieved an excellent net enrolment rate (97.58%). This indicates that the district has almost reached the goal of primary educational for all. The district also has large percentage of complete schools (58 out of 81.) A complete primary school is a primary school that has a principal and teachers for all grades (Grade 1-5.) If a school size is big, it has a principal and a deputy principal, but usually no more than 3 principals. On the other hand, an incomplete primary school offers fewer than five grades of instruction. Some schools are incomplete because they lack teachers able to teach at the upper grades. Sometimes school are incomplete because they lack classrooms or lack sufficient student numbers. Many of these schools are multi-grade schools. This means that the schools may offer all grades of learning up to grade 5 but there may be only 2 or 3 teachers at the school. For example, one teacher can teach grades 1-2, and another can teach grades 3-5 (Ministry of Education, October 2008).

Theoretically, a cluster resource centre is built in each cluster. In practice only one resource centre was built in one cluster in the district under the EQIP II project, while there are 12 clusters in total. In principle, pedagogical advisors (PA) are responsible for providing technical support to teachers in the cluster, teaching at least 4-6 hours per week as well as

<table>
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<tr>
<th>2009</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Student enrolment in primary education</td>
<td>5,086</td>
<td>4,832</td>
<td>9,918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Student enrolment in secondary education</td>
<td>3,238</td>
<td>2,283</td>
<td>5,521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Number of primary school teachers</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Number of primary Pedagogical Advisors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Number of secondary school teachers</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complete</td>
<td>incomplete</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Number of primary schools</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Number of cluster schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Number of cluster resource centres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower</td>
<td>upper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Number of secondary schools</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
being based at their centre or unit (Ministerial Decree No 146/MOE.DGE/2007, 18 Jan 2007). In reality, there are only three PA to provide academic support to 81 schools in the entire district. It was very demanding for the PA to give sufficient support to schools while they have to teach and work in the office. To strengthen school leadership capacity, sufficient support from the DEB was very crucial. This issued needed further investigation.

As stated earlier, one of my objectives was to develop an initial understanding of the role of donors. I found out that the district and the initially selected cluster had no external support from donors at the time. However, I learnt that the cluster was previously involved in piloting for the “Active Learning” program, an in-service training program for primary school teachers which originated from the TTEST project funded by Sida in 2005-2006. I was familiar with the program because I had worked for this project. It was a 12 days in-service training for teachers and principals focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. The teachers and principals shared practical ways of teaching and learning, interactive methodologies, multi-grade teaching, and basic literacy. This indicates that a donor funded project can bring new ideas into the Lao education system and create positive outcomes during the life of the project but when the project ends, the positive result too often turns out to be the only quick flash-in-the-pan professional development opportunity which local school leaders ever have.

5.1.2.2 The initially selected cluster schools

At the beginning of this stage I planned to select one cluster in the district so that I could work closely with school leaders in this cluster. I decided to focus on the Phonthong cluster because the cluster size and distances appeared manageable for me. In addition, the size of the schools was mixed, ranging from a big school with good access to the main road to a medium and a small school located in more remote rural areas. All schools in the cluster were complete schools and had school principals and deputy principals who were regarded by the MOE as good school leadership teams. All schools visited had very basic physical infrastructure with limited teaching and learning materials and equipment. This cluster comprised 5 complete primary schools including a core school. The cluster was named after the core school, Phonthong primary school, which is the biggest school in the cluster. Its location is on the main road to the Thai border with the four satellite schools scattered on the periphery of the cluster in four different villages. The following maps and pictures provide insights into the general educational context in the initially selected cluster.
Map 5.2: Phonthong cluster

The cluster core school

Legend

- Core school
- Satellite complete school
- Secondary school
- DEB office
- The main road
- Distance

Adapted from map provided by cluster head and based on my own travels. (Not to scale.)
Phonthong school is the core school located along the main road (actually a good road), which makes it easy to access. It has five buildings, two in good condition, the other three (wooden) in poor condition. This concrete building construction was funded by the community and a senior monk.

This wooden building has existed from pre-revolutionary times. It is termite infested and the classrooms have a dirt floor. The community is seeking external funds to rebuild this building.

The school has one hand water pump donated by a Lao-American couple from California on 26 March 2001 (information was written on the water tank) but the school had neither latrines nor a resource centre.
Phonsanh complete primary school used to be an incomplete school, at that time an annex of Kae school. The school was also located along the main road. The school building construction was completed in 2008 with funding from local community, monks and laymen from Vientiane.

The school has no latrines but has a hand water pump. Students prefer to drink fresh water from the ground, which they believe to be tastier than boiled water.

As Kae school previously had Phonsanh school as an annex, it was called a sub-cluster or muad. The school is located 1.5 km from the main road.

It can be seen that every school had a flag pole. This symbol was seen to be important by school and the DEB because it is part of school assessment criteria.
Koung school is another satellite school, situated 5 km from the main road but 6 km from the core school. The school is still under construction aiming to build a permanent concrete building. The classrooms have a dirt floor with no internal dividing walls. The school has no fence, no gate, no latrines or water hand pump and only a few trees.

Chik school is quite remote and isolated because it is 7 km from the main road, but around 8 km from the core school. There are two very dilapidated buildings: an unfinished concrete building and a wooden one, which was built in the old regime. The community is seeking funds to complete their school construction. The school has a good fence and gate but no latrine.

To reach Chik School in the rainy season the river must be crossed by ferry as the water level in the river blocks the road. The village has recently been connected to electricity.

Cluster size and distance seem to be manageable for local students with reasonable access to secondary schools for most students. However, access to secondary school for students from Koung village and upper secondary school for students from Chik village was difficult. For
example, if the students from Chik village want to complete upper secondary school (10-12), they have to go Phonthong village because the secondary school in their village offers only grade 6-9. To travel 8 km from home is very challenging because there is no local public transport available and the road is in a poor condition, especially during the rainy season. There are clear needs for more complete secondary schools, more teachers, and more textbooks, along with sufficient funds to cover the costs of education, especially in the poorer remote areas. This was not only an obstacle for students but also for teachers in the cluster, to their ability to network and share experiences about teaching and learning.

5.1.2.3 Local needs and concerns

The original aim of my visits was to develop a research relationship with the participants and inform them about my research. However, when I was in the field, especially in my native area, it was impossible to stop local people talking to me. I found that the idea of listening, especially to often unheard voices like the local people, was the starting point for my research as well as a very effective way to establish a relationship with the locals and learn about my research context. As a practitioner I had a responsibility to listen to the needs and concerns of the local people. This was even more important as visits by staff from the central Ministry in Vientiane were not a regular event. For example, one school principal claimed that I was the first person from the Ministry to ever visit the school. I found that my emerging research focus project became secondary to the community interests. For instance, when I explained about the purpose of my visit to the community representatives in Champasak province, they gave me a puzzled look at the word “research” (although I did not say Action Research), “PhD” and “decentralization.” I had to explain the meaning of these words. Now I realized that my research was not only about looking for answers for my research questions but also applying western research methodology with the local people in Laos. I learned too, that I had to use simple language, which was easy to understand for the local people.

It soon became apparent from the community’s reaction that my research was not their concern. What concerned them at the moment was to get funding to finish the school and temple construction because they said that other villages had better schools and beautiful temples, and would be regarded as a developed village. A principal reported at the village meeting that the school planning and construction had been a growing issue because the school relied on community contributions. But the community also had to contribute in other
areas of village development such as temple construction, festivals, village road construction, village security guards, and so on.

The community is building a road to their village as well as to their school.

Another concern was school recurrent costs. Although all schools visited were public schools, they received very little funding from the central government. I was told during my school visits that the government was responsible for providing teachers’ salaries and other incentives, such as an allowance for multi-grade teaching. For instance, one principal told me that his school survived on community contributions for recurrent costs. In his village each family contributed 10,000 kip or the equivalent of US$1.20 per year for school operation and maintenance. This is a significant amount of money for a subsistence farming family. (I noted that this issue needed further investigation.)

Another common issue raised by school principals was the delay in distributing office supplies. For example, one principal reported that although the government provided office supplies such as note books, pens, chalk, student attendance and progress record books, etc., these materials never reached his school before the start of the academic year. One of the principals stated that it would be a great help if they were able to receive the student attendance and progress record books at the beginning of each academic year because then teachers would not have to copy everything twice. They could buy notebooks, pens and chalk from the local market but the student attendance and progress record books were not available locally.
5.1.2.4 Hierarchy and the importance of maintaining local harmonious relationships

Although I already had a personal relationship with some local people in the province, it was not so easy to build a research relationship with the local research participants because they continued to see me as a MOE senior official. The local people in Phonthong also viewed me a child and a native of their area who presumably had power and authority. They had high expectations of me and I felt I had no right to upset them. They were excited (and so was I) to see me return to my parents’ hometown for this research. For example, a PES senior official said to me that if I did not develop my own home town, who would do it and she continued to say that local teachers would be happy to meet me because I came from the MOE and my visits would stimulate the local teachers in their teaching and they would feel that they were being supported by the central level. This feedback helped local officials understand my position and support my proposed research. When I reached the district, I once again realized that it was not easy to convince local people to see me as a researcher instead of a senior MOE official. My visits also brought attention from the local people as it was quite rare for the districts to have a visitor from the MOE. For instance, after a brief introduction about my visit plan, out of curiosity, a DEB official asked me why I had chosen to come to his district. I told him because it was my parents’ hometown and I expected it to be representative of lowland Lao villages. He said that he knew people who had the same family name as mine including a deputy director of Phonthong DEB and a cluster head. Again, these quiet, informal conversations were significant because they strengthened a research relationship with the local people so they supported my proposed research.

As noted earlier, my visits to schools and villages were unusual events. As a consequence, I found it even harder to make the local people see me as a researcher because they thought that I had a much more superior role or was more phouyai than them. For example, when I explained about my research plan to school principals and teachers, they did not say much about my research project but they just said that they had no problem following the guidelines from the upper level or khantheung. Teachers and principals felt that they had lower status than me (although we were all civil servants) because they worked at the grass roots level (school) while I worked at the central level (MOE) and had higher educational qualifications.

This distinction became even more apparent when I was invited to attend the Cluster Trade Union Annual Meeting on 16 February 2009 where I was asked to give a speech (which I had
not prepared for.) I thought that attending the meeting would give a good chance to meet all teachers and school principals so that I could make myself known to the local people as well as to learn more about the cluster. I came into the meeting room planning to sit with female teachers at the back of the room but I was invited to sit at the front table, which was arranged for the chair person, principals and guests from the DEB. At the end of the meeting, a meeting organizer insisted that I should say something to the participants because they perceived me as a special guest from the MOE. Again I could not stop the local people from seeing me as an MOE official although I obviously informed them that my role in the cluster was as a researcher. However, I took this occasion to clarify my roles and emphasized how important their roles were for the education development in their community. The meeting made me more aware that many locals are suspicious of outsiders, especially ones from the central government.

Another incident that challenged my role as a researcher at the school level was when the local people saw me as someone who had money and power because I worked for the MOE and initiated research. For example, one principal asked me to buy soccer balls for students to replace the old ones as well as to ask me to help them find external contributors for school construction. I realised that I should not have come here with empty hands even though I was unaware of the real situation. Actually I thought I should treat all schools in the cluster equally and fairly. If I bought some soccer balls for one school, other schools would think that I treated them unfairly and this would ruin my reputation as an MOE official. I understood that they must think I was rich being a MOE official and a student in Australia, a foreign country, and I must earn a higher income than them. These kinds of perceptions and expectations seemed to be a consequence of their previous experiences. However, if I did not contribute, they might think I was stingy and culturally insensitive. This situation also made it clear how much the schools worry about money. Once again I was reminded of the importance of local perceptions because they could create misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations.

The above incidents made me aware that my research journey was riskier and trickier than I had thought. I was made aware again that I had to balance my roles as a MOE official and researcher in addition to the responsibilities that flow from the perceptions that came from my family name and connections, as well as being well-educated and, in all probability, a wealthier member of the community. These occurrences also increased my understanding of
the local educational context. It had become clear that in order to be able to conduct my research and bring about change in school leadership in remote areas, the initial step was to make sure that the local people had a clear understanding of my purposes and that I was aware of their perceptions.

5.1.2.5 Significance of local attitudes and cultural practices

During my time in the district I encountered a number of significant cultural attitudes and practices which provided me with good insights about the local people and my research context. For example, one of the common cultural practices I came across in the district was an annual village religious festival, an important event for the local community. During the festival, children had a school holiday in addition to other national holidays and teacher meetings. Instead of having one day off for the festival, the teachers and students had two days including a preparation day and the festival day. According to the Ministerial Directive No 1373/MOE/96 (17 Oct 1996) on Guidelines for the Management of Kindergarten and Primary Schools, a school is allowed to have three days off for local cultural festival days in addition to other official holidays such as National Day, Women's Day, Lao New Year, Labour Day, Children's Day and National Tree Plantation Day, National Teacher's Day, and International New Year’s Day. The Directive indicates that a school principal and the local authority have to make decisions on these additional days off. In reality, these practices were loosely implemented. These events also drew my attention to insufficient student contact time at schools, which resulted in inequality of education provision. These practices became a new issue for me, especially when all schools in the entire country had to use the same textbook or in other words a centralized textbook or curriculum and presumably provide the same amount of tuition time. But, to me it seemed that the local teachers knew their community much better than I did and recognised the importance of annual festivals and the importance of belonging to their community. It also suggested that local people valued both their community and education.
On a preparation day for a village festival a mother and son are making rice noodles or *khaopun*, a typical festival food.

Although I realised that it was difficult for the local people to understand my research plan and my new role as a researcher, my visits to my potential research site increased my understanding of the local education and my research contexts. The visits also highlighted the importance of listening and talking to local people involved in the educational planning process.

### 5.1.3 Preliminary visits to Luang Namtha province

During this preliminary or orientation stage I also made two trips to Luang Namtha province in order to develop a research relationship with my research participants and develop an understanding of my research context in a very demanding environment. The first trip was from 2-6 March 2009 and the second journey was from 20-24 April 2009. During these trips I visited the PES, the DEB, 9 schools in Xiengeun cluster and villages in remote areas. Unlike in Champasak province I had limited personal or professional contacts in Luang Namtha. I only had a professional relationship with the Luang Namtha Teacher Training School and the PES officials through my work at the MOE. I had never been to the selected district (actually I was very excited to go there.) My research project in Luang Namtha was more challenging than in Champasak because I was not familiar with the local people and the area. The following sections describe insights and findings gained from my visits which helped me to gain a deeper understanding of my research context based on my travels to the province and added to the understandings gained in Champasak.
3.1. The location and characteristics of the district

Map 5.3: Luang Namtha province showing the research site of

Source: David McClay

Map 5.3: Luang Namtha province showing the research site of
This mountainous district is located in the north-west of Luang Namtha province bordering on Myanmar and China. The district was once closely associated with Sipsongpanna Kingdom centred in present day Yunnan, in China. The town has been influenced by Chinese, Burmese and French occupants. The district also has strong traditional Tai Lue, Tai Neua and Ahka cultural connections, as well as being a trade centre the minority tribal groups Tai Dam, Hmong, Mien and Lolo. This ethnic diversity creates a challenge for educational development in the district.

Luang Namtha is not a very big province but travelling between districts is time consuming because the area is remote and mountainous. For example, Sing district is about 60 km from the provincial capital. However, it took me almost two hours to reach the district by car due to the mountainous terrain and poor road conditions (See picture below.) These geographical restrictions also create difficulties for education development, having a big impact on expanding access to education, particularly in these poor, remote and mountainous areas. The majority of the population live in small rural villages and engage in subsistence agriculture. In addition to the remote locations, poverty, gender and ethnicity are all factors in explaining unequal access and participation in schooling (Ministry of Education, October 2005).

5.1.3.1  A district education snapshot
I also encountered similar problems in this district to those in the district in Champasak province. It was not easy to compile data in rural areas due to limited technology and inadequate information systems. The table below gives an overview of the education context in the district based on information provided by the DEB officials and data based on this
research.

Table 5.2: Key educational indicators in Sing district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Gross enrolment rate in primary education</td>
<td>147.1%</td>
<td>114.4%</td>
<td>130.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Net enrolment rate in primary education</td>
<td>93.5%</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Student enrolment in primary education</td>
<td>3,051</td>
<td>2,538</td>
<td>5,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Student enrolment in secondary education</td>
<td>1,041</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>1,791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Number of primary school teachers</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Number of primary Pedagogical Advisors</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Number of secondary school teachers</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>complete</td>
<td>incomplete</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Number of primary schools</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Number of cluster schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Number of cluster resource centres</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>upper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Number of secondary schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like Phonthong district, the percentage of net enrolment in Sing seems high (90%). On the other hand, there is a high proportion of incomplete schools in the district. This data points out the need to research whether the students are able to complete their primary school cycle or not once they enrol. In addition, the cluster size seems very big. There are two big clusters in this district comprising 13 complete and 50 incomplete schools. Based on information given by the DEB and this research, cluster schools were organized into groupe scolaire or sub-clusters or muad with a large complete school at the centre and smaller schools or incomplete schools in isolated areas on the periphery of the muad. A number of muad forms one cluster under the supervision of the cluster head. The head of the cluster coordinates with the head of the muad. The head of the muad is usually the principal of the complete schools. In all areas visited, schools were arranged in this manner where the principal of a complete school was responsible for the satellite incomplete schools. Generally one or two teachers...
were allocated to the satellite incomplete schools depending on the size of the school. Based on information from PES and DEB officials and this research, a teacher who was based in a satellite school was expected to teach as well as to manage the school with support from the head of *muad*. Like Phonthong district there are only four pedagogical advisers (PA.) It appeared to be very challenging for the PAs to provide adequate academic support to all 63 schools mostly located in remote and mountainous areas in the district (I again noted that this issue needed further investigation.)

All schools have very basic physical infrastructure with limited teaching and learning materials and equipment, except that those schools which are involved in the UNICEF funded the SoQ program were better equipped. The government only pays for teacher salaries and some incentives for teaching multi-grade classes and teaching in remote mountainous areas. Like in Phonthong district all schools in this district have to rely on community contributions for recurrent funding (I noted that this issue needed further investigation.) In theory, there was a cluster resource centre for teachers located in the cluster core school where teachers met to plan their lessons and produce teaching materials with assistance from a cluster resource centre manager (See the picture below.) The cluster resource centre manager was appointed to manage and administer the activities of the resource centre. The resource centre manager’s major task was to produce and use a range of teaching materials to increase activity based-learning in classrooms. In practice, due to lack of recurrent funds to support the operation of the resource centre, the resource centre manager did not produce any new teaching and learning materials and teachers had stopped visiting the centre since the introduction of the SoQ Program.

The cluster resource centre is located at the cluster core school. Most previous hand made materials, books and some equipment were covered with dust and were out-of-date. It seemed that the centre had not been used for a long time.
5.1.3.2 Emerging objectives

At the commencement of this stage I did not plan to undertake any research into the role of donors at the local level. However, it was hard not to pay attention to donors because they were evident in the system everywhere and I could neither avoid this issue when I came across it, nor stop the local people talking about donor activities. On the first day I arrived at the PES, I found that all key staff were very busy running around preparing for a quarterly workshop on donor projects supporting education sector activities in the province. This suggested that the PES had to deal with many donor activities. Based on the Plan No 2003 LNT/PES dated 31 March 2009 provided by the PES, there were the lists of donor projects, activities, intended participants, locations and durations. After my experience on aid projects funded by two donors, I could imagine how challenging for the PES to manage those projects dealing with different rules and regulations, reporting requirements and cycles, personnel, and activities from different donors such as ADB, the World Bank (WB), UNICEF, World Health Organization (WHO), European Union (EU), and World Food Program (WFP.) When I perused the Quarterly Plan, I could see that the PES had not developed its own plan and priorities. The plan was driven by different project activities funded by external sources.

Out of curiosity, I asked whether PES officials understood the concept of donor coordination and management. One PES senior official explained that donor coordination meant that different donors were supposed to support different districts so that their projects would not overlap. This indicates that the local people might see donor coordination and management as a method of prevention of overlapping of project locations and clashing activities. This indicates that the implementation of fragmented single projects funded by different donors and weak coordination capacity at the PES level allows donor projects to dominate education practice in the province. For example, currently, my selected district received assistance from EQIP II/ADB, EDP II/WB, UNICEF, WHO and WFP. Among these donors, UNICEF and WFP are the major contributors. UNICEF supported the implementation of the SoQ Program and WFP sponsored a school feeding program in the district (see pictures below.) According to the list given by the PES, only twenty-three schools (out of 63) in the district were involved in the SoQ Program for the academic year 2007-2008. This data indicates that donor support is unevenly distributed. This has become a critical issue at the moment. (I noted that I needed to follow this up.) This information also added to my knowledge about of the role of donors and increased my understanding of the educational context in the district.
If a school is involved in the SoQ program, each class receives a metal box consisting of teaching and learning supplies which is refilled every semester.

The transcript on the box reads “Namai primary school, grade 3 26.12.07; Ministry of Education, Unicef, a case of teaching materials.”

The cooking utensils shown in this picture are provided by WFP to all schools. The kitchen was built by the community. In addition to the food and cooking utensils, the WFP also built a food warehouse and gave a cook and a warehouse man 15kg of rice each month.

5.1.3.3 The initially selected cluster schools

As recommended by the PES and DEB, I initially aimed to conduct my research in the Xiengnguen cluster. In this cluster there were 12 complete schools and 23 incomplete schools while the PES reported 8 complete and 23 incomplete schools. In total there were 35 schools in this cluster dispersed in urban and remote mountainous and ethnic areas. The schools were formed into 12 muad and each muad had its annexes depending on the location of the schools. Generally, each complete school was the core school in a muad where a principal or the head of the muad provided support and leadership to its member schools. All muad satellite schools were incomplete schools offering only grade 1-2 or grade 1-3 or grade 1-4 depending on the size of the village, student population and the availability of teachers. During my first trip to this cluster I visited 7 schools, which consisted of 4 complete and 3 incomplete. The following map and pictures provide insights gained from the school visits.
Map 5.4: Xiengnguen cluster

Legend
- Core school
- Satellite complete school
- Satellite incomplete school
- Secondary school
- DEB office
- Distance
- Muad or sub-cluster
- Muad Namai

Based on interviews with DEB officials, school principals and school heads and my own travels. (Not to scale.)

Note: The time between to travel varies according to local conditions (terrain, weather). It is likely that it would take young children at least 30 minutes to travel 1 kilometre.
5.1.3.4 The initially selected sub-cluster

As indicated earlier, the original aim was to become familiar with my research site and context. Within this aim I planned to identify a cluster in the district so that I could narrow the focus area for my research project. After the completion of my first trip to the district, I realised that the size of the cluster was not manageable or accessible for me. To conduct my research in the entire cluster was too challenging because it required a lot of travelling around in order to cover 10 complete and 23 incomplete primary schools. Due to the location and the size of the cluster and with the time allocation for my research I thought it would be more useful and realistic to focus on one sub-cluster in the cluster instead of the whole cluster (to carry out my research project in two different districts and provinces was already challenging.) I decided to focus on one muad or sub-cluster. I chose to focus on one sub-cluster or muad Namai because the size and location were manageable. I also selected this muad because it is located in a poor rural remote area of ethnic diversity with neither access to electricity nor running water and with limited access to media.

Muad Namai functions as one of the Xiengnguen cluster’s satellite schools (See map 5.4.) In this muad there are one complete and four incomplete primary schools. The complete school is a core school while the four incomplete schools operate as muad satellite schools. These schools are located in four different villages scattered on the periphery of the muad. The core school is the biggest school and other four satellite schools are small schools with one or two teachers. The core school has a principal and deputy principal who are officially considered to be school leadership by the MOE. This leadership team is expected to provide leadership to all muad satellite schools because they do not have school principals but a teacher who teaches, manages and leads the school at the same time. The following pictures provide insights gained from the school visits in this selected muad.
The muad core school

Namai is a core school located 3 km from the DEB and the cluster core school (See Section 3.4 for the picture of the school building.) The school has a large playground for students but there was no latrine or running water or library. As part of SoQ Program criteria, the community and school built reading huts for students. These reading huts are supposed to serve as a place for children to sit and read but the children hardly ever used the huts.

The muad satellite schools

Houayluangpasang is situated about 1.5 km from the muad core school in an Ahka ethnic village. As this school is a one teacher school and the teacher comes from another village, the community built a house for the teacher beside the school building (See Section 3.4 for the picture of the school building.) The house has no lighting or running water.

Chome incomplete primary school offers grade 1-3 instructions with two teachers. The school was located on a flat area in Khamu village, which was about 1.5 km from the muad core school. Based on the MOE standard, the school building was classified as a semi permanent standard with concrete floor, wooden walls and tin roofing provided from funding by GTZ.
Houaylongmai is an incomplete primary school (grade 1-4) with two teachers located about 4 km from the muad core school in an Akha ethnic village. The school has a separate latrine for boys and girls funded by BEGP/ADB project but there is neither running water nor school yard because of its location, which is very hilly (See Section 3.4 for the picture of the school building.)

Houaylongkao is the remotest and most isolated school in the muad situated in the centre of an Akha ethnic village in the mountains. It is only 14 km from the Chinese border. The school is an incomplete school (grade 1-2) with one teacher, located 1.5 km from Houaylongmai but about 7 km from the Muad core school. The school construction was funded by GTZ.

This bumpy, winding, narrow dirt road is the only road that accesses Houaylongmai and Houaylongkao schools. It is very mountainous and isolated with no access to electricity and water. In the rainy season the road is very muddy and slippery and during the dry season is very dusty.
Although the size of the *muad* makes it relatively convenient for me to carry out my research, it is very difficult for children in the satellite schools to complete their primary education cycle. For example, when students from Houylongkao move to grade 3 and 4 they have to transfer to the Houylongmai school, which is about 1.5 km from their village. When they come to grade 5 they have to transfer to the *muad* core school, which is about 7 km from their village. To walk from Houylongkao to the Houylongmai school might take one hour and a half for young children and to continue to walk to the *muad* core school to study grade 5 probably takes half a day. This situation makes it extremely hard for these young children from Houaylongkao school to complete a cycle of primary education where there is no local transportation available, unless accommodation is provided at the *muad* core school or qualified primary school teachers who are able to teach all grades are based in their village so they do not need to travel from home. This condition is also very challenging for a head of the *muad* (principal) to provide support in the satellite schools. (I noted that this issue needed further inquiry.)

5.1 3.5 **Hierarchy and the importance of maintaining local harmonious relationships**

As in Champasak province, in order to carry out my research project I had to develop a research relationship. To do this I had to acknowledge local hierarchies and support local harmony. Again, I was conscious of my dual roles as researcher and a representative of the MOE because it was clear that the local people saw me a conduit to power and authority. I could also see their curiosity about my research and they did come to see that my research was important and could benefit their schools and province. For example, a PES senior official commented that my research was very relevant to the education context in his province because there were many donors implementing their activities, which made it hard for the PES to coordinate the activities. He also suggested that when I finished my research he would like to have a copy of my research so he could learn from my research findings.

As I was considered to be a MOE official carrying out my research project at the local level, the PES assigned one female staff who was responsible for the cluster schools in the province, to work with me during my time at the PES. She was appointed to help me with my research such as arranging a trip to the district and providing information needed for my research (if it was available.) I used this background information to help me learn more about the role of donors and the context of the local education. For instance, she told me that when UNICEF support funds ended, most clusters stopped functioning for three academic years, especially
the big clusters because there were no recurrent funds. She did not understand why UNICEF ceased its support after its long-term assistance in developing the cluster school system. In her opinion, the cluster school system was good because teachers could improve their teaching and learning and they knew how to write their lesson plans. She also stated that the SoQ program which focused on whole school improvement aiming for an individual school to become self-sufficient, broke the cluster structure. I also began to receive a message from some senior officials that my research question on school clusters was not “fashionable” as the “SoQ” or “Child Friendly Schools” scheme had become more significant in donor jargon. However, talking to the PES staff gave me significant insights for my research situation and I could make myself known to the local people.

When I was at the district level, I was once again treated more like a MOE official than a researcher. For example, the DEB appointed a technical staff member to work with and accompany me to schools. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I found out that the further I went down to the local level, the less people understood the purpose of my visit and my research. For instance, when I explained about my research project to a DEB official, he seemed unfamiliar with words I used such as decentralization, action research. When we started to talk about cluster schools in his district, he gave me good information, so I let him speak as the information was related to my research objective. I used this insight to increase my understanding of the roles of donors as well as the context of my research. For example, he told me that a donor had stopped supporting cluster schools and had now shifted to funding the SoQ program. To him it remained mysterious why the cluster schools stopped running because he thought that they were good for regular grade meetings for all teachers in the cluster where teachers participated in lesson planning, sharing of teaching ideas and making teaching and learning materials for teaching different subjects.

My visits to schools were considered to be a rare event which gave principals and teachers quite a shock and surprise. Most of the school principals and teachers in rural remote and ethnic areas were surprised to see me because it was the first contact for them with the staff from the Ministry. For example, like in Champasak, a principal told me that his school had never received a guest from the MOE. Again it became obvious that the principal had not been informed of my visit and I appeared as a stranger with power and authority. The situation was similar to the one I had encountered in Phonthong district when I explained my research to local people. They too seemed unfamiliar with words I used such as
decentralization or action research. For example, when I introduced the purpose of my visit to a school principal, he gave me a very puzzled look when he heard the word decentralization so I explained the definition of the word. Then, he started to tell me about his background and a brief overview of the school instead (I let him speak.) I again made use of this information to develop a preliminary understanding of the role of donors, the role of school leaders and gained deeper knowledge about the educational context. For example, the principal reported to me that his muad received support from UNICEF under SoQ, but the support had, to date, reached only his school while the other four school cluster members had not received anything yet. Another principal told me that her school was part of the SoQ so the school received teaching and learning materials supplies but not operational or maintenance funds.

Although it was hard for the local people to understand my role as a researcher, I received a warm welcome and excellent cooperation from them. This reinforced how valuable it was to be an inside researcher with support from the MOE, where I had the advantage of getting welcome access to data and respondents. I also learnt that I should use simple words and explanations and very limited technology (very often pen and paper) with the local people, otherwise, I would frighten them and they might find it hard to participate in my research. In addition, the research revealed that donor support in primary education was uneven and focused on only capital investment. It was also apparent that the MOE, PES and DEB had limited understanding of the situation in schools or communication with them. I could see tensions between the local needs and the impact of donor activities while school leaders had little involvement in the decision making process. It became apparent that to bring about change in school leadership where teaching and learning is taking place, it is important to recognize local leadership roles and to assist local leaders to participate in the decision making, because school leaders are important change agents.

5.1.3.6 The emerging research issues
Initially I had planned to establish a research relationship and learn about the context of my research site. I did not plan to interview my research participants for this field visit. However, once I visited schools at the village level, it was hard for me not to ask questions about what I encountered, or let the local people talk to me. As in Phonthong district, MOE visits to schools and villages in Sing district were rare events. For example, one village chief told me that it was the first time for him to see a MOE official visiting a school in his village so he
was very happy because *khangtheung* (the upper level) would know the real situation at the local level.

As a practitioner I was able to listen and talk to the local people about their needs and concerns. Although they volunteered information about their problems and needs, many comments corresponded to my research interest and objectives. I used these background comments to confirm my knowledge and develop new understandings about the local education context and the role of school leaders. Talking quietly and informally and listening to what the local people said also helped me to build effective relationships with them. (In reporting this I have been careful not to identify individuals or their comments.)

One of the issues which emerged was language diversity. This issue creates a big challenge for school principals and school leadership teams in dealing with language of instruction for ethnic children. For instance, one principal said that the language diversity created difficulty for teachers to teach ethnic children to cope with schooling, particularly at grades 1-2 as they did not understand classroom instruction in Lao. Another principal said that in his school many children came from different ethnic background including Akha, Lue, Phounoy, Yao, Hmong, Lolo, TaiDam, Tai Deng, Tai Neun, and so on. Ethnic diversity is a big challenge for new teachers of grades 1-2 because they did not understand their students’ languages or cultures. A teacher at an incomplete school in an Akha village claimed that during the first year it was hard for him to teach because he did not know the local language but now (after a couple years in the community) he could speak the language and use the language in teaching when students did not understand the lesson. (I noted that this issue needed to be further examined.)

Like in Phonthong district, many principals commented on the delay in distributing office supplies such as student attendance and progress report books. These materials were never delivered to their school at the beginning of new academic year. This created difficulty for school leadership in managing their school on a daily basis as they needed to provide their teachers with necessary office supplies in order to facilitate teaching and learning.

Another issue is limited recurrent funding. All school principals claimed that they did not receive recurrent funding from the government. The government mainly paid for teacher salaries and some incentives for teaching multi-grade classes and teaching in remote
mountainous areas. Consequently, all schools had to rely on collecting registration fees and community contribution both in kind (labour and materials) and cash for their recurrent budget. It became apparent that the schools suffered from a severe shortage of recurrent funds. These issues made it very difficult for school leadership to keep their schools running from day to day.

Student absenteeism as a result of significant local attitudes and cultural practices was another issue that emerged during this stage. I encountered this issue during my second trip to the initially selected sub-cluster. For example, when I visited one satellite cluster school in Akha village, I noticed that there were fewer students in the class than my last visit. A teacher explained that students’ absenteeism was common during plantation and harvest seasons because parents needed their children to help on the farm. The students came from poor families living in rural and remote areas, relying on subsistence agricultural activities. The planting and harvest seasons are the family’s major and vital production periods. This data suggested that poorly educated subsistence farmers might see the relevance of formal education for their children but also see that schooling creates problems, requiring payments, taking away valuable family labour and making children unsuitable to continue village and farm life. Vorakhoun (29 December 2008) argues that many people believe that increasing access to education will solve problems and reduce poverty, but it is not easy to change people’s practice. When confronted with a choice between education and food, people will always choose food. This issue suggests that it is not easy for school leadership to create favourable education conditions for children in remote areas.

Another emerging issue was the range and complexity of community needs. As in Phonthong district, when I talked about my research project to local community leaders they often did not completely understand my research objectives but they told me about what they needed instead. For example, a village chief in Akha village told me that what the village urgently wanted their school to get access to electricity to facilitate the adult literacy class in the evenings. In his opinion, he wanted more people in his village to become literate so they could help him with the village administration work such as collecting land tax. He said electricity would bring civilization to the village. I could see that, despite my explanations, the local people did not have clear understanding about my roles and purposes. However, I was pleased that the local people spoke to me openly probably thinking that I had power and authority to help them. Although I found out that it was quite hard for the local people to
understand my research plan and my new role as a researcher, they were very keen to welcome me to their community and to talk to me.

My first field visits provided significant gateways and insights for my research. I gained preliminary understandings of my research context and participants, which were to make important contributions to my knowledge of the local educational context, especially the school leadership context. In addition, potential respondents came to know and welcome me. They might not have clearly understood the nature of my research but I was welcomed by colleagues and the local people and I developed the confidence to carry out my research in the two provinces. This preliminary field work also helped me to realise how important my research was to the MOE and to schools leaders in rural Laos (discussed in more detail in Stage 3.) It also provided important insights into my role as a practitioner and provided signposts for further reading and personal professional development. Although I worked for the MOE I had to admit that I lacked firsthand experience in rural remote areas. Many consultant reports made references to problems and issues of education in remote areas. These reports, combined with my first brief visits to Champasak and Luang Namtha, gave me some limited insights, but I could not feel the real challenge at the local levels. My visits opened my eyes to the reality of the education situation in remote areas, such as problems faced by teachers, issues associated with cluster schools and incomplete schools. I also came to understand the vital role of principals and leadership in school development. The problems and challenges which were identified and the comments made in official reports now became more real and understandable to me. In Laos we have a proverb saying that “Seeb parkwao borthortahen” or “Hearing ten people saying something is not equivalent to seeing it with your own eyes.” Preliminary readings and context analysis were very useful prior to the field work and helped me to contest and confirm my knowledge. I considered my trips extremely valuable in focusing my research and determining the issues to be followed up in the next field visits. And as a consequence, they helped me clarify and frame my plans and intentions for on-going research in Australia and subsequent field work.

In addition, I gained a better understanding of the tensions between practitioner and researcher. I was torn between the needs of the MOE and the Lao education system (particularly school leadership) and the realities of research and found it extremely difficult to deal with these tensions. Although I had some understanding of the nature of my research based on my reading and discussion with supervisors prior to the field work, it turned out that
the reality in the field was very challenging and tricky. It also became increasingly apparent that although I might be reasonably clear about my roles, many of the people I met were not interested in my problems or concerns, they were (understandably) focussed on the needs of their schools and children. I could see differences between the MOE needs, donor imperatives and the local perceptions and expectations. While the local people perceived me as someone with power and authority, I had to maintain my professional responsibilities to the MOE as a permanent staff member. I found that a major challenge was to bridge the gap between the central and the local levels.
5.1.4 Reflection

By the end of this stage I had four objectives. These can be summed up as:

- developing and maintaining research relationships with research participants;
- developing an understanding of the educational context of Phonthong and Sing districts;
- developing a preliminary understanding of the role of school leaders; and
- developing an understanding of the role of donors.

In order to ensure that the discussion was manageable, I organised my reflections according to these objectives. At the end of this stage I outline my plans for the second field round of work in the Lao PDR.

5.1.4.1 Developing research relationships with research participants

I started by reflecting on my personal relationships with research participants at the central (MOE), and local (PES, DEB, school and community) levels. To develop relationships with the research participants, two main notions were reinforced during the first cycle of my research project. These concepts were:

- the importance of harmony and hierarchy at the MOE
- hierarchy and the importance of maintaining local harmonious relationships

As discussed earlier it was not difficult for me to establish a research relationship with participants at the MOE because I already had personal and professional relationships. In other words, I was known professionally and personally, but not in my new role as a serious researcher. To develop a research relationship with my new role as a researcher the importance of harmony and hierarchy was emphasized. To harmonise my working relationships I had to maintain my reciprocal responsibilities to the MOE. The MOE required continued high involvement and active commitment to the EQIPII/TTEST project as the researcher has been and continues to be a participant in the organization. Apart from my formal responsibilities, I also have obligations to superiors and colleagues in the MOE as well as my family. For example, I was assigned to represent the MOE at an international conference, at donor reviews and workshops, to interpret at the meeting and so on, whilst at
the same time meeting research imperatives. The research role is more isolated, more theoretical, demands greater objectivity and is often much more challenging than I had anticipated (See Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

Although the above tasks and tensions created stress and some insecurity in my research journey as well as increasing my work level, I received cooperation and support from the MOE for my research project. As the outcome of my position at the MOE my research project was approved was by the Director General of the Department of Teacher Education (DTE) on 7 Jan 2009 and I received the Ministerial Decree number 79/MoE.DTE/2009 dated 14 Jan 2009 (see Portfolio Exhibit 1). It is the MOE’s requirement to obtain a Ministerial Decree or khortoklong in order to conduct any activities. In our system, the Ministerial Decree with a red stamp and signature is a very important document. It not only showed that I had received formal permission from the Ministry but I also had support and cooperation from my organization. The decree was seen as a legal support document which provided security and trust for both researcher and participants and respondents. To obtain the Ministerial Decree would be not so easy for outsider researchers who might not understand how important the decree was, particularly when the research sites were in public schools.

Harmony and hierarchy were emphasized at the MOE and were also important at the local level. This was reflected in the process and communication of my permission to conduct research. Although I had the Ministerial Decree I needed to send each PES an official announcement letter or nangsiuchaengkan. It was the MOE practice to send out the official announcement signed by the Director General of the MOE Cabinet with reference to the Decree, to the PES prior to the commencement of any activities carried out by a MOE official including my trip to Champasak and Luang Namtha provinces. This practice was a sign of showing respect to the local levels and keeping them informed, as well as a form of protection for me and the local people. Once the PES received the official announcement, then they would inform the district levels and hopefully the message reached the school levels. Again this was a custom which was commonly practiced where channels of communication flowed from the centre to the local levels respectively and vice versa. This pointed up the issue of communication and the levels of bureaucracy.

A courtesy visit is also another form of showing respect for local hierarchy and maintaining local harmonious relationships. I started my field visit to each province with a courtesy visit
to each PES and DEB before I travelled to schools and villages. In the Lao PDR it is a common custom to pay a courtesy visit to the PES and DEB respectively before visiting schools. My visits to the PES and DEB would lay down a framework for cooperation and collaboration with the PES and DEB for the following visits and would make it easier for me to talk with the local people. I had learnt this custom and protocol from being a MOE official, and understood that these visits were always an effective strategy. This type of visit was not only a form of showing respect to authority and seniority, but also a form of establishing relationships and securing networks with local people. I could view my journey like Pholsena who described her trip to research sites at a village level: “I went down from the capital to attain the village. It was not merely a geographical displacement-I went through the hierarchy of power, from the centre to the periphery, (Pholsena, 2006, p. 9).” My visits from the central ministry not only crossed provincial borders but also inner boundaries within the MOE. Some of my inner boundaries were also crossed. Although it was an early stage of my research project, I could not stop the local people from seeing me as a MOE official rather than an independent researcher. For the local level, especially at school levels I appeared to be a conduit to the education hierarchy. This often meant that I was invited to give a speech and provide guidance into current official thinking. I was also expected to make some contribution to school improvement. In addition, I had to sit down and listen to their needs and concerns. These activities helped to establish my credibility and develop harmonious relationships with local research participants.

Some methodological issues and implications emerged during this stage. First, one emerging concern about my choice of action research is being an agent of change. Although I have approval from the MOE to conduct my action research project, it is not easy for me to influence ongoing action for change because I do not have legitimate power or authority. On the other hand, local people may see me as someone with power because I work for the MOE and had initiated the research and they expected some change. However, to bring change in school leadership is a complex issue because it involves both power and authority relationships and decision making at and between the central and the local levels.

Role duality also emerged. Undertaking research in the By Project mode and adopting the practitioner action research was a new academic practice at the MOE. A combination of this type of research is very challenging because action research is also new for education management in the Lao PDR. Although it was an early stage of my research it was quite hard
to keep my twin roles balanced and to make people understand these roles. Tensions emerged when I returned to Laos in January 2009 to undertake preliminary research. Despite letters from my supervisors and my superior, it was assumed by many colleagues and some of my superiors that I had returned to work and that my research was very secondary. It was expected that I would slot back into my former roles. A trip to the Philippines to represent the MOE was an example. To conduct this research project at schools in rural remote areas is even harder. I clearly saw how school leaders viewed themselves as *phounoy* or inferiors who could not be decision makers (or even influence decisions) and treated me as *phouyai* who had power and authority. For example, I was invited to give a speech at Phonthong cluster meeting, at the MOE I was asked to interpret at EQIP II/TTEST Joint Annual Review Mission meeting. I became aware that the different perspectives between the central and local levels on my role would continue to create tensions.

The ongoing process of reflection inherent in the cyclical process of action research as well as time spent at RMIT University involving continuing reference to literature and discussion with my supervisors has helped me to clarify my twin roles. I became increasingly aware that it is challenging to go through this process because I was engaged in different research, work and day-to-day living contexts moving between Laos and Australia; between the workplace and home and the university and between two different research sites at the local level in Laos. Once I had immersed myself in each context I often felt reluctant to return because I was concerned about the needs of people in each context and my responsibilities to them as a member of the MOE and as a researcher.

### 5.1.4.2 Developing an understanding of my research context

During this stage my understanding of the research context developed. I started to recognize the similarities and differences between Sing and Phonthong districts. First, the two districts have similarities in terms of their economic situation. The two districts are predominantly rural with an agriculture-based economic structure. However, the initial research data suggests that Phonthong district is wealthier than Sing. For example, many houses in my research site in Sing district were grass houses scattered in the mountain while in Phonthong districts most villagers lived in more permanent housing of wooden or half concrete and wooden houses.
Second, all schools in the two districts tend to have basic educational facilities and physical infrastructure. No schools in the Phonthong cluster and muad Namai have libraries and have only limited supplementary reading materials. Most teaching and learning is still board focused and mainly relies on textbooks provided by the MOE. Students sat in rows and the most common activity was listening and repeating. Two schools (out of 5) in the Phonthong cluster had water pumps while none of schools in muad Namai had access to clean water. Most schools I visited in both districts had no latrine, except for one school in muad Namai (but no running water.) Most schools had no access to electricity. While only two schools in the Phonthong cluster had access to electricity, none of schools in muad Namai had electricity. Third, all schools in the initially selected cluster and muad are public schools but received very little funding from the government in order to run their schools. The data shows that recurrent funding is a real issue in both districts. At this stage it became apparent that lack of recurrent funding was related to Lao taxation collection and distribution procedures and the very low national tax base. This data was not new to me. Because of my work on aid projects and my preliminary reading I was aware of the shortage of the recurrent funds. However, this information confirmed my knowledge of the education context.

Third, local community support for school leaders in the two districts is enormous, particularly in the Phonthong district. (Effective and supportive school leadership was seen as important in all communities.) Although local communities in Sing district make some contribution to support school leaders, it should be noted that the community contribution to education in Phonthong district is higher than Sing. Even if it was an early stage in my research project the data clearly reveals that it was noticeable that major school construction in the initial selected cluster in Phonthong district is funded by the local community, reflecting the greater relative wealth of that community. It was also clear that all schools in both districts rely on community contributions for school operation and maintenance. (Community support for school leaders will need further investigation at a later stage.)

Fourth, communications are a challenge for schools in both districts, especially schools located in rural remote and mountainous areas. Poor communications leave school leaders in isolation with limited support from senior levels. It should also be noted that Sing district is more distant from Vientiane in terms of communication networks. School leaders do not receive adequate current educational information and senior levels are not well-informed about school leaders and the school situation. The limited knowledge of decentralised
education policy of school leaders was an example. Poor communications also create a gap between the central and local levels. This gap leads to poor policy implementation as the central and local levels do not have common understanding or share a common educational view.

The fifth and final similarity is the impact of significant local attitudes and cultural practices on student absenteeism. In Phonthong district students tend to stay home during their village religious festivals. On the other hand, student absenteeism is common during planting and harvest seasons in Sing district where the majority of students’ families depend on upland rice cultivation to survive. This requires a large amount of labour and most families rely on all family members to assist, thus reducing the opportunities for children to attend school. Saiyachit (2008) also observes that there are no official or professional salaried jobs in the ethnic minority communities; people are farmers, they survive on what they can get from nature. She continues to argue that they produce food for their everyday living, growing vegetables and rice and finding food in the fields, forests and rivers. There is a real challenge for school leaders to encourage ethnic parents to send their children to school to support the government policy of achieving Education for All and provide relevant knowledge to students for their survival and the economic and social development of the country.

In addition to the similarities between the two districts, there are a number of significant differences between them. The first difference between Sing and Phonthong district is its geographic location. Sing district is located in the mountainous north of Laos, which makes travel difficult and time consuming. It also shares a border with Laos’ powerful neighbour - China. On the other hand, Phonthong district is in the south located on the western side of the Mekong River and next to Thailand. The landscape is flat so it is easy to access. Pholsena & Banomyong (2006) maintain that in the north of the country, small provincial towns now receive a continual flow of Chinese cultural influence and visitors while the capital and the towns of south have cultural and economic influences from Thailand, especially in urban areas and along the Mekong. Cultural influences from Thailand are strong because of the widespread popularity of Thai media such as TV and magazines. The official data and the initial research show that Sing district is remoter and more isolated than Phonthong.

Ethnic diversity is the second difference. The dominant ethnic group in Phonthong district is Lao Tai, which is also the predominant ethnic group (65%) in the Lao PDR while in Sing
district the population is a mixture of low, mid and high land Lao (See the composition of ethnicity in the Lao PDR in Chapter 2.) This ethnic diversity also creates language diversity. The lowland population in Phonthong district are Lao Tai speakers whilst in Sing district ethnic groups are Lao Tai, Austro-Asiatic, Hmong-Yu Mien and Sino-Tibetan. The language and ethnic diversity create a greater challenge for school leaders in Sing than Phonthong. In Luang Namtha province more than 50 percent of the population is comprised of minority ethnic groups (Ministry of Education, October 2005). This ethnic diversity creates huge disparities between provinces and districts in terms of national education progress. For example, in provinces with more than 50 percent ethnic minority population, net enrolment rates are below 75 percent compared with 84 percent for the other provinces, and completion rates are below 50 percent compared with over 60 percent for the other provinces (Ministry of Education, October 2005). The evidence clearly shows that the ethnic diversity continues to be a serious challenge for education development in the Lao PDR. The data also implies that language diversity has an impact on student performance. In schools of ethnic minority groups, the Lao language is the language of instruction, but is not the mother tongue of the ethnic students. This might be an important factor influencing the students’ learning (Saiyachit, 2008, p. 95). This language diversity becomes a big challenge for school leaders and all teachers in Sing district, especially in poorer, remote ethnic communities.

The high proportion of incomplete schools is the third distinction. For example, in Sing district 50 schools (out of 63) are incomplete schools whereas in Phonthong district only 23 schools (out of 81) are incomplete schools. A large number of incomplete schools are considered to be one of causes of significant differences in drop-out rates across the provinces. According to Education for All mid-decade assessment, the drop-out rate in Champasak province is 9.3% while in Luang Namtha it is 12.4% (Ministry of Education, October 2008). The evidence shows that the existence of many incomplete schools remains a challenge for primary education. Conversion of incomplete schools to complete schools is complex, depending on projected population size, availability of teachers and classrooms and the availability of funds to pay for possible additional teacher salaries and construction costs (Ministry of Education, October 2008, p. 58). The geographic, economic and population constraints of many small villages in Sing district has resulted many small incomplete schools being situated at some distance from each other. The distance from the nearest complete school where there is no local public transportation available makes it difficult for children to complete their primary education cycle, for example, for students from Houaylongkao to be
able to complete their primary education, they have to change schools to study grade 3 & 4 at Houaylongmai and change again to continue their grade 5 education at Namai school. It takes at least half a day to walk from Houaylongkao village to Namai village. Like in the Education for All mid-decade assessment, this data too found that distance to school is one of the major reasons for never attending primary education (Ministry of Education, October 2008).

In addition, the geographical size of Sing district (1,650 square kilometres) is smaller than Phonthong (15,415 square kilometres.) However, Sing Cluster is much larger due to the large number of incomplete schools. In Sing district there are 63 schools and two clusters while in Phonthong there are 81 schools and 12 clusters. To form functional school clusters was a difficult task for local communities and the district in Sing. Even though this was an early stage of my research, the data suggests that the large number of incomplete schools in the district combined with long distance, poverty, geographical constraints and limited recurrent fund for travelling costs and fluctuating donor support made it hard to form functioning clusters. The observation clearly shows that the application of the cluster school system in rural areas proved to be difficult where there is very limited support, particularly in remote mountains. This has been observed by a number of researchers including Bredenberg in a preliminary audit of the cluster school in Lao PDR and strategic recommendations and the TTEST project’s operational study on school clusters: management, professional development and classroom teaching (See Bredenberg, 2005; Teacher Education and Administrator Development Centre, 2004).

Donor support is the fourth difference. While Sing district received support from a number of donors, Phonthong district had no donor support at that time. As the role of donors became an emerging objective, this issue will be discussed in section 4.

The discussion on similarities and differences between Sing and Phonthong districts has relevance for my research project. With the insights gained from the outcomes of this initial field work, and discussion with my research participants and with time to sit back and reflect, I realized that my initial research design was too ambitious: conducting research in two districts in two provinces was clearly more than adequate. From the MOE perspective I still thought it would be valuable and relevant to undertake research in different parts of the country in order to gain an understanding of how the Lao education policies applied in very different places. Even though it was the beginning of my research it had become clear that
schools in different districts and regions demanded different resources and facilities. It is very challenging for the MOE to develop responsive education policies and appropriate training for school leaders to work in a range of contexts as each school faces different challenges. Dealing with language and ethnic diversity in Sing district is an example.

5.1.4.3 Developing a preliminary understanding of the role of school leaders

My understanding of the role of school leaders had developed. First, I came to realise that people were not familiar with the term school leaders in the Lao educational context. In the Lao language the word leaders or *phounam* is usually related to a political leader who has authority, power and influence. The term in Lao for school leaders is *phounampha khonhonghien* and refers to school principals and vice principals. When I told MOE officials and colleagues that my research focus was on strengthening school leadership capacity, all of them immediately saw school principals and vice principals as school leaders. This understanding was the same in Phonthong and Sing districts. Principals and vice principals were considered to a school leadership team. In *muad* Namai, my initially selected sub-cluster, there are a principal, a deputy principal and three school teachers. These teachers are based in incomplete schools and in reality, have to teach, manage and lead schools. In theory, the principal at the *muad* core school has to provide leadership and technical support to teachers in the satellite member schools. In practice, these teachers are not officially recognised as school leaders and, as a consequence, these school teachers are often removed from any official information flow.

Northouse (2007) argues that the person assigned to a leadership position does not always become the real leader in a particular setting. When others recognize an individual as the most influential member of a group or organization, despite of the individual title, that person is demonstrating emergent leadership. Actually, those school teachers in *muad* satellite schools have to manage and teach in the school at the same time. On the daily basis these school teachers lead and manage the school and teach (usually multi-grade teaching) and undertake a range of community responsibilities. For the purpose of this research project school leaders are school principals and school teachers who are assigned to teach and are based in a small incomplete school. These teachers are also seen as important figures in the local education
system. (My preliminary field visits supported this contention.)

Second, even thought it was an early stage of my research, I could see that school leaders in Laos tend to play a passive role in educational policy development process. I found that school leaders were not familiar with the term decentralization or other fashionable donor driven educational trends. School leaders had very little knowledge about decentralization or student centred learning or multigrade learning because there had never been well-developed policies and information sessions. As a consequence, most school leaders felt ignorant as they were never really or clearly informed. The data suggests that school leaders understand that they have to followed directives from the senior levels. The problem for them is that these directives are rarely delivered consistently, coherently or effectively. It seems that the current centrally planned and initiated decentralization has provided an ambiguous, if not contradictory, context for school leaders to exercise their leadership. It is very crucial for both central and local levels to understand their reciprocal duties and responsibilities for effective decentralization and other national educational reforms.

Third, principal’s skills and capacities have become an emerging issue. Many officials questioned the capacity of principals to manage schools effectively and saw the need for instigating improved training of school principals. For instance, a senior MOE official claimed that most educational projects have supported training on technical or academic matters (for example, in-service for teachers) but not training for educational managers or management teams. She continued to say that due to limited knowledge and low qualifications, school principals did not have a vision for education. If they did not have a vision and they did not understand Lao education policies and change, how they could formulate strategies to develop their schools? It became increasingly obvious that there is an urgent need for school leadership capacity building, which motivated me to conduct further investigations. It is clear from this preliminary research and informal discussions and conversations with colleagues and time to reflect that, school leaders play an even more important role in developing and managing schools effectively in the Lao educational context. They need increased support and training to make an even greater contribution to teaching and learning in Laos.

The role of school leaders is significant for school improvement. The principal is the crucial implementer of change; any proposal for change that intends to alter the quality of life in the
school depends primarily for its implementation on the principal (Gorton, Alston, & Snowden, 2007, p. 179). Cohn & Rossmiller (1987) also suggest that one element of an effective school is strong instructional leadership provided by the school principal, other administrators, or teachers. The principal is in a unique position to fill this role and his or her support is crucial. They also suggest that the principals’ instructional leadership role has increasingly gained importance while his/her managerial role has reduced in importance. While much of the literature has emphasized the important roles and responsibilities of the principals for effective schools, the Lao education system has not paid much attention to building their school leadership capacity or remunerating them, instead their limited knowledge and ability have been questioned.

This preliminary research has drawn my attention to the school leadership capacity problem. It was increasingly clear that school leaders are poorly informed about their roles and responsibilities, and poorly resourced to perform their tasks in order to run schools for better outcomes, particularly in rural areas like in Sing and Phonthong districts. I also started thinking about other possible challenges or constraints that prevented them from performing their tasks and what kind of skills and support they need in order to help them fully perform their roles and responsibilities.

5.1.4.4 Developing an understanding of the roles of donors

One significant consequence of taking time to reflect was that I was beginning to see that donors play a crucial role in directing planning and practice in primary education in Laos. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have become an overarching framework for development in the aid industry. In theory they direct a focus in aid funded projects and programs on poverty reduction. All major aid projects and programs at the MOE are designed to align with poverty reduction and achieve universal Education for All (EFA) including the EQIP II project funded by ADB, the TTEST project funded by Sida, the Second Education Development Project (EDP II) funded by the WB and so on. One senior MOE official claimed that MOE officials were often pressured to undertake projects determined by donors.

While I was writing I could not help but recall and reflect on a talk given by a former vice-president of the World Bank at the international conference on New Metaphors for Leadership.
in Schools that I presented at in Melbourne on 30 September 2008. The topic of the talk was “The Urgent Need for New Approaches to Global Problem-Solving and the role of Education Institutions.” He claimed that many urgent global problems were left unresolved. These problems included dangerous climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, fisheries depletion, water shortage, poverty, global financial stability and biotechnology research. He suggested that one of these problems that relates to the education sector was poverty reduction. The speaker also argued that fighting poverty was a serious issue and EFA was the best tool to solve poverty reduction. Nowadays many developing countries including Laos are striving to achieve the EFA goals. Even at this early stage I started to see that Lao education is influenced by external change agents’ activities and donors’ strategies. This preliminary research identifies that the donor system is ideologically driven by goals of social transformation. Typically it promotes western management styles and strategies based on systems thinking, believing that change can be predicted in advance and is measurable (Mowles, Stacey, & Griffin, 2008) but which are not necessarily sympathetic to local communities, their needs and aspirations. The donor system has become burdened with a plethora of new western management terms. For example, after the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2 Mar 2005) and the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (29 Nov 2006), a number of terms were stressed or introduced, such as capacity development framework, result-based approach, programme-based approach, sector development framework or sector wide approach and so on, which mean very little to many Lao education managers or school leaders. The new donor trends imply that traditional, stand-alone projects supported by different donors are no longer in favour. Yet this research clearly suggests that this approach is still common and continues. This rhetoric and the tensions it exposes and creates needs further investigation, especially in terms of its impact on school leaders.

Another important outcome of my reflection was that donors tend to keep introducing new educational fashions and jargon into primary educational policy, planning and practice. For instance, the cluster school system has become out of fashion in the school sector. The new donor approach or trend is the SoQ program supported by UNICEF. One DEB official in Sing district said that cluster schools had been replaced by the Child Friendly School initiative and now we had the SoQ Program. Since the cluster school system stopped being supported, my research question had, according to some at the centre, become less relevant. Based on this, I started to trace back and reflect on the many concepts or terms used in Lao education practices, which were introduced through aid funded projects. For example, the cluster school
system was introduced by the World Bank 1998-1990. The National Charter of Teacher Competency was initiated in 2004 by the TTEST project funded by Sida. Under the TTEST project, Active Learning was piloted in 2005-2006 in the Phonthong cluster and later expanded to six provinces under the EQIP II project funded by ADB. Recently, a Joint Review Mission between MOE, Sida and ADB suggested the establishment of Teacher Professional Development Network, which my colleagues and I are working on. Based on this scan of the data I began to realise how directions in primary education were clearly imposed by outside influences through aid funded projects or initiatives. These findings attracted my attention to continue my further inquiry.

In addition, even though this was an early stage in my research project, my reflection revealed that donor support for school improvement is patchy. The implementation of SoQ and the school feeding program is an example. While Sing district has received support for donors on SoQ and the school feeding program, donors are not active in Phonthong district. It was understandable that donors and the MOE have target districts for support. These contributions have created variations in schooling circumstances including school facilities, availability of learning and teaching materials between communities, district and provinces. Bergmann (2002) claims that the effectiveness of projects and programmes can be improved by integrating them into coherent national development and sector strategies that are supported and implemented mutually by the host country and the donor community.

While it is easy to suggest the development of sector strategies as a possible solution to improve and support the work of the donors, it is an extremely complex task for the local people because this new approach requires knowledge of and knowledge management within the education sector, while most personnel of the MOE, PES, DEB, including school principals, are usually teachers who are promoted from the ranks. In addition, due to a lack of systematic and accessible knowledge of sector management, local educational leaders are not familiar with this approach and, as a consequence, cannot utilise it. Moving toward a national sector development strategy plan developed by the host country and conforming to its priorities requires time, effort and cooperation among international development partners. I also started to see some tensions between donors and the MOE in supporting primary education and I started to think that there might be no single recipe for donor-MOE cooperation because each has its own specific interests and objectives that might or might not be relevant to the needs of schools and their leaders and communities.
At this stage I was gaining a better understanding of the many challenges that school leaders face and the complexity of the leadership context in the Lao PDR. The challenges and complexity emerge from distance, poverty, especially poor schools in rural remote areas, locally significant cultural practices, language and ethnic diversity and donor initiatives. In order to address and pave the way forward for children’s education in remote areas local school leaders are often working in a complex and disconnected context; they lack adequate school recurrent funds; they also tend to lack capacity and equipment and have to manage multi-tasks in poor working conditions. Many school leaders live in isolation from the education hierarchies and with limited access to current information and are often removed from central educational expectations.

The above reflections provide a basic foundation for further investigation in the following stage – Stage 2. In particular, I plan to:

- maintain and develop a better relationship with research participants
- continue to develop a deeper understanding of the research context
- gain a greater understanding of the roles of school leaders in leading and managing school effectively
- gain a better understanding the work of donors in contributing to uneven development of school leaders and schools.

In addition, this reflection or sense-making process has convinced me to delete my initial interest in decentralization and the educational value of school clusters. It became apparent that there was little interest by the bureaucracy in clusters and decentralization had become an issue of limited debate and almost no implementation or action. Perhaps, even more importantly for this research, the scope had become too large and overly ambitious. It had become time to more sharply define the scope and focus of the next stage.
Stage 5.2
The second field work in the Lao PDR
(November 2009-February 2010)

In Stage two I had four objectives - two enabling objectives and two major objectives thus:

Enabling objectives
1. Maintain and develop relationships with research participants
2. Continue to develop a deeper understanding of the context

Major objectives
3. Gain a greater understanding of the roles of school leaders in leading and managing schools effectively
4. Gain a better understanding the roles of donors in contributing to the uneven development of school leaders and school

These objectives shaped the structure of this mini chapter. However, as the role of school leaders and donors assumed greater importance in this second stage, the contextual issues are discussed in terms of these two major objectives and this emerging objective. Accordingly there are three major parts to the first part of this chapter.

5.2.1 Maintain and develop relationships
5.2.1.1 At the Ministry of Education
My intention was to maintain and strengthen my relationships with research participants at the MOE established during the first round of field work. I continued to work harmoniously within the MOE. To do this I had to respect and acknowledge the existing hierarchical structures and contribute to the productive interpersonal relationships that are important to Lao culture. As an insider researcher I therefore continued with my reciprocal obligations to the MOE although I had the Ministerial Decree, ethics approval as well as my supervisors’ letter, all authorising me to conduct my research project. My responsibilities, duties and tasks within the MOE on top of my academic research, once again increased my work levels and created stress and some uncertainty for my research journey. (My family and supervisors started to worry about my energy and stress levels.)
For example, one of the allocated tasks was to assist in running a workshop on piloting the establishment of teacher professional development networks in three target provinces: Vientiane, Luang Namtha and Champasak provinces. This task was a follow up activity to a concept paper I had developed for the MOE during my field work in Stage 1. Another task was to assist the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) in drafting the TTEST Project Consolidation and Sustainability Plan which was requested by the Sida Joint Annual Review Mission 15-30 October, 2009. I took this opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the role of a significant donor. The insights gained from the assigned tasks will be discussed in section 5.2.3.

5.2.1.2 At the local level
I also planned to maintain and strengthen my research relationships with local research participants, continuing to respect local hierarchies and maintain harmonious relationships with my research participants. As in Stage 1, I could not stop the local people seeing me as an MOE official although I clearly (and often) indicated that I was an independent researcher. Based on my previous visits to both districts, the local people saw me as a friendly, approachable outsider with authority and power. For example, when I attended a principals’ meeting at the DEB in Sing district on 19 November 2009, the MC introduced me as special guest from the MOE, saying my full name and position at the MOE, even though I sat with principals from 2 clusters in the district while a DEB deputy director, DEB officers, PPAs sat at the front table. However, I took this chance to gain a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of school leaders and their working contexts as well as learning how the DEB provided support to school leaders. The insights gained from this meeting will be discussed in section 5.2.2.2.

Like in Sing district, I attended three school meetings in Phonthong district where I was considered to be a guest from the MOE. I was invited to give a speech at each meeting. I had not expected to be asked to give a speech or make comments on issues at the meetings, but I could not ignore requests from the school leadership teams.

Ajian could you say something to our teachers and community as you are here to make them happy and stay in touch with khantheung (upper level), asked a principal.

I replied,
I have not prepared a talk and I just came to observe how you conduct a meeting.

Just a short comment, please, insisted the principal.

As a practitioner I could not refuse in such a situation. The school leadership team needed my support in front of their teachers and community. I was seen as link between the MOE and schools. This was not the first time. I had encountered the same experience when I first attended a cluster trade union meeting the previous year (Stage 1.)

Another practice that I adopted to maintain and develop relationships with the local people was to donate sports equipments such as soccer balls, volley balls and rattan balls to schools I visited in both districts. I had learnt that all schools lacked sports equipment for their extracurricular activities. In return, when I gave each school in Phonthong district some sports equipment, a principal and teachers gave me some snake beans and rice from their farms and fresh coconuts from their gardens. These agricultural products were a source of income and I was aware that they worked hard with low salaries and incentives. In this situation I could not refuse because it would not be culturally appropriate to reject their gifts. This practice indicated that I was welcomed by the local people and my relationships with them were harmonious.

5.2.2 Gain a greater understanding of the roles of school leaders in leading and managing school effectively

To help me gain a greater understanding of the roles of school leaders, I further examined challenges and factors that hindered the school leaders from carrying out their duties. I also investigated how school leaders attempted to overcome these challenges. I was overwhelmed by the number of issues and constraints faced by school leaders. However, I was very impressed at how school leaders and the community as well as local authorities worked hard to keep schools running and contribute to education development depending on their capacity and resources. It was becoming very apparent that my data was sometimes consistent and sometimes contradictory. To organize the data and to assist in understanding the role of school leaders, I categorised the data as it related to the three Lao locations: at the MOE, Sing and Phonthong districts.
5.2.2.1 At the Ministry of Education - MOE perceptions and strategies

Official functions based on the government decrees and regulations

My starting point was to analyse the official roles and responsibilities of school leaders. This was more difficult than I thought, for while there was a significant amount of official documentation, there was no single consolidated document. There were also differences. For example, the MOE Guidelines for Management of Kindergarten and Primary Schools (Ministerial Directive No 1373/MOE/96, 17 Oct 1996), listed nine rights and functions of a school principal.

1. Implementing directives from senior levels (e.g. DEB, PES and the MOE) effectively.
2. Leading political mobilization of teachers and students
3. Leading the implementation of technical/academic aspects
4. Leading the management of school
5. Leading the implementation of extra curricular activities
6. Leading the management of finance and physical infrastructure including equipment
7. Leading the management of students affairs
8. Leading the community and mass organization
9. Supporting and facilitating district and provincial Pedagogical Advisors (PAs) in improving quality of teaching and learning in school and promote regular internal pedagogical activities at school (translated by the researcher.)

In 2001 the MOE developed a training manual, the Primary Principal School Management Manual, using UNESCO funding. This manual was officially endorsed by the Ministerial Directive No 847/MOE.UNESCO/01 (8 Jun 2001). It identified three functions and four roles for a primary school principal. The three functions were: facilitating and promoting teaching, ensuring smooth operation of the school and working with community. Under this training manual a school principal was expected to play four major roles: being a pedagogical advisor, a school manager, a school daily administrator and a community campaigner.

In 2006 the ADB funded another project, Basic Education for Girls Project. This project developed another training manual which added seven new management functions. These seven management functions were: (1) academic management, (2) personnel management, (3) student affairs management, (4) infrastructure management, (5) office and financial management, (6) relationship between school and community management and (7) mass organization management including the Women’s Union, the Youth Organization, and the Scout Organization (Ministry of Education, June 2006).
Over time different documents have been developed to serve different objectives but they share some similarities. For instance, the seven management functions that were the key indicators for effective school leadership and management were also used in another donor funded project, the SoQ Program. The SoQ identified six dimensions: (1) Inclusive of all children; (2) Effective teaching and learning; (3) Healthy, safe and protective school environment; (4) Gender; (5) Local ownership and community participation; and (6) Effective school management and leadership (Willsher, 2008). In contrast, the Ministerial Directive No 763/MOE.DGE/07 (10 Sep 2007) endorsed the establishment of the Model School Program. The program aims to improve school management and teaching and learning. The standards for the model school decreed that a school leadership team had to:

1. build solidarity within the school and community;
2. write annual, semester, monthly and weekly plans (these plans became observable indicators of the principal’s work although the quality of plans was not emphasized);
3. conduct regular internal pedagogical activities and staff assessment as specified in the seven management functions;
4. organize fund raising with the community to improve school and manage school funds;
5. be enthusiastic in establishing a school parents association;
6. be enthusiastic in participating in cluster school system activities (if there are cluster schools);
7. promote female participating in education, child rights and gender equity;
8. organise security guarding to ensure peace within school;
9. commit to political ideology and be able to distinguish friends and enemies.
(Translated by the researcher)

It became clear that many staff at the school level were either unaware of much of the official documentation or confused about the different emphases. The data from this project indicates that the education system had many additional expectations of principals that they had to meet in order to manage bureaucratic, social and political and donor expectations. This had a number of implications. For the principals and the Lao education bureaucracy this made their tasks even more confusing and challenging. As a researcher, it was difficult to realistically define the roles and responsibilities of the principal and school leaders in the Lao educational context. In addition, there appeared to be no recognition of the leadership role of a teacher who is based in an incomplete satellite school while he/she had to deal with teaching and managing a school on his or her own, on a daily basis.
Data from MOE interviewees

There was a wide range of views on the roles, performance and responsibilities expected of school leaders. For instance, three MOE officials claimed that, in support of the government’s decentralization policy, principals were currently implementing the seven major management functions. These management functions were frequently reinforced at the MOE level. The principals were expected to assume both managerial and pedagogical roles. For example, a senior MOE official commented,

_The principals should be good planners and advisers. The principals also need to be internal pedagogical advisers who master academic matters such as curriculum and teaching so they can solve teaching problems for teachers._

Another senior MOE official said,

_Principals have limited time working at schools because they had to do their administrative job, work with their communities, the village Party unit and other mass organizations and attend meetings at the DEB. They also have to attend the Party or Trade Union organizations and village meetings and activities._

The data showed that school leaders not only acted as educational bureaucrats but also had a political and social role. The responsibility to the mass organizations added an extra layer of responsibility to most school principals.

Data from consultants

Educational consultants emphasised different roles and responsibilities and they had high expectations of principals. For instance, an international education advisor based in the MOE in Vientiane revealed,

_There are not many donors left in the education sector. A new challenge for school leaders would be the introduction of the SoQ program, which would be one model operating more broadly. The role of principal will change because Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) and school will operate the school together. The principal’s role is more focused on pedagogical aspects than management. The VEDC will develop a school improvement plan._

The expectations were from an outsider perspective, driven by a consultant who did not speak Lao and was based in Vientiane most of the time. This consultant knew little about the reality in schools so might have a very limited understanding of the nature of the work of the principal at a school in remote areas. (This lack of knowledge did not stop the consultant from
expressing his/her views rather forcefully.) This perspective also contradicted local expectations of the roles and responsibilities of the principal from local educational hierarchies who understood that the seven management functions for school principals were still valid. Based on this finding I decided to undertake a small inquiry with other international consultants who had worked in Laos for a long period of time about the role and responsibility of the school principal. I found that their perceptions and opinions varied. For example, a senior foreign consultant suggested,

_In my opinion the principal’s work should centre upon school administration and management and curriculum and teaching and academic matters within the school, but in many countries too often the emphasis is on administration and management alone. The challenge for the principal is to come to a clear understanding of what a school is, how it is made up of a number of interlocking systems, and how each of these systems must be attended to if the school is going to be an effective educational institution._

Another senior consultant said that a school principal might perform the following tasks,

_Manage and coordinate the educational, administrative and financial affairs of a school, develop approaches to management and policy within broad governmental guidelines in conjunction with the school council..., manage staff recruitment and training and perform teaching tasks._

These perceptions articulated by the international consultants seem to be informed by their own education systems and work experience, which may not always be relevant to Laos. Based on this research, it is very critical that the MOE articulate clear expectations of school leaders, and that donors hire international consultants who have a sound understanding of the Lao educational context. The data also suggests that a consultant’s technical advice or input was not necessarily relevant to the Lao educational situation. In addition, this employment practice could also be ineffective if a consultant worked with an MOE official counterpart who also had limited understanding of the reality in schools in rural areas. In this environment it is likely (as we have seen) that the outcome of their work might not be relevant, realistic or responsive to actual needs at the school level.

5.2.2.2 School leadership challenges in Sing district

The story below illustrates an example of a school principal’s life who is appointed to work in an Akha village. The village is located in a remote mountainous area in Sing district in Luang
Namtha province. This story was drawn for my research during my trips to Sing district between 16-20 November 2009 and 21-28 December 2009. This story demonstrates the principal’s personal and professional responsibilities and provides a context for the main discussion in this section.

**Khou (teacher) Kongkeo**

*Khou Kongkeo* is a deputy principal in a primary school in Sing district. He graduated from Luang Namtha Teacher Training School with a qualification of 8+3 certificate (eight years of schooling and three years of teacher training.) He was a teacher for six years before being promoted to being a deputy principal. Today *Khou Kongkeo* left home early because it is Monday morning when students and teachers have to salute the national flag and sing the national anthem before classes start at 8.00 am. Although *Khou Kongkeo* is a deputy principal, he has to teach every day (grade 4) while a principal only teaches 7 hours a week.

He also helps his principal with some administrative work at school. For example, he conducts peer observation among teachers and discusses feedback after each observation. He also organizes some extra curricular activities with students such as teaching students how to sing and organizing students to do mid morning exercise sessions, planting trees or flowers and collecting rubbish around the school.…

Two months ago *Khou Kongkeo* was approached by the DEB asking him if he wanted to be a principal in a primary school in an Akha village, a newly established complete school (grade 1-5.) He was recommended by his principal to the DEB. The principal is a senior Party member at the school. After almost five years of service as a deputy principal, *Khou Kongkeo* could not refuse this unexpected promotion. His new position would bring prestige and pride to his family because being a civil servant with a title and position means a lot in rural remote areas. He thought he was very lucky because other deputy principals have been in the same position for more than 10 years or even all their lives. He accepted the position because it was the only way that he could move up in his career path. Today while he was teaching, a principal came to his class and told him that

> Nong, (younger brother) you have to go to the DEB office now because the Ministerial Decree for your new appointment has arrived.

> Yes, Ai (older brother) but I am in the middle of teaching my students how to work out a mathematic problem, replied *Khou Kongkeo*.

> Don’t worry. You can ask your students to do self study or khonkhua and I’ll supervise your class, the principal suggested.

> Thank you very much Ai, said *Khou Kongkeo*

*Khou Kongkeo* was given a copy of the Decree and a school performance assessment. The DEB also gave him some instructions on how to manage a school and wished him good luck. Two weeks later *Khou Kongkeo* on his old Chinese motor bike, left his two young children and a wife for his new position. He had never been to the village and he could not speak the local (Akha) language. The school was about 30 km from home located on a mountainous slope. Although the distance seems manageable, it is a hard journey and costly for him to ride his old motorbike between the school and home everyday, so he promised his family that he would come home every weekend. With a monthly salary about 600,000 kip (US$75) and a position allowance fee of 8,000 kip (US$1) a month, *Khou Kongkeo* thinks that he cannot afford to travel every day. To help *Khou Kongkeo*, the community built him a small grass hut near the school for him to stay and gives him some rice. There is no electricity and running water. The school is very isolated but the community is very supportive.

With limited training on school management in his new position at muad core school, he is not
only responsible for school operation on a daily basis. He also has to teach grade 3 students
every day because there are not enough teachers. He chose to teach grade 3 because the
students understand his language (Lao) reasonably well. The other two teachers also have a
teaching load. Each of them has to do multi-grade teaching such as grade 1&2 and grade 4&5. At
night they have to run an adult literacy class for parents because during the day time the parents
work on their farms. It is very poor community with low level of literacy.

Every day Khou Kongkeo is so exhausted from his teaching that he does not have much time for
his school management. He cannot provide technical support for his satellite member schools in
the muad. Sometimes he has to leave his class to attend meetings such as a village Party unit or
to attend a meeting at the DEB. Sometimes he has to go to town to collect his and his teachers’
salaries. During the harvest season, he has to help his family work on their farm collecting rice.
As a family head he is a major source of labour for his family’s income generation. At night
sometimes Khou Kongkeo thinks that he should have remained in his previous position and
stayed with his family in town but when he thinks about the ethnic children in the village he
reflects that he should stay and help them because they are future of the country.

This story shows that school leaders face a wide variety of challenges in order to carry out
their duties. The challenges emerge from the local context for a very demanding position, the
confusion about roles and responsibilities, limited support for the position, supporting
teachers, supporting students, dealing with the mass organizations and working with local
community. The following sections discuss these challenges and suggest some strategies for
school leaders to overcome the challenges or constraints.

**Local context for a very demanding position**

Local school leaders in Sing district work in a complex, demanding situation. This difficult
context emerges from two main factors: a large range of responsibilities and lack of resources.
These factors have a huge impact on their positions as they take a large amount of time from
their routine work. The following discusses these issues.

All school leader participants in this research claimed that they had to teach and manage their
school at the same time. A principal claimed,

*This year I am asked to teach 7 hours a week. I am also responsible for teaching The
World Around Us subject. Every month, I receive 18,000 kip (US$2.00) for teaching
fee and 8,000 kip (US$1) for my position allowance on top of my base salary (US$50).
In the past, I was asked to teach but I could not because I had so many tasks. I also
teach when a teacher is sick or busy with important business such as harvesting the
rice, attending meetings or training.*
Based on this participant’s information, I decided to find out more about principals’ teaching loads. The teaching burden came from a range of factors. First, it was a result of the decree that mandated that the principal had to teach. A DEB senior official explained,

*The reason why principals have to teach is because we don’t have enough teachers and now there are also teacher position (honorific) titles. If the principals want to receive the titles, they have to teach.*

The Prime Minister’s Decree No 208/PM (30 July 2007) on teacher honorifics, was to reward teachers who made the most effective contribution nationally. There were two levels of awards: a “national teacher” title or *khouhaengsaad* and a “teacher of people” title or *khoupasasonh*. Furthermore, there was another reward program for teacher positions based on the Prime Ministerial Decree No 209/PM (30 July 2007). The purpose of the awards is to provide salary enhancement to teachers who demonstrate a particular level of expertise. The awards are categorized into four levels: - experienced teacher, skilled teacher, expert teacher and senior expert teacher (See the portfolio exhibit item 6 for a discussion of salary enhancement for each level and assessment criteria.) The emphasis in both decrees was that the honorific would be a motivating factor for teachers and planned to ensure that teachers in remote areas also received benefits. The problem was that there was no salary enhancement for principals. A person who received one of these titles remained in their teaching position. This finding implies that salaries and incentives for principals were not sufficiently attractive and not much different from teachers. In addition, some principals have poor living conditions in rural remote areas. (See the picture below.)

This is a principal’s house in an Akha village. A school in the village was newly upgraded to be a complete school so a new principal was appointed to the school. Because the principal came from another village the community built his accommodation. The house has neither light nor running water.
Secondly, the teaching burden was exacerbated by a shortage of teachers. A newly appointed principal reported,

_Theoretically in our muad I have to teach 7 hours a week, but in practice I teach 8 hours a day. I have a teaching load so I don’t have time for school management tasks. Regarding personnel needs, we can propose solutions but the problems are not solved because there is no quota for new staff._

In reality, to recruit a new teacher, school leaders could only assess their needs and make a recommendation to the DEB; they could not make a decision as to whether a new teacher was to be recruited or not, because they did not know if there was a quota or funding available for their school. And very often the DEB cannot recruit new teachers.

Third, the teaching load was increased with the requirement to conduct adult literacy classes. A young male school teacher at an incomplete school in an Akha village claimed,

_During the day time I teach children and in the evening I run an adult literacy program for parents from level 1 to level 3. It overloads me to do two jobs and I don’t have much time for relaxation._

This data clearly indicates that being a school leader in a rural remote community where most parents were poorly educated is a very demanding job. The school leaders had to teach not only students but also educate their parents. To help the district to achieve education for all by 2015, teachers and principals had to run adult literacy programs in addition to their normal teaching during the day time. The principal had to be a leader in teaching literacy classes and working closely with the community. Teaching adult literacy requires different skills from teaching primary students, but they had to do it because they were the most educated person in the remote community.

This situation made it hard for principals and teachers to concentrate on the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning because they were often overloaded with other teaching tasks. In addition to these teaching responsibilities, school leaders were dealing with unpredictable and unplanned tasks, which were often not related to teaching and learning at all. One principal claimed,
Sometimes the DEB calls me to help with school data, especially during the beginning of the new semester. Sometimes the DEB wants data about School of Quality. Yesterday I was suddenly called by a Pedagogical Advisor requiring me to attend a meeting. Every time I go to a meeting, I receive a new task.

This study suggests that principal job expectations were broad and, often, unforeseeable as they were expected to perform ad hoc tasks requested by the senior levels. This working context creates additional responsibilities and tasks for principals.

Apart from a wide range of responsibilities and tasks, there was a lack of resources. The lack of resources forced school leaders to find a range of strategies to help to secure them. Again this task added another level of complexity to their job and required a substantial amount of additional time and effort to further develop school infrastructure, teaching and learning materials and obtain recurrent funding. School leaders in this research project often informed me that they were expected to emphasise improving the school’s physical infrastructure, such as building reading huts and extra classroom, and toilets. A newly appointed deputy principal claimed,

*We need a classroom for grade three students because grade 1&2 and grade 4&5 are using the two available classrooms that we have. We are trying to ask the community to build an extra classroom but it is hard because they are poor farmers.*

The following picture shows some of the school infrastructure built by school leaders and the community. These physical features are part of SoQ performance indicators.
Previously this satellite school (building on the right) offered grade 1-4. This year it was upgraded to be a complete primary school (grade 1-5) so the school leaders and the community built an additional classroom (picture on the left.) A new principal was appointed to the school and a former school head was promoted to be a deputy principal.

In addition to poor physical infrastructure, there are limited learning and teaching materials especially for multi-ethnic groups. The challenge is complicated when Lao is not the students’ first language. Second, there are very few textbooks and even more limited supplementary materials to support the implementation of national curriculum. None of the schools in the selected *muad* had a library. Many school leaders reported that it was hard for them to follow the national curriculum. A teacher at an incomplete school claimed,

*We don’t have equipment to teach art and handicraft and music subjects so we only teach students to sing songs and tap their tables and dance instead.*

A principal commented,

*We have a shortage of sport equipments such as soccer balls and sepak takraw (rattan balls.) We sometimes borrow this equipment from the Village Youth Organisation. This year our school could buy only a soccer ball, using the community contribution because the community put a lot of money to install electricity into their village. This job is very expensive for the community and they helped us to install the electricity in teachers’ dormitory and school.*’’

The data suggests that school leaders have to struggle to find strategies to facilitate teaching and learning at their schools. In order to meet these challenges school leaders and teachers improvise and use local materials and skills as illustrated in the picture below.
Besides limited teaching and learning materials, there is a lack of recurrent funding. This issue was raised in Stage 1 but it is important to address it again as it has emerged as a major issue in primary education. This problem prevents many school leaders from fully performing their duties as they have to secure funding to manage their schools. For example, a principal said,

> Our schools relied on collecting informal registration fees and community contribution both in kind (labour and materials) and cash for our recurrent budget. To keep the schools running each household contributed 5,000 kip per year (equivalent to US$0.62).

A school teacher reported,

> Most of my community members are poor, especially those families who just moved into the village. These new villagers are itinerant so they mainly contributed labour to the school. The permanent villagers are better well off because they have rice fields and they are the ones who quite often donate money to school.

Based on my research project and curiosity, I undertook further investigation at the local DEB office. One senior DEB official explained,

> In theory the DEB is supposed to share the recurrent costs to primary schools but in practice the DEB received a small amount of the budget funds and sometimes there is not enough to cover all proposed plans. Therefore, the schools have to rely on their communities through informal registration fees for school operation and maintenance costs.

The above data clearly indicates that lack of recurrent funding is a major issue in primary education due to low public funding of education. This also creates a challenge for the DEB to
provide sufficient support to schools. Without adequate funding the DEB itself is not able to fully perform its role in supporting schools.

**School leadership confusion about roles and responsibilities**

School leaders’ perceptions of their roles and responsibilities indicate inconsistency and confusion. School principal participants perceived that their primary roles and responsibilities focus on technical/academic and management functions. These roles and responsibilities were divided among a school leadership team usually consisting of a principal and a deputy principal. While the deputy principal was assigned to focus on technical or academic or visakan matters and extra curricular activities, the principal was responsible for overall technical affairs and management aspects including working with the community and mass organizations. Their perceptions seem to contradict the MOE Guidelines for Management of Kindergartens and Primary Schools (Ministerial Directive No 1373/MOE/96, 17 Oct 1996) and the Ministerial Directive on the establishment of the Model School (Ministerial Directive No 763/MOE.DGE/07, 10 Sep 2007). While the Guidelines and the Directive emphasized the nine functions for school leadership team (See section 2.1), school leadership participants in this research claimed that they had heard of seven management functions for school leadership teams but could not articulate them. More importantly, the data indicated that principals could not explain how the seven functions could be used to inform their practice. For instance, one principal reported,

> According to what I learnt I have many roles, but the seven management functions are the most important. Each function consists of many mini tasks.

A young newly appointed vice principal added,

> I know that we have seven main functions but I cannot remember them all. I have a book in the cupboard.

This research suggests that this confusion is exacerbated by insufficient preparation, information and support for these leadership positions. There seemed to be no systematic formal training made available for school leaders to get to know the nature of their roles and responsibilities prior to the commencement of their positions. Once school leaders were appointed, most of them learnt how to manage and lead their school on their job. One principal claimed,
We have training about teaching and learning but we didn’t have training on school management. We know that there are seven major tasks of school management. We only read those tasks by ourselves and understand them in our own way.

The current circumstances make it hard for school leaders to exercise their leadership because they were rarely informed about the changing expectations of education authorities or the skills and knowledge needed in order to carry out their roles and responsibilities. This situation was even more challenging for school teachers who taught in and ran an incomplete school but were not recognized by the system as school leaders. A school teacher in an Akha village said,

I didn’t have an orientation course before my appointment. I was only given a copy of a teacher duty assessment form.

Leadership responsibilities were even more difficult for a newly graduated teacher who was allocated to run an incomplete school in a remote community because she/he was not well-prepared to work in such environment. In addition, the teachers in incomplete schools had similar roles and responsibilities to complete core school principals. Although, in theory, it was the principal in the core school who should lead the incomplete school, it was the school teacher who actually managed the school on a daily basis.

The data from this research indicates that there seems to be no systematic policy or procedures for initial and on-going school leadership training for school leadership positions. It also appeared that school leaders received insufficient support from senior levels to help them carry out their duties. A typical response from the DEB to a question about local leadership issues is the following:

Normally this document was distributed to all schools except newly established schools. You don’t have to take notes because they are all in the book. What is the principal’s duty? The MOE scheduled time allocation for the school’s seven management functions. Now what muad are following this schedule? You should look again. Comrades, you need to have a look at the document again, remember it and put it into action. (Extract from my journal at the principals’ meeting on 19 November 2009)

This kind of comment was indicative of the lack of any great assistance to school principals who were struggling to improve management and educational outcomes in their schools. It
may also indicate that the DEB official was unsure about the roles and responsibilities of school leaders. If the seven management functions were still official and relevant and if they are to be implemented, DEB officials need to ensure that all principals understand all the terms in the book distributed to them. The evidence suggests that there was limited understanding and application of the Guidelines. It was also clear that the DEB had limited capacity to assist school leaders.

**Limited support for the position**

The following is an account of a principal’s relationship with the DEB. The story was based on a principal’s technical meeting at a DEB office on 19 November 2009. The principals had all received only one day’s notice to attend. A total of 27 principals and nine DEB officials attended the meeting. The agenda was not available for the participants in advance so they were not clear about the meeting’s aim, procedures and expectations. The meeting was facilitated by the DEB officers including four PPAs. To attend this meeting the principals had to fund their own travel and some of them had to ask their teachers to teach their classes. The story also highlights the main argument in this section.

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**Khoun Inpeng going to a meeting at the DEB**

Today was quite unusual. Khoun Inpeng had to attend a meeting at the DEB. He did not know why the DEB suddenly called all principals to a meeting because the principals’ monthly meeting is usually held during the first week of each month. Because of the rapid technology development of the mobile phone coverage, Khoun Inpeng could not be absent from the meeting. This meeting was a quite an important meeting, as explained by the chair of the meeting,

> "Today’s meeting is considered to be a high level meeting for educational administrators in our district because you are all in the most important position at schools."

The meeting was chaired by the DEB deputy director and facilitated by PPAs and DEB technical officers. Khoun Inpeng and all principals were told by the meeting organizer that the major focus of this meeting was on technical issues. At the beginning of the meeting, a DEB officer gave Khoun Inpeng and his fellow principals a monthly food distribution report form to be filled.

> "I would like you to report on School Meals Programme supported by the WFP using this form. Do you have any questions about the form?" asked the DEB officer.

> "No," replied all the principals in chorus.

Then a Pedagogical Advisor continued to facilitate the meeting outlining SoQ issues.

> "Now we want you to pay attention to the school environment issues. The school environment must be in line with the criteria of schools of quality. These criteria will be become overall standards for primary schools of quality in the Lao PDR and at the moment they are implementing in 11 provinces. When a PPA or technical staff member conducts regular monitoring, there are some improvements but when we do not visit schools, things are the same. Why? A model school is selected and teaching and learning materials were given. If you do not continue to improve, the schools of quality will disappear. School principals need to
increase their responsibilities.”

A female principal who sat next to Khou Inpeng whispered,

“Ai (older brother), what do you think about my school?”

“Your school is nice and clean. I think your school is better than any other schools in our cluster so far”, replied Khou Inpeng.

“I heard that many people blamed me and said that my school was not good enough to be a model school and I could not do my job. They said my school playground was still dirty and grass needed to be cut, continued the female principal.” (Note that the focus is not on teaching and learning.)

While most DEB officers and PPAs did the talking, Khou Inpeng and his fellow principals only listened and had no comments. Although all the principals were asked to sit in a U-shape, there was no group work for Khou Inpeng and his colleagues to share and discuss issues they encountered at their schools. When the meeting moved on to the management session, a DEB officer did a quick revision of the principles of the school management and leadership. Once he started to talk about this topic, all the principals were quiet and Khou Inpeng spoke softly to a female principal who sat next to him,

“The DEB should give us an appropriate guidance and advice. Other principals are not interested in this topic because they already know this. If we are too strict it is not so good. Perhaps they don’t know a real situation at schools because they hardly ever visit schools. Sometime they visit a school once a year.”

While the PPA continued to emphasized,

“Principals must be better than teachers because you are an academic officer, a manager as well as an advocate for education. Comrades are internal pedagogical advisers but we are external pedagogical advisers.”

At the end of the meeting, a DEB officer read out the rules and explained about educational personnel and what teachers should not do. The DEB officer also told the principals to read more about these rules in the Education Law. The principals were also asked to disseminate this information to teachers during a teacher council meeting at school. Ten minutes before the end of the meeting, it was time for principals to raise questions or issues and give comments about the issues discussed at the meeting today. Suddenly, Khou Inpeng raised an issue of a sports competition during the teaching time.

“Mr chairman, I think a sport competition shouldn’t be organised during the teaching time because teachers are pulled out from their teaching and remaining teachers have teaching loads.”

“We cannot change anything because the competition is organized by the District Administration Office”, replied the DEB officer.

There was nothing that Khou Inpeng could do about the sport competition but for sure today he received more inputs, feedback, orders or tasks to be completed by the next principals’ meeting.

Theoretically the DEB provides three types of support to school leadership teams. The first activity is through a monthly meeting where the DEB invites all principals to present a report on their school’s monthly plan, including achievements, issues and the plan for the following month. The meeting is mainly focussed on management issues. The second support is a
technical meeting or *kongpasum visakan*. The aim of the technical meeting is to focus on teaching and learning aspects. The third activity is through PPAs’ visits and supervision. The PPAs were originally based in the DEB but in some districts, including Sing, they are based in separate centres. They are funded by the DEB and are accountable to the DEB. Officially the PPAs’ role is to support schools and individual teachers to improve teaching and learning.

In practice, none of the three types of support appeared to be very effective. The principals’ monthly meeting was usually held on 2nd of each month where all school principals came to present their monthly report and plan and the DEB gave feedback and suggestions on their plans. Based on the reports, the DEB then compiled all information and reported to the PES. This data suggests that senior educational authorities view school principals as an arm of the DEB and consider that the principal’s central work should be focused on managerial tasks. This perception is supported by lack of acknowledgements in MOE documentation.

The technical meetings in Sing district were typical of meetings at the district level. Such meetings only occurred when the DEB had some urgent information to disseminate or when there was an urgent issue to be addressed. For instance, once during my time in the field all principals in the district were suddenly invited to attend a technical meeting on 19 Nov 2009 at the DEB office. As stated earlier, all principals in the district had only one day’s notice to attend this meeting. The principals did not know the purpose of the meeting as the agenda was not available in advance. It seemed common practice to pull out principals from their duties to attend meetings and existing teachers had to cover their teaching tasks.

**Comparison with a principals’ network meeting in Melbourne**

During this meeting I could not help but think about a principals’ network meeting, which I attended on 22nd October 2009 at Laverton Primary to Year 12 College in Melbourne. I noticed some significant differences in contrast with the technical meeting held in Sing district. First, the meeting was conducted in a collaborative way where principals, assistant principals, the regional director, network leaders and technical staff met to discuss and share issues and problems. For example, one of the topics of discussion was the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy data in their region (Western Metropolitan Region) as well as in their network. The discussion was facilitated by the regional director where all principals had discussion in groups on the issues and impacts on their schools and classrooms. During the discussion Principals discussed curriculum issues, situations in their
schools, challenges, professional learning plans for their teachers, how effectively instructional leaders dealt with changes…etc. In other words, the issues might have been similar, but the facilitation strategies were very different. And this is important. Good management behaviour should be modelled at senior levels so that it might be implemented at the school level. There was clear support and leadership involvement in this network – the senior level was contributing to improved leadership performance.

On the other hand, the technical meeting in Sing district was more controlled and little time was devoted to understanding the current difficulties experienced by the principals. Most DEB officers and PPAs did the talking while the principals only listened and answered questions and had only a short time to share their opinions or to ask some questions at the end of the meeting. Although the principals were asked to sit in a U-shape, there was no pair or group work for principals to discuss and shared issues they encountered at their schools. This feature of the meeting also suggests a significant aspect of the nature of Lao education with its emphasis on listening or receiving input with very limited questioning about what was taught or heard. In addition, this characteristic was an indicator of Lao hierarchical relationships and Lao education structures. According to Jazzar & Algozzine (2006) this type of relationship and structure fits within a hierarchy of authority where all positions are placed according to the principle of hierarchy with lower stations reporting to higher ones. In this context, schools were considered to be the lowest level of education organization and school leaders perceived their role and status lower than the DEB officials so it was hard for them to challenge or confront the higher authorities.

Secondly, the main focus of the principals’ network meeting in Melbourne was professional learning for the school leadership team, including principals and assistant principals. The role of the regional office was to build leadership capacity with the emphasis on the practice of good teaching and learning in order to lead an effective school. In addition, the regional office tried to help principals to become leaders in teaching and learning and to contribute to positive learning outcomes for students. Although a regional director and a network leader were facilitating the meeting, it was open and interactive. The majority of time was spent on professional learning while only 30 minutes was assigned for managerial issues or other matters at the end of the meeting.
The purpose of the principal network meeting was part of actions that was drawn from a regional Blueprint for School Improvement and Effective School Model. The region had developed its own Blueprint for School Improvement, which was commonly used as an action for school improvement. In contrast, although the technical meeting in Sing district was meant to mainly focus on the technical issues, the actual meeting combined dissemination (from the centre) of information on new assessment policy, managerial issues and technical aspects including assessment matters, revision of principal roles and responsibility and other issues.

The role of the DEB was to tell principals what to do and there appeared to be no specific program designed to build capacity for school leadership teams in order to help them carry on their duties effectively. From my observation the principals came only to receive more bureaucratic inputs, feedback from the top down, and orders or tasks to be completed. But Lao and Australian school leaders voiced a number of similar concerns including management approaches/directives and on going budget problems.

Third, the principals’ network meeting in Melbourne was funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Each school took a turn to host the principals’ network meeting and the regional director and the network leader travelled to facilitate the meeting. In addition, there were also funds for a guest speaker to talk about current issues in school to help the school leadership obtain new information related to professional learning, such as how to use an intelligent white board effectively. The topic was an interesting and relevant topic for principals and assistant principals, as they had 21st century learners and needed to know what training their teachers needed. On the other hand, there was no fund to support the technical meeting in Sing district. The DEB facilitated the meeting based on its own limited understanding of school improvement with limited access to current educational knowledge. Unlike in Victoria, the principals had to support themselves to attend the meeting.

Limited support for the position (Continued)

I decided to undertake further investigation whether school leaders received other types of support from the DEB in addition to the ‘technical meetings’. Based on this research it seemed that there was no specific program designed to provide support for principals and deputy principals on the ground but it theoretically appeared that PPAs provide school visits and supervision. In practice, the effectiveness of PPA support was limited by two factors.
First, the number of PPAs in Sing district was very small (4 PPAs for 63 schools.) The PPAs had to teach four hours a week and conduct school visits and supervision. From the data it could be seen that the PPAs’ role was very demanding and they did not have enough time to provide sufficient support to all school in the district. Second, there was very limited supervision and monitoring funds for the PPAs to perform their duties. For instance, a PPA stated,

_For the whole year we receive 3,000,000 kip (US$ 375) for our school supervision fund. We receive a per diem of 15,000 kip/day (US$1.9) but the cost of a chicken is 25,000 kip (US$3)._

The limited budget and low incentives might de-motivate PPAs to carry on their duties, especially in rural remote areas. To support PPAs’ work there should be more budget for travel costs. For instance, a deputy principal said,

_Each month PPAs visit schools in nearby areas. If schools are in remote areas, PPAs visit once per semester._

This data indicated that schools in remote areas were not as well serviced. On the other hand there was a lot of freedom and flexibility for school leaders because there was less interruption from the bureaucracy.

**Supporting teachers**

Continuing teacher development is important for good teaching and learning. An important role for school principals is to ensure on-going professional development for their teachers. This was another challenge for school leaders because of the limited opportunities for teacher professional development. School principals claimed that they had no budget for teachers to undertake professional development so they had to rely on donor projects. One principal stated,

_Providing continuous training for teachers is also another difficult task. We rely on donor projects. If the project gives us funds, we can do it, if not we cannot. Last year we were given some training on how to become a school of quality._

If schools rely on training funded by donor projects, it is questionable whether the training received addressed their actual needs because very often the project was designed to solve a particular problem in advance and often designed without consultations at the local level or
consideration of local needs. This situation was also harder for school leaders who were placed at incomplete schools in rural remote and ethnic areas. All reported that it was extremely difficult for them to teach ethnic children the Lao language during their first two years of their profession because they could not speak the local language. It is clear that pre-service and in-service teacher training did not prepare teachers to work effectively in this situation.

**Supporting students**

The school is expected to carry many administrative activities such as student registration including documenting the student profile, student enrolment, establishment, the dissemination and strengthening of school rules and regulations, student welfare, helping poor and disadvantaged students, seeking and providing scholarships, and conducting sport and art activities. These tasks are demanding and challenging for a school leadership team because of limited funding, limited support staff and facilities and local cultural practices. There was rarely any helpful technology. For example, all student data and texts are written by hand, including names, enrolment and examination results. This task was very time consuming for teachers and principals. To conduct student extra-curricular activities was also challenging because of poor resources. The following pictures show some students’ extra-curricular work at schools.

During Wednesday and Friday afternoons students undertake agriculture work such as growing flowers, growing trees, planting vegetables as well as cleaning classrooms and collecting rubbish. These activities are considered important parts of their extra-curricular activities.
The data manifestly suggests that school leaders have to find strategies to ensure on-going student activities. This situation continues to be another challenge for all school leaders in rural remote areas.

Furthermore, encouraging student participation in education is another challenge due to local significant culture practices. For instance, school leaders frequently stated that dealing with students’ absenteeism and ethnicity emerged as additional challenges for them. This made it hard for the school leaders to achieve the implementation of the curriculum as their students had fewer contact hours at school. For example, one school teacher in an incomplete school said that,

*When I talk to students’ parents, they don’t understand the importance of education. Some parents ask me to give permission on leave for their children because they want their children to help on the farm for 2 or 3 days.*

Another school teacher explained,

*We cannot achieve the implementation of curriculum because we have many different ethnic groups so we have different festivals, such as Hmong new year, Tai Lue religious ceremonies or bounthantham. For instance, for Hmong new year we tell students to have only one day off, but in practice they take two days off.*

In Sing district this ethnic diversity causes real problems. According to Evrard & Goudineau (2004) these villages can be described as *ban passom*, which means that the village formation is based on the resettling and regrouping of several segments of different highland villages (e.g. Akha, Kmu, Hmong) and sometimes parts of lowland villages (e.g. Tai Lue.) In addition, the highland population practised shifting cultivation (Evrard & Goudineau, 2004), so students’ absenteeism was quite high when families moved. For example, a school teacher in an Akha village said that

*Sometime students go back home to their old village with their parents and do not go to school there.*

This kind of migration is a major feature of some northern upland groups, especially the Mon-Khmer speaking groups such as the Khmu and Akha (Evrard & Goudineau, 2004). The type of resettlement not only created difficulties for school leaders to keep and teach students at
school but it was also makes it almost impossible for the local educational authorities to achieve education for all in the district.

**Dealing with the mass organizations**

In the Lao PDR there is an officially integrated mass mobilization strategy and structure. The three main mass organisations related to school leaders are the Lao People’s Revolutionary Youth Union (RPRYU), the Lao Women’s Union (LWU) and the Lao Federation of Trade Unions (LFTU.) These mass organisations are considered to be arms of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party that has governed the Lao PDR since 1975. The three mass organisations operate throughout the country at four levels, namely central, provincial/municipal/ministerial, district and village levels. The young people’s organisational structure is outlined below:

- *Ongkanchattanganusonh* or Young Pioneer organization (young people typically six to eight years) - Primary School
- *Ongkanchattangyaovasonh* or Scout organization (aged about nine to 15 years) - Primary/Junior Secondary School
- *Ongkanchattangxaonum* or the RPRYU (aged from approximately 16 years to a maximum of 30 years)
- *Sahaphanmaeyinglao* or the LWU (eligible to join at about 16 years)

The management of mass organizations is important because schools have a significant role in the system. School leaders have a particular role in maintaining and developing the mass organizations. There are two broad parts to the school leader’s role. The first relates to the teachers and the second to the students. The principal is expected to identify teachers who could contribute/participate in the different parts of the mass organization. The ultimate goal is to identify and foster full party members. This function of identification and fostering also applies to the students within the school. The school leader identifies model students. There is no official definition of ‘model student’ but typically a model student is one who performs well at school, is well behaved and who participates in school and extra curricula activities. (This role confers real prestige and there is some competition to be identified as a model student.) The purpose of all this activity is to consolidate the role of the party as the guardian of the nation and its development and to identify and eliminate possible opponents or backsliders.
School principals are responsible for supporting mass organizing activities as most of them were in a senior position in their communities. They are expected to represent the Party and the government by liaising with mass organizations as well as supporting and facilitating the implementation of mass organization activities. For instance, a senior principal reported,

*I am responsible for assessing staff and making recommendation for the Party member selection and mass organization member recruitment such as the Lao Federated Trade Union.*

The data showed that school leaders act as political and social agents. The responsibility to the mass organizations added an extra layer of responsibility to most school principals, especially in big schools. In rural and/or disadvantaged schools participation in mass organizations can be difficult. Some school teachers in this study, reported that they found it difficult to comply with the expectation to actively encourage students to become members of *Anusonh and Yaovasonh* because the local organization lacked strength and, moreover, there was lack of private and community resources. They appeared resigned to this situation – “What can we do?” was the common response.

**Working with local community**

In addition to their educational leadership within the school, school leaders also have a role in their local communities. Especially in rural areas of the Lao PDR they are also seen as community leaders. As such they are expected to act as a figure head and perform a number of community leadership functions. School leaders are also expected to provide services to their local community. The nature of these services varies depending on the particular needs of the community. The school leader is expected to provide access to school facilities for community activities including adult education (such as adult literacy classes), voting venues, health clinics especially for vaccinations and so on. A senior principal said, “My community came to consult about a village chief selection and I also helped the village to solve local problems.” These community responsibilities placed additional burdens on school leaders. However, the relationship between school leaders, schools and the community was reciprocal. During this research I found that school leaders and their communities worked closely in managing and supporting their schools. This showed that schools did not exist in isolation. A senior principal reported,
Each month a teacher who was not resident in the village is given 22kg of rice per month and if they are a couple they receive 44kg a month. If a teacher is from the village, he/she will not be given the rice because he/she owns rice fields.

A village chief in Akha village said,

_We are happy to contribute to school improvement in terms of labour for school maintenance as well as providing necessary materials because most of the villagers cannot read and write Lao._

Since community members in remote areas were not well-educated and gave schools support both in cash and kind, they expected teachers and principals to be responsible for students learning and school management. This data also revealed that in a rural remote area parents left all education issues to school leaders to decide. As less educated parents they thought that they were not in a position to contribute to teaching and learning and school management. The parents thought that school leaders knew better about all educational aspects. This expectation added another layer of responsibility to principals.

### 5.2.2.3 School leadership challenges in Phonthong district

The following story discusses how a school leadership team strives to lead and manage their school. The story is based on my visits to the district between 10-16 January and 2-8 February 2010. It also outlines some of the continuing challenges that many principals encounter. I will focus this discussion on significantly different issues confronting leadership teams in Phonthong and factors that might illuminate findings from research in Sing. This story presents major discussion points for this section.

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**Khou (teacher) Bounma and his team**

*Khou* Bounma has been a principal for five years in a school in Champasak province. He was promoted to this position after the retirement of the previous principal who was in the position for more than thirty years. Because his school is big (600 students) his school leadership team is comprised of himself and two deputy principals. Their school does not receive funding from the senior levels to cover school expenses such as electricity, office supplies and equipment, daily operation and maintenance, school construction…etc. With limited resources it is very challenging for *Khou* Bounma and his team to manage the school. He is responsible for overall school operation, to manage and lead the school. He only teaches when a teacher is sick or attends a training workshop. *Khou* Bounma has to ensure that all teachers are present so he checks teacher attendance, supervises their teaching and checks if teachers write their lesson plans and sign their teaching record book.

One of the deputy principals has to teach everyday while another does not teach but helps with administrative jobs because there are no support staff at the school. *Khou* Bounma and his team also write semester examinations, weekly and monthly plans and he has to make sure that all the plans are written and put up on his office wall. *Khou* Chanhom, the deputy principal who does not teach, spends most of his time completing the paper work that needs to be done such as school
plans and reports, students’ examination results, time tables, student statistics…etc. These are also placed on the wall to show DEB officers that the school leadership works hard to fulfil the DEB model school criteria.

To carry on his duties as a principal Khou Bounma spends a lot of time on fund raising from the community, seeking help from relatives who live abroad or in Vientiane, asking for some donations from monks after a village festival or other religious festivals. At the moment the school and community are building a school gate and fence and next semester they are going to build a new flag pole. They are trying to raise funds to continue rebuilding their school because at the moment school construction is only half completed. They also want to build toilets for students and teachers. The community started to complain about the smell that came from the bush at the back of the school because children use the bush for their toilet. Some female teachers sometimes go home to the toilet in the middle of teaching so the kids are noisy and interrupt other classes. These physical features are very important for the school performance assessment criteria. If the school does not conform to these criteria, it is not eligible for a model school nomination and the village will not be able to receive a model village reward either. Then Khou Bounma and his team will attract criticism.

In addition to fund raising the senior managers have to support their teachers in order for them to carry out their teaching on a daily basis. Khou Bounma and his team have to make sure that teachers are equipped with necessary office supplies such as note books, pen, pencil, chalk, student attendance record books…etc. Sometimes teachers ask about addition funding for buying materials to produce teaching aids for their lessons. Sometimes he can help his teachers; sometimes he cannot. For example, when one of his teachers told him that she could not teach a song from a new textbook because she did not know how to sing that song and there was no cassette and cassette player. Khou Bounma did not know what to advise.

Since the introduction of English into grade 3 under the government education reform, the school leadership is looking for an English teacher to teach at their school. The issue has not been resolved because it is very hard for them to find an English teacher in a rural area. If he can find one, he is afraid that it will be like a nearby school, where the school and community have hired a young newly trained graduate who has a qualification of 11+3 to teach English at their school. The teacher was trained to teach English at a lower secondary school but was willing to teach at the primary school because it was close to home. She has waited for two years to be recruited as a civil servant. Now, the school and the community are worried because she might not continue to teach there and the school cannot guarantee her employment. The school can only propose a candidate to the DEB and then recruitment is based on the employment quota. Khou Bounma and his team admit that they have problems because their school cannot completely comply with the directions of the education reform but this issue far beyond their capacity.

This story illustrates that school leaders face a range of challenges. The challenges come from the local context, the confusion about roles and responsibilities, limited support for the position, the need to support their teachers and students, dealing with the mass organizations and working with local community. The following sections discuss these challenges and the strategies to help school leaders overcome the challenges or constraints.

Local contexts for a very demanding position

Similar to Sing district, the local educational context created many challenges for school leaders. As in Sing, the challenges emerged from the wide range of responsibilities and lack of resources. Most school leaders claimed that they faced administrative burdens, unpredictable tasks and teaching loads. This study suggests that their workload was
compounded by a lack of defined school leadership responsibilities, and inadequate management structures and positions at school level. One school principal said,

As a principal I have to deal with tasks that come from different units at DEB such as general education, personnel and organisation, teacher development, Pedagogical Advisor office, statistics and planning...etc.

This above data indicates that a school principal was not only responsible for the overall operations of their school but also reported to all offices in the DEB. This practice is understandable as all primary school management in the Lao PDR is under DEB supervision.

In the Lao PDR the role of the school leader is not confined to the grounds of the school – he or she has responsibilities beyond the school gate.

As in Sing, school leaders had to deal with urgent or unplanned tasks, many of which were not related to teaching and learning. These tasks limited their working time at school. One principal said,

Sometimes we have urgent tasks to do for which we are not warned in advance. For example, we have to conduct an activity to celebrate an important event or day based on an announcement from the upper level.

As can be seen from the above statements, this study suggests that expectations of school leaders were enormous. This created an ambiguous, complex and demanding working situation for school leaders.

Moreover, many school leaders in this research had to manage their school and teach at the same time, especially in a small school (less than 100 students.) Again the teaching job added additional responsibilities. One principal explained,

In a special case, for example when a teacher is sick or absent for a day students are allocated to other classes. If a teacher has long sick leave, I have to teach or another deputy principal has to teach.

Another principal claimed,

I have to teach because there are not enough teachers.
Again, the lack of teachers related to funding and limited teacher quotas was similar to the situation in Sing district. To solve this problem a principal had to teach or asked his/her community to hire a teacher. For example, a principal at a core school reported that since the MOE launched the education system reform strategy in 2007 by introducing English into grade 3, the school and the community had hired a young female newly graduated English language teacher in order to fulfil the national curriculum. This teacher still waited to be formally recruited after almost two years.

While school leaders were supposed to implement the directives of the DEB, many school leaders in this research project acted with considerable autonomy to respond to particular needs confronting their schools, including the appointment of locally employed teachers. I made a decision to follow up this issue with other school leaders and a common response was:

> Regarding teacher recruitment, I can propose a candidate but the DEB makes the decision. For example, I have observed that some new graduates are recruited but some old contracted teachers have been waiting for two to three years and are not recruited. This practice has de-motivated young teachers as well as the community.

Teacher recruitment remained an on-going issue and was beyond the school leaders’ ability to do solve alone. If a teacher was not recruited, the community continued to pay their salary or a principal continued to teach. This made it even harder for school leaders to concentrate on their job. I decided to investigate further at the DEB office. A senior DEB official reported,

> Last year (academic year 2009-2010) the DEB received only 88 quotas for the entire district including kindergarten, primary and secondary school teachers.

The limited quotas created a difficult position for the DEB to respond to the needs of schools. Recent research also suggests that teacher availability was not the main constraint to the supply of teachers; the limited civil service quota was the major cause. Noonan & Xaiyasensouk (2007) also address this issue, claiming that the current policy nexus is not working clearly and the major cause is described as a broad system failure rather than a failure of Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) to get qualified teachers into remote communities. This practice leads not only to the loss of teachers but also to the waste of teacher training resources because the system finds it difficult to keep its promises.
It should also be noted that student-teacher ratios for primary schools are approximately 30 to one (World Bank, 2008). (Of course, this average tends to hide some of the issues that have been identified here.) At the time of this research on this research, while the student-teacher ratio at the national level was reasonably good, the more remote communities continued to face the same problems over and over again - paying for teachers who were waiting to be formally recruited. Ensuring the allocation of staff to where the need is greatest continues to be a real challenge for the MOE.

As in Sing, in addition to administrative burdens, unpredictable tasks and teaching loads, there was a lack of resources. The school leaders had to place significant priority on improving school resources and this required time-consuming fund raising. School leaders in this research frequently reported that they spent most of their time on improving school buildings such as school building construction, building school fences, gates and signs, raising a flag pole, building latrines and repairing school furniture. These physical features appeared to be part of school performance criteria and were considered important to the MOE. Most schools had no budget to cover all of these activities. A principal reported,

"Our school building construction was funded with support from local community and a junior monk from Vientiane. Each family contributed 100,000 kip (equivalent of US$12.5) (a significant sum for Lao farming families) together with a big donation from a Lao and French couple."

Even when the school receives some limited support from the DEB the school leader and, in many cases, the teaching staff seek support from the community and relatives overseas. A teacher reported,

"To build this school each family donated 100,000 kip (equivalent to US$12.5) together with a donation from my cousin who lives in the US. The DEB contributed 380 sheets of tin roofing and the rest was from the community, including labour."

Another principal reported,

"This year our school has three big projects including making a school gate and sign, fixing an underground well and building a school fence. We decided to postpone the construction of school latrine because we have a small budget and it has become over burden for the community because they are now building a temple. The community gave us 100,000 kip for fixing the underground well and 1,000,000 for building the"
It seemed that establishing and maintaining the physical facilities was a struggle for all school leaders, especially in remote and poorer communities. As noted, communities are capable of making contributions to education in other ways through labour, cash, materials, and school financial management. This data also indicated that the central focus of the school leaders’ tasks was to raise funds to improve school buildings instead of improving teaching and learning quality in their schools. The data from this research clearly indicates that all school leaders, as part of their management and leadership functions, have to spend an inordinate amount of time on the infrastructure of their schools, instead of on teaching and learning. This practice tends to subvert the MOE’s stated concerns about the primacy of improving the quality of education. However, the role of principal cannot be divorced from the context in which they practice. In other words, as has been shown, notwithstanding the official documents produced by the MOE, each principal confronts particular challenges that, too often, are not acknowledged.

At this point of my field work I was reminded of Northouse's (2007) view that different situations require different kinds of leadership. Therefore, to be an effective leader demands that a person should conduct him/herself based on the demands of a particular situation. I also recalled my attendance at the Principal Network Meetings in Victoria. The priorities and the demands on principals in the western region of Melbourne were very different from the priorities and the educational needs in the Lao PDR. Jazzar & Algozzine (2006) argue that historically, the principals were judged on the way that they managed the school's facilities, ensured student discipline and met state reporting requirements. However the role of principals has shifted and the focus should be on instructional or educational issues. While this shift might be occurring in developed countries, and my experience in the Principal Network meetings in Melbourne would support this, it would be unrealistic to expect such a shift in the current Lao education context. Despite the difficulties, especially in remote areas Sergiovanni's five leadership dimensions could be usefully adapted (Department of Education Victoria, 2007). The potential for adaptation would appear to be strongest in the symbolic leadership domain where school leaders have to demonstrate the capacity to model important values and behaviours to school and community. As school leaders are considered to be the most educated and knowledgeable persons in their community, it is very hard for them to
escape from their community’s attention and they are expected to be role models. In fact it is likely that symbolic leadership is even more important than that described by Sergiovanni.

The picture below shows a school leader and a community member building a school gate. Once again this demonstrates that school leaders and the community are often more concerned about peripheral infrastructure as mandated in MOE directives. The implementation of the Model School (Ministerial Directive No 763/MOE.DGE/07, 10 Sep 2007) is an example of the focus on appearances rather than the educational needs of students and teachers. In Phonthong district, having a model school was one of the standards for being a model village. The implementation of the model school suggested different training emphasis and job expectations for school principals.

As part of the model school assessment criteria, the school and the community are building a school gate and sign before the next school assessment team arrives. (Gates often seemed to be more important than classrooms.)

While school leaders were struggling to improve school physical infrastructure, they faced limited teaching and learning facilities relevant to the local educational context due to limited funding, knowledge and skills. These problems restricted them from implementing aspects of the curriculum. The school leaders frequently reported that school teaching and learning exclusively depended on textbooks provided by the MOE. No schools had a library, supplementary reading books or other teaching equipment. One of the principals claimed,

*Producing teaching aids is quite hard because we have to buy some materials, sometime we ask students to bring some materials and our teachers especially the senior ones have limited knowledge about making teaching aids.*

Another principal explained,
Our school has done extra curricular activities only to a moderate degree, because we don’t have sports equipment, but we do labour work for school construction, such as fetching water for builders and digging fence post holes.

The data clearly shows that as in Sing, limited teaching and learning materials and facilities continue to be a challenge in rural schools in order to comply with the aim of the national curriculum set by the MOE. Based on the national curriculum goals, schools are supposed to educate a child in five dimensions including intellectual, moral, art, physical and labour education (Ministry of Education, 1998). These expectations have created real challenges for school leaders when formal text-book and board-focus still dominate classroom teaching and learning practice.

As in Sing district, lack of recurrent funds remains a major problem. School leader participants in this research always reported that there were no funds provided to schools by the government and that neither the PES nor DEB provided funds. All schools had to rely on community contribution for their operation and maintenance. One principal indicated,

Our school has relied on the community for school operations and maintenance. Each household contributed 10,000 kip (equivalent to US$1.2) per year.

Once again I decided to follow this issue at the DEB office. A senior DEB official reported,

This year we received 65,000,000 kip (equivalent to US$ 8,125) from our district. Within this amount 15,000,000 kip (equivalent to US$ 1,875) is assigned for technical activities including running workshops and school visits and monitoring for DEB staff. The rest of the budget will be used for DEB recurrent costs, such as paying water supply and electricity bills...etc.

This research evidently implies that lack of recurrent funding continues to be an on-going challenge for all primary schools in the Lao PDR. This problem was reported in a number of papers (See High, 2006; Ministry of Education, October 2008; World Bank, 2008). The data clearly proves that it is very difficult for school leaders to build an effective school where good quality of teaching and learning can take place.

School leadership confusion about roles and responsibilities
Like Sing district, there were confusion and contradiction in school leaders’ perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. Some principal participants in Phonthong had neither heard about the nine rights and functions (Ministerial Directive No 763/MOE.DGE/07, 10 Sep
2007; Ministerial Directive No 1373/MOE/96, 17 Oct 1996) nor seven management functions for school principals (Ministry of Education, June 2006). They understood that their primary roles and responsibilities focused on technical/academic and management functions. One principal explained,

> *Our school is big (more than 600 pupils) so I have two deputy principals. The first deputy principal is responsible for technical matters and the second deputy principal is in charge of extra curricular activities and home room teachers. I am responsible for overall technical and management aspects."

Another principal also said,

> *Our school leadership team is made up of myself and a deputy principal. The deputy principal is usually responsible for academic affairs and extra curricular activities while I’m in charge of both academic matters and management.*

In contrast, other participants had heard of, but could not articulate these functions. More importantly this research suggested that principals could not explain how these seven functions could be applied into their management practice. One principal reported,

> *I heard about 7 management functions in 2006 when I attended a 7-day workshop run by a project. Then I was assessed by the PES.*

A newly appointed principal claimed,

> *I have borrowed books from other schools to read for my study.*

Based on this research it became apparent that most school leaders had very limited training for their positions. Even though a few participants in this research attended a brief training workshop, this principal training was a one off event, typically funded by a donor cooperation project, which was not integrated into normal activity. In other words, most of the training was done in an ad hoc manner funded by different projects with lack of coherency and it was not institutionalized and there was no follow up after the training.

**Limited support for the position**

Similar to Sing district, school leadership officially received three kinds of support from the DEB. This support included a monthly meeting, a technical meeting and PPA school visits and monitoring. The monthly meeting is conducted each month at the DEB. The DEB invites all primary and secondary principals. The focus of the meeting is on management issues
including dissemination of directives and policy changes. At the meeting each principal presents a monthly report on achievements, issues and the plan for the following month. Based on the reports presented by the principals, the DEB compiles all information and reports to the PES.

In addition, a technical meeting is normally organized twice a year to discuss academic matters. The content of the technical meetings is supposed to be based on the needs of teachers. A senior DEB official explained, “Many schools reported that teachers were not trained in multi-grade teaching so we ran a training workshop on multi-grade teaching.” The technical meetings were usually facilitated by the DEB deputy director who was in charge of academic affairs together with the Teacher Development Unit and PPAs. He also stated that sometimes the DEB invited a facilitator from the PES to facilitate a workshop on an area that the DEB officials were not familiar with, such as early childhood learning and teaching. This data implied that the DEB had some funding for teacher professional development activities and recognised the importance of teachers in facilitating quality teaching and learning. However, it also meant there was no budget allocated for principal professional development. Whether intentionally or not, the principal seemed to be forgotten in this case. If the DEB expected principals to be an internal PA, the principals should receive training on pedagogical/leadership/management training so they are able to provide technical support to their teachers on the ground.

In addition to the technical meetings, school leadership had access to PPAs. The PPAs were originally based in the DEB but in some districts, including Phonthong, they were based in separate centres. They continued to be funded by the DEB and were accountable to the DEB. Officially the PPAs’ role was to support schools and individual teachers to improve teaching and learning. One PPA explained,

*If a school does not have good learning outcomes or good exam results, we go to work with teachers. We also help teachers in writing and planning a lesson, advice on lesson plan writing, producing teaching aids and teaching and learning materials.*

This data clearly suggests that the PPA support focuses on teachers, not principals. I decided to further investigate whether there was a PPA program designed to support the pedagogical role of the principal. It emerged that although the official role of the PPAs was to support schools, the effectiveness of this support was limited by two factors. First, the number of
PPAs in the district was very limited. The 3 PPAs were responsible for providing technical support to teachers at 81 primary schools in the district. The PPAs were also expected to spend two days at the cluster resource centre and three days at schools. One of the PPAs said,

_At the moment only two of us visit schools because one PPA has left for political training for three months. It is quite an overload for us._

Second, there was confusion amongst principals and PPAs about the role of PPAs. This confusion resulted in some role conflict. For instance, when the PPAs conducted school visits and supervision, they were asked to do other tasks, such as assessment of schools in each cluster. This confusion also created tension between schools and the bureaucracy because the support from PPAs was viewed as having an inspectorial purpose rather than the supportive role as intended. One of the PPAs reported,

_When we visit schools to provide technical support, we are asked to assess school clusters at the same time._

In addition, a principal said,

_PPAs usually visit our school during the beginning of a new semester and assess our school. They come to our school twice a year and sometimes once a year._

The role conflict of the PPAs not only confused school leaders but also the PPAs themselves. If PPAs were supposed to fulfil a pedagogical role, they needed proper facilitation skills on how to work with teachers and they needed enough time to sit down and listen and gain information and provide advice. Based on this research there does not appear to be any particular charter or program designed to enhance the pedagogical role of school leaders. One principal claimed,

_Being an internal pedagogical advisor for teachers is hard for me because I haven’t participated in training with teachers so I don’t understand and don’t know what advice to give to teachers when I monitor their teaching._

In addition, it was not clear who would be responsible for providing support to principals. One principal claimed,

_PAAs really talk about academic matters only; they don’t talk about administration._
I came to realize that my visits to schools and discussion with school leaders about their roles and responsibilities were regarded as the first technical support received from the centre in both Sing and Phonthong. For example, one principal said,

_Ajan from the MOE visiting us is very good because we can ask what we don’t understand or don’t know and it helps us solve problems._

Another principal also commented,

_I like the way you talk to us because it gives us new knowledge, good guidance and attitude. I think this method is the best. In the past DEB staff just came and assessed our performance. They did not come to discuss and listen to us; instead they developed a plan for us and told us to try to achieve their plan._

The above data suggests that school leaders clearly need support on the ground from the education hierarchy in order to help them carry out their duties effectively. This information also questions the level of the DEB capacity to act as an educational service unit in order to help the school leaders to improve school leadership.

**Supporting teachers**

Opportunities for leadership and educational professional development in both districts were few and far between for teachers. This situation created another difficult task for principals to support their teachers to become educational professionals. Most school principals claimed that they had no budget for teachers to take on professional development so they had to rely on the limited DEB plans for staff development. For example, one principal reported,

_We send our teachers for training according to a notice from the DEB because our school does not have a staff development plan._

On-going professional development is important in both districts because many, especially older teachers, were inadequately trained at the start of their teaching careers.

I decided to undertake further investigation to find out whether school leaders had other challenges in supporting their schools. Based on my observations and interviews and
consultation, it turned out that many school leaders needed assistance for teaching physical education and art lessons and science. For instance, one principal maintained,

_There should be a teacher for teaching art and physical education. Primary school teachers are expected to teach everything. Male teachers can’t teach Lao dance._

A deputy principal also stated,

_Teachers have difficulty in teaching science because they don’t have training in this area. New teachers haven’t been trained from their pre-service course. The new teachers don’t know and the old teachers forgot about this._

This data reinforces the findings that the education system has high and broad expectations of both primary school teachers and school leaders. As a school leader, a principal was expected to be an internal Pedagogical Advisor who was able to provide assistance to teachers with all academic matters. They also needed to have a wide range of skills and knowledge in order to support their teachers to perform effective teaching and learning at school.

As in Sing, in addition to supporting on-going professional development, school leadership has to secure office supplies for teachers. The school leaders have to make sure that their teachers are equipped with books for writing lesson plans, teaching record books, student attendance and monitoring record books. These materials are not available in the local market and they should be sent from the DEB at the beginning of school year. In practice, the materials always arrived late. One of the principals claimed,

_Every year when I attend an open-the academic year session at the DEB, I usually come back with empty hands._

A second principal added,

_We use money collected from the community through the parents’ association to buy office supplies for teachers such as pens and notebooks. Teachers usually noted down their student attendance in small notebooks and when a proper student attendance record book arrived in Nov, they had to copy the attendance record again to the official record book provided._

It is clear that many school leaders have to develop a range of strategies to secure office supplies for their teachers. This insight also indicated the limited capacity of the DEB to act as
a service unit to provide support to school. I continued to further investigate at the DEB and the common reply was that the materials were not delivered from the higher level on time. In this situation, there was little that school leaders or the DEB could do.

Supporting students

As in Sing district, school leadership was supposed to conduct many activities in order to support students, such as student registration, dissemination and strengthening school rules and regulations, conducting sport and art activities, identifying model students, liaising with parents, etc. In practice, it was almost impossible for the school leadership team to do all these jobs due to limited support staff, staff capacity, facilities, funding and local cultural practices. For instance, to maintain student data was a time consuming task for teachers and principals as there was rarely any support staff or technology. All student data and texts are written by hand, including names, enrolments and examination results.

In addition, most school leader participants claimed that it was hard for them to participate in sports competition because of the limited budget for sending their students to events, including travel costs and other expenses. One principal argued,

_Our school receives an announcement from the DEB asking us to send our students to participate in a sport competition in the district. Each school in our cluster has to contribute for travel cost to the district, pay a registration fee of 100,000 kip and provide a donation of 50,000 kip in a separate envelop. Our cluster agreed to select students from the core school to represent our cluster to participate in the event because the school is close to the main road and it saves expenditure for us. To participate in this event, each teacher also contributes 6,000 kip. If each school sends their students to participate in the competition, it will cost more money for us._

It could be seen from the above data that school leaders have to find a range of strategies to support their students. The above example also suggests an uneven impact across schools and students and a lack of understanding of the reality in schools by some in the DEBs. It is clear that the schools in poorer and more remote districts face greater problems in supporting their students.

School leaders also have to be aware of and be responsive to the culture of their students and teachers. In Phonthong district, the majority of the community are Buddhist so most students tend not to come to school on days of Buddhist festivals. They tend to stay home and help
their parents and go to the temple. Most school leaders claimed that it was very hard to encourage students to come to school during the Buddhist festivals. One school principal said,

*Sometimes students don’t show up on a preparation day for their village festivals. The DEB told us not to have a day off on the preparation day but allowed us to take a day off on the village festival day.*

The “Guidelines for Management of Kindergarten and Primary Schools” (Ministerial Directive No 1373/MOE/96, 17 Oct 1996) state that apart from official holiday such as National Day (2 Dec), Women's Day (8 March), Lao New Year (in April 3 or 4 days depending on the year), National Teachers’ Day (7 Oct), schools are allowed to have only three additional days for local festivals and events. The Phonthong community valued their festivals. They demonstrate the importance of collective traditions in the community where the enthusiastic involvement of the whole neighbourhood is expected. However, often, these cultural attitudes and practices have become challenging for educational leaders at the local level, especially in Sing where there is a range of different ethnic groups and associated cultural practices. In addition, when education is linked to notions of development, which defines human welfare in terms of wealth or possession of material goods, village festivals which exhibited and valued non-material dimensions or spiritual aspects might be seen as irrelevant (Coll, 2004). Therefore, external development was not so simply imposed at the village level. Changing the way villagers orient themselves at the local and national levels is very complex – especially for those school leaders who confront these issues, often on a daily basis.

**Dealing with the mass organizations**

As in Sing district, school leaders have a role in maintaining and developing the mass organizations. While experienced principals were able to deal with this responsibility, newly appointed principals tended to find these functions quite hard to handle. A newly appointed principal claimed,

*To be responsible for a mass organization task is quite hard because I have no experience in management and training on political ideology or theory. I do as I understand plus my basic experience learning from the previous principal. If I don’t understand, I’ll seek further information.*
This research suggests that as a school leader in the Lao educational management context, a principal is required to have three main roles: an official educational role, a community leadership role and a local political leadership role. It was often hard for school leaders to differentiate between these three roles. In other words, there was an overlapping between educational responsibilities on the one hand and the political/social dimension on the other. In the Lao PDR the positive outcome of involvement in mass organizations is a step along the track to being a highly regarded school leader and promotion.

**Working with local community**

In addition to their educational leadership within the school, school leaders also have a range of roles in their local communities, especially in rural areas. They are expected to act as community leaders and participate in community activities including village cultural events, religious festivals, community development activities and others. A newly appointed principal reported,

> Last year, I was asked to disseminate training documents for the Village Youth Organisation twice. I was also appointed to be a village health volunteer where I have become a coordinator for our village immunization because I help to inform and report to the village clinic about community member vaccination. Sometimes people are confused about my job because I am teacher but participate in training with nurses about the dangers of fake medicine.

This community responsibility adds another layer of expectations to their school leadership functions and tends to reduce time available to their school working time. On the other hand, the relationship between school leaders, school and community is reciprocal in nature. This research suggests that school leaders and community work closely in managing and supporting their schools. This obviously points out that schools do not survive in isolation. One principal revealed,

> Our school invites the community to participate in school important events, such as an opening new academic year and closing academic year meetings.

Another principal explained,

> The community keeps cash and the school keeps record of revenue and expenditure. If we would like to use the budget, we write a proposal to the village in order to get disbursement including paying school electricity bills,
This research also suggests that the community values education and contributes to school financial management and funding.

Unlike Sing district, in Phonthong district, principals and deputy principals typically came from their villages. For example, the principal in Chik school and his wife (who is a teacher), and the deputy principal all come from the same village. This was common in rural areas where many school leaders were community members and had a sense of belonging and an obligation to serve their communities. In this case community support already existed and principals saw their roles as including working with the local community and strengthening partnerships. One of the principals commented,

> Asking for a contribution from the community is not so difficult. If we ask them, they are very cooperative and supportive but we have to recognize their contribution. The community leaves the teaching job to us while they support the funding.

One of the community leaders in Phonthong explained,

> We cannot contribute to teaching and learning because we think it is the school’s responsibility. We can help with something such as fund raising for school construction, encouraging parents to send their kids to school or practical matters such as building school fences and gates, etc.

This shows a clear understanding of, and support for, school and community relationships: the community’s role was to support funding and school leaders were expected to provide a decent education to their children. Again, this indicates the value placed on education even in more remote rural areas in the Lao PDR.

5.2.3 Gain a better understanding the roles of donors in contributing to the uneven development of school leaders and schools

5.2.3.1 Donors at the MOE

During the first two stages of field work I became increasingly aware of the uneven impact of donors on schools and school leaders. I was confronted by the work of donors as I talked to school leaders and, from time to time, I encountered their consultants in the flesh. As a consequence, I was encouraged to consider in more detail the impact of donors. This has lead
to a more extensive detour than I had originally planned. In order to give some insights into the range of donors contributing to education in Laos, I have listed the significant donors from the year 2006-2010. The donors included lenders, multi-lateral and bi-lateral agencies and international non-government organizations (INGOs.) I started with the aid project that I worked on for six years. This project was co-financed by the ADB and a bi-lateral agency and was known as EQIP II/TTEST (Table 5.3.) Then, I summarised major projects financed by significant banks and bi-lateral agencies (Table 5.4.) Finally, I listed multi-lateral agencies and INGOs (Table 5.5.)

Table 5.3: A case study of the EQIP II/TTEST project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Second Education Improvement Project</th>
<th>Quality Teacher Training and Status of Teachers Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donor</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall objective</td>
<td>To improve the relevance, quality, and efficiency of education by integrating the supply of good quality teachers nation wide, providing increased access to and participation in primary education under the decentralized education management.</td>
<td>To strengthen teacher training system capacity and develop teacher incentive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locations</td>
<td>72 districts in 9 provinces: Bokeo, Champasak, Luang Prabang, Savannakhet, Sayabuly, Vientiane, Luang Namtha, Saravan and Xieng Khuang.</td>
<td>FOE and TEADC at NUOL, 8 TEIs in 8 provinces: Xiengkhuang, Luang Prabang, Luang Namtha, Vientiane, Vientiane Capital, Savannakhet, Champasak and Saravan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount &amp; duration</td>
<td>Loan: US$20 million loan; from 5 March 2002 to 30 June 2010</td>
<td>Grant: US$9.6 million; from 1 July 2002 to 31 Dec June 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of international consultants and fees</td>
<td>US$1,052,816 3 international consultants</td>
<td>US$5,187,076 (36,309,537 SEK) 11 international consultants (exchange rate US$1 to SEK7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of national consultants and fees</td>
<td>US$ 3,080,032 60 national consultants 1 local administrative staff</td>
<td>US$1,697,856 (11,884,996 SEK) 32 national consultants 2 local administrative staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.4: Major projects funded by significant banks and bi-lateral agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Donor</th>
<th>Overall objective</th>
<th>Locations</th>
<th>Amount &amp; duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second Education Development (EDP II) Project</td>
<td>World Bank (WB) and Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) added 2008-09</td>
<td>To increase primary school enrolment and completion and improve quality; To strengthen capacity to develop policies and strategies to monitor and manage primary education.</td>
<td>19 districts in 6 provinces: Luang Namtha, Oudomxay, Huaphan, Phonsaly, Attapeu and Sekong.</td>
<td>Grant: US$13 million and Au$3.28 million; from 2004 to 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Basic Education in Laos (ABEL) Project</td>
<td>AusAID</td>
<td>To improve access to basic education in Laos by tackling key constraints relating to children’s food security and health.</td>
<td>3 provinces: Oudomxay, Luang Namtha and Phongsaly</td>
<td>Grant: Au$11 million; from 2005-2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of the Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF)</td>
<td>AusAID</td>
<td>To improve sector wide planning to address key sector performance constraints and, in particular, to enable a more balanced, strategic and long-term approach to education sector development.</td>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Grant: US$0.5 million; from 2008-2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Education (Girls) Project (BEGP)</td>
<td>ADB &amp; AusAID</td>
<td>To improve women’s status in the Lao PDR by increasing their participation in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Basic Education (Girls) Project (BEGP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Objective</strong></th>
<th>socio-economic development, improving their families’ health and welfare, and preparing them for future roles.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>52 districts in 11 provinces: Phongsaly, Luang Namtha, Huaphan, Oudomxay, Xiengkhouang, Borikhamxay, Khammuane, Saravane, Sekong, Attapeu, and Xaysomboun special Zone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount &amp; duration</strong></td>
<td>US$34.6 million including Au$8.2 grant from AusAID; from 1999-2008</td>
</tr>
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### Basic Education Sector Development Project (BESDP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Donor</strong></th>
<th>ADB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall objective</strong></td>
<td>To contribute to poverty reduction through improved access, equity, and quality of education resulting in higher education attainment leading to enhanced productivity, competitiveness, and economic development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>20 districts in 6 provinces: Attapeu, Bokeo, Champasak, Khammuane, Laung Namth and Savannakhet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount &amp; duration</strong></td>
<td>Loan: US$15.83 million; from 2007-2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### School Environment Improvement in the Southern Provinces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Donor</strong></th>
<th>Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall objective</strong></td>
<td>To improve educational environments in the three southern provinces, collaborating with the on-going Japanese technical assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>74 primary schools in 3 provinces: Saravan, Sekong and Attapeu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount &amp; duration</strong></td>
<td>Grant: US$7.6 million; from 2009-2010</td>
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</table>

### Fast Track Initiative-Catalytic Fund (EFA-FTI- Catalytic Fund) Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Donor</strong></th>
<th>AusAID and International Development Association (IDA) including JICA, UNICEF and World Food Program through World Bank administration.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td>To support the Government of the Lao PDR (GOL) to increased the coverage and improve the quality of pre-primary and primary education with a focus on the most educationally disadvantaged children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>56 of the 142 districts in the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount &amp; duration</strong></td>
<td>Grant: US$65.5 million (US$20 million from AusAID, US$30 million from IDA and US$15.5 million from World Bank); from 2010-2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.5: Programs financed by significant multi-lateral agencies and INGOs**

**School of Quality Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Donor</strong></th>
<th>United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall objective</strong></td>
<td>To promote child-friendly educational system and schools within a rights based-approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>11 provinces: Phongsaly, Luang Namtha, Oudomxay, Luang Prabang, Xiengkhuang, Houaphanh, Vientiane, Savannakhet, Sekong, Saravan, and Attapeu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount &amp; duration</strong></td>
<td>Provided implementation guidelines and an evaluation report but no budget allocation (This made it difficult for planning and implementation.) 2005-2010 (from 2011 this program will become an integral part of the ESDF strategy)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**School Feeding Program (SF)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Donor</strong></th>
<th>United Nations World Food Program (WFP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Overall objective** | To improve access to primary education, especially for girls.  
To increase school retention (the program has become an integral part of the ESDF strategy since 2010.) |
| **Location** | 30 poorest districts in three northern and three southern provinces  
The three northern provinces: Oudomxay, Phongsaly, and Luang Namtha  
The three southern provinces: Saravan, Sekong, and Attapeu |
| **Amount & duration** | Grant: US$ 33,547,245 million  
2002-2012 (2002-2012 three northern provinces and 2008-2012 three southern provinces) |

**Basic Education Development in Northern Communities (BENC)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Donor</strong></th>
<th>European Commission (EC)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall objective</strong></td>
<td>To increase primary school enrolment and completion in the 3 northern provinces, improve quality and strengthen capacities to develop policies and strategies to monitor and manage primary education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>9 districts in 3 provinces: Luang Namtha, Phongsaly and Luang Prabang.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount &amp; duration</strong></td>
<td>Grant: €6 million; from 2004-2010</td>
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### Several areas in the Lao education sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Donor</strong></th>
<th>UNESCO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall objective</strong></td>
<td>To support: (i) EFA coordination, planning, monitoring and assessment, (ii) early childhood development (ECD), (iii) primary and secondary education, (iv) gender and education, (v) HIV/AIDS prevention and health education, and (vi) inclusive education, (vii) literacy, non-formal education (NFE) and skills development, (viii) ICT in education, and (ix) Education for Sustainable Development (ESD.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>The project provides a strategy plan but no specific location (This has the advantage of allowing flexibility but monitoring and evaluation of project fund use is very difficult)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount &amp; duration</strong></td>
<td>The amount of the Regular Programme budget (US$72,500.) In most cases, the Regular Programme budget was used (i) to start new/pilot projects with the expectation/possibility of extending them when they are found successful, (ii) as seed money to attract external resources, and (iii) to complement the extra budgetary activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Capacity Development for Education for All (CapEFA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Donor</strong></th>
<th>UNESCO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall objective</strong></td>
<td>To achieve the goal set out in the country’s own Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF), Teacher Education Strategy and Action Plan (TESAP), and the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Location** | The project provides support to particular components but no specific location. The programme focuses on action learning in four components:  
- Teacher Education  
- Secondary Education  
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training  
- Non-formal Education |
| **Amount & duration** | Grant: US$1 million |

### INGOs

#### Quality Education Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Donor</strong></th>
<th>Save the Children Norway (SCN)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall objective</strong></td>
<td>To improve the quality of education in primary and pre-school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14 districts in 4 provinces: Luang Prabang, Borikhamxay, Vientiane and Xiengkhouang; from 2006-2008

| Location & duration | 14 districts in 4 provinces: Luang Prabang, Borikhamxay, Vientiane and Xiengkhouang; from 2006-2008 |

**INGO Training Teachers to Establish and Use Libraries and Reading Rooms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Donor</th>
<th>Room to Read</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall objective</td>
<td>To ensure books are accessed by the students and to improve literacy levels; To improve the quality of education through the increased use of literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location &amp; duration</td>
<td>26 districts in 8 provinces: Saravane, Phongsaly, Xayaboury, Oudomxay, Borikhamxay, Vientiane province, Vientiane Municipality and Savannakhet; commenced in 2005-on-going.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 Lao education has been strongly influenced by external agencies. The influence is embedded in the educational system and practice which adds another layer of complexity and challenge in education management. At this stage of the research it became apparent that donors play a critical role in directing planning and practice in primary education. Although many concerns emerged about the role of donors, research in Stage 2 reveals that poor coordination, poor communication, unequal power relationships and lengthy and inflexible pre-planning combined with rigid project implementation are the most significant. These four issues have serious ramifications for school leadership at all levels.

**Poor coordination**

Poor coordination seems to be the most fundamental issue affecting aid effectiveness. The data from my field research suggests that poor coordination causes lack of continuity, coherence and consistency. This insight also indicates that donor coordination seemed to be very difficult under the current aid agency systems. Aid projects, whether intentionally or not, are directly involved in establishing a fragmented and uneven support system for school leaders and their schools. Tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 illustrate this fragmented support.

Continuing the implementation of the EQIP II/TTEST project and the implementation of the new Fast Track Initiative-Catalytic Fund (EFA-FTI-Catalytic) Program is one example of this. The new EFA-FTI Program reportedly claims to support the Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF) for a period of three years. The program covers 56 of the 142 districts in the Lao PDR. The EFA-FIT program changes project areas, educational concept and methodology. Too often a new program is introduced by a new donor without
any continuity, coherence or consistency with the existing program commenced by a previous donor. These issues create problems for school leaders, the MOE, the PES and the DEB. For instance, donor initiated programs often bring the introduction of new jargon and new trends in educational thinking. Each new program has new glossy program documentation outlining the rationale, purported benefits, expected outcomes, implementation plan and so on. Often this new jargon is not fully understood by staff at the MOE or consultants. One way of illustrating the problems associated with the jargon is that some years ago one international consultant was involved in the Education for All Program. More recently the consultant was involved in a new program, Strengthening Decentralized Education Management and, even more recently, in the ESDF. Consistent with the accompanying documentation, the consultant used new jargon for each of the programs that he/she was involved with. Often, despite changes in jargon and trends, local understandings and practice remained the same. The new jargon or technical terms were reflected in MOE conversations, often without real understanding. Terms could also disappear. Since the end of the Strengthening Decentralized Education Management Project in 2003 (Asian Development Bank, 2003), the term ‘decentralization’ is no longer fashionable because donors stopped supporting the concept and associated projects.

There seem to be four major causes contributing to poor coordination, lack of continuity, coherence and consistency. Lack of funding is the first cause. The following assessment was made by Sida in the TTEST Consolidation and Sustainability Plan. Although the PIU received very positive feedback from Sida, major concerns were signalled about the availability of government funding to sustain the work mandated by the TTEST research.

The Consolidation and Sustainability Plan reflects a strong ownership of the MOE and PIU for thinking through the process to implement the existing plan for TTEST. It takes into account the actual achievements and challenges. The planned interventions to be internalised into the MOE are quite impressive, but sometimes with insufficient funding. It means that the implementation of activities is relying on MOE capacity to internalise and implement the decree and guidelines developed under TTEST throughout the MOE organisational structure. Besides Sida funds, the expected funding sources of the Consolidation and Sustainability Plan are based on MOE applied Fast Track Initiative-Catalytic Fund for Education Sector Development Framework and Government of Lao PDR’s funding.” (Extract from a letter from the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok dated 11 Jan 2010.)

This data clearly reveals that there is a real challenge for the MOE to continue with a project
when the project funds run out. Based on my observation and experience working on aid projects, this characteristic was not new and this was always a serious problem because without on-going donor and/or government funding nothing is sustainable.

The second cause is a lack of capacity at the MOE, PES, DEB and schools to manage many projects. Tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 reveal the challenge of managing different projects and programs at different times in various locations. The effective management of projects/programs requires competent personnel with sufficient skills and technical knowledge. Even the existing, highly competent personnel are often overwhelmed by the large number of projects. This often results in a loss of effective control.

Time constraints are the third factor. Fixed project duration puts pressure on both donors and the MOE. Unrealistic timelines often result in a failure to achieve the initial objectives of the project. This pressure contributes to ineffective use of donor funding as there is more focus on the completion date than the quality of work.

Finally there is a political dimension to aid projects. Donors have their own particular interests and agenda. For instance, one international consultant claimed,

UNICEF has a specific activity (Child Friendly School initiative later modified to match MOE’s preference and now called SoQ) while JICA never works away from the main road.

Easterly (2007) also suggests that it is impossible to coordinate multiple aid agencies under the current aid system when each agency reports to different bosses who have different agendas. Based on this research, the data obviously implies that along with lack of funding, capacity and project time constraints, donor specific interests and agenda are all major causes in creating a cyclical pattern of poor coordination, discontinuity, incoherence and inconsistency of aid projects.

Poor Communication

Poor communication is another crucial challenge for donors and Lao educators in planning, managing and delivering aid projects. There is a number of reasons contributing to poor communication. First, the language of reports and reporting and instruction in all aid projects is English (Too often international consultants do not speak Lao.) Many senior officials at the
central and local levels do not always speak English so it is hard for them to understand and interpret documentation written by donors. It is even more difficult for school leaders at the local level. Second, often new concepts and jargon brought by consultants through new aid projects or programs come from an outside perspective, by consultants who do not speak Lao and who, most of the time, are based in Vientiane.

Third, schools are located in rural remote areas with limited access to senior levels and current education information. Quite often donors and their consultants rely on information provided by the MOE and previous consultants and dated project reports. This has become a barrier for communication at the school level. As a consequence, donors are inadequately informed about local school needs and concerns. Distance, infrequency of visits and lack of capacity also contribute to lack of effective communication. It should be remembered that very few remote schools and not all DEBs have electricity. This prevents the use of modern communication technology.

Unequal power relationships
By now it should be apparent that the relationship between the MOE, local education communities and donors is complex from all view-points. This complexity stems in large part from unequal power relationships, which become another factor hindering effective aid planning, management and delivery. An international education advisor states that

*At the moment there are two major moves in primary education. The first policy was the introduction of School of Quality program. The second one was Fast Track Initiative through the World Bank and AusAID. The main purpose is to make incomplete schools into complete schools and at the school level FTI will place an emphasis on Village Education Development Committees rather than principals.*

As can be seen that under the EFA-FIT program, the SoQ program has been adopted as a national policy for school improvement but it covers only 56 districts (of 142.) In addition, table 5.5 shows that the SoQ activities only took place in eleven provinces between 2005-2010. The coverage of the program gives an example of uneven distribution of donors in schools. (How the introduction of SoQ affects the role of the principal will be discussed later in Section 5.2.3.2.) This practice is not only an example of uneven and fragmented support but also an example of a decision that was made at the centre with donors without consultation with school leaders. Too often decisions have been made by donors and
government officials based in Vientiane, based on inadequate and uninformed information about the needs of school leaders, schools and their communities.

The implementation of the EFA-FTI program is also another example of unequal power relationships. While the program proposed to support the ESDF, it covers only a part of a sector or of a large scale project (56 districts out of 142.). This compromised a new and promising approach for aid effectiveness. In terms of implementation and government target districts this approach sounded sensible, but it failed to support the government’s plans for nationwide education development based on the MDGs. This goal was spelled out in the Prime Minister’s Decree on MOE’s Organisation and Function No 62/PM (07 April 2008) stating that,

> the MOE is government’s central management organization and has the role and function of macro management of education with a nationwide focus on human resource development, developing individuals to be good citizens with the behaviour, knowledge, skills, professionalism and competence to comply with the needs for national development (translated by the researcher.)

This shows that the MOE is in a difficult position; while trying to improve education nationwide with limited resources to ensure equal benefits for all stakeholders, it is being pushed by donors to concentrate on more narrowly focused projects and districts. This situation fits well with Mowles, Stacey, & Griffin (2008) finding on the quality of working relationship between managers and staff in INGOs with their local partners NGOs in Laos. The authors claim that while managers and staff in INGOs substantially argue that their working relationship is based on partnership, participation and consultation, in reality all parties are aware of the problematic nature of a relationship where one side has the money and the other needs it. Similarly, the MOE is forced to face the same dilemma over and over again because the MOE has limited funding to carry on education development nationwide.

**Lengthy and inflexible pre-planning**

Lengthy and inflexible pre-planning coupled with rigid project implementation also cause problems for all parties. Table 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 indicate that many projects are implemented over more than 5 years following the project design document being prepared prior to the commencement of the project. Along with the project design document, each project develops an implementation manual which is called different names, for example, a project
administration memorandum, a project implementation manual, a project work plan and so on. Usually these documents are developed in advance and contain project rational, scope, funding, project logical framework and identifying objectives, activities together with expected outcomes, performance indicators, project implementing units and structure, guidelines for procurements, and so on. This practice is consistent with an observation made by Mowles, Stacey, & Griffin (2008). They claim that donors stress that the best way of understanding change is to imagine that social transformation is an end point achieved in logical, causal and predictable steps. They continue to argue that planning tools such as the logical framework are mostly unconcerned with the process of achieving what is set out in the plan. From my observations and experience though, the project design and the implementing manual are hardly ever revised or modified to suit the current situation and needs. Even though there are semi annual reviews and annual reviews during the life of the project, these documents appear to be a set in stone for the entire project - even if the project lasts five or more years.

The implementation of EQIP II is an example. The Project Administration Memorandum (known as the PAM) was completed in 2002 but the project continued until 2010. Even when all parties concerned recognised that it was almost impossible for the GOL to contribute 30% to school construction, 20% to staff development; 53% to school furniture; and 65% to operation and maintenance, it seems that change could not be made to the project design. The inflexibility of the donor or lender approach has placed additional burdens at all levels, including at the school level, on school leaders and communities.

The above discussion demonstrates how aid has an impact on the macro level (the policy level.) The discussion clearly indicates that donors have a direct impact on MOE thinking and methodologies and practice, and of course on the PEI, DEBs and schools, because of their work in planning, project management and their funding initiatives.

Now it is time to examine how aid is delivered at the local level (the implementation level) in Sing and Phonthong districts.

5.2.3.2 The impact of donors on education in Sing district
In Stage 1 I found that the role of donors did not seem to have much direct impact on school leaders, but with further investigation and research it became apparent that their project
design and funding initiatives did have a direct impact on educational practice at schools via the SoQ and school feeding program. In Stage 2 I undertook further investigation on donor roles at my research sites. Last year there were two donors actively involved in school improvement in Sing. UNICEF supported the implementation of the SoQ program while the World Food Program assisted in a student feeding program.

Research in Stage 2 suggests that donors’ approach in delivering aid at the school levels was one of piecemeal development, based on inadequate local consultation and constant change in educational concepts. These issues have significant impacts on school leaders and school. While the school meal program supported every school in the district, only a small number of the schools were involved in the SoQ program (28 out of 63 schools.) A school head in Sing district claimed,

*I want my school to be involved in SoQ program because we have a limited budget for teaching and learning materials*

This suggests that an incomplete school located in a poor village still struggles as a result of the piecemeal approach by donors. It also suggests, despite best intentions, there is a lack of understanding of the real needs of schools in a rural remote area by donors and the MOE. The piece meal approach also tended to benefit children in complete schools. This situation made it even harder for school leaders who were expected to provide equal support to all satellite school students.

Lack of consultation at all levels also contributes to this piecemeal approach. A principal reported,

*Any schools that accept a school meal program from the WFP will be involved in the SoQ program and receive materials from UNICEF. Phoundonthan school is not involved in the SoQ program because a village chief didn’t want to accept the school meal program. This was because the women don’t want to cook meals for students because they have to collect fire wood and this takes away their time from farming. When the senior level brings a project whether it is good or bad we have to accept it and we have to do the same, otherwise we’ll be seen to be a weak point.*

This suggests that lack of consultation at the grassroots level creates some tension between donors and communities. This situation also adds complexity to a principal’s job in dealing
with his/her community because most donor funded cooperative projects now require community participation in education. It is not always easy to encourage poor communities to become involved in supporting their schools as it takes away their working time to earn a living. In addition, this data implies that most school leaders had very limited involvement in designing the new programs and they were told to perform new tasks or functions without explanation and support. In this case it was the role of a school leader to be the implementer. If a school principal is to be a school leader who is an effective agent for education improvement at the grassroots level, he/she should be involved in decision making processes, project planning and design because they are the key implementers at the community and school levels.

Further investigation provided an additional insight into the SoQ program (see section 5.2.2.1.) This research implies that donors tend to come up with a change in educational concepts. The SoQ appeared to be a new fashion in Sing district and it was hard for school leaders to resist because it was introduced by the MOE and a key donor. The concepts underpinning the SoQ program had now become the official new inspiring framework for school improvement in the district. One senior DEB official commented,

_Cluster schools were replaced by the Child Friendly School initiative and now we have the Quality School Program. I don't understand why the cluster schools stopped running because I think they are good for regular grade meetings for all teachers in the cluster._

I acknowledge that the issue of lack of recurrent funding in support of the operation of the cluster school system creates problems. However, this research suggests that the cluster is an effective way to improve school leadership and student learning and make best use of available capacity and resources. Based on information provided by a PES official, UNICEF previously launched the Child Friendly School initiative but has now had shifted to the SoQ Program. The introduction of new educational concepts repeatedly reoccurred. I saw the five-pointed star picture hanging on the wall in one of the principal offices in Sing district. I remembered the five-pointed star because it was once used to be the ideal for teaching and learning flowing from one of the cooperative projects on education back in the 1990s.
The five-pointed star encompasses five concepts including activity-based learning, improving teacher questioning, using illustrations effectively, application to daily life and group learning and group discussion. This concept was useful twenty years ago and is still seen to be a useful guide to teaching and learning.

It can be seen from the above narratives that the implementation of the SoQ program would be another new challenge to school leaders and a useful conceptual tool was increasingly overlooked. To implement this program required a different training focus, job expectations and additional resources. It was also foreseen that this program would direct the development of future in-service training activities that should be directly linked to improving school and student outcomes. And the complexities and challenges and new fashions continue.

5.2.3.3 The impact of donors on education in the Phonthong district

In Stage 1 I indicated that donors were not active in Phonthong district. However, in 2010 the core school received assistance from JICA for school construction. As in Sing district, donor support appeared to be rather haphazard with a piecemeal approach and again, based on a lack of local consultation and understanding of the local educational context. The following data provides an example of these characteristics.

At a meeting with two senior DEB officials, one DEB official reported,

Soon JICA will build 13 schools in our district including 8 primary schools and 5 lower secondary schools.

The district was officially informed of this by the JICA team but neither the PES nor the MOE were involved in the decision making process. My observations revealed the DEB was happy because JICA was going to build more schools in their district and that this contribution would reduce the community’s burden. (And it was almost impossible for the
MOE or PES to countermand this donor decision.) One of the target schools for new construction was the core school at my initially selected research cluster. As I had learned on my previous visits, the school construction project was a vital issue because the community could not afford the construction. The school and the community were very pleased with the JICA decision. One principal said,

*JICA will build 12 classrooms for our school because it is the biggest school in Phonthong cluster with 26 teachers and more than 600 students.*

To contribute to this project the school and the community had to remove the old wooden building and clear the construction site. They also had to build temporary classrooms for students making sure that the students continued their learning while waiting for the new classrooms. The following pictures showed the school and community contribution to the school construction project.

A teacher and students clearing the construction site on a Friday afternoon. (On Wednesday and Friday afternoons students are supposed to be involved in student extra curricular activities.)

The community and school leaders building temporary classrooms on Saturday using the remaining materials from the old building.
Despite the good news about the core school, there was a sad story about one of the satellite schools in the same cluster in Chik village. This event saddened me and the school leadership and the local community. The remotest and poorest school in the cluster was eliminated from the JICA school construction project because of its location. The school was 7 km away from the main road and could only be accessed in the dry season. There was no proper bridge to cross the river so local people used a boat or ferry for travelling. One of the JICA selection criteria was that a school must be accessible during both dry and rainy seasons so that there would be no obstacles to transporting construction materials. Two senior DEB officials exclaimed,

_The community is siachailai (greatly losing heart) with the decision made by JICA so we have to invite the principal to the DEB and explain to him the reason (for the JICA decision.) The principal has to go back and explain to his community._

When I visited this school last month, the community and the school were extremely excited about the visit of the JICA team surveying the feasibility of the school construction. I saw the community building a road and removing the school gate. They also planned to move electricity pylons from the school yard as it was suggested by the JICA team. The community and the school put all their efforts into trying to get assistance from JICA but they faced a heart-breaking experience because of their school location. This incident illustrates the complexity within school leaders’ work. This complexity was created by poor donor consultations and inadequate communications between the donor, the district and the school community. It also indicates the unequal power relationships that exist in the donor-recipient environment. Finally, this piecemeal approach to school improvement illustrates donor based activity based on unrealistic criteria where local people have limited involvement in the decision making process and have no ability to provide feedback to the donor. This process further exacerbated school and community disadvantage.

As a practitioner I wanted to listen to what happened and support the local people in their involvement in education development in their village. Being seen as a representative of the MOE meant that I was obliged to listen. The school leadership team, teachers, the village chief, a head of parent association, the head of elderly citizen’s group could not wait to tell me what happened to the proposed school construction project by JICA during my second visit to the school.
The principal lamented,

*Pasasonh (villagers) are willing to help 100% but they said they were unable to deliver construction materials to our school in both seasons because of the river. We can do everything except changing nature.*

The deputy principal added,

*Honghien (school) Nonkhoun was also rejected because of the same reason. They like a place where many people can see the new school. Perhaps they want to be a bit of a show off and they don’t like a rural remote location.*

The head of the elderly citizen’s group claimed,

*They should have come and asked me how to transport construction materials across the river. I’ll show them how to do it, but just give us a chance.*

The above event gave insight into the way some donors failed to understand the real needs at the grassroots level (and tended to act in their own interests) due to lack of consultation and understanding the situation. This also clearly suggested that their decision, whether it was intentional or not, neglected to help the poor because the poor schools continued to struggle and the community still paid a price in their endeavours to receive assistance. It also indicates the DEB’s lack of power or willingness to influence a decision that exacerbated uneven education delivery across the district. As a consequence of this donor decision I decided to help the community raise funds with friends in Vientiane and Australia to help them rebuild their school. (Information about this activity is contained in the Portfolio as item 13.)
5.2.4 Reflection

This stage again provided me with time for more continuous reflection and analysis based on the data drawn from notes and journals during the action phase of Stage 2. I also used relevant literature to help me make greater sense of the data. I had four objectives for Stage 2. These can be summarised as: maintaining and developing relationships; continuing to develop a deeper understanding of the context; gaining a greater understanding the role of school leadership and finally to understand the role of education donors. My reflections are organised according to these objectives.

5.2.4.1 Maintain and develop relationships with research participants

My personal relationships with the research participants were tentatively established in Stage 1 and strengthened in Stage 2. To maintain and develop relationships with my research participants, three key ideas were either reinforced or became increasingly evident during this second stage of my research project. These notions include:

- The importance of trust
- The reciprocal nature of relationships
- Sensitivity to power and inequalities

In the Lao research context, the importance of trust is a crucial element. First, increased levels of trust led to greater access to data. At the MOE I was able to work across departments, and hierarchical boundaries to gain relevant data. I also could utilise a range of government documents and participate in discussions and meetings as a welcomed colleague. I did have access to respondents in their own language which also encouraged trust and access to significant data. In addition, at the local level including PES, DEB, schools and communities in remote areas I was no longer an outsider. In the Lao PDR local people are often suspicious of an outsider and they tend not provide information or collaboration. Second, high levels of trust also led to personal reciprocal relationships and networks. Although I was very aware that personal reciprocal relationships and networks were a key ingredient in Lao culture, I became even more aware of this. Northouse (2007) sums this up well when he suggests power distance is related to the way culture is formed into layers, thus creating levels between people based on power, authority, prestige, status, wealth and material possessions. It was
relevant to my research because I better understood why I could not stop research participants at the local level from seeing me as a powerful MOE official rather than a researcher. According to Hofstede & Hofstede (2005) a relationship of trust should be established with another person before any business can be done. Through a number of visits to my research sites and being a good listener helped me build networks and relationships with local research participants and ultimately increase trust and access to significant data.

In addition to the importance of trust, the reciprocal nature of relationships is also an essential aspect in Lao culture. By showing respect and acknowledging the existing hierarchical structures, maintaining my reciprocal obligations to the MOE and working harmoniously within the MOE, in return I gained support and cooperation for my research. This natural reciprocity again led to access to significant data at the MOE. Similar to the MOE level, at the local level I showed respect for local hierarchies, compassion and concern for them, maintained harmonious relationships with research participants and helped them where possible. For example, as part of the reciprocity process, I made some small donations to schools such as soccer balls and volley balls as well as some small gifts (key chains, T-shirts, neck-ties and so on) to PES and DEB officials and school leader research participants. In return, I received good cooperation and support from the research participants and gained greater access to local data. For example, I was allowed to attend formal meetings at the DEB. At school level, I was welcomed by the school community and I was also given some local agricultural products such as fresh snake beans, young coconuts, sticky rice and peanuts and so on to take back to Vientiane. This reciprocal nature of developing relationships also helped me further strengthen my relationship with the local people.

Along with the importance of trust and the reciprocal nature of relationships sit the notion of sensitivity to power and inequalities. While gaining greater access to data was a fundamental advantage for me, I had to be aware of critical political and sensitive issues in terms of publication and dissemination of my data (Coghlan, 2003; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Rowley, 2003). I needed to establish a balance between the research imperatives and the needs of the Lao education and political systems and my position within them.

As Kemmis & Mc Taggart (2000) noted, the aim of research is to find the truth. However, balancing truthfulness with the need to respect the participants and research requirements in the Lao political context was very challenging. Too often I had to draw a fine line between
these expectations while maintaining the essence of practitioner research in contributing to transformation of practice (Smith G & Mockler, 2005). In addition, I had to develop practical new knowledge and solutions to issues of pressing concerns to research participants and their communities (Reason, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2006). Thus, from time to time, I had to be careful not appear to be too critical and to protect myself and my participants. By doing so I was able to maintain the authenticity of my data and protect my participants and myself because by the end of this research project I would go back and continue my work with the MOE.

The issues discussed above have methodological implications. One of the assumptions underpinning action research is the requirement to be critical and to be fearless in analysing and reporting the data. However this is not always easily done in the Lao PDR. Action research is not common in the Lao PDR and is not really understood. There are cultural and political impediments to being critical and to reporting data fearlessly. As discussed earlier, Lao culture can be described as hierarchical and power relations are rarely equal. This research project rests on an assumption that facilitating participation and involvement of people at the district and school levels could be seen as a form of pressure. Undertaking research in rural areas is also difficult to achieve in practice where research participants felt that they had lower status than me. In addition, they are often told what to do by senior levels and to follow directives. To help school leaders recognise their role as an educational agent involved in change and improvement brought by action research is a real challenge.

5.2.4.2 Continuing to develop a deeper understanding of the research context

During this stage my understanding of the research context deepened. In particular I developed a greater understanding of the similarities and differences between Sing and Phonthong districts. The two districts have similarities in terms of remoteness and isolation of school locations and donor approaches in supporting schools. I also gained a better understanding of the differences between these two districts in terms of wealth, religion and ethnic diversity. The similarities and differences between Sing and Phonthong districts have had an impact on their education development. The following paragraphs discuss these insights.
The first similarity is the remoteness. This issue was raised in Stage 1 but it is worth emphasising again. The remoteness of school locations not only leads to communication problems for both school leaders and senior levels, but also leaves schools and school leaders in isolation. School leaders are often not well-informed about policy changes, and frequently the centre became disconnected from schools. Too often the remotest and poorest schools are not as well-served as schools situated in urban lowland areas. On the other hand, the relative remoteness gives school leaders a surprising amount of freedom to exercise and interpret policy and directives into action to support teaching and learning in their schools. This situation provides an opportunity for school leaders to exhibit their true leadership if they are to bring about change in their schools. However, it becomes apparent that not all principals are able to exploit this opportunity.

Issues flowing from donor support approaches are another major similarity in the two districts. As discussed in Stage 1, the role of donors and lenders was a sub-set of the context that emerged during Stage 1 and then later become the major part of this research. For example, initially donors were active only in Sing district while there was no donor support in Phonthong district. During this Stage the selected cluster in Phonthong district also received support from a donor for a school construction project. I found that the donor approach in supporting the two districts shared some similarities. For instance, their support was a piecemeal and focused on capital investment. To keep the discussion manageable these aspects will be discussed in a separate section (section 5.2.4.4) on the critical analysis of the role of the donors in contributing to the improvement of school leadership.

In addition to these similarities, there are a number of different features between Sing and Phonthong district. First, there is an economic distinction. The community contribution to school physical infrastructure and operation and maintenance costs are an example. Each family in Phonthong district contributed at least 100,000 kip (US$12) for school building, while the community in Sing district built a grass hut school and relied on donor support for better school building standards. Whereas each household gave its school at least 10,000 kip (US$1.2) for school operation costs in Phonthong district, in Sing district the school community paid 5,000 kip (US$0.60) each and preferred to contribute labour to their school instead of cash. This data clearly suggests that the community in Sing district is poorer than Phonthong district. However, both communities in the two districts valued education and their contribution depended on their socio-economic condition.
Religion is a second difference between the two districts. Buddhism is the predominant religion in Phonthong district whilst Animism is widely practiced in Sing district. The advantage for Phonthong district was the Buddhist monks in addition to encouraging and, in a number of instances, managing funds for school development projects, played an active role in supporting education, for example, donating a large amount of funds for school construction, while in Sing district religion did not play an active role in education. Most school construction funds in Phonthong cluster were co-financed by the community and monks. Stuart-Fox (1999) asserts that in rural communities monks have the leadership role because they are keen on community development and they are open to modernization, especially when they also gain benefits themselves. In addition, the traditional Buddhist Wat (temple) schools have a long history in contributing to Lao education development (Faming, 2007). This explains some of the reasons why Buddhism maintains its popularity in contemporary Lao society.

The third key difference between these two districts is ethnic diversity. This distinction was discussed in Stage 1 but it kept reappearing in Stage 2 so it is significant to re-examine it again. This issue is a considerable challenge for school leaders in Sing district. While in Phonthong district Lao-Tai speaking ethnic group was the dominant population, in Sing district there were many ethnic groups including low, mid and high-land ethnic groups such as Lao-Tai, Austro-Asiatic, Hmong-Yu Mien and Sino-Tibetan. In addition, minority ethnic groups (highland populations) were often mobilised and encouraged to move by the government to prevent slash-and-burn agriculture (Evrard & Goudineau, 2004). The increased and diversified mobility and language diversity created an additional challenge for school leaders in Sing district in expanding access to primary education as well as dealing with language of instruction at school, especially in grade 1 and 2. Faming (2007) also claims that the primary education curriculum is written in Lao language and designed within the “Lao national context” (i.e. ethnic Lao culture and Buddhism), which is hard to implement for teachers and pupils in the rural areas and ethnic children who are non-Lao speakers.

This was not a unique problem for the Lao PDR, it also an issue in other educational system in developing countries, especially in the former colonies of European powers (Bergmann, 2002). Bergmann suggests that teaching children to read and write should begin in a language they understand or their mother tongue; at a later stage the country’s official language should
be introduced as the medium of instruction. But in teaching terms, the transition to the official language is not easy to manage. The introduction of a foreign language in Grade 3 under the education system reform strategy adds another layer of difficulty for ethnic children as well as another challenge to their teachers and school leaders.

Field research on the similarities and differences between the two districts helped me to understand that educational policies and directives that are handed down from a distant source (the centre) were not always relevant or effective or implemented in all districts in the Lao PDR. As I have discussed above, there were key differences between the two districts that were the focus of this research project. These differences have implications for education policy and management practice in the Lao PDR. It is understandable that the central government would attempt to have one policy for the entire country. It is also understandable that the central government would be concerned with maintaining national unity. The language policy is one example of this. However, it is also important to realize the differences between regions and that the education policy may require different implementation strategies and different resourcing levels. Sultan (2003) claims that policy makers’ lack of understanding of the local context seemed to be one of the key factors for the less than successful effort in the Lao PDR. During this research it became apparent that random formal visits to schools by MOE and PES senior officials are necessary for a better understanding of the local educational context. This strategy would not only help to improve communication and the flow of information but also maintain contact with schools and school leaders so they do not feel so separated from the centre. More importantly, the local people will understand that education is not driven by technical experts at the central level who make decisions for everyone and are responsible for planning what will be done, despite the fact that implementation would have to occur at the school level (Sergiovanni, 2005).

5.2.4.3 Gain a greater understanding of the roles of school leaders in leading and managing school effectively

To analyse and reflect on my data as well as to assist me in understanding the role of school leaders, I adopted three steps. First, I looked at my data (especially my writing) and listed some dot points as a consequence of my reflection for this stage. The following table illustrates an example of the brainstorming process on the four objectives (see Portfolio 2 for the complete brainstorming).
Table 5.6: An initial analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining and developing relationship</td>
<td>- Respect and acknowledge the existing hierarchical structure and contribute to productive interpersonal relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Respect local hierarchy and maintain relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing to develop a deeper understanding of research context</td>
<td>- Increase the awareness of remoteness and isolation of school locations in two districts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Understand the differences between the two districts in terms of wealth, religion, donor, ethnicity diversity, its location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- the role of donors is a sub-set of context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain a greater understanding of the roles of school leaders in leading</td>
<td>- very narrow leadership development pathways for individuals and their careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and managing schools (issues are similar but there are some differences in two districts)</td>
<td>- low incentives and salaries &amp; little training and limited support for the position but high job expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- multiple roles: an educational and social/political leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- vigilant so they rely on guidelines from the senior levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain a better understanding the roles of donors in contributing to the</td>
<td>- lack of understanding of the reality on the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uneven development of school leaders and schools</td>
<td>- active and often come with good intentions but end with unintended consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- focus on more observable outcomes rather than invisible support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- an example of centrally planned themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- add more responsibility to school leaders who have limited administrative skills and resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, I used the brainstorming table to discuss and review my initial analysis with my two supervisors. On reflection, my objective here was to give voice to local school leaders.
Although I was not a school leader, Reason’s (2001) call for a more encompassing form of research that includes three separate voices influenced my approach to the analysis of the data about school leaders. He refers to first, second and third person action research. First person focuses on the ability of the research to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life by consciously taking action and assessing outcomes in the outside world while acting. Second person involves the researcher working with others on issues of mutual concern. The third person research intends to create a wider community of inquiry. I found Reason’s work helpful in positioning myself in relation to other research participants in the research process. It also helped me see more clearly issues from a school leader’s perspective and this, in turn, helped me to understand and analyse my rich research data.

While the work of Reason was useful during the action phase, it had limitations because I had to lot of data from three locations (the MOE, Sing and Phonthong districts) to deal with as a result of my reflection for this stage. It was during discussion with supervisors that we developed an approach to make more sense of my data analysis. The grouping of data not only grew out of Reason’s work but also related to the high power distance context outlined by Hofstede & Hofstede (2005) and Northouse (2007). This notion was useful because the Lao educational management system could be described as a hierarchical system where superiors and subordinates consider each other very unequal. Based on this research, school leaders were seen (if seen at all) by the MOE, PESs and DEBs as subordinates because they worked at the school level, the lowest educational administration unit. For example, schools were not included in the official educational decision-making hierarchy. They were expected to be told what to do and follow directives from the senior levels. And behind this level of relationships sit donors, the Party, powerful local personalities and so on. As a consequence, a second table was developed based on discussions with supervisors and the work of Reason, Hofstede & Hofstede and Northouse.

The second table was very useful because it more accurately reflected the key relationships and enabled a more effective analysis of these relationships. The table below summarises the critical relationships of the principals/school leaders. First, saytang or a vertical line includes the senior educational bureaucracy such as DEB, PES and MOE. They are removed from the day to day school operation. In broad term, saytang means vertical reporting relationships but the understanding can be flexible depending on the context. Second, saykhouang or a horizontal line comprises the local community and the local elements of the mass
organizations. The third element is the donors. Although they are outsiders they play an active role in primary education as they closely work with the *saytang*. Within these relationships I identified four common areas that had an impact on the role of school leader: expectations, status/recognition, support, and relationship.

Table 5.7: Critical relationships of school leaders 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting lines</th>
<th>Expectation of</th>
<th>Status/ recognition of</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vertical line or <em>saytang</em>:</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>limited</td>
<td>limited</td>
<td>Formal bureaucratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEB, PES, MOE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal line or <em>saykhouang</em>:</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>Informal reciprocity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local community, mass organisations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donors</td>
<td>compliant</td>
<td>limited</td>
<td>Fragmented</td>
<td>Subservient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To take a further step in my data analysis I again consulted with my two supervisors. Although the second version of the table facilitated deeper analysis, it missed an important element. My data, reflection and discussions in Melbourne, led me to conclude that knowledge was also a substantial aspect. Within the critical relationships of school leaders I now had five common areas that had an impact on the role of school leader: expectations, status/recognition, support, relationship and knowledge. The third and final version of the table became my analysis tool for Stage 2.
Table 5.8: Critical relationships of school leaders 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting lines</th>
<th>Expectation of</th>
<th>Status/recognition of</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vertical line or saytang: DEB, PES, MOE</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>limited</td>
<td>limited</td>
<td>Formal bureaucratic</td>
<td>Limited knowledge of local context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal line or saykhouang: local community, mass organisations</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>Informal reciprocity</td>
<td>High local knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donors</td>
<td>compliant</td>
<td>limited</td>
<td>Fragmented</td>
<td>Subservient</td>
<td>Outside (limited understanding of the local context)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated earlier, the role of donors emerged as a major part of this research and it will be discussed in a separate section. This section discusses reflection on school leaders’ relationships along *saytang* (vertical) and *saykhouang* (horizontal) reporting lines.

**Saytang or vertical relationships**

As indicated above, elements of the *saytang* are disconnected from the day-to-day reality of school operation. The *saytang* expect a school leader in the Lao PDR, to be an educational leader, a bureaucrat, and a local social and political leader. Educational leadership includes pedagogical adviser, providing advice to teachers about teaching and learning. In addition, they are expected to be a school manager and a daily administrator who manages academic, personnel, student affairs, infrastructure and finance. Furthermore they are expected to be a community campaigner, a fundraiser as well as manage the local mass organization. These expectations require multi-roles and impose responsibilities on the principal in the exercise of their leadership.
While those within the vertical hierarchy place great demands on the principal position, the work of principals does not appear to be either recognized or valued. For example, they have a low salary and incentives as well as poor working conditions. Their salary is similar to the teachers they supervise. This research shows that there appears to be no specific salary enhancement program or specific titles for the principals while teachers have honorific titles and teaching position awards. In addition, their working conditions are often difficult - the schools are often in remote locations and in poor conditions without running water and electricity and lack teaching and learning materials. In addition, their housing is not adequate, especially in Sing district where the school leaders sometimes have to live in grass huts without electricity or water supplies.

Furthermore, the opportunities for professional or career development are few and far between. For instance, they have little training and limited preparation for their position. There also appears to be no systematic training for school leaders before their official appointment. Most of them learn how to lead and manage schools on their job. There was evidence of some training being done in an ad-hoc manner based on donor funded projects. There was no on-going government capacity building for principals.

In addition to limited orientation for the position, the saytang hierarchy seems to provide limited on-going professional development to help school leaders carry out their duties. According to the research participants in this project, they received little or no real assistance designed to help them perform their expected roles and duties. Moreover it is not clear who is responsible for training and supporting principals. In addition, there seems to be no solid updated official statement about principal roles. Limited training and support, coupled with a lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities leads to a lack of understanding of the central focus of the principals’ job responsibilities, and of the skills necessary to perform the role. School principals should clearly understand the major responsibilities that they are expected to exercise so that their performance can be judged according to their effectiveness in defined areas (Catano & Stronge, 2007, p. 394).

Besides the limited support, the characteristic of the relationship within the saytang structure and school leaders is formal, distant and bureaucratic. The bureaucratic nature of the relationship is compounded by the often poor communication. The opportunities for principals to meet DEB staff are only through a monthly meeting and technical meetings,
which are organised in an ad-hoc manner to disseminate new polices or directives. The monthly meeting is used to collect reports from schools and disseminate plans for the following months. The school leaders reported that they were often told to undertake new functions without explanation and support. The nature of this relationship may create tension between school leaders and senior levels. While the school leaders often view themselves as rule followers, they comprehend that senior levels are autocratic. One possible implication of this hierarchical structure is lack of independence and creativity. In fact, it appears that the current hierarchical structure may hinder school leaders from being creative and effective leaders. I remembered one consultant commenting that the principal needed to be a creative educator and not just a rule follower. He also suggested that there were rules that the principal had to follow in administering and managing the school, and there was nothing wrong in carefully following these. He continued to argue that the creative principal would look at the world his/her students inhabited and would seek to make what went on in school relevant to their lives outside the classroom and relevant to the lives they would lead once their schooldays were over. If the principal did not do this, the teaching and learning was just so much ritual and might in fact give little of any genuine worth to children and the community. The current educational settings in the Lao PDR create great challenges for the principal to go beyond ritual and make school effective and relevant.

While the need for a vertical educational structure is understandable, it poses particular problems for central school leaders. Key educational decision makers are located at the centre. Policies and the decision based on these policies are often removed far away from the reality of educational practice in districts such as Sing and Phonthong. Senior educational officials (central and provincial levels) rarely pay a visit to schools or attempt to gain a first-hand understanding of school leaders and their communities. Even district educational officials, who are better placed to understand the local education realities rarely visit. (Financial support for such visits is often a challenge.)

The exception is pedagogical advisors. However, even here there is a problem - a role conflict. In theory, the pedagogical advisors are responsible for providing technical support to teachers, where they are supposed to sit down and listen to problems and issues and advice from school principals and communities. In practice, they are very frequently asked to focus on assessing school performance for the title of the model school.
It is important for senior levels to understand the role and responsibility and the complexity of the principal’s job as a school leader in remote rural areas. Creating new directives adds more tasks and requires a set of new skills and knowledge and resources for school principals to fulfil the new expectations from the system. For instance, the implementation of the Model School Program (Ministerial Directive No 763/MOE.DGE/07, 10 Sep 2007), the SoQ program (Ministerial Decree No 928/MOE.DoP/10, 2010), and the on-going assessment (Ministerial Directive No 1203/MOE.DPPE/09, 30 Nov 2009) place additional responsibilities on principals and require new and different skills and resources. Therefore, the role and responsibilities of school leaders is becoming more complex and demanding as these educational expectations are added to an already onerous position. There is a need for further investigation to examine the impact of the vertical hierarchies in order to help senior officials support the principals in leading and managing their schools effectively.

This study argues that principals are forgotten people. In fact, as noted earlier in this Chapter excluded from the educational decision-making hierarchy. For instance, one of the principals’ responsibilities is to implement directives from senior levels (e.g. DEB, PES and MOE) effectively (Ministerial Directive No 1373/MOE/96, 17 Oct 1996). They need to be thought of and treated as key educational administrators and trained and supported by the system. The data also indicates that school principals have very narrow and limited leadership and career development pathways.

**Saykhouang or horizontal relationships**

As stated earlier that the saykhouang relationships are those with local communities and the local elements of the mass organizations who are located close to schools. The saykhouang creates high expectations of school leaders. School leaders in rural remote schools are confronted with another layer of responsibilities as they are expected to play an active role in the development of their community. For instance, they provide school facilities for adult literacy classes (and often teach these classes), voting venues and cheap accommodation. This research clearly suggests that school leaders exercise their leadership beyond the school fence. To facilitate educational services to their local communities, they are not only responsible for leading and managing their schools and the teaching and learning in them; they are expected to contribute to the community and its political development.
School leader participants in this research project are all public servants. The word for “public servant” in the old regime was khalasakaan, which means a slave of the kingdom (literally translated.) Nowadays the word “public servant” has changed to ladthakone or phanakgnanlad, which means a state worker (literally translated.) In fact “serving the people” or habsaihapasonh has been the doctrine and mission of Communist Party of Laos from the very beginning. All ladthakone or phanakgnanlad are expected to serve the people and are seen as working class. Although the word has changed, from serving the kingdom to serving the state and people, the meaning remains similar. School leaders in remote areas are the focus of enormous expectations and their role contextually depends on the needs of their community and the demands of their superiors.

Apart from being a community leader, school leaders also have an official political and social role in their communities. The principals who participated in this research project hold senior positions in local mass organisations, namely the Lao Federated Trade Union and Village Party Unit. They are expected to maintain and mobilise mass organizations with tasks such as identifying teachers who could be involved in the different parts of the mass organizations. This task is seen to be very important. His Excellency Kaysone Phomvihane, a former Party Secretary General, stressed in his speech on 9 December 1978 that teachers were personnel of the Party (Mangnormek, 2008). For example, one of the selection criteria for a teacher honorific title and teaching position required a prospective teacher to be a Party member and committed to socialist ideology (Prime Ministerial Decree No 208/PM, 30 July 2007; Prime Ministerial Decree No 209/PM, 30 July 2007). The task of identification and fostering mass organisations also applied to students within schools. Furthermore, principals are also expected to conduct meetings with current mass organisation members within schools and attend the mass organisation meetings at the village and DEB levels. It might be argued that in some aspects that the Lao structure is similar to that in China; it isn't that people are supposed not to know that a hidden Party structure shadows the state agencies: they are supposed to be fully aware that there is such a hidden network (Žižek, 21 October 2010, p. 8). This shadow political/social advocacy adds another layer of responsibilities and ambiguity to the principal’s job but this ideology also helps the principal to gain support for the leadership position officially and publicly (See Chapter 4 Section 4.4 for the leadership appointment criteria.)
While school leaders are on the receiving end of high expectations from *saykhouang*, they do receive high recognition from their local communities. Their status is not only based on their active involvement in their communities as discussed above but also from their formal position. Being a public servant with title or position in a school in a village in a rural remote area in the Lao PDR is a privilege and is respected. Position power is the power a person gains from a particular office or rank in a formal organisation system while personal power is derived from a leader’s expertise and/or friendship, trustworthiness and general sociability (Jackson & Parry, 2008; Northouse, 2007). In this connection, being a school principal is considered to be the highest educational position in the village as he or she is expected to be a knowledgeable and helpful person. According to research participants, principals are asked to help their village to solve a problem and to assist in the selection process of their village chief or *nayban*, which means the village head (literally translated.) They are not only seen as a community advisor but also act as an educational agent who links the school and the community. In addition, school principals cannot escape from their community’s attention. As there seems to be no official principal selection criteria, the appointment to the principal’s position is based on the results of consultations with local authority and community. This evidence suggests that principal must be accepted by their local communities. This finding suggests that to be an effective school leader in the remote rural areas required both positional and personal power so that he/she is able to lead and manage their school effectively.

School leaders in this study not only gained high status but also support from their local communities. The support from the communities is in both cash and in-kind contributions. For example, the local communities in both districts help school leaders to lead and operate their school by providing recurrent funding for school operation and maintenance, providing both labour and cash contributions for building schools, school gates and signs, reading huts and hiring teachers and so on. In Sing district the community even built accommodation for the school principal and school heads and give rice to teachers who are not residents in the villages. The data suggests that school leaders need significant local resources in order to provide education and services to students and run schools effectively. It also shows that limited support from the vertical line has added burdens on the school leaders to fill this gap and the local communities are required to maintain their own schools using their own resources.
The relationship between school leaders and the local communities is also informal and reciprocal. In this research project all school leaders in Phonthong district come from their own villages so personal networks and relationships already existed. The personal networks and relationships are critical tools because they create relationships of trust and mutual support. High (2006, p. 36) observes that in contemporary Laos, the concept of the village is bound up with concepts of belonging, place, mutual support, and aspiration. As discussed above, the local communities support school leaders both cash and in-kind; in return school leaders have obligations to serve their communities. For instance, one of the principals in Phonthong district also assumes the role of the village health coordinator to educate his community about the use of fake medicine and report on new immunization programs for villagers. In Sing district school leaders help to teach adult literacy classes for ethnic students’ parents in the evening.

School leaders not only develop good relationships with their local communities, they also have knowledge of their local educational context. They know who are the most respected and influential actors in the village so they can seek help. For example, they invite community representatives including the village chief and village elderly headman to participate in important school events such as the new academic year and closing academic year meetings. They have an understanding of their local political context. They also know their student and teacher needs and concerns as well as their community’s. For example, principal research participants reported that their teachers need assistance for teaching physical education, art, science and Lao language. Second, they have knowledge of the local geography. They know the location and distance between schools in their muad and cluster, and how to travel between schools and how much travel time they need as well as how to communicate in their areas. Third, they have knowledge of their community’s socio-economic situation. They are aware of their community’s financial situation. They know that if their community is poor they still have to find ways to encourage contributions to other development activities such as installation of electricity, building a road into their village as well as building village temples. Fourth, they often understand local languages, especially in Sing district. School leader participants also tend to speak local languages after their first two years of struggling. Fifth, they have knowledge of significant local cultural practices and attitudes. They are aware of each ethnic group’s festivals so that they can adjust their teaching schedule. This local knowledge is important and should be recognised as it will help to shape educational policy to be more responsive to the local needs and situation. There is a need here for further
investigation in order to recognise and support school leaders in leading and managing schools effectively.

Decentralization policies (often donor driven) have placed additional responsibilities on both school leaders and local communities. As the school is the lowest tier of educational administration, school leaders are expected to be responsible for the entire school system in the local area. School leaders are bombarded with multiple expectations and responsibilities, the demands of a centrally driven system with limited resources. School leaders devote much of their time to securing school resources and as a consequence, work closely with their community. In this connection, it appears that a school leader’s primary role and responsibility is to effectively manage school operations by paying more attention to infrastructure issues than to academic programs at school. It is understandable as all schools are poor and have a demand for resources and facilities. It is clear that under the government decentralization policy, the village is the implementation unit, and local communities are over-burdened with government development initiatives. High (2006, p. 25) notes that these decentralization policies require villagers to donate their time, efforts, and possessions under the rubric of solidarity. This research clearly shows that decentralization has made a wide variety of demands on the rural population. For example, most villages in this research project were required to construct and maintain their own school using their own resources. While the political language of decentralization and participation meshes closely with the latest in international development rhetoric, there is nothing new in a policy platform that demands locals to give freely to the state (High, 2006, p. 28).

5.2.4.4 Gain a better understanding the roles of donors in contributing to the uneven development of school leaders and schools

In some ways donors could be seen as outsiders. However, they are very like to be regarded as saytang. Based on this research they could be seen as part of the official hierarchy. Although aid and donors are active in Lao education, the focus of this project is not a broad analysis of the role of international development aid. Donors can play an important role. However, it is important that this role is effective and must be relevant to the needs of the recipient. It is important that educational aid is consistent with the national education plan. Unfortunately this is not always the case. It is not that aid bureaucrats are bad; in fact many smart, hard-
working, dedicated professional toil away in the world's top aid agencies (Easterly, 2007, p. 4). I work with Lao education technocrats and foreign consultants who are capable, honest and well-meaning people with a high commitment to make a contribution to Lao educational development.

I hope my research will increase an understanding of the needs of local leaders and communities and their contribution to aid focus and delivery. To examine the role of donors based on this research project, I again followed the summary table of critical relationships of school leaders as discussed in section 5.2.4.3. Based on the vertical and horizontal grid, five identified dimensions were identified and are used to guide the reflection on and analysis of the roles of donors in relation to school leaders. The dimensions include expectations, status/recognition, support, relationship and knowledge. Each element will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The donors’ understanding of the demands on school leaders appear to be limited. They tend to expect school leaders to be compliant. In other words, they expect that school leaders will comply with their project design or program or funding initiative. Although the school leaders do not have direct contact with donors, the donors’ activities have direct impact on their work. For example, at the moment there are two major directions in primary education. The first policy is the introduction of SoQ program and the second one is the EFA-FIT program through the World Bank and AusAID. On the surface there appears to be no tension between donors and education leaders as donors always appear with good intentions and funding. This condition allows them to orchestrate educational planning and practice from a distance (the centre) while school leaders play a passive role in the development and delivery processes. In addition, donors and central officials seem to believe that the prime role of school leaders is to be grateful. Donors pay less attention to the needs and perceptions of local school leaders and their capacity to participate in the decision making process. They tend to appear from nowhere but expect school leaders to be grateful for their intentions. These characteristics seem to confirm my experience at AusAID - well-meaning, concerned about development practice and theory, but poorly informed about the Lao realities.

Donors also seem to have limited recognition or appreciation of the role of local school leaders in the development and delivery of aid. For example, in Sing district they are told to participate in the SoQ program and the school meal program without explanation and
consultation. In addition, in Phonthong district school leaders were not involved in decision making on the school selection for the construction project brought by JICA. Aid agencies, examples of top-down bureaucracy themselves, tend to favour highly visible top-down bureaucracies to deliver services in poor countries, even though the conditions for effective bureaucracies are absent (Easterly, 2003, p. 8). This study suggests that lack of consultation at the grassroots levels results in ineffective government and donor policy and strategy. Many donor projects and programs focus on the centre; and are largely ignorant of local school leaders in rural remote areas while claiming their projects and support are aimed at poverty reduction at the local levels. This practice creates tensions between encouraging local participation and the imposition of externally imposed funding initiatives and models. It also suggests that donors have a different agenda, and donors overlook whether or not their programs or projects are related to or consistent with local priorities, or even if they may cause problems for the affected communities.

In addition to the issues identified above, donors’ support to school leaders and schools appear to be fragmented. For example, at the national scale, so far only 756 schools (out of 8,871) are currently involved in the SoQ program (Rhodes & McDonald, 2009). The EFA-FTI program also covers only 56 districts (out of 142) in the Lao PDR. At the district level in my research sites, while the DEB reported only 23 out of 63 schools were in involved in SoQ program in 2008, in Phongthong district none of schools are members of SoQ program. This piecemeal development approach creates inequality amongst schools, and means that only small number of children, teachers and school leaders will benefit.

Furthermore, donor contributions seem to focus on more observable outcomes rather than less visible and intangible support. Highly visible signs advertising the name of the donors are often one of visible outcomes of the projects. While basic infrastructure has improved in many parts of the country, including Sing and Phonthong districts, education access and quality are on-going challenges. This has been observed by a number of researchers including Faming, and the MOE report on Education for All Mid-decade Assessment (See Faming, 2007; Ministry of Education, October 2008).

The characteristic of the relationship between donors and school leaders is similar to the Lao "saytang" relationships. The school leaders are seen as passive or subservient. Donors expect the school leaders to implement or accept whatever project program or concepts are
introduced into the school system, such as the five pointed star principle, or the cluster school system, Child Friendly School initiative and more recently SoQ program. (I have touched on this point already, but it is worth repeating.) The donors’ concepts are seen as tools for bringing change in schools and school leaders are expected to be compliant but assume a leadership role at the local level. And as noted, it appears that donors themselves are an example of bureaucratic authoritarian leadership style. This relationship characteristic seems to fit well with the “Authority-Compliance Management” leadership style as described by Northouse. This style of leadership has a heavy emphasis on task and job requirements and less emphasis on people, except to the extent that people are tools for getting the job done (Northouse, 2007, p. 73). In sum, new donor projects or initiatives, whether intentionally or not, add complexity to educational practices in primary education. They also impose additional difficulties for school leaders who have limited administrative skills and resources.

Moreover, it is apparent that donors have limited understanding of the reality of the local and Lao education context and the work of other or earlier donors. Too often each new program has new glossy program documentation describing the rationale, purpose, benefits, expected outcomes, implementation plan and so on. As donors are non-indigenous their knowledge tends to be informed by their own educational systems in their cultural socio-economical and political context, and on information provided by MOE and other government officials. Escobar (1995) asserts that development has depended on one knowledge system explicitly, the modern Western one. The control of this knowledge system has dictated the marginalization and disqualification of non-Western knowledge systems. Said (1978) describes this form of knowledge as Orientalism, which is simultaneously produced by, and continues (propagates), certain power relations, in this case the power which Western states and authoritative individuals exercise (or seek to exercise) over the Orient.

This research project also shares similar findings with the research done by the Teacher Education and Administrator Development Centre on school clusters. The findings show that the creation of school clusters faces many critical challenges in the Lao educational context. Clusters are located in remote areas, where distances between schools are great and travel conditions poor. Most clusters face a lack of funds and have to rely on fund raising from the community through traditional means such as sales at festivals as well as contributions by households collected by Parent Associations (Teacher Education and Administrator Development Centre, 2004).
What’s more, donors seem to have limited understanding of the local political and leadership context. Leftwich & Hogg (2007) argue that while aid agencies increasingly understand the importance of effective states, strong institutions and good governance, there is significant gap in their recognition and understanding of the centrality of politics and leadership. To support donor work and improve education responsiveness to rural remote areas, donors need to know key actors at all levels who are in positions to influence school functions and developmental outcomes. Furthermore, as indicated donors are almost invariably non Lao speakers so the medium of communication is always English. I remember one comment made by a senior AusAID officer during my internship at AusAID office in Canberra in March 2010. He said that communication has become a major problem for developing countries because they do not understand donors’ languages. (Not that the donors rarely have any knowledge of the Lao language.) This problem is not only the case in Laos but is also an issue in other developing countries. As most of donors’ texts are written in English, this creates difficulty in communication, especially for school leaders at the local level. This difficulty is even more significant for the introduction of new ideas and concepts, especially those from abroad that are based on different traditions and social conditions (United Nations Development Programme, 2003). Many modern concepts and new trends in the education thinking or jargon do not always have an equivalent in the Lao language. There are real problems in translating terms like ‘civil society’, ‘sector-wide approach’, ‘logical framework approach’, ‘fast track initiatives’ and so on.

This research project concludes that donors generally have good intentions but often create unintended consequences. They tend to appear from nowhere and expect school leaders to be grateful for their intentions. As outsiders, donors seem to continue to impose solutions to solve local problems through a range of new (and sometimes recycled old) initiatives. Donors need to recognise the important role of school leaders and treat them as key educational administrators who should participate in all stage of planning, developing and delivering aid-funded projects and programs. This study also highlights the need to listen to the needs and perceptions of local communities in the management of aid. Too often decisions were made by donors and MOE officials based in Vientiane, based on inadequate and uninformed information about the needs of schools, school leaders and communities. If principals are to be school leaders, it is also important for donors to recognise the need for their leadership development. Building local leaders’ capacity and capability by providing focused and
sustainable knowledge and skills, would allow these leaders to support the work of donors more effectively.

This above data, reflection and analysis provided the basics for the planning of the next step. In particular, I plan to:

1. To fill some minor gaps in my existing data, especially about the school leaders and the role of donors
2. Verify and clarify preliminary findings
3. Report back to research participants on preliminary findings and invite feedback about tentative recommendations and conclusions.
Like the first two stages, the third and final stage of this research project centred on field work in the Lao PDR. The four objectives at the core of this research project continued in this third stage. While planning the third field visit I established three particular aims. The immediate aims for Stage 3 were:

1. To fill some minor gaps in my existing data, especially about the school leaders and the role of donors
2. Verify and clarify preliminary findings
3. Report back to research informants on preliminary findings and invite feedback about tentative recommendations and conclusions.

The By Project mode of post-graduate research emphasises the importance of the social distribution of knowledge. Much of the Lao PDR is essentially an oral culture and I decided that workshops would enable me to achieve the third of the Stage 3 aims: distribution of the knowledge gained during the project, feedback from participants and at the same time be faithful to Lao culture and tradition. As a consequence, I conducted three workshops – in Phonthong and Sing Districts and at the MOE in Vientiane Capital.

The following section described what happened at the workshops and the outcomes of the workshops at each location.

5.3.1 Phonthong district

When I arrived in Phonthong district I was warmly welcomed. It was clear that I was no longer considered an outsider by local educational officials, school and community leaders. For instance, when I contacted the DEB prior to my arrival in the Lao PDR and said that I
would like to run a workshop to present my preliminary findings to school and community leader research participants, the staff readily agreed and offered to organise the event.

Table 5.9: The workshop snapshot in Phonthong district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop title</th>
<th>Preliminary research findings workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Venue</td>
<td>Phonsanh Primary School, Phonthong district, Champasak province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>18 February 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>2.30-5.00 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants:</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 PES deputy director (female)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 DEB deputy director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 DEB technical staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 school leaders(5 principals &amp; 6 deputy principals including 1 female)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 community leaders (1 village chief, 3 deputy village chiefs &amp; 3 female heads of village Lao Women Union)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop agenda</td>
<td>Opening remarks, DEB deputy director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategies for Implementing Effective Management in Primary Education in the Lao PDR, Daravone Kittiphanh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Closing remarks, PES deputy director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The school and community leaders were very keen to hear about the research findings as it was the first time ever that they were involved in a research project done by a MOE official.

The workshop materials were written by hand on bush papers as there was very limited technology in the district. (See pictures of materials in the portfolio as item 11 for details.) There were two highlights of the workshop content (See pictures below.) First, I used maps, photos and descriptions to describe the two research sites: Phonthong and Sing districts. The participants loved to see their own photos, schools and activities. The photos provided the participants with information about the two districts so they learnt about some similarities and differences between the two districts. For example, Buddhism was a predominant religion in Phonthong district and played an active role in supporting school construction, while in Sing district religion did not play a significant role. Some school leader participants as well as senior PES and DEB officials wanted to visit Sing district. The second focal point of the workshop content was the table of critical school leader relationships that I developed in Stage 2. The table not only showed the preliminary research findings but it also generated
discussion, elicited clarification and prompted future recommendations for the improvement of school leadership.

This picture is an example of a photo exhibition at the workshop. The picture illustrates some photos taken in Phonthong district. Each photo has a description written in Lao.

This picture shows the table on critical relationships of school leaders translated into Lao and written by hand. The table was placed on the black board to be presented to workshop participants.

The workshop and, in particular, the responses from the workshop participants, meant that in Phonthong at least I was able to achieve my aims. Three key issues emerged: a knowledge and understanding gap amongst participants, concerns about funding issues and the work of donors.

First, the responses confirmed the knowledge and understanding gap that I had highlighted in the presentation. The DEB and the PES participants admitted that they had limited knowledge of the local education context and schools but they claimed that they had knowledge of broader educational strategy plans, educational policies, decrees, and educational development plans. School leaders explained that they thought that the saytang (DEB) had good knowledge of formal documents. In contrast the school leaders said that they had limited knowledge of these official documents.
We don’t know everything happening at schools because we are not stationed there. School leaders have better knowledge about their community, said the DEB official.

I think your research is accurate and reflects the reality of the local (educational) context, especially at the selected cluster, commented a principal.

Ajan I agree with your research findings, especially the finding about saykhouang, said one village chief.

In addition, school leader participants acknowledged that they had limited knowledge of school leadership and management.

The senior levels should pay more attention to training school leaders (educational managers), said one principal.

The senior levels should assume increased responsibility and provide advice and work more closely with principals in all tasks, said one principal.

The senior levels should upgrade leadership and school management knowledge as well as (information about) politics and governance for principals, said another principal.

Second, the school leader participants challenged the PES and DEB about funding. They claimed that lack of adequate funding prevented them from achieving better educational outcomes. They argued that some of the funding practices of the DEB were not the priorities of the local community. Even staff from the DEB acknowledged past mistakes, for example, building a meeting hall at the DEB instead of purchasing a vehicle to support school visits. While funding was a real issue, it can also be an excuse for the school leaders. Building a school gate was a particular example of a situation where there could be better use of funds. In this case there was a greater need for toilets for teachers and students.

There was also some further explanation of limited support from PES and DEB due to limited funding. The PES and DEB participants agreed that saytang did not provide enough real support to school leaders, especially in rural and remote areas. School visits were particularly difficult due to financial limitations.

We want to visit all schools but we don’t have enough budget. Sometime we have a petrol allowance to reach only DEB so most of the time we listen to reports from the DEB.
Saytang always support school leadership and see the importance of the work of the school leaders, explained the senior PES official.

As I stated above while funding was a real issue, this explanation could also be another excuse for inaction. Primary school leaders, especially in rural remote areas, worked at the lowest educational institutions and their schools were often distant and perceived to be not attractive or important. As a consequence it was possible that they were overlooked.

The third and final issue that emerged was about donors. The participants revealed that donor support was uneven and support often went to the more easily accessible schools. Often donors were not involved with local educational authorities and school leaders in making decisions. The failure of JICA school construction in Chik school was an example. (See Stage 2 Section 5.2.3.3.)

Donors like to show off, said a PES senior official.

While many donors made useful contributions to school improvement, their support focussed on projects that were visible and their work tended to be fragmented.

5.3.2 Sing district

Like in Phonthong district, I received good cooperation and support from the PES, DEB, school and community leaders to deliver my workshop. For instance, when I contacted a PES official about my intention to run a workshop in Sing district to present my preliminary research findings, he was delighted to contact the DEB and coordinate with the DEB to organise the workshop for me. The school and community leaders were also pleased to see me returning to their schools. The following table shows the snapshot of the workshop conducted in Sing district.
Table 5.10: The workshop snapshot in Sing district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop title</th>
<th>Preliminary research findings workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Venue</td>
<td>Namai Primary School, Sing district, Luang Namtha province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>24 February 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>9.30 am-12.00 pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Number of participants: 13 | 2 DEB officials (1 Pedagogical Advisor)  
6 school leaders (2 principals, 1 deputy principal & 3 teachers including 1 female)  
5 community leaders (5 village chiefs) |
| Workshop agenda | Opening remarks, DEB deputy head of general education unit  
Strategies for Implementing Effective Management in Primary Education in the Lao PDR, Daravone Kittiphanh  
Group discussion  
Closing remarks, DEB deputy head of general education unit |

The above table shows that I had a smaller number of participants attending my workshop than Phonthong district because the number of research participants in Sing district was smaller. Originally, the PES assigned a senior official to accompany me to the district to conduct the workshop. Due to the death of a family member (her grandmother passed away) she had to cancel the trip to Sing so I had no representative from the PES attending my workshop. However, I briefed the PES deputy director and a senior official at the PES based on the table of critical school leader relationships. The two senior officials showed great interest in my research, especially on the role of donors. They said that they would like a copy of my research findings.

_Your findings reflect the reality in our province very well. I want donors and khantheung (upper level) to consult with our province before imposing any plans or projects. They plan for us and we cannot change (these plans),_ claimed one of the senior PES officials.

This comment made by the senior PES official indicates the limited consultation with the local level in planning a donor funding program. It also shows inflexibility in planning or project design in delivering or implementing the plan or project.

In Sing district, I delivered the same workshop content and used the same procedure that I used in Phonthong district with the two highlights: (1) maps, photos and descriptions to
demonstrate two research sites: Phonthong and Sing districts and (2) table of critical school leader relationships. Responses at the Sing workshop were similar to the responses of Phonthong participants. For instance, the participants liked the photos which helped them see the similarities and differences between the two districts. The pictures also opened their eyes to see and learn about Phonthong district. (Some requested a study visit to Phonthong district.)

In addition, the participants appreciated the research information about relationships between saytang and saykhouang and donors.

The characteristic of relationships between saytang and saykhouang and donor are accurate, one participant said,

The community participants also acknowledged the data about their status and lack of recognition. One principal affirmed,

In terms of status and recognition I agree because saytang seek and provide the funding so we have to implement the project linked to the fund. On the other hand, we have high status from saykhouang as we (school leaders) are locally considered to be community advisors.”

In terms of the role of donors, one school leader was quite blunt.

We have to follow donors. If we don’t we are afraid that we won’t receive funding or we’ll be criticised and regarded as having weaknesses.

In terms of knowledge, most school leader participants agreed with the findings but they claimed that they had limited knowledge of school leadership and management because they did not have adequate training for their position. They also requested an upgrading of their qualifications, especially the older teachers. Some of them only held 8+3 qualification (eight years of schooling with three years of teacher training), 11+1 (eleven years of schooling with one year teacher training) and 5+3 (five years of schooling with three years of teacher training.)

Based on the above feedback and comments, my research findings were confirmed. However, there were two key issues, which took considerable time at the Sing workshop. First,
discussion was devoted to ethnic and language diversity. For example, one of senior DEB officials said,

*I would like to emphasize this issue (ethnic and language diversity) because it makes it very challenging and difficult for our district to be able to eradicate illiteracy and to achieve education for all by 2015.*

This issue was not new. It kept appearing in all stages of my research. Language and ethnic diversity continue to be a real barrier, preventing local educational authorities and school leaders from assisting the government to achieve universal quality education for all by 2015.

Second, school leaders claimed that their communities had a limited understanding of the importance of education and participation in education. They requested community training on education participation. They also wanted parents to help teachers to encourage their children to study and behave well and not leave everything to the principals and teachers.

The above issue indicated that the community placed big responsibilities on the school leaders’ shoulders. I decided to explain a little bit about community participation in education at the workshop to support the school leaders. This issue was similar to Vientiane (and, in my limited experience, to Australia) where parents assumed that teachers and principals had to be responsible for their children’s learning and behaviour. For example, in Vientiane all students had to wear uniforms with a badge so it was easy to identify which schools the students came from. After school if the students did not go home, the public seemed to blame schools and teachers and principals often received criticism. I had to emphasize that teachers and principals were paid to work during the official working hours and after school hours it was the parents’ responsibility to look after their children. I also added that research showed that parent involvement and support in education has a positive impact on their children’s learning (See Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Cohn & Rossmiller, 1987; Dalavong, 2008).

5.3.3 At the MOE

My return to the MOE to conduct a workshop to present my preliminary research results was considered to be a new practice and approach that had not been undertaken before. This event was a new information sharing activity within the MOE. The MOE and NUOL officials were
eager to know about the research findings and the Research by Project mode. The following table is a summary of the MOE workshop.

Table 5.11: The workshop snapshot at the MOE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop title</th>
<th>Preliminary research findings workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Venue</td>
<td>English Language Resource Centre (ELRC), Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>9.30-11.30 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants: 52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
  - 28 MOE senior officials (9 female)
  - 3 Former senior MOE officials
  - 2 senior National University of Laos (NUOL) lecturers
  - 5 National consultants
  - 2 international consultants
  - 2 donor representatives
  - 4 outside invited guests
  - 6 ELRC staff |
| Workshop agenda |
  - Opening remarks, DTE deputy director general
  - Strategies for Implementing Effective Management in Primary Education in the Lao PDR, Daravone Kittiphanh
  - Research By Project Overview, Dr Bill Vistarini
  - Open discussion
  - Closing remarks followed by lunch provided |

The workshop agenda was similar to the workshops that I had presented in Sing and Phonthong, but I made two additions. First, I invited one of my supervisors to give a presentation on By Project mode of post-graduate research and my research. (It is worth noting that my supervisor had worked in the MOE and taught in Laos and knew many of the participants.) I also modified my presentation by adding additional information about the Research by Project and Practitioner Action Research. These modifications were intended to provide useful insights for senior MOE officials and NUOL academics about the important link between research, practice and the need for improved educational outcomes (see Portfolio Exhibit 11 for details of the content of the workshops).

There were four highlights at the MOE workshop: the photos and maps display about the two research sites; the table of critical relationships of school leaders; research methodology and general discussion.
First, I used the same photos that I displayed in the two workshops in Sing and Phonthong. Like the participants in the two districts, the MOE workshop participants could see the similarities and differences between the two districts. The pictures also helped them to see and understand the challenges faced by the school leaders and the MOE. The similarities and differences between the two districts suggested that there was a need to examine local educational practices in each instance rather than making assumptions at the centre.

Second, I emphasized the table of critical school leader relationships. This table identified the key relationships of school leaders namely a vertical line or saytang, horizontal line or saykhouang and donors. Five dimensions were examined related to each relationship line such as expectation, status/recognition, support, characteristics and knowledge. When I first explained the table of critical relationships of school leaders, there was extended period of silence. Participants spent time absorbing and considering the data. But then there was widespread support. To my surprise people previously had not seemed to consider the complexity of the local school leader relationships. The table outlining the critical relationships of school leaders motivated considerable comment. Overwhelmingly the comments supported the preliminary findings. For example,

*I agree with data presented in the table,*" stated one senior MOE official.

Another participant added,

*The preliminary research findings can be used as a framework for future projects. We should follow this policy for implementation.*

One of the participants who managed more than a US$30 million dollars project said,

*These research findings help me reflect on the work I’m doing.*

Third, responses at the MOE workshop supported my research methodology. For example, a number of participants made favourable comments about the way that my research was conducted. The By Project approach, with its emphasis on explicitly linking research and practical social outcomes is unknown in the Lao PDR. Likewise action research is largely unknown and, to be best of my knowledge, no one has used this approach for his or her doctoral research. A former Director of the MOE Cabinet spoke passionately about the methodology.
Congratulations! This type of research is a new and effective way of doing research. It is not theoretical. The organization can use the outcomes of this research, which is good. Research participants who are involved also benefit. I’d like to have a copy of the presentation.

The former director was supported by a number of other participants including the director of the Asia Research Centre at the NUOL.

*We have data by heart not based on research. We have a shortage of researchers in the education sector. We rely on research done by foreign funded projects. We should introduce research based on ajan Daravone’s research methodology.*

Towards the end of the presentations discussion expanded to more general concerns: quality and sensitivity of research. One of these concerns was the quality of education and the strategies to improve quality. One of the strategies was the World Bank SoQ program, which provoked some of the most animated discussion at the workshop. Even MOE staff expressed their confusion about this program.

A senior MOE official from the Strategy Research and Education Analysis Centre argued that,

*We don’t have standards for a quality school so we don’t have SoQ.*

Another senior MOE who represented the Department of Pre-school and Primary Education Department announced that,

*At the moment we can’t conclude or identify which school is a school of quality. We have only minimum standards for a SoQ.*

The views of the two officials above were supported by a former director Cabinet of the MOE claimed,

*There are three main issues including policy, quality and quantity. In terms of policy we should state clearly how to educate students as Lao citizens: clearly enunciating what we want them to be. What we want for the quality of education; is it clear? In terms of quantity, we should have accurate data. Are the figures based on strong research? Do they duplicate existing data?*
It was clear that some MOE officials could not explain the concept of educational quality in the Lao context. In a way this is understandable as the names, objectives and implementation strategies of key donor driven educational programs have been constantly changing. The SoQ program, for example, is a modification of the Child Friendly School Program which was introduced by UNICEF. Staff at all levels of education are subjected to a plethora of new terminology and approaches, each with grand promises. (The presentation exploded into listing by participants of the latest educational fads.) The Sector-Wide Approach, EFA-FIT program and ESDF or khobphattana kansiuksa (literally translated) as many senior MOE officials love to refer to in their conversations are just a few examples. These names, often donor imposed, mean little to school leaders and the communities that they serve.

Another issue was about the sensitivity of my research. (I had expected this and was grateful for advice and feedback.) For example, there were a number of occasions (before and after the MOE workshop) I received private or personal feedback. A very senior MOE official came to my desk after a meeting with my supervisor and said,

_Your supervisor said that your research (exegesis) was very good. You are very brave; the first person to critique the role of donors._

Another very senior former MOE official, who was now a national consultant to an ADB funded project, talked to me privately just before my presentation at the workshop to show concern about my research and suggested that,

_In your research you should find ways to soften your words and appear not too critical. Perhaps it is not the right time. You should make your stance clear. (I suggest that you) say that your research focuses on technical aspects or visakan, not government policy._

The following day after my workshop I again received personal feedback from a very senior MOE official who managed the biggest donor funded program.

_You shouldn’t say ‘donor driven’ because donors do provide significant funding. It’s sensitive. Our government policy is to seek external assistance._

This was a significant comment. The use of the term ‘donor driven’ is an issue for some donors and the MOE. This issue is especially important in the light of the recent Vientiane
Declaration On Aid Effectiveness (29 November 2006) which clearly asserts in its introduction that:

1. The Government leads in developing and implementing its five-year National Socio Economic Development Plan or NSEDP (2006-2010) through a broad consultative process that integrates the official development assistance into mainstream planning.
2. The Government continues to translate the NSEDP into prioritised and result-oriented operational programmes in the Public Investment Programmes (PIPs) and the annual plans and budgets.
3. The Government exercises an effective leadership role in coordinating aid at the macro and sectoral levels through a substantive and ongoing process of dialogue with relevant stakeholders including the Partners in development; through such mechanisms as the Round Table Meetings and the Sector Working Groups.
4. The Partners will support the leadership of the Government and strengthen the Government’s capacity to exercise its leadership.

Despite this powerful statement of intent, this research suggests that away from the centre, much educational aid is seen by recipients and local managers as donor driven; that there is a gap between intention and local realities. It is also fair to note that some respondents at the centre support the assessment that aid is donor driven. This is a sensitive issue in the Lao PDR.

The above very welcome feedback obviously indicates that to become overtly critical is a challenge in the Lao educational management context. To bring change and improvement is not easy in this environment or any educational environment. However, as a researcher I have a responsibility to honestly present the findings of my research. After all, the MOE officially supports my research and they deserve to hear significant findings. The research is also funded by a significant education donor and AusAID too, deserves accurate feedback. The challenge has been to find an approach that acknowledges the valuable feedback from good friends and colleagues in the Lao PDR and takes into account the need to present data accurately and honestly and openly. It is also a challenge not to be overtly critical (of donors, government policy, MOE decisions or local educational decision making) as this could cause problems.
5.4 Reflection

Similar to the first and second stage of this practitioner action research project, there has been time for deep analysis and reflection on data collected in the field. Four key issues are identified: role of school leaders, role of donors, lack of contextual understanding and the challenges of the research process.

First, the workshop participants at all three workshops acknowledged the central argument of this research: that while school leaders play a critical role in basic education, their role is underestimated. A key aspect of this underestimation was the failure to appreciate the multiplicity of roles, responsibilities and relationships of school leaders. Second, it is clear that donors have considerable influence on education policy and programs whilst there was also an acknowledgement that Lao education benefited from their contributions. There is also a recognition that some donors’ activities had unintended consequences. The constant changing in terminology and approaches causes confusion and some irritation. There is also a reluctance to criticise donors’ activities too openly. Thirdly, the participants in the two districts confirmed that they thought that staff at the provincial and central level had little real understanding of the challenges and difficulties faced by school leaders and the local community. This disconnect was also acknowledged by many staff at the central level.

Somewhat unexpectedly, the workshops also highlighted one of the dilemmas of action research and the By Project approach to post graduate research. A number of senior MOE and NUOL staff expressed support for the research approach that I had adopted for this project. There also appeared to be a realisation that this approach could result in real social benefits. At the same time few participants appeared to appreciate the issue of being critical. Criticism is a sensitive issue in the Lao research environment. This dilemma has a very personal dimension. I am an employee of the MOE. The Ministry is supporting my research. I am very conscious of my responsibilities and of the requirement for loyalty and reciprocity. I am also a researcher and as such I have a responsibility to honestly seek and report the realities of my research findings. I am also particularly conscious of my responsibilities to the two Lao communities in which I worked. I wanted to be their voice.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

The initial aim of this research project was to strengthen school leadership capacity in the Lao PDR in the context of decentralization so that local education needs are better addressed. As was noted explicitly in Chapter 2 and implicitly in Chapter 5, the focus of this research shifted away from decentralization issues to issues of greater concern for local education leaders. To pursue my action research I spent a total of 12 months in the field. My field work was conducted in a cyclical process within three different stages through a practitioner action research approach. The three stages are summarised below.

The action research stages

In Stage 1 I spent 5 months (December 2008 to April 2009) in the field with the key focus of establishing contacts and obtaining formal permission to work in the field, developing a preliminary understanding of the research context, gaining some preliminary understanding of the roles of school leaders and the roles of donors. At the commencement of this stage I had three immediate objectives.

- To establish a research relationship with research participants
- To develop an understanding of educational context of Sing and Phonthong districts
- To develop a preliminary understanding of the role of school leaders

During this stage a fourth objective emerged. This was to develop an understanding of the role of donors in educational decision making and practices.

This stage of my research also resulted in the focus being refined and narrowed. I gained formal permission from the MOE to conduct my research and my research relationship with school leader participants was established. However, tensions between my roles as researcher and a practitioner started to emerge and I started to see many challenges that school leaders faced and the complexity of the leadership context in the Lao PDR. Challenges and complexity seemed to stem from distance from the centres of power, poverty, locally
significant cultural practices, language and ethnic diversity and donor initiatives. It became apparent that school leaders were poorly resourced to perform their tasks in order to run schools for better outcomes. In addition, school leaders were considered to be key players for school improvement but they had almost no role in the role in the decision making process; they were expected to be passive in any planning or decision making process, but responsive to directions from above. In contrast, donors played a critical role in directing planning and practice in primary education in Laos.

In Stage 2 I stayed 4 months (November 2009-February 2010) in Laos. To follow up the outcomes of Stage 1, my major focus was on the roles of school leaders and donors. Consequently, I developed four objectives: two enabling objectives and two major objectives. The enabling objectives were to:

- maintain and develop my relationship with research participants
- continue to develop a deeper understanding of the research context.

The major objectives were to gain a:

- greater understanding of the role of school leaders in leading and managing school effectively
- better understanding the roles of donors in contributing to the uneven development of school leaders and schools.

As a result of this stage my personal relationships with research participants were increased and my understanding of the research context grew. In addition, I gained a deeper understanding of the complexity and challenges faced by school leaders. The school leaders had to manage multiple roles and carry a large range of responsibilities: implement government policy; support teachers and students; work with their communities and deal with local mass organizations. Furthermore, I gained a better understanding of the impact of donors and influential lenders on school leaders and school improvement. To illustrate the complexity and demands faced by school leaders and help me to better understand the role of school leaders, a table of critical relationships of school leaders was developed (See Chapter 5, Stage 2 Reflection, Section 5.2.4.3.) This table became my analysis tool for Stage 2 and a tool for structuring feedback for Stage 3.

In Stage 3 I went back to Laos for approximately 3 months (January-March 2011) to conduct three workshops, as the major focus of this stage was to provide feedback to my informants.
on preliminary research findings and to highlight the importance of the social distribution of knowledge.

My plan for Stage 3 was to:

- fill some minor gaps in my existing data, especially about the school leaders and the role of donors
- verify and clarify preliminary findings
- report back to research informants on preliminary findings and invite feedback about tentative recommendations and conclusions.

Three workshops were conducted, one each in Phonthong and Sing district and one at the MOE. The workshops were a new form of information sharing activities at the MOE and at the community levels. The total workshop participants were 86: MOE (52), Phonthong (21) and Sing (13). The outcome of the workshops was an improved and shared understanding of the local education context (schools), the critical role of school leaders in primary education and the challenges they encountered in order to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. In this connection, donors were also seen by the workshop participants at all three workshops as powerful actors in Lao education policy and practice.

Regarding the research process, some dilemmas emerged from action research and the By Project approach. Although it was apparent that my research brought real benefits to me and the MOE and donors, there were some concerns about being critical as even implicit criticism is a sensitive issue in the Lao research and work environment.

6.1 The challenges of improving educational leadership in the Lao PDR

This research produced a much broader understanding of the realities faced by school leaders and of the educational context common in rural remote areas. The research also raised key educational stakeholders’ consciousness on the role of influential lenders and donors and their impact on school leaders and school improvement. This research acknowledges and highlights the expectations of school leaders and the range of responsibilities that all levels of the system place on them. As the MOE strives to maintain a unified education system with adequate support to all schools nationwide, there is a pressing range of challenges faced by all school
leaders, including those at the district, province and the centre. These challenges emerge from distance, lack of funding and capacity, managing multiple roles and a large range of responsibilities, donor expectations and the management of critical relationships.

Distance is the first key challenge. At the school level, distance from the funders and decision makers and the consequent impact on information flow is a significant challenge. This tends to generate some tensions and misunderstandings between the centre and periphery, especially in poor districts, remote from Vientiane. In addition, distance contributes to school leaders having less power and influence on the broader system as their voices are not often heard. They often become forgotten educators. As a result they are often not fully involved in decision making processes. Furthermore, distance contributes to some school leaders living and working in isolation because distance contributes to poor communication. School leaders are generally not well-informed about current educational information and the centre is often not effectively informed about the issues that they face. They tend to be disconnected from the education hierarchies and removed from educational policy and expectations determined at the centre. Finally, distance tends to be associated with an increase in ethnic diversity and poverty as many small ethnic groups live in rural remote areas. This ethnic diversity adds additional challenges to school leaders in that they have to deal with a range of languages and cultural diversity. The following remarks illustrate the above findings.

A principal commented,

*I disseminate resolutions to mass organization members, directives from the District Administration Office and the DEB to teachers. I don’t have a copy of the education regulations, but we do the school rules and regulations. We don’t have the legal or official documents. I have borrowed books from other schools to read for my study.*

One of the school leaders in Sing district stressed,

*We need better materials to teach ethnic children. Following textbooks provided by the MOE is very time consuming because it takes a longer time for ethnic children to understand the content of the textbook as their first language is not Lao.*

This research highlights that listening and talking to the local educational leaders will improve communication and contribute to decreased tensions between the central and the local levels, as well as, ultimately improving relationships between the centre and the locals and contribute to improving educational leadership and teaching and learning. It is critical for the senior educational managers not to be viewed as distant, indifferent and authoritarian, a perception
which does not engender a positive or effective teaching and learning environment. Moreover, if schools do not feel disconnected from the centre, the centre may provide better support. It might also help school leaders to better understand the problems confronting the DEBs, PESs and the MOE.

Poverty is a second major challenge. Distance and lack of resources contribute to school leaders being less knowledgeable and effective. They have limited opportunities for professional development and often rely on ad hoc training provided by donor support projects. In addition, school leaders tend to have limited support from senior levels. As a consequence, school leaders have limited resources, capacity and skills and they have to rely of their local communities for support. A comment made by a senior MOE official reflects this finding:

Most educational projects have supported training on technical or academic matters (in-service for teachers) but not training for educational managers or management teams. We should train educational managers, including school principals. Due to limited knowledge and low qualifications, school leaders do not have a vision for education. If they do not have a vision, how they can formulate strategy to develop their schools if they do not understand education policies and change?

Distance and very limited funding also contribute to school leaders lacking resources to operate and lead schools. School leaders have difficulties in providing adequate educational support materials for students and teachers. This finding is illustrated in the following comment by one of the school leader participants,

We do not have budget for school operation and maintenance so we use money that the community pays - 5,000 kip per year. Besides this if we want to do something we propose it to the community then they collect money for the activity. For example, if we want to build something which costs 200,000 kip, we submit a plan to the village chief. The community will divide the amount between all families in the village. Then they share the cost.

Moreover, the greater the distance and poverty, the more vulnerable school leaders are. Distance and poverty not only make school leaders vulnerable to donors’ changing expectations, but also to the whole system including the MOE, PES, DEB and their communities. This has an impact on teaching and learning because students also become vulnerable. Even though school leaders are recognized as critical actors in basic education, there is insufficient understanding of the nature of their work, roles, responsibilities and
relationships. As distance and poverty increase, the more powerful and less informed donors tend to be. Donors do seem to have good intentions. My internship in AusAID in March 2010 gave me a better understanding of the challenges donors face in developing policies and delivering projects in Laos. (See the letter from Mr Steve Hogg, Assistant Director, General Governance & Leadership Branch of AusAID, in the Portfolio, item 12) However, donors’ programs and approaches seem to often impose additional burdens on school leaders and local education communities. In addition donors are generally seen to be unaware of their impact as they tend to have limited knowledge of the local context. A recent comment in the “Times Literary Supplement” illustrates this finding:

Donors … should engage in poor countries with the social fabric as it already exists, rather than with "window-dressing civil society” based on abstract models imported from elsewhere - often by local Non-Governmental Organizations which function as mirror images of international NGOs (The Times Literary Supplement, 1 April 2011, p. 4)

Performing multiple roles and carrying a wide range of responsibilities are daunting challenges. School leaders must be prepared to manage multiple roles. They are required to meet bureaucratic, socio-political, donor and community expectations. Inadequate donor coordination and expectations add another layer of complexity and responsibility to the work of school leaders. As consequence, local school leaders are educational leaders, bureaucrats, social and political leaders, donor initiative implementers, school managers, daily administrators, community and student advisors, fundraisers and so on. This research shows there are many dedicated school leaders and teachers who make positive contributions to school and community improvement. They do build bridges between school, community, and DEB, PES and the MOE. The following comments made by principals support these findings.

This year our teachers and I fixed 30 sets of school furniture, including tables and benches because we did not want to disturb the community but we asked them to buy materials and nails for us.

As a head of our cluster I help to distribute teachers’ salaries, disseminate information (directives), compile reports and statistics as well as collect data. I think we (principals) help DEB to gather information so it is easier for the DEB to report to the PES.

Dealing with a range of critical relationships is the final important challenge if schools are to be led and run effectively. As documented, school leaders have to deal with two sets of
relationships. First, they have to deal with bureaucratic or hierarchical relationships. These relationships tend to be distant and formal. School leaders are viewed as rule followers or directive implementers. They work at the lowest level of the education administration system. The second significant set of relationships relates to managing community relationships and responsibilities. These relationships tend to be reciprocal and more informal. School leaders are seen to be at the highest level of the community. They are seen by their communities as knowledgeable and respected educators. The following account made by a principal highlights this finding.

*In some areas we do more tasks than indicated in our written job statement, such as tasks related to community development because our work is based on community needs. It is necessary for us to commit ourselves to the community because our school relies on the community for funding. Sometime we haven’t focused much on academic matters and we have not much time for staff improvement and we have limited new knowledge.*

6.2 The practitioner research challenge

In terms of the research process, even though this research claims to introduce new knowledge, awareness and real social benefits, the methodology can generate paradox and tensions. This approach relates to expectations and understandings flowing from distance and proximity.

Distance from my day to day work in the MOE increased my understanding of the Lao PDR educational leadership context, particularly at the local level including the nature of principal roles and responsibilities and community expectations. Reflection time in Australia and access to literature allowed me to see more clearly the educational challenges and issues faced by the MOE. In addition, my time at RMIT in Melbourne allowed me to see that educational managers in the public sector in Victoria face many of the problems that their Lao counterparts confront, including lack of resources, a shortage of specialist teachers, incorporating foreign concepts and practices, but this is not to suggest that these problems are in the same order as, for example, educational leaders in Vientiane or Sing or Phonthong districts.
This research project forced me to go to more remote areas of Laos to discuss the situation and challenges confronting school leaders and local communities. This practice is consistent with Research By Project mode which gives me licence and guidance in the conduct of this investigation.

The MOE needs to be congratulated and thanked for supporting and encouraging this research and I do thank the MOE and many of its staff for supporting this research project. This support allowed me to maintain personal and professional relationships and provided me with access to informants and official documentation. The whole research methodology seems to have been set up for me to do research which benefits me personally and the organisation and the system as a whole. It also helped me gain a much better understanding of the management challenges facing the MOE. Like school leaders at the community level, senior managers at the MOE face daily resources issues, directives from above, complex (and often contradicting) expectations from donors and lenders and the challenge of maintaining staff morale and nudging the system in a direction that will improve its performance and significantly contribute to teaching and learning at the community level. Senior managers work hard in the MOE and not one official deliberately neglects the work of teachers and school leaders in Sing or Phonthong districts. From time to time the whole system is overwhelmed: maintaining the status quo is a challenge; bringing improvement to the more remote schools in Sing is often almost an impossibility.

Doing research by project at RMIT University provided me with a valued opportunity for my professional and scholarly development, and encouraged me to become a more knowledgeable and skilled practitioner who can contribute to improvement in practice at my workplace. I do value my colleagues, culture and country. However, it is both a personal and professional risk for me to undertake this type of research. I have to be mindful of the political and social reality in the Lao PDR. As this research project unfolded I become more politically and culturally aware. This has helped equip me to draw a distinction between research imperatives and my responsibilities and the requirement for maintaining my reciprocal obligations to the MOE and the local communities in Sing and Phonthong.

As a consequence of this research I have become a link between the academic world (university) and the workplace (the MOE and the system for which it is responsible); more precisely between researcher and the practitioner. This research also provides a linking role
between the Western (Australian) world and the Lao PDR, which gives me a privileged position to see two different worlds so that I am able to gain better understanding of these two different worlds of knowledge. I grew up within a fairly narrow education context, but I have made a big jump. This has placed me in a very unusual, albeit rewarding position. This jump is very exciting but it also presents some challenges when I return to work in my home country. In addition and importantly, this research builds a bridge between the centre (MOE) and the education periphery based on my personal relationships and encourages a rethink of educational leadership practices at all levels. This form of leadership should provide school leaders and teachers with an opportunity to make their voices heard and mirror an improved day to day education management at the centre and the community levels. This bridge will not only increase improved understanding but also narrow the gaps between the centre and the community levels. Ultimately this bridge will lead to better and perhaps, shared common educational values and goals leading to collective actions in bringing about change and improvement in school leadership and, as a consequence, more valued and effective teaching and learning.

Finally, I am reminded of a Lao metaphor that I explored very early in this research. It is still valid and highlights what this research has achieved. It throws clearer light on the Lao system within which I will continue to work:

A red thian is part of the logo of the Ministry of Education. The light of the thian shines indefinitely, as does inspiring leadership. In Lao education, leadership is seen as a caring gift to be shone across the Ministry, the broader education system, friends and family (Chan, et al., 2008, p. 68).

6.3 The project lives on

My research was funded by AusAID under the Australian Leadership Award Scholarship Program (ALAS.) As an ALAS awardee I have a commitment to return to my home country to make a real contribution to the future development of my country in addressing and researching educational challenges. As my research focuses on strengthening school leadership capacity, this research project is a starting point for a journey to enhance educational leadership. While education is one of the government priorities and AusAID is a major contributor to this sector, I will continue to contribute to improving education, especially for those living in poor remote communities. Improving education for all people is
not easy. However, based on my research and the responses during the workshops, the data that identified systematic weaknesses was received positively by senior MOE and NUOL officials. In addition, this research provides opportunities for future research in the education sector. I am also hopeful that the By Project mode of post graduate research with its commitment to solving real world problems and for the social distribution of knowledge will be embraced.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


The Times Literary Supplement. (1 April 2011). p. 4.


The Challenges of Developing Educational Leadership in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic

Daravone Kittiphanh

A Portfolio submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Philosophy in Management (Research)

School of Management, College of Business
RMIT University

1 July 2011
Portfolio

The portfolio is divided into five parts: documents supporting research, conference papers and presentations, a journal article, workshop materials and other project related activities. The following table lists the portfolio items, each of which provides a snapshot of an action which took place during the research project. The table also shows the links between each action and the Exegesis. A short description of each exhibit is provided for each action taken.

Documents supporting research

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Documents Supporting Research
Exhibit 1

The letter of formal approval from the Department of Teacher Education, Ministry of Education, Vientiane and the Ministerial Decree

There are two supporting documents from the MOE for permission to carry out my research: the letter of formal approval from the Department of Teacher Education (DTE) No 0014 DTE/MOE/09 dated 7 January 2009, and the Ministerial Decree No 79/MoE.DTE/2009 dated 14 January 2009. As I am still considered to be a MOE employee based in the DTE I needed to obtain approval from the MOE to conduct my research. First I needed approval from the Director General of DTE. In doing so I had to provide information about my research title, objectives and research questions. I also indicated my research locations, participants, methodology and methods and project plan. After receiving approval from the DTE I then requested a Ministerial Decree (khortoklong), which is required prior to conducting any research. In the Lao education management system, a Ministerial Decree with its red stamp and signature is a very important document. It not only shows that I had received formal permission from the Ministry but I also had the support and cooperation of my organization. The decree is a legal supporting document, indicating formal trust in the researcher, and providing security to the researcher, participants and respondents. Such a Ministerial Decree would be not be easy for an outsider researcher to obtain. Neither might they understand how important the decree is in the Lao PDR.
សូមអភិបាលអនុញ្លះក្រុមពិឈត
ការប្រការការងារក្នុងប្រកួតប្រជែងការសម្រាប់ការធ្វើជនប្រឹក្សាគ្រូនិតិនិយោះនិងការសម្រាប់ការឈុតជាចាប់

ប្រការ 1: អម្រេសូមមានការពារក្នុងការងារអនុញ្លះក្រុមពិឈតឱ្យមានការសម្រាប់ការធ្វើជនប្រឹក្សាគ្រូនិតិនិយោះនិងការសម្រាប់ការឈុតជាចាប់ក្នុងក្រុមពិឈតឱ្យមានអត្ថន័យនិងការសម្រាប់ការប្រការការងារក្នុងក្រុមពិឈតឱ្យមានអត្ថព័ត៌មានទៅកាន់ក្នុងក្រុមពិឈតឱ្យមានការសម្រាប់ការធ្វើជនប្រឹក្សាគ្រូនិតិនិយោះនិងការសម្រាប់ការឈុតជាចាប់ ដូចជា កំពុងឆ្លាញ់ក្នុងក្រុមពិឈតឱ្យមានអត្ថព័ត៌មានទៅកាន់ក្នុមពិឈតឱ្យមានការសម្រាប់ការធ្វើជនប្រឹក្សាគ្រូនិតិនិយោះនិងការសម្រាប់ការឈុតជាចាប់ ដូចជា កំពុងឆ្លាញ់

ប្រការ 2: ក្រុមពិឈតឱ្យមានការងារក្នុងការសម្រាប់ការធ្វើជនប្រឹក្សាគ្រូនិតិនិយោះ និងការសម្រាប់ការឈុតជាចាប់ក្នុងក្រុមពិឈតឱ្យមានអត្ថន័យនិងការសម្រាប់ការប្រការការងារក្នុងក្រុមពិឈតឱ្យមានអត្ថព័ត៌មានទៅកាន់ក្នុមពិឈតឱ្យមានការសម្រាប់ការធ្វើជនប្រឹក្សាគ្រូនិតិនិយោះនិងការសម្រាប់ការឈុតជាចាប់ ដូចជា កំពុងឆ្លាញ់

ប្រការ 3: ក្រុមពិឈតឱ្យមានការងារក្នុងការធ្វើជនប្រឹក្សាគ្រូនិតិនិយោះ និងការសម្រាប់ការឈុតជាចាប់ ដូចជា កំពុងឆ្លាញ់ក្នុមពិឈតឱ្យមានអត្ថន័យនិងការសម្រាប់ការប្រការការងារក្នុងក្រុមពិឈតឱ្យមានអត្ថព័ត៌មានទៅកាន់ក្នុមពិឈតឱ្យមានការសម្រាប់ការធ្វើជនប្រឹក្សាគ្រូនិតិនិយោះ និងការសម្រាប់ការឈុតជាចាប់
មាន់ក់ 4:  ដុះគ្នានៅក្នុងការធ្វើកិច្ចការនេះក្នុង រឿងផ្សេងៗ និងបង់ផ្សេងៗ នៅក្នុង EPCIPII ។ ដូច្នេត្រូវបានគេសម្រេចៗនេះ ទៅក្នុងការធ្វើកិច្ចការ និងសញ្ឹមោងៗនេះ នៅ ក្នុងក្រុមអ្នកសិក្សាដែលបានធ្វើកិច្ចការនេះ នៅ ក្នុងក្រុមបច្ចុប្បន្ន។

មានក្នុង 5:  ប្រការ្យមុខងារធ្វើកិច្ចការនេះបានរក្សាទុកក្រុមអ្នកសិក្សានេះ នៅក្នុងក្រុមបច្ចុប្បន្ន។

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>លេខក្រុង</th>
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សេចក្តីបំណុល ព្រះគត់ សំណាង
ក្រុមក្រុមស្ថាខារ

ក្រុមនេះ៖ ចាស់, ដែលបានប្រការពីការប្រការពីក្រុមស្ថាខារ នៅក្នុងប្រការពីការរៀននៅ Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University (RMIT University). ក្រុមនេះបានប្រការពីការរៀននៅ RMIT University, នៅក្នុងប្រការពីការរៀននៅ RMIT University នៅក្នុងប្រការពីការរៀននៅ RMIT University. នៅក្នុងប្រការពីការរៀននៅ RMIT University, នៅក្នុងប្រការពីការរៀននៅ RMIT University, នៅក្នុងប្រការពីការរៀននៅ RMIT University, នៅក្នុងប្រការពីការរៀននៅ RMIT University.
นอกจาก红楼梦บทสำคัญๆจะถูกล้อมรอบด้วยผมพันธุ์ต้นไม้สูงก้านร้านร้านมีภูเขา
แบบหมดผืนคลื่นพันที่ก้านก้านอันต้นไม้ใหญ่หุ่นใหญ่
ราษฎร์ร้อยร้อย
1. มีการนำของบุคคลที่มีต่อต้านการตีบตันกันในรูปแบบของศิลปินผู้มีชีวิตอยู่?
เรื่องราวถึงการจัดแสดงศิลปะจากในสถานศึกษาสามารถใช้เป็นข้อมูลเชิงบวกในชีวิต
การจัดแสดงศิลปิน?
2. มีการแสดงถึงการตัดสินใจของศิลปินที่มีความรู้สึกถึงการเข้าสู่ชีวิตในชีวิต
โดยมีการศึกษาจากทรัพย์สินชีวิต
รูปแบบของศิลปิน?
3. ทุกๆเรื่องราวสามารถแสดงถึงความต้องการความมั่นคงในชีวิต?
เรื่องราวถึงการจัดแสดงศิลปะจากในสถานศึกษาสามารถใช้เป็นข้อมูลเชิงบวกในชีวิต
การจัดแสดงศิลปิน?
4. ดูดีดีและดูสิ้นสุดผู้ที่จะต้องการความมั่นคงในการเรียนรู้
จากทุกๆเรื่องราวที่มีการศึกษาจากทรัพย์สินชีวิต?
เรื่องราวถึงการจัดแสดงศิลปะจากในสถานศึกษาสามารถใช้เป็นข้อมูลเชิงบวกในชีวิต
การจัดแสดงศิลปิน?

บทบาทที่จะแสดงเป็นการวิจัยและผลิตผลงานที่มีคุณค่าทางศิลปะ
และทุกส่วน เพื่อให้ทุกคนได้เรียนรู้ในทุกๆเรื่องราุมี 2 สาขานี้ คือ ทุกๆเรื่องราุมี 1 ทุกๆเรื่องราว
เป็นเรื่องราว มีการจัดแสดงศิลปะและผ่านกระบวนการต่างๆ 1 ทุกๆเรื่องราว มีการจัดแสดงศิลปะ
และผ่านกระบวนการต่างๆ
บทบาทที่จะแสดงเป็นการวิจัยและผลิตผลงานที่มีคุณค่าทางศิลปะ
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และผ่านกระบวนการต่างๆ
ត្រូវដូច្នេះ និង ប្រឈមៗ ស្របី។ ការឆ្លងកាត់ដែលមើលពីរឿងភ្ជាប់នេះនឹងកោត្តក្របុកណកម្មកុំព្យូទ័រ។

ជាដំណើរ, ការឆ្លងកាត់ដែលមើលពីរឿងភ្ជាប់នេះនឹងកោត្តក្របុកណកម្មកុំព្យូទ័រ។ ក្នុងបញ្ហាខាងក្រោមនេះមានការវិភាគប្រការគ្រប់គ្រូ។ ក្នុងការវិភាគប្រការគ្រប់គ្រូ។

ក្នុងការចែកចាយដូច្នេះដូច្នេះព្រ័តផ្លូវក្នុងក្រុងបួត។

ប្រធានាធិបតី

[ប្រធានាធិបតី]

[ធាតុរបស់ប្រធានាធិបតី]

[ធាតុរបស់ប្រធានាធិបតី]
### ដំណើរការវិបត្ត

ការប្រកួតប្រជុំជាមួយពីរផលិតផល 5 ឆ្នាំមករសើននៅតែក្រុមប្រកួតប្រជុំគឺជារយៈពេល 5 ឆ្នាំមករសើននៅតែក្រុមប្រកួតប្រជុំ។ ក្រុមប្រកួតប្រជុំនេះបានធ្វើការរាប់បញ្ជាក់អំពីការយកផលិតផលជាច្រើនទៀត តាមរយៈប្រការឆ្នាំ 2008 ដល់ 2011 ។ ក្រុមប្រកួតប្រជុំបានធ្វើការយកផលិតផលជាច្រើនទៀត នៅក្នុងប្រការឆ្នាំ 2012 ។ ក្រុមប្រកួតប្រជុំបានធ្វើការរាប់បញ្ជាក់អំពីការយកផលិតផលជាច្រើនទៀត នៅក្នុងប្រការឆ្នាំ 2013 ។ ក្រុមប្រកួតប្រជុំបានធ្វើការរាប់បញ្ជាក់អំពីការយកផលិតផលជាច្រើនទៀត នៅក្នុងប្រការឆ្នាំ 2014 ។ ក្រុមប្រកួតប្រជុំបានធ្វើការរាប់បញ្ជាក់អំពីការយកផលិតផលជាច្រើនទៀត នៅក្នុងប្រការឆ្នាំ 2015 ។

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<th>លេខសមរប 2</th>
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<td>អំពូលធាតុ 4</td>
<td>ការគេហូរយកនិងវិធីអំពូលមួយ 2 (ទូ សប្ប សង)</td>
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<td>ប្រភេទធាតុ 5</td>
<td>វិធីអំពូល និងអំពូលអនុសីទ (ទូ សប្ប សង និង អំពូលអនុសីទ)</td>
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<td>ប្រភេទធាតុ 5</td>
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The brainstorming process was a very useful tool for my data analysis/reflection. It also facilitated discussion of my data analysis with my supervisors. This brainstorming table illustrates my first step of reflection after I summarized key issues according to my objectives in each research location. It contains a number of dot points that flowed from my actions.
I look at my data (writing) and list some dot points that I learned from my action. Then I reflect on the four objectives what I learned from my actions.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
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| Maintaining and developing relationships                                  | - Respect and acknowledge the existing hierarchical structure and contribute to productive interpersonal relationships  
- Respect local hierarchy and maintain relationships  
- Personal relationships established in stage 2 were strengthened in stage 4 so research participants trusted in me. This lead to great access to data for my research  
- Personal relationship is very important; Lao culture can be seen as an example of a high power distance relationship  
- In remote areas I am no longer an outsider |
| Continuing to develop a deeper understanding of research context          | - Increase the awareness of remoteness and isolation of school locations in two districts. This aspect creates challenges for school leaders.  
- Understand the differences between the two districts in terms of wealth, religion, donor, ethnicity diversity, its location (e.g. sharing border with China; Thailand).  
- School leaders face different challenges between Sing and Phonthong districts.  
- Demand of resources and facilities for schools  
- poor communication  
- The role of donors is sub-set of context that emerged from stage 2 then become the major part. |
| Gaining a greater understanding of the roles of school leaders in leading and managing school (issues are similar but there are some differences in two districts) | - very narrow leadership development pathway for individual and career stages  
- low incentives and salaries  
- little training and limited support for the position  
- high job expectation as they are ultimately responsible for the whole of the school system  
- not well-informed of new directives/requirements.  
- They are forgotten people. They need to be thought of and treated as the key figure of educational administrator and trained and supported by the system.  
- educational and social/political dimensions to carry out their position  
- Work closely with their community  
- need clarification for the focus of their role so that training and support will be determined by this focus.  
- vigilant - they rely on guidelines from the upper level to maintain their comfort zone |
| Critically analysing the role of donors in contributing to improved school leadership | - lack of understanding of the reality on the ground  
- lack of real concerns and needs of the locals.  
- donors have different agendas so their support is uncertain.  
- active and often come with good intention but end |
| Others | - communication issue  
- lack of feedback from the locals because they have no money and no political power |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|

with unintended consequences  
- focus on more observable outcomes rather than invisible support, e.g. finance new capital investment projects such as building schools so quantity has gone up but quality remain low.  
- conflict between encouragement of local participation and imposition of new funding initiative and model. On other words, donors use very nice rhetoric or western tools to try to solve problems in Laos.  
- an product of a centrally planned system themselves  
- add more responsibility to school leaders who have limited administrative skills and resources.
Conference Papers and Presentations
Exhibit 3

An overview of the Lao education development

(14 August 2008 & 19 December 2009)

This paper was an outcome of my context analysis conducted during the early phase of my research project (June-Nov 2008). To prepare myself as a practitioner researcher I needed to develop a considered understanding of the educational context in the Lao PDR before the commencement of my first field work (Dec 2008-Apr 2009). This paper explores education development in the Lao PDR starting from the period of French Colonialism, to US imperialism, the arrival of socialism, post revolution and current development strategies introduced by donors. This paper was presented at two RMIT seminars: RMIT Community Forum 14 August 2008 and School of Management seminar 19 December 2008.
An overview of the Lao education development

This paper is an outcome of the foundation and planning phase of my research journey (June-Nov 2008) where I spent my time reading, reflecting and conceptualizing the overarching context of my research before I conducted my first field visit (Dec 2008- April 2009). Many government, donor and consultant reports were examined. A broad review of relevant literature on two key areas, the history of Lao education and the role of donors, was also undertaken.

1. Overview of Lao education

Current education management challenges have been influenced by a range of often uncontrollable internal and external factors. These forces have had an impact on Lao education development. The internal forces include geographical and demographic factors. The external forces include outside systems of thoughts and ideas that have been imposed on Lao education. These range from French colonial ideology, an extended period of war, socialist ideology and now, more recently, a development ideology instigated by donors, loan providers and consultants embedded in the system.

1.1 Internal factors

According to Than and Vokes (1997) ethnic diversity is often seen as an obstacle to the management and development Lao education. It does create significant disparities in educational provision and access, particularly for the ethnic groups living in rural and remote areas. Improving access to education in rural ethnic areas is not simple within the socio-economic and cultural context of Lao PDR. Lao, the official and instructional language, is the first language of about 66.2 percent of the population (Asian Development Bank, 2006). Children from homes where Lao is not spoken enter schools with a significant disadvantage, partly contributing the high dropout rate (Asian Development Bank, 2000). However, changing the language of instruction would be a complex political and technical problem, and it is unlikely in the foreseeable future. Another issue is the shortage of teachers and a shortage of qualified teachers in remote and ethnic areas. Recent studies on Alternative Models of Teacher Training for Remote Areas (Noonan & Xaiyasensouk, 2007) argue for the establishment of Teacher Education Institution (TEI) Annexes to serve the needs of small towns and rural and remote areas. They suggest that the most effective way of getting
qualified teachers into remote ethnic schools is to train people from those remote communities, because they know the language, the culture and the people. It is likely that people trained relatively close to their homes and away from the big town will be more likely to return to their villages than if they receive training in larger institutions in the larger towns. Although the establishment of TEI Annexes seems to be one way to respond to the shortage of teachers in remote communities, this proposed model raises issues of on-going funding, facilities and competent teaching staff for the Annexes.

1.2 External forces

1.2.1 French colonialism (1893-1945)

Before French colonial times, the only mode of institutional teaching was education in the monastery (Rehbein, 2007). Girls were taught by their parents, while boys had the option of being ordained and educated as novices and then monks. When the French integrated Laos into their colonial empire of Indochina in 1893, Laos was seen as a remote colony (Stuart-Fox, 1997). Laos’ resources and people were not developed. Education in Laos was part of a common Indochinese education system. The education system instituted under colonial rule was not comprehensive, lacked depth and emphasized the good values of the colonizing power (Thant & Vokes, 1997). According to Boupha (2003), during the 1893-1945 French regime, Laos had complete primary schools located only in larger towns like Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Savannakhet, Pakse, Xiengkhouang and Thakhek. Education reached only a small percentage of the population. In general the Lao language was taught only up to grade 3 and the study of Buddhist ethics was also introduced. Thereafter, the medium of instruction for all subjects was French. During the French colonial period the curricular content of the school which maintained France as the focus of study (Vistarini, 1978) was remote from the local cultural situation and inappropriate to the country's needs and problems. There was only one junior high school in Vientiane. Lao people who wished to continue their education at upper secondary school or university had to go to Vietnam (Hanoi or Saigon), Cambodia (Phnom Penh) or France. Only children from high ranking and rich families could afford to pursue further studies abroad and only when they were nominated and supported by the French. French language continued to be the medium of instruction in teachers’ colleges and most senior secondary schools (lycees) into the early seventies. A significant proportion of the population did not have access to this basic education (Thant & Vokes, 1997). In 1937, approximately 90 per cent of lowland Lao remained subsistence peasant farmers (Stuart-Fox,
It can be seen that Lao education inherited very little of any relevance from the colonial period. Although the French had established a few schools in Laos, these remained tied to an Indochina-wide system for higher education rather than being developed within the country (Evans, 2002). This French style education did not reach very far beyond the urban centres where schools were only intended to educate the elite for the French administration of Laos ignoring rural and ethnic people. It can be argued that under French rule Laos had a subservient role. Although the French had begun to construct Lao history and Lao identity, they were not very interested in creating an education system that suited Lao value and needs. Nor were they interested in laying the ground work for an independent Lao nation.

1.2.2 The Royal Government and US War (1946–early 1975)

During World War II the Japanese occupied French Indochina, including Laos. Laos declared independence from France in 1945 just prior to Japan’s surrender. After the French defeat, many of the educated elite became the driving force of opposition to the French return in 1946 and formed a movement for national liberation and began to claim national leadership for themselves (Rehbein, 2007), although the king (Sisavangvong) was very reluctant to proclaim independence and quickly supported the French forces when they returned to Laos.

However, this was not the end of the journey for the Lao independence struggle. Laos again found itself drawn into a wider conflict, which set Lao against Lao. In the process, the Royal Lao Government (RLG), a nationalist government supported by the United States of America, fought a losing battle against the Pathet Lao (which later became the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party), a communist group supported by the North Vietnamese communists (Bäcktorp, 2007). This period of struggle is known as kanpatiwat samseeppee or a thirty-year revolution (1945-1975). The country struggled with decades of civil war and heavy involvement in the larger Indochina war in the eastern and northern provinces. The population was severely disrupted by bombing during the war years. It was estimated that there were hundreds of daily bombing raids over southern Laos and the rate of air strikes in northern Laos escalated from 20 per day flown previously by Royal Lao Airforce T-28, to between 200 and 300 per day, flown mostly by US aircraft based in Thailand (Evans, 2002). Bombing during this period also used strategic B-52 aircrafts (Boupha, 2003). By the time a cease-fire was declared early 1973, over two million tones of bombs had been dropped on the Pathet Lao zone, or more than two tones per head of population (Stuart-Fox, 1997). The war created loss of life on both sides (the Royal Lao Government and the Pathet Lao), enormous
infrastructure destruction and a quarter of the entire population had been driven from their homes to become refugees in their country. The number of refugees dislocated over 1969-1970 grew to 150,000 (Evans, 2002). The impact of the war was deeply damaging, individual lives and families were torn apart. The war weakened the Lao state, damaged the morality of public life and set back the cause of national unity and security (Stuart-Fox, 1997).

During the Royal Lao Government administration, education was regarded as being of secondary importance while the development of physical infrastructure to assist its war on communism was the main focus (Achren, 2007). A French education system was kept after independence in 1953 until 1967. However, primary and secondary education slowly expanded in the urban areas. For the first time, the language of instruction was Lao and therefore accessible to greater number of the population. At the same time the French tried hard to keep French language in public secondary schools and teachers’ colleges and refused to adapt the French-oriented curricula to the needs and problem of Laos while the American attempted to counteract French influence in Lao education by investing large sums in American style comprehensive secondary schools without taking into consideration the economic reality of Laos (Vistarini, 1978). Secondary schools were established in the major urban areas such as Pakse in 1945, Luang Prabang in 1946, Savannakhet in 1974, and Thakhek in 1953. Some limited progress was also made in expanding tertiary education. For example, the Institute of Pedagogy for training upper secondary school teachers was established at Dong Dok in Vientiane (Thant & Vokes, 1997). A small number of students began to study overseas in countries such as America, Australia and France (Evans, 2002).

In the Pathet Lao Zone, by contrast, an alternative education system was initiated which aimed to incorporate the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, promote national ideals and training for active life (Vistarini, 1978). The number of junior and senior high schools as well as mid-level vocational schools were increased (Boupha, 2003). Higher education was mostly in Vietnamese and many young people were sent to Vietnam for further study as mechanics, as nurses or doctors and for political training (Evans, 2002). It was observed that Lao education development became fragmented comprising the French, American and the revolutionary models. Neither the French nor the Americans had been interested in developing genuine education for Laos. Although the Americans invested more money in Laos at that time, their focus was on the urban elites and military infrastructure. On the other hand, the communist
movement initiated an option for Lao education aiming to serve poor people in rural areas and reduce social inequality, which drew on Marx and Lenin as interpreted by the Soviets and Vietnamese (Rehbein, 2007).

1.2.3 From the post revolutionary period to the introduction of the ‘New Economic Mechanism’ (1975-1986)

Following the victory of the Pathet Lao, the Royal Lao Government administration was abolished. Laos proclaimed the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) on 2 December 1975 under the leadership of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party following a socialist system, which aimed to gradually modernize Laos to socialism without going through the stage of capitalist development. However, the impact of the long and painful struggle from freedom and unity created a significant challenge for the new socialist state to resettle and educate these displaced people. After the war, America withdrew financial support from Laos and almost all qualified manpower who had worked under the Royal Lao Government administration left the country. Those who left included not only almost all professionally qualified doctors, engineers, managers and administrators, but also mechanics and tradesmen (Achren, 2007). In addition, it would seem that the new regime lost an enormous number of teachers of the former Royal Lao Government after 1975 (Evans, 2002). The departure of large number of trained personnel including administrators and teachers seriously weakened the government’s ability to formulate and implement education policies, which created a significant challenge to education development (Thant & Vokes, 1997).

During the early period of the new regime, education development focused on increasing nationwide access to primary education rather than secondary and tertiary education with the goal of improving overall literacy and developing a population with broad basic knowledge and skills (Thant & Vokes, 1997). The government aimed to spread socialist education throughout the country, and spelling and grammar were simplified (Rehbein, 2007). At the same time, Laos received military protection, financial aid, education and technical assistance from socialist brother nations (Rehbein, 2007). Higher education remained dependent on foreign input (Evans, 2002). To improve its pool of skilled people the Lao government also sent students abroad to countries offering scholarships (Achren, 2007). Between 1975 and 1985 around 700 Lao were sent to study in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, while another 1,200 studied in Vietnam (Rehbein, 2007). By the early 1990s, there were
instructors from Russian, East Germany, US, UK, Australia, Cuba, Vietnam and Japan working at Dong Dok Teacher Training College (current National University of Laos).

In addition, during the first five years of the Lao PDR, the government gave immediate priority to agricultural production and national security. Lao geopolitical pressures and internal policies were strongly interlocked (Evans, 2002). There was an attempt to socialise Laos and to introduce a radical economic reform, such as agricultural collectivization or sahakone louamu. The rational for this reform was to restore production levels and to develop communal self-sufficiency nationally; another reason was political. Cooperatives were seen not only as an economic form of organization in the rural areas, but also a key political structure (Evans, 2002). By adopting these political-economic structures, surpluses could be transferred to the government. However, these attempts were a failure because cooperatives had been rushed together without sufficient preparation; peasants had been forced to join and they received minimal compensation from their product (Evans, 2002). In the mid-1980s the government moved towards a more market-inclined economy and emphasis on cooperatives declined. As a consequence of sweeping changes in the USSR and Vietnam a significant policy change resulted in the introduction of the ‘New Economic Mechanism’ known in Lao as kon kai sethakit mai, which indicated the start of a transition from bureaucratic centralism and dependency on state subsidies to a new system which began decentralizing control and encouraging private enterprise (Stuart-Fox, 1997). Kon kai sethakit mai was part of a broad strategy known as chintanakan mai -new line of thinking’ or ‘renovation policy’, which was adopted at the Fourth Party Congress in 1986 (Fry, 2008).

After 1975 Laos attempted to develop an education system which stressed the socialist ideology, abolished colonial ideology, royalty and feudalism. This was part of my education experience and I remembered when I was at primary school I used to address my primary school teachers ‘older sister/ brother teacher’ or euay khou or ai khou in stead of nai khou (boss teacher literally translated), which was a common term used to address teachers in the old regime. The communist Bloc offered a positive framework in which to create a modern state and bring social equality. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union forced the young socialist nation to shift policy direction in order to fulfill socio-economic development. This policy change led to a new direction for education development, which was required to serve a labour market rather than the administration.
1.2.4 New thinking (early 1990s-present)

1.2.4.1 New Economic Mechanism or kon kai sethakit mai

After 1986, due to the need to seek alternative sources of aid as a result of the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and the failure of government economic policies, Laos adopted a more neutral foreign policy (Stuart-Fox, 1997). Since 1986, the government introduced major economic reforms under the ‘New Economic Mechanism’ (NEM), the underlying assumption and hope was that, over time, the state would be come a facilitator of the shift toward privatization (Asian Development Bank, 2000). The new economic reforms were also a significant step away from communal farming and collectivization put in place during the beginning of the establishment of Lao PDR. Through these reforms the Lao PDR made substantial progress on living conditions for some individuals, delivering higher incomes to those who were able to cash in on salaries in the private sector and from improved business opportunities, especially in urban areas. On the other hand, there were also some serious implications for education development. First of all, the pace of educational growth remained slow as in the pre NEM period due to the limited amount of resources available to education sector. Secondly, the move to a freer market economy under the NEM would in large part depend on the education system’s ability to provide the skilled workforce demanded by a modern monetised economy. Therefore, the need to provide skilled human resources became increasingly important since they were required, not only to provide additional services, but also sustain the old ones. Although the government sent the majority of students to Eastern Bloc countries for further education in the 1980s, the outcome was mixed, graduates often came back home with skills unsuited to Laos, and fluent in a mixture of foreign languages (Evans, 2002). As a result, there were not so many capable personnel who could implement management tasks adequately (Achren, 2007).

1.2.4.2 An opening up to the West and ASEAN

Another major change occurred in 1997 when Laos became a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). This change signaled greater openness to the West for economic assistance and the investment needed to fund the country’s development programs (Achren, 2007). In addition, globalization transformed Laos’ relations with the world at large (Evans, 2002). The Lao PDR has turned again to western aid to support its system of higher
education. The government has sent people to study in both capitalist and socialist countries which provided scholarships, including Australia, US, Japan, Thailand, China and Vietnam. Rehbein (2007) argues that capitalism is being systematically introduced, based on textbook methods, with support of foreign experts or siosantangpathet. English has become a popular foreign language in school since the mid-1990s (Achren, 2007). The opening towards the West has not only increased trade and tourism but also economic modernization and integration into the region. Laos in 2000 has been described as a country where one-party state socialism meets capitalism (Bäcktorp, 2007). We could say that today Laos, has a market-economy and privatization implanted into a heritage of colonialism and a socialist revolution. These changes in policy integrated the nation as well as education into regional and international co-operation.

Although education and human resource development activities expanded, overall returns on investment in education and training were low with little contribution to economic growth. As a consequence there has been an increase in official development assistance (ODA) and investment in primary and higher education sub-sectors. For example, in 2005-2006 ODA accounted for 57% of the government’s education budget and 92% of the capital budget in education (UNESCO, 2007). Although education outcomes have improved in the Lao PDR in the past decade, disparities between rich and poor areas are large; the level of public funding is low; and the inequitable distribution of resources and inefficient management of public expenditure have lessened the effectiveness of education spending (World Bank, 2008). By contrast, while the demands and expectations of society for education are high, teachers and educational managers have low salaries and incentives, which hinders the educational development necessary to support the demands of the nation (Ministry of Education, 2006).

1.2.4.3 Poverty alleviation and the United Nation Millennium Development Goals

The Lao PDR’s long term development goal as defined by the 6th Party Congress in 1996 is to leave the status of least developed country by the year 2020. As a consequence, the immediate future of education development mainly focusses on access and quality improvement for developing national human resources to meet the need of the country’s socio-economic development plan. In particular, education is considered a major intervention for poverty alleviation (Ministry of Education, 2000). It is argued that this will contribute to the country’s national long-term development goal aiming to graduate from the ranks of the least developed country by the year 2020 through sustainable economic growth and equitable
social development, while at the same time safeguarding the country’s social, cultural, economic and political identity (Ministry of Education, 2005).

The Lao PDR has been committed to achieving the United Nation Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) since 2000. The MDGs represent commitments by all countries to reduce poverty and hunger, and to tackle poor-health, gender inequality, lack of education, lack of access to clean water and environmental degradation by 2015. Implementing the MDGs requires efforts that must be undertaken by developing countries and the contribution that developed countries can make through trade, development assistance, debt relief, access to essential medicines and technology transfer (United Nations Development Programme, 2008). The MOE has articulated its vision, aspirations and goals, particularly MDG2 for education development as part of the Education Strategic Vision Up to the Year 2020. The Education Strategic Vision identified the education vision as a general directive for the development of education up to 2020 and served as a framework for a basic discussion between the MOE and the donor community. Since then, education has becomes one of the four priorities of the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) which is regarded as a sensible policy of poverty-focused educational development (UNESCO, 2007). One of the education visions has a focus on universalisation of quality basic education at primary level and continued expansion of participation at the lower secondary level, ensuring that all people have the opportunity to apply their education to serve the socio-economic development programmes (Ministry of Education, 2000). This will contribute greatly to the country’s poverty reduction strategies and thus meet the MDGs.

Currently, the education sector is striving to achieve MDG2 or universal primary education by 2015. To accomplish universal primary education, the Education for All (EFA) National Plan of Action 2003-2015 was developed as a road map establishing goals to be reached by 2015. The EFA National Plan of Action sets goals for universal basic and primary education, to reach disadvantaged population groups in rural and urban areas, promote community participation of basic education and literacy at the grassroots level, and improve the relevance and quality of basic education through enhancing learning opportunities for children, youth and adults (Ministry of Education, 2005). Since this plan has been implemented, the government has made advances in educational growth. However, a significant proportion of children, especially girls and ethnic groups in remotes areas are not guaranteed an equal opportunity to a basic education. The age-specific primary school participation rates range
from 92% for urban Lao-Tai girls to 81% for rural Lao-Tai girls and 52% for rural non Lao-Tai girls (UNESCO, 2007). In addition, access to secondary and tertiary education is still limited and adult literacy is low in rural, mountainous and ethnic areas. The literacy rate for the population aged 15 and over among the Lao Tai groups was 84%, compared to 49% for the non Lao Tai groups (National Statistical Centre, 2005). The quality of education available is currently inadequate to meet economic and social demands. Although more investment will be needed to provide the physical infrastructure, major attention will need to be paid to recurrent expenditure in the education sector. Efforts will need to be made to improve the quality of education materials and teachers. Furthermore, ethnic diversity creates specific learning challenges regarding the language medium of instruction and a model for educating teachers for remote and ethnic areas. The MOE cannot achieve the EFA alone, and to develop a more effective and efficient education system will require positive support from a multiplicity of actors including parents, teachers, students, taxpayer, political actors, financiers, employers, etc.

1.2.4.4 Short-term project funding

As noted earlier, the Lao PDR since 1975 has relied to great extent on the inflow of external assistance, although the source of funds has changed over time. The education sector has received its share of external assistance in short-term project funding from both bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, financial institutes and international non-government organisations. These projects are seen as development instrument where goals, targets, different types and quantities of inputs are specified in advance within a time frame. The projects tend to have a specific geographical or institutional focus. For example one project covers only some provinces and districts. Project activities and inputs are identified in advance in the project design. The underlying assumption for this development project design and practice is social transformation, where western management theories and strategies based in system thinking suppose that change can be predicted in advance; thus designing solutions to problems assuming that social transformation is an end point reached in logical, causal and predictable steps (Mowles, Stacey, & Griffin, 2008). The projects can produce positive change and successfully contribute to the development of education systems. However, shortcomings are becoming apparent; especially where the number of external partners has increased or where the beneficiary country does not yet have a framework to coordinate external support (Swedish International Development Agency, 2005). It has been
observed in many reports (including UNESCO National Education Support Strategy- Lao PDR 2008-2013) that the education sector has struggled to coordinate and manage a number of short-term projects funded by different donors due to the limited competent personnel and institutional resources. Although the MOE has been aware of the quality of its work and the relationship with donors who supported the projects, the problematic nature of a relationship can be seen as where one side has the money and the other needs it. For countries that are highly dependent on external support, they feel like they have no option but to follow where the external community leads (Swedish International Development Agency, 2005).

Another feature of the short-term projects is the issue of sustainability. The projects create a momentum for education development, but once they come to the end, it often seems that project outcomes discontinue. Most project design requires that once projects end the responsibility for on-going funding for the projects will be entirely in Lao hands. The project design takes no responsibility for how this would be achieved (Achren, 2007). The MOE is required to ensure that outcomes of the projects are sustainable when the project funding finishes. To obtain on-going support for the post project activities from the government budget is often difficult for the MOE because the provision of recurrent funding is limited. According to Lao PDR Public Expenditure Tracking Survey in Primary Education and Primary Health (World Bank, 2008), finance and planning operations at the central and local levels are fragmented, and coordination between capital and recurrent expenditures is weak because of low domestic resources, and a large part of education funding is from external support. While donors have started to finance the recurrent budget implicit in their projects, they are concerned about insufficient domestic funding of recurrent expenditures once donor projects are completed. It is suggested that there is a need to look carefully at how the benefits of the projects can be sustained and deal with the context of national educational reform in Lao PDR and the MOE should develop strategies and seek resources for medium and long-term planned action to address this issue as a contribution to meeting the government goals for EFA by 2015 (Burke, 2007). In addition, strengthening financial management to make effective use of limited resources is crucial for improving service delivery as well as the effectiveness of donor aid (World Bank, 2008).

1.2.4.5 The National Education System Reform Strategy (2006-2015)

The 8th Lao People’s Revolution Party Congress (LPRP) re-emphasized its long-term national development goal of enabling the country to graduate from the ranks of the least developed
countries by 2020, and to build human resource development through a better quality of education for the shift to industrialization and modernization which will sustain socio-economic development (Valasane Aloummai, 2006). With reference to the resolution of the 8th LPRP Congress and to meet the demands of the socio-economic development of the country and its growing movement towards globalization, the MOE needs to improve educational quality and standards (Ministry of Education, 2006). The current education reforms include the expansion of school grades by increasing the number of years of schooling from 11 years (5+3+3) to 12 years (5+4+3), curriculum reforms with the introduction of competency-based curriculum development and assessment and examination methodologies; the introduction of foreign language learning in primary schools (grade 3) and the introduction of information technology (IT) skills and knowledge in secondary school curriculum. These reforms will have an impact on the teacher education system, particularly on demands for training teachers to teach a foreign language and IT skills and knowledge and using competency-based teaching as well as the new assessment and examination methods.

Laos has endured a long history of conflict and change. When looking back over how education has grown over four major periods starting from the French colonization up to the current development era, it can be seen that, although Laos must be flexible and tolerant to change, there must also be guidelines developed to effectively manage and coordinate the work of donors. Moreover, the data suggests that although in recent years the education sector has received more attention than the past and has made progress in offering wider access to people, the major focus has been placed on managerial and technical improvement and has not widely recognized the importance of local educational leadership capacity development in the promotion of economic growth and social development. In addition, it is possible that strategies need to be developed to overcome the fact that some people are reluctant to take on local leadership roles.

2. Role of donors

As described earlier, Official Development Assistance (ODA) plays a fundamental role in relation to both public expenditure and the Public Investment Program (PIP) in the Lao PDR (UNESCO, 2007). According to the Foreign Aid Report 2004-2005 (August 2006) ODA constituted on 50% of the total expenditure of the government and 73% of the Public Investment Program in 1999-2000. While the general trend indicates that the share of the ODA has gradually declined over recent years, it still remained 28% of the total expenditure.
and 42% of the PIP in 2004-2005 (UNESCO, 2007). The overall responsibility for aid coordination within the Government is managed by the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). With foreign aid accounting for more than two thirds of public investment in sectors like health, education, agriculture and transport, delivering aid effectively and efficiently is vitally important to development success and the future of Lao PDR (UNDP Lao PDR, 2008). Within the MOE, the Department of Planning and Cooperation (DPC) is in charge of coordinating donor support in the education sector. Since taking on this role, DPC has facilitated the sharing of information among various projects including projects funded by international financial institutes, bilateral, multilateral donors and INGOs. However, the department has had some difficulty in fully undertaking its responsibility due to the limited human and institutional resources for comprehensive aid management and delivery.

Given the importance of external support and the number of donors, there is increasing recognition by both development partners and the government of the importance of coordination and harmonization (United Nations Development Programme, 2007). As noted earlier, the education sector is exemplified by disintegration in the past. Since the signing of the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2006, the localised version of ‘The Paris Declaration’, the Second High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2005, the government has taken a much more active role in leading donor coordination, particularly through the establishment of joint government-development partner sector working groups. On the donor side, starting in 2006 there has been highly effective coordination through the Round Table Meeting process led by the United Nations Development Programme (United Nations Development Programme, 2007). Currently, development partners are also recognising their commitment to increasing aid effectiveness, and have strongly supported the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG). They have realised the need to ensure appropriate coordination among themselves for more strategic and long-term planning in education sector development. The MOE has also recognized the need for improved sector-wide planning to address some of key deficiencies of the education sector, and mainly to ensure a more balanced approach to education development. There is a growing recognition that lack of coordination and disorganized investments have contributed to some of the problems that the sector faces today and external assistance should be better coordinated.
The ESWG, chaired by MOE and co-chaired by UNICEF and Australia, has made a great deal of progress in strengthening the policy dialogue between MOE and development partners and implementing the aid effectiveness agenda as articulated in the associated Country Action Plan, particularly through promoting the development of Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF). Significantly, the Secretariat function, funded by Australia through UNICEF under the Access to Basic Education in Laos (ABEL) program, provides the MOE with essential support needed to manage the ESWG effectively (UNESCO, 2007). The expectation is that, in line with the Paris principles, and through alignment with the priorities identified in ESDF, development partners will move away from stand-alone project-based investments towards a more program-based approach, which eventually is implemented through the government system. Although efforts have been made to improve management and mainstreaming of aid, there are many challenges that may hamper the effectiveness use of external funding for education development. These challenges comprise donor driven versus educational driven development agendas; implementation of education development projects and balance between recurrent and investment expenditure; implementation of mechanisms for aid coordination and institutional capacity; and impacts on government allocation of time and human resources (United Nations Development Programme, 2007). In addition, the major factor that constrains the MOE is the weak and underdeveloped capacity of the Lao civil service, both at central level and in provincial and district administrations (Swedish International Development Agency, 2005). This data implies that there are only few competent and capable educational leaders. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to increase the knowledge and skills of educational leaders in order to support the work of donors.

The Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness suggests that the effectiveness of aid coordination can be improved by strengthening government ownership of development; aligning donors to national policies and increasing their use of national institutions; making donors’ actions more harmonized, transparent and simple; managing results; and improving accountability. The development partners are now trying to use (i) a more coordinated approach to programming in the key sectors of the National Socio-Economic Development Plan as well as strengthened use of national systems; (ii) common procedures and harmonizing activities such as reporting and evaluating procedures; and (iii) aid more transparent, predictable and better integrated into national and sectoral plans and budgets (The Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic and Development Partners, 2006).
This data suggests that the international community has not done enough to recognize the fundamental role of local leaders in development process. While significant investment has focused on good governance and institutional development, very little attention has been paid to building capacity for local leaders to carry on the work of the donors. In order to coordinate and manage donor contributions effectively, it is essential to start to increase an awareness and concern about the role of local leaders in supporting sustainable socio-economic development.

References


Exhibit 4

Intercultural metaphors: Leadership perspectives from South East Asia

(30 September-2 October 2008)

This joint conference paper was based on the paper written by the 10 fellows including myself who attended the first Australian Leadership Award Fellowship program hosted by Australian Catholic University (ACU) funded by AusAID in 2007. Since my Vietnamese fellow and I were both doing a PhD in Melbourne, we were approached by ACU to present the paper on behalf of other fellows. Our conference participation was funded by ACU. Our contribution would become a good model for the 2008 fellows. I co-presented this paper with the Vietnamese fellow and a lecturer from ACU at the international conference on New Metaphors for Leadership in Schools in Melbourne from 30th September to 2nd October 2008 at the Sofitel Melbourne, Australia. This paper explores intercultural definitions of educational leadership through the use of metaphors. In doing so, leadership is defined and described and a number of characteristics of a good leader are distilled. What is highlighted is that to ensure good educational leadership, many cultural factors, as well as leadership qualities have to be addressed. All of them are interlinked and mutually affect each other. A good leader, therefore, is a person who has a clear vision, is culturally aware, is present and is politically insightful.
Intercultural metaphors: Leadership perspectives from Southeast Asia

Dang Thi Kim Anh, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Jack Frawley, Australian Catholic University
Daravone Kittiphanh, Ministry of Education, Lao PDR
Presentation Outline

- Overview of the 2007 Australian Leadership Awards Fellowship (ALAF) programme
  - AusAID focus
  - Australian scholarships
  - 2007 programme
  - Guiding beliefs
  - 2007 fellows
- Cultural metaphors
  - the process
  - the metaphors
  - from Laos
  - from Vietnam
- Leadership capabilities identified and described

Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)

- Australia is committed to the eight Millennium Development Goals
- AusAID manages the Australian government’s overseas aid program.
- Focus on the Asia Pacific region but also provides selective assistance to Africa and the Middle East.
• Australian Scholarships is an initiative of the Australian Government to promote sustainable development and excellence in education in the Asia-Pacific region.

• The initiative brings under one umbrella three Australian Government education award programs managed by AusAID and DEST.
  1. Australian Development Scholarships (AusAID).
  3. Endeavour Programme (DEST).

Project Funding

• In 2007, Flagship hosted a professional development program for 10 educational leaders from Southeast Asia

• Funding from AusAID through Australian Leadership Awards Fellowship (ALAF) program
Guiding beliefs

- Leadership will remain too narrowly conceived unless there is an attempt to understand it as being partially derived from, and influenced by societal culture. (Walker & Dimmock, 2002).

- Established educational leadership discourse has been dominated by Western perspectives oblivious to the cultural diversity that characterises the contemporary world (Collard, 2007).

The 2007 ALA Fellows

- Mid-career high achieving educational leaders within their own sphere of influence
- Nominated by their organisations - NGOs (3), Universities (3), Teacher Training Centres (2), Schools (1), Ministries (1)
- Timor Leste (2), Vietnam (2), Lao PDR (4), Cambodia (2)
Cultural metaphors

- Metaphor workshops
  1. Discuss the characteristics of effective educational leadership
  2. Develop a metaphor: *Educational leadership is ..*
  3. Illustrate the metaphor
  4. Share, explain and discuss the metaphor

- Educational leadership is ...
  - uma lulik (a sacred house)
  - kaibuk (a Timorese crescent crown)
  - cay tre (bamboo)
  - thian (a candle)
  - kuk (a white heron)
  - bayon (a four-faced temple)

Lao Metaphor for Leadership

- *a thian* - a candle-simple but powerful; hard and soft
- Thian brings light, success, peace and prosperity
- Thian are widely used for performance in many traditional and religious events: wedding ceremony, Buddhist Lent
- Lao light Thian to show respect to Buddha and ancestors for well wishing to lead their lives in peace and prosperity.
In the Lao Metaphor: Leadership Identified and Described

- The light of thian shines forever as does enduring leadership
- Leadership is a gift to be shared and a leader is always caring about people and family
- A leader should be able to establish a clear vision, become symbolic and knowledgeable and bring light into organisation
- Thian promotes learning and lifelong learning

Cay tre (Bamboo tree) Metaphor from Vietnam team

• Characteristics:
  - Tall, straight, shiny green
  - Flexible, easily bent but not easily broken
  - Tough, easily grown
  - Resistant to strong wind and storms
  - Widely used and indispensable in traditional life of Vietnamese people
Cay tre (Bamboo tree) Metaphor from Vietnam team

Popular & indispensible in traditional life of Vietnamese people - societal, cultural meanings

Cay tre (Bamboo tree) Metaphor from Vietnam team

Popular & indispensible in traditional life of Vietnamese people: cultural, social life
Cay tre (Bamboo tree)
Metaphor from Vietnam team

Popular & indispensable in traditional life of Vietnamese people (spiritual, cultural)

Cay tre (Bamboo tree)

Societal meaning

Historical meaning

Spiritual meaning

Cultural meaning
Cay tre (Bamboo tree)
Leadership is...

Relationship

Influence

Love of people

Integrity, vision, flexibility, resilience, adaptability

Shared leadership

Gentleman: male-dominant

Multi-functional

Strong-willed, practical, sentimental

The Metaphors Identified:
Characteristics of Good Educational Leaders

- Have capabilities and capacity to lead others: influence, inspire, empower and motivate others (desirable skills, values and qualities)
- Project positive philosophy of life and learning: optimist and enthusiastic
- Have a clear vision
- Be devoted
- Exercise shared leadership
- Play many roles
- Be a role-model
- Treasure learning
- Be more gender-neutral
- Encourage the growth of young leaders
CONCLUSION

“Teaching is the noblest job”

“A good leader must have a clear vision, culturally aware, present...Good educational leaders should possess boundless love for people, as leadership must come from the heart.... Work closely with people with the hope to transform their life... Much love, clear mind, a sound set of ethics... changing people for the better”

“Working in the field of teaching and learning, educational leaders must never stop learning...”

“Who dares to teach must never be afraid to learn...”

THANK YOU! KHOB CHAI! XIN CAM ON!
Exhibit 5
Gender & Intercultural Leadership Workshop
(20-22 August 2008)

As a former Australian Leadership Award Fellow (ALAF) I was regarded as a resource person to support the delivery of the second ALAF program hosted by ACU and funded by AusAID. I was again approached and invited by ACU to co-facilitate a three-day workshop on Gender and Intercultural Leadership from 20 to 22 August 2008 to the 2008 fellows from Cambodia, India, Laos, Nepal, the Philippines, PNG and Vietnam. I ran the workshop with my Vietnamese fellow and a senior research fellow from ACU. To be able to make my contribution to the workshop I studied the Millennium Development Goals, gender and leadership. I also used my knowledge and experience gained from my job as an educational project leader in the MOE.

This joint workshop focused on gender, culture and leadership, which provides fellows with the opportunity to explore, compare and challenge traditional and contemporary perspectives and models of leadership from the perspectives of gender and culture. Issues of leadership, how leadership is culturally constructed and gendered, and what it means to lead effectively will be explored. The workshop also examined how gender affects the way women enact leadership as well as how others react to women leaders.
**Gender & Inter-cultural Leadership Workshop**

Kim Anh, Melbourne University
Daravone Kittiphanh, RMIT University
Jack Frawley, Australian Catholic University
Grouping

How much do you know about other fellows?

Expectations

In groups, share your expectations:

- For the workshop (contents & activities)
- For the facilitators
- For other participants
- Other expectations

Write the expectations on butcher papers
Key topics

- Gender and Gender equality
- Culture and Inter-culturalism
- Globalisation
- Leadership capabilities

Workshop outcomes

1. gain an increased understanding of gender and inter-cultural issues in relation to educational leadership;
2. identify strategies to address gender policies globally, nationally and locally with the focus on working with cultural constraints;
3. discuss and critique globalisation and what it means locally;
4. discuss and define inter-culturalism and develop appropriate capabilities for leadership in intercultural contexts; and,
5. contribute to the analysis of a System Leadership (SL) conceptual framework from a cultural and inter-cultural perspective.
**Workshop Schedule**

1. Participants’ expectations
2. Workshop schedule and objectives
3. Overview of gender, culture and leadership
4. United Nations Millennium Development Goals
5. AusAID dimensions of gender equality
6. Fellows’ country analysis of dimensions
7. Fellows’ organizational analysis of dimensions
8. Addressing gender equality within cultural constraints
9. Defining globalisation
10. Defining culture
11. Defining inter-culturalism
12. Exercising leadership in an inter-cultural environment
13. Developing influential and authentic inter-cultural leadership capabilities
14. Daily evaluation

**Working with cultural constraints**

- **Background:** In Tiwi culture, brothers and sisters have an avoidance relationship. They must not sit together or speak directly to each other.
- **Scenario:** Anne is a Principal of a Tiwi school. Her brother Michael is a Teacher’s Assistant and wants to discuss a sensitive professional issue with her. How do both Michael and Anne deal with this in a culturally sensitive way?
• In September 2000, the largest-ever gathering of world leaders ushered in the new millennium by adopting the Millennium Declaration. The Declaration, endorsed by 189 countries, was then translated into a roadmap setting out goals to be reached by 2015.

• The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) build on agreements made at United Nations conferences in the 1990s and represent commitments by all countries to reduce poverty and hunger, and to tackle ill-health, gender inequality, lack of education, lack of access to clean water and environmental degradation.

• The MDGs are framed as a compact, which recognizes both the efforts that must be undertaken by developing countries, and the contribution that developed countries can make through trade, development assistance, debt relief, access to essential medicines and technology transfer.
MDG 2 Achieve Universal Primary Education

Target:
Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

Indicators:
2.1 Net enrolment ratio in primary education
2.2 Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach last grade of primary
2.3 Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds, women and men
1. Achievement of Universal Basic Education (AUBE)
   - Children without Pre-Primary education
   - Children who never completed Primary school
   - Adults without basic literacy

2. Political Will
   - Right to free education
   - Public expenditure on education as percent of total government expenditure

3. Growth in enrolments
   - Growth rates in pre-primary, primary and secondary education enrolments

4. Quality inputs
   - Trained teachers needed to attain the most favourable ratio of 20:1
   - Trained teachers needed to attain minimum acceptable ratio of 40:1
   - Free textbooks in classrooms

5. Equal opportunities
   - Female enrolments in secondary education
   - Inequality in completion of Grade 9 between rural and urban children between 15-19 years
   - Education incentives e.g. school meals, cash transfers

6. Transparency and accountability
   - Public perception of corruption
   - Civil society participation in education policy platforms
   - Teacher union rights

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Report Cards by Indicators

- Country: United States
- Grade: B
- Overall Grade: C

Teacher's Remarks: George has missed the chance of being bottom of the class, but his scores are still very disappointing given that he has so much potential. He needs to pay more attention to most areas, but especially in overall and maths and coming to TZ, we still feel he has the potential to graduate this class with honours, but he needs to put in a big effort in this next year to prove his worth.
**MDG 3 Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women**

**Target:**
Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

**Indicators:**
3.1 Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education
3.2 Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector
3.3 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament
What is meant by gender?

Refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female. These attributes and opportunities are socially constructed, context- and time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman, man, boy or girl in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men, and between boys and girls, in responsibilities, roles, access to and control over resources, and decision making patterns.

“Gender” or “Sex”?  

- Women give birth to children and breastfeed them.  
- Men like football and women like shopping.  
- In many societies, women stay home and look after children while men go to work to support the family.
What is meant by gender equality?

Refers to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will be the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognising the diversity among different groups of women and men. Equality between women and men is a human right, and a precondition for, and an indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.

AusAID’s commitment to gender equality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes of Australia’s aid program</th>
<th>Gender equality outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accelerating economic growth</td>
<td>Improved economic status of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering functioning and effective states</td>
<td>Equal participation of women in decision making and leadership including in fragile states and conflict situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest in people</td>
<td>Improved and equitable health and education outcomes for women, men, girls and boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting regional stability and cooperation</td>
<td>Gender equality advanced in regional cooperation efforts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Australia’s commitment requires that women’s and girls’ views, needs, interests and rights shape the development agenda as much as men’s and boys’. Women and men will participate in and benefit equally from the aid program, and development will support progress towards equality between women and men, boys and girls.
AusAID’s Four Dimensions of Gender Equality

Access: Access to economic resources and assets such as land, other property, information, income, and financial services is particularly important, along with skills, leadership and training. It is essential to analyse the constraints that prevent women and girls from accessing resources and benefiting from aid programs.

Women’s rights: Discrimination must be eliminated where it exists in customary law, formal legislation, and in social, economic and political institutions to enable women and girls to realise their rights, access resources, make decisions, and live without fear of violence and coercion. Efforts that promote awareness by women and men of the human rights of all people are essential to support these changes.

Decision making: For women to be able to participate equally in decision making, changes in gender relations are essential: in the household, community, and in social, economic and political institutions at local and national levels. Programs to enhance women’s capacity are critical to support women’s participation in decision making. Efforts to change the attitudes and behaviour of men – husbands, fathers, brothers, and male leaders – are essential to secure women’s and girls’ participation in development.

Gender capacity building: Strengthening institutional capacity among all development stakeholders underpins efforts in each of the above areas. Donor and partner government agencies, civil society, and regional organisations all need to increase their capacity for integrated gender and poverty analysis. Supporting women’s organisations to articulate their priorities, advocate for gender equality, and carry out their own agendas can lead to strategic and sustainable changes in gender relations.
MDG 3 Progress

- Read this article and note the conclusions
  - Are there any other outcomes that effective policies and programmes should ensure?
WHAT IS THE MDG MONITOR?

The MDG Monitor shows how countries are progressing in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). With the 2015 target date fast approaching, it is more important than ever to understand where the goals are on track, and where additional efforts and support are needed, both globally and at the country level.

The MDG Monitor is designed as a tool for policymakers, development practitioners, journalists, students and others to:
- TRACK progress through interactive maps and country-specific profiles
- LEARN about countries' challenges and achievements and get the latest news
- SUPPORT organizations working on the MDGs around the world

http://www.mdgmonitor.org/index.cfm

Country and Workplace Analysis Task

ACTIVITY 1
In groups or individually identify the major challenges to achieving the MDG 2 and 3 in your country. For each challenge think about what strategy might be needed to overcome it.

ACTIVITY 2
Individually or in groups, go back to the MDG 2 challenges for your country that you identified in activity 1. Think about the different ways in which each of the challenges identified might affect boys/men and girls/women differently. How would they need to be tackled to ensure that the needs of girls/women and boys/men are addressed?

ACTIVITY 3
In groups or individually identify the major challenges to achieving gender equality - use AusAID’s 4 dimensions as a reference point - in your workplace/organisation. For each challenge think about what strategy might be needed to overcome it.
What does globalisation mean?

- List some of the terms associated with 'globalisation'.
- Draw a symbol for each term e.g.

Key ‘Globalisation’ Terms
What does globalisation have to do with me?

- Globalisation has impacted on Australians in many ways. We drink Coke, eat at McDonalds and KFC, wear Nike runners and use Nokia mobile phones.
- How about you? Do a clothing check and items check on yourself and list the countries where the clothing and items are made.

The Miniature Earth: If the world consisted of 100 people what would it look like?

- As we move deeper into the 21st Century the notion of the world as a global village continues to develop.
- Watch 'The Miniature Earth' and explain your emotions as you watch this webmovie?
- How does 'The Miniature Earth' link to the notion of 'Globalization'.
- Were you surprised at this statistical view of world?
- What impact does an increasingly global world have on you?
- What experiences are you likely to have with people from other countries in the future?
- Consider the knowledge and skills you may need to have to deal with these experiences.
Globalisation: a critical perspective

- Watch John Pilger’s ‘The New Rulers of the World’ and read his article ‘Spoils of a Massacre’.
- What does Pilger see as:
  - the driving force behind globalisation?
  - the impacts?
  - the issues?
  - the alternatives?
- To what extent do you agree or disagree with Pilger’s views?

What does culture mean?

- Answer these questions:
  - What is culture?
  - How is culture manifested or displayed?
- Pyramid discussion activity: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16
Some definitions

• A culture is a way of life of a group of people—the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.

• Culture is symbolic communication. Some of its symbols include a group’s skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, and motives. The meanings of the symbols are learned and deliberately perpetuated in a society through its institutions.

• Culture is the sum of total of the learned behavior of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation.

Manifestations of Culture

• Symbols are words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning which is only recognized by those who share a particular culture. They represent the outermost layer of a culture.

• Heroes are persons, past or present, real or fictitious, who possess characteristics that are highly prized in a culture. They also serve as models for behavior.

• Rituals are collective activities and are carried out most of the times for their own sake (ways of greetings, religious and social ceremonies, etc.).

• Values form the core of a culture. Many values remain unconscious to those who hold them.

• Symbols, heroes, and rituals are the tangible or visual aspects of the practices of a culture.
Culture and leadership

• Work in groups or individually to discuss a hero/ heroine of your culture, past or present, and the person’s characteristics; and how these reflect your cultural values or characteristics highly prized by your culture.

• Share this with the whole group.

Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions

• Power Distance Index (PDI) is defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally”.

• Individualism (IDV) pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family.

• Masculinity (MAS) focuses on the degree to which ‘masculine’ values like competitiveness and the acquisition of wealth are valued over ‘feminine’ values like relationship building and quality of life.

• Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) focuses on the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society.

• Long-Term Orientation (LTO) focuses on the degree the society embraces, or does not embrace, long-term devotion to traditional values.
Cultural comparisons

- Read Hofstede’s article *Dimensions of Culture*.
- Visit Hofstede’s webpage and do some comparisons (your country may not be listed because the study is limited):

Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (GLOBE)

- Project GLOBE supplements Hofstede’s work by adding further cultural dimensions to include the following:
  - **Uncertainty Avoidance** is defined as the extent to which members of an organization or society strive to avoid uncertainty by reliance on social norms, rituals, and bureaucratic practices to alleviate the unpredictability of future events.
  - **Power Distance** is defined as the degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be unequally shared.
  - **Collectivism I** reflects the degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.
  - **Collectivism II** reflects the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in their organizations or families.
  - **Gender Egalitarianism** is the extent to which an organization or a society minimizes gender role differences.
GLOBE’s Cultural Dimensions

- **Assertiveness** is the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships.
- **Future Orientation** is the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies engage in future-oriented behaviours such as planning, investing in the future, and delaying gratification.
- **Performance Orientation** refers to the extent to which an organization or society encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence.
- **Humane Orientation** is the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others.

- Read GLOBE’s article: *Southern Asia cluster: where the old meets the new?*
- How useful is the work of Hofstede and GLOBE in assisting to better understand cultures and cultural difference?

---

**Does globalisation stop culture?**

- How does globalisation impact on the key elements of a culture?
- Does globalisation lead to a ‘monoculture’?
- Consider the impact of other cultures on your culture and your work.
- Consider the knowledge and skills you may need to have to deal with these experiences.
What does ‘interculturalism’ mean?

- Interculturalism is an idea that proposes an encounter between cultures that take place from fundamental characteristics, matrices, and unique aspects of each individual culture, on the common horizon that belongs exclusively to none of them.

- Interculturalism is a releasing experience for each of the cultures involved leading to an awareness of the limits that are inherent to our own cultures and worlds.


A Yolngu View of Interculturalism

‘We cannot hold back change which will happen whether we like it or not. But as a minority society we can adapt by finding common ground with the majority society. It is through an exchange of meanings that we can produce a ‘two ways’ school curriculum. In an exchange of knowledge both sides learn from each other instead of knowledge coming only from the Balanda side. But Yolngu and Balanda knowledge will only come together if there is respect for our knowledge and where Aboriginal people are taking the initiative, where we shape and develop the educational programs and then implement them’ (Wunungmurra, 1989, p.12).
What is it like for you working in an inter-cultural context?

Grouping: various cultures, mixed gender.

- Share with the group your personal experiences of working in an inter-cultural context.
- What are distinct issues of such context?
- What are essential skills or knowledge to exercise influential and authentic leadership in such context?

Potential issues

- Conflict and power
- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Gender
- Ethics
- Communication
- Negotiation
- ...
**Systems Leadership**

- System leaders recognise the importance of the connections between different issues, different individuals and different institutions. They understand that it is these connections that create systems, which are more than the sum of their parts.
- System Leadership is understood as being exercised in five major domains: Identity, Education, Stewardship, Community and Future Focus.
- In each of these domains, systems leaders demonstrate a range of capabilities: personal, relational, professional, organisational.
- Read *Framework for System Leadership in Catholic Education in Australia*.
- In terms of our discussion on globalisation, culture and interculturalism in the context of Systems Leadership there seems to be an obvious omission i.e. intercultural capabilities.

**Intercultural Capabilities**

- What are they?
  - Make a list of intercultural capabilities you view as being crucial for working within systems.
Ganma metaphor

Ganma is the name of a lagoon where salt and fresh water meet. Water is a symbol of knowledge in Yolngu philosophy, and the metaphor of the meeting of two bodies of water is a way of talking about the knowledge systems of two cultures working together (Marika, 1998)

Interculturalism is …

In groups or with a partner:

1. Discuss what are the characteristics you wish to describe
   – How is interculturalism viewed and defined?
   – Who is an intercultural leader?
   – What kind of leadership is needed in an intercultural system?
   – What is it like to exercise leadership in an intercultural system?
   – How do we work interculturally within a system?
   – What do intercultural leaders do?
   – What is the role of the system in intercultural leadership?

2. Develop a metaphor: Interculturalism is …

3. Illustrate the metaphor

4. Share, explain and discuss the metaphor
References

• Websites:
Global campaign for education - www.campaignforeducation.org/
Culture - www.tamu.edu/classes/cosc/choudhury/culture.html
John Pilger – www.johnpilger.com
MDG monitor - http://www.mdgmonitor.org/index.cfm
Geert Hofstede ‘Cultural Dimensions’ - www.geert-hofstede.com/
Project GLOBE - www.thunderbird.edu/wwwfiles/ms/globe/

• Books and Articles


Exhibit 6

Teaching competency standards in the Lao PDR
(16-21 March 2009)

In the 16th -21st March 2009 I represented the MOE at an international conference on Teaching Competency Standards in Southeast Asian Countries in Manila, the Philippines organized by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO INNOTECH).

To participate in this conference I prepared a country report on teaching competency standards, a power point presentation and completed a survey on teaching competency standards in the Lao PDR. The report outlined the education system and teacher education in the Lao PDR. It also contained a description of teaching competency standards including, a policy for supporting for the implementation of the teaching competency standards and the evaluation and assessment of teachers. The report then concluded with some further recommendations. The survey also contained elements of teaching competence, assessment of student performance, classroom management, professionalism development, determining teaching competency standards, policy support for teaching competency standards, implementing of teaching competency standards and monitoring and assessment of competency-based teaching standards. The country report, presentation and survey were submitted to SEAMEO INNOTECH for future reference.
COUNTRY REPORT

TEACHING COMPETENCY STANDARDS

IN THE LAO PDR

A Report to the SEAMEO INNOTECH Conference
Teaching Competency Standards in Southeast Asian Countries
Manila, March 2009

Daravone Kittiphanh
Teacher Education Department
Ministry of Education
Vientiane, Lao PDR
February 2009
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### ABBREVIATIONS

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>DEB</td>
<td>District Education Bureau</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Department of Personnel</td>
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<td>DPPE</td>
<td>Department of Primary and Pre-school Education</td>
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<td>Department of Teacher Education</td>
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<td>EDP II</td>
<td>Second Education Development Project</td>
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<td>Second Education Quality Improvement Project</td>
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<td>Faculty of Education</td>
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<td>Lao People’s Democratic Republic</td>
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<td>National Charter of Teacher Competencies</td>
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<td>National University of Laos</td>
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<td>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</td>
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<td>Teacher and Education Administrator Development Centre</td>
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<td>Teacher Training College</td>
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<td>Teacher Training Enhancement and Status of Teachers</td>
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<td>Teacher Training School</td>
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<td>Teacher Upgrading Centre</td>
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TEACHING COMPETENCY STANDARDS
IN THE LAO PDR

1. INTRODUCTION

After an extended period of struggle the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) was constituted in 1975. However the country can trace its history as far back as the mid-14th Century when, after the arrival of Buddhism, it was unified as the Kingdom of Lane Xang (literally “a million elephants”) under King Fa Ngum (Stuart-Fox, 1997).

The Lao PDR is a small, sparsely populated, landlocked country in mainland Southeast Asia and is little known outside the region. It covers an area of 236,800 square kilometres and shares borders with Cambodia to the South, China to the North, Myanmar and Thailand to the West and Vietnam to the East. Extensive mountain ranges cover much of the country. This geography restricts both the quantity and quality of land available for agriculture and creates difficulties for the development of education, trade, social infrastructure, transport and communication links. The 2005 National Census estimates the population of Lao PDR at 5.62 million. The Census also shows that in terms of ethnicity and languages the population is diverse. Over 80% of people live in rural areas, many of which are distant and isolated from roads. Average incomes are very low with 73% of the population living on less than US$2 per day, and 25 percent on less than US$1 per day (United Nations Development Programme, 2007). On the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (2006) the Lao PDR is ranked 133 out of 177 countries. Overall the country remains one of the poorest in the Asia-Pacific region, and is classified by the United Nations as a least-developed country (LDC) - one of four in South-East Asia.
2. EDUCATION IN LAO PDR

2.1 The Education System

The formal education system in Lao PDR consists of general education, technical and vocational education and training (including teacher education), and higher education. In addition, non-formal education is offered predominantly to out-of-school youth and adults. The divisions for general education are:

(a) pre-school - crèche for children ages 0-2, and kindergarten for children ages 3-5;
(b) primary - five years of schooling (Grades 1-5) for children of ages 6-10;
(c) lower secondary - three years of schooling (Grades 6-8) for ages 11-13;
(d) upper secondary - three years of schooling (Grades 9-11) for ages 14-16.

Under its Five Year Education Development Plan 2006-2010 and the approved National Education System Reform Strategy 2006-2015, the Government of Lao (GOL) plans to increase the length of schooling in general education from 11 years (5 years primary + 3 years lower secondary + 3 years upper secondary) to 12 years (5+4+3). This will be done by shifting Grade 9 into lower secondary education so that Grades 6-9 are covered at this level. The three years of upper secondary education will then cover Grades 10-12 for students of ages 15-17. This reform will bring the general education system in the Lao PDR in line with the international norm of a 12-year school cycle.

2.2 Teacher Education

The strengthening of teacher education has been a national priority throughout the current decade. One of the first steps taken to reform this area was to consolidate the 59 small teacher training schools that were spread across the country into a much more efficient and effective organisation of 10 regional teacher education institutions (TEIs) together with a Faculty of Education (FoE) at the National University of Laos (NUOL). Under these new arrangements a Teacher and Education Administrator Development Centre (TEADC) based at FoE works closely with the Department of Teacher Education (DTE) in the Ministry of Education (MoE) on curricula, textbooks and materials for all pre-service teacher training programs. In 2002 the MoE began the implementation of the Second Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIPII) including the Sida-funded Teacher Training Enhancement and Status of Teachers (TTEST) component. TTEST has been at the forefront of teacher training reform and innovation and, among many other things, has been instrumental in the professional
development of staff in the TEIs. Under the auspices of TTEST a number of operational research studies were also carried out. The sixth of these studies *Professional development networks including isolated schools* (2006), provides examples of the professional development opportunities available in the Lao PDR. The study identifies three main types of professional development activities - in-service training workshops, the Teacher Upgrading Program (TUP), and professional gatherings and meetings, and each of these areas, along with pre-service training, are discussed below.

### 2.3 Pre-service Training

Pre-service teacher education consists of a formal training program to provide trainees with an official teacher qualification. Programs are of different lengths and offered for entry to different levels of teaching depending on the number of years of formal education the student has had prior to entry into the training program. For example a primary teacher might train through the 5+4 course meaning that the trainee has had 5 years of formal schooling and the training course is of 4 years duration. Similarly, a trainee who has had 8 years of formal education will enter the 8+3 program and study for 3 years. From the academic year 2009 a 5+4 course will be phased out. Pre-service training is delivered in teacher training schools, teacher training colleges or through the National University of Laos (NUOL) and is classified as a form of higher education. As part of pre-service teacher training students are required to complete a 3-month practical training.

The 10 TEIs, which operate under the general supervision of the DTE within the MoE, are further classified as Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) (of which there are five), or as Teacher Training Schools (TTS). TTCs prepared trainees for secondary school teaching through an 11+3 program and award a high level diploma. Since the academic year 2008-2009 TTCs have also offered pre-school and primary teacher training programs. TTSs train pre-school and primary teachers through 11+1, 8+3 or 5+4 programs. Graduates from these programs receive a medium level diploma. In addition, the Faculty of Education (FoE) at the NUOL offers a degree level program for upper secondary teachers. It is envisioned that in the near future there will be five options for pre-service training for pre-school, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary teachers. The options are a pre-school program (11+2), two primary school programs (8+3 or 11+2), and a lower secondary program (11+3) which will include five subject specialisation streams. Trainees who wish to teach at the upper secondary
level must enroll in the FoE at the NUOL and graduate with a bachelor’s degree from an 11+5 program.

Currently the education system in the Lao PDR does not have a formal teacher induction program. However there is substantial evidence to show that while it is essential to have good quality pre-service training, this alone is not enough to bring about system-wide educational change. To achieve sustained educational change it will be necessary to continue with the training of young teachers once they are in the schools. New teachers are understandably concerned about acceptance by their colleagues and the community, and if not properly supported they have a tendency to revert to the outdated teaching styles by which they themselves were taught. In August 2006 the MoE launched the Teacher Education Strategy (2006-2015) and Action Plan (2006-2010) (TESAP). This key document sets out overall goals, directions, objectives and targets for both pre-service and in-service teacher training and aims to support the National Education For All Plan of Action. According to TESAP, it is envisaged that in the future an induction program will be established for newly graduated teachers. These teachers will be supported by trained mentors in schools and by a program designed and delivered by the TEIs. The period of induction can be used to help young teachers to build upon the foundation of their pre-service education as well as to provide a structural link between pre-service and in-service training.

2.4 In-service Training: Workshops

In-service training, or continuous professional development, takes place after teachers have been deployed. It is designed to update teachers’ knowledge about subject matter, teaching methodologies, or other topics related to their work. It is usually delivered by the MoE or other authorities at school or district level, or at teacher education institutions. In-service training usually takes the form of short-term workshops and these career development opportunities allow teachers to up-grade their basic professional skills. Much of the in-service training in Lao PDR is supported by various NGOs and international aid agencies (see Willsher 2008).

The primary purpose of such in-service training is simply to increase the ability of teachers so that students will learn more effectively. Within the MoE two departments share key responsibilities for the professional development of primary teachers through in-service training. Those departments are the Department of Primary and Preschool Education (DPPE)
and the DTE. A wide variety of in-service training and workshops flows from their work. The DPPE has worked with multi-lateral and bilateral aid programs as well as a number of non-government organizations to provide in-service training opportunities for teachers, while the DTE has also implemented in-service teacher training for teachers through two large projects - the Second Education Development Project (EDP II) and the Second Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP II). According to Willsher (2008), there are currently more than 24 agencies and internationally funded projects supporting primary teacher in-service training in the Lao PDR. Willsher also shows that there are nine topics that are commonly delivered within the various training programs run by the agencies and projects. Some topics are the sole focus of separate workshops or programs while others are typically embedded within a larger training program and are not run on their own.

The direction in which the MoE expects teacher in-service to develop is set out in its 2006 Action and Strategy Plan, TESAP. A new initiative within the Plan is that the responsibility for the provision of in-service training is to be delegated to the Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) under the direction of the DTE and in cooperation with Provincial Education Services (PES), District Education Bureaus (DEBs) and schools. Under TESAP it is recognised that there will be additional responsibilities for the DTE, the DPPE, and the TEIs. The Plan also recognises that new forms of collaboration will need to be developed between PES, DEB and schools. The critical task is to develop guidelines on professional development (including responsibility for upgrading and in-service programs) in order to outline a mechanism to bring demand, supply and management of professional development together in order to provide effective support to teacher education. Three other steps that also need to be developed are, first, that teachers are given opportunities to express what they see are their own needs for professional development; second, that a system is established which gives recognition and credit to teachers for successful participation in accredited professional development activities; and third, that such credit becomes a factor in determining a teacher’s status and rewards.

2.5 In-service Training: Teacher Upgrading Program (TUP)

In the Lao PDR there are approximately 1,000 permanent primary teachers (excluding contracted teachers and village-employed teachers) who have not been trained in teacher education institutions working in schools, many of them being older teachers who formerly did not have the opportunities to obtain an appropriate level of education themselves and
whose basic education and/or professional education is subsequently below standard. A significant amount of in-service training is targeted at assisting these teachers to up-grade so they are able to obtain an official qualification.

The Teacher Upgrading Program (TUP) was introduced to provide access to training and qualifications for this group of teachers. The Program is taught at 17 Teacher Upgrading Centres that are distributed across the country. Under the supervision of the DTE the TUP allows teachers to study in the semester breaks to upgrade their qualifications. The overall purpose of the Program is to upgrade the qualifications of teachers to an 8+3 level. This training is for teachers who are currently teaching and who have completed a lower qualification, such as a 5+3 and a 5+4 year certificate.

2.6 In-service Training: Meetings and Networks

Another form that in-service training often takes in Lao PDR is that of professional development through direct contact with other colleagues. In rural areas schools are commonly organised into “clusters” with a large school at the centre and smaller schools in isolated areas on the periphery of the cluster. Cluster meetings are held at the central school and are opportunities for those working very often in considerable professional isolation, to meet with other teachers and to share common issues with them. Such meetings typically take place three or four times a year and might last for one or two days. While part of the meetings deal with administrative issues, time is also set aside for professional development activities.

In 2004 the TEADC published the second of the operational studies commissioned under EQIP II - School clusters: management, professional support and classroom teaching. This was followed in 2006 by the sixth study, referred to earlier - Professional development networks, including isolated schools. As a response to these studies consideration is now being given within the DTE to formalise the cluster meetings into a professional network of linked schools and teachers. Ideally the networks will reach beyond the school level and may come to involve professional officers from the District Education Bureaus and the Teacher Education Institutions. However, with all these plans the reality is that budgets for professional development are restricted and constrain what can be achieved.
3. TEACHING COMPETENCY STANDARDS

3.1 Determining Teaching Competency Standards

To make teacher training at all levels effective and teaching performance measurable, there needs to be a description of competencies against which effectiveness and performance can be assessed. In the Lao PDR competencies for teacher trainers have not been determined. The competencies for schoolteachers however have been determined so that teacher trainers in the TEIs know the objectives of their training. The list of competencies also serves to inform the community of the standards they can expect of teachers.

A National Charter of Teacher Competencies (NTC) has been developed to guide teachers over the career-long process of professional development. The competencies can be used as a reference point for assessing a teacher’s in-school performance, or of performance in other educational contexts. Through the development of the NTC the MoE set out to determine the standard skill set required for its teachers. The NTC was then able to be used to promote good practice for teachers, to allow development and integration of various pre-service and in-service teacher training curricula, and, with the development of teacher performance measures, lead towards a revision of salary scales and teacher incentives.

The Lao PDR teacher competencies define the key abilities, qualities and pedagogical skill areas in which each teacher should be competent. These competencies are classified into three categories:

(i) Teachers’ characteristics and professional ethics;
(ii) Knowledge of children; and,
(iii) Subject knowledge and practical teaching wisdom.

All areas are equally important and each set contains ten competencies. The first category focuses on policy at national and local levels, professional values and ethics, personal development and community relations. The second category emphasizes the establishment of a good learning environment, understanding child development, teacher-student relationship, and responding to students’ learning needs. The third category focuses on the teacher’s knowledge of national and local curriculum, the teaching plan, student assessment, recording students’ achievement, and classroom management. The NTC, summarised under its three categories of abilities, qualities and skills, are given below.
Category 1: Teachers’ Characteristics and Professional Ethics

1. Have a good understanding of and put into correct practice the policy platform of the party and the state law and regulations, and be self-disciplined in their application.
2. Respect Lao cultures and traditions and offer consistent and fair treatment to students irrespective of their gender, or of their social, cultural, linguistic, religious or ethnic background.
3. Acknowledge diversity and encourage students to respect each other and accept differences.
4. Be socialistic, living by the same personal values that they expect from their students.
5. Have high expectations of their students and support them in their development as learners who are striving to achieve their potential through learning.
6. Improve their teaching through self-evaluation and through reflection on the observations, comments and advice of colleagues and others.
7. Take responsibility for continuous personal professional development in order to keep up to date with changing academic knowledge and to maximise the learning outcomes for their students.
8. Work collaboratively with colleagues and the community.
9. Form and develop partnerships with the parents and guardians of their students and promote the rights and responsibilities that parents and guardians have for raising their own children.
10. Be role models of morality and integrity within society, contributing to the development and guidance of the community by promoting local arts, cultures and traditions.

Category 2: Knowledge of Children

13. Accept that children learn in different ways, and accordingly use teaching and learning approaches that are appropriate to each child.
14. Develop good interpersonal relationships with students.
15. Encourage interaction among students in the classroom.
16. Ensure students have a significant degree of control over their own learning and should support learning through group work and investigation.
17. Support children with special educational needs.
18. Encourage children and pay special attention to their creativity.
19. Create a positive classroom environment which stimulates student's learning.
20. Learn the culture and language of the children in the area where they are teaching.

**Category 3: Subject Knowledge and Practical Teaching Wisdom**

21. Implement the National Curriculum and know how to design local curricula and activities.
22. Employ modern teaching methodologies, techniques and subject knowledge in teaching and learning.
23. Set learning objectives and outcomes that match the real-life situations of the students.
24. Select appropriate teaching materials to maximise student learning.
25. Teach lessons sequentially and attractively while taking account of student learning.
26. Use different modes of assessing children's work and integrate assessment into planning.
27. Assess student progress in relation to the basic learning competencies identified in the National Curriculum.
28. Record student achievement systematically.
29. Organise and manage classrooms effectively.
30. Provide children with learning opportunities both within and outside school hours.

Led by an international consultant, the NTC was developed following a substantial consultation exercise at the central level (the Ministry) and at local levels in six provinces. A wide range of education stakeholders gave their views including teachers, local community groups, staff of TEIs, PES, DEB, and Teacher Upgrading Centres, officials in the MoE, and staff in non-government organizations and international agencies. The data collection for the exercise was part of the wider process of developing TESAP. The process included interviews with stakeholders, observation of teachers in the classroom, formal meetings, reading of documents, a literature review, and study tours. The data collection was carried out by six specially trained teams, each team comprised of four Lao researchers and each team covering one of the six chosen provinces. Each team was made up of a leader from either the Research Institute of Education Science or the NUOL, an officer from the Ministry, one person from the relevant PES, and one person from a TEI. Training took one week, data collection three weeks and data processing a final two weeks. The teams produced the
document in Lao and then translated it into English. After the investigation, the research teams formed the view that the very concept of competency was unfamiliar to many of the stakeholders. Most, however, were able to state that they wanted teachers who had moral standing, knew their subject, and ensured that young people learnt well. After the initial consultation, it was decided that the international consultant would develop a draft NTC document and this would be the basis for further consultation. Within the draft there was detail about what being a good and moral teacher and school manager might mean. Each statement was reviewed in detail, reduced to words that were easily translated into Lao, and some new statements included. When the document was completed in Lao it was translated into English for editing.

Interviews were generally semi-structured. Observation took place but on a smaller scale than anticipated as much of the research activity took place when the schools were closed for the summer vacation. Outcomes of the observations were compared with similar work carried out as part of the operational studies and the results were found to be largely in agreement. Formal meetings were held with PESs, DEBs, TEIs, local community groups, aid partners and others. Efforts were made to ensure all meetings were friendly, informal, informative, open and unthreatening. All such meetings were used to collect data. Two major study tours took place in 2004, the first to Kuala Lumpur and the second to Ha Noi and in each case the international consultant accompanied the group. The Ha Noi group was made up largely of Ministry personnel while the Kuala Lumpur team included three people from different government ministries. All of these activities resulted in the collection of a comprehensive data set. As the data came from different sources and was collected using a range of methods, it was possible to cross-check meanings and submissions to seek areas of agreement and difference.

3.2 Policy Support for Teaching Competency Standards

The development of the NTC was included in TESAP as Output 4.2, Component 4: *Strategy for Continuing Professional Development*. The TESAP indicates that the NTC will support continuous professional development at all levels of the education system. Stemming from this policy position, the NTC was published and distributed nationwide. In 2007 TESAP was incorporated into the National Education System Reform Strategy and forms the basis of the teacher education strategy within the draft Education Sector Development Framework currently being prepared.
There is a widespread view that the understanding and use of the competencies will improve teaching and teacher education. However, education stakeholders have not been trained to use the competencies to evaluate the performance of either teacher trainees or teachers. Currently the DTE is in the process of developing example indicators and case summaries for each competency statement. There is also a need to develop practical guidelines for how to use the NTC in the process of teacher performance assessment. In order to do so, it is fundamental to disseminate, trial and implement the NTC at central, provincial, district and school levels.

3.3 Evaluation and Assessment of Teachers

Although the NTC was published and distributed nationwide, no formal implementation guidelines have been developed. A system of monitoring and assessment of competency-based teaching standards need to be developed and utilised. Currently, the Department of Teacher Education is in the process of developing example indicators and case summaries for each competency statement to facilitate the monitoring and assessment process. One of the NTC objectives is that it can be used as part of the assessment of teachers for promotion. For example, the NTC will facilitate the incorporation of measurements of teacher performance into the design of a system of revised salary scales and incentives for teachers. Along with the development of the NTC, the Department of Personnel (DoP) developed the system for awarding academic titles to teachers. The purpose of the awards is to provide salary enhancement to teachers who demonstrate a particular level of expertise. The awards are categorized into four levels of academic titles - experienced teacher, skilled teacher, expert teacher and senior expert teacher. The criteria for assessment for each title includes performance, attitudes and values, qualification, teaching experience, and academic output. Each level will receive a salary enhancement on top of the base salary. For example, the first level (experienced teacher) will receive 40% of the base salary. The second level (skilled teacher) will get 60%, the third level (expert teacher) 80%, and the fourth level (senior expert teacher) 100%. This policy has been approved by the Government and DoP is assessing teachers in order to classify them into the new academic titles. An urgent task for the Ministry is to integrate the NTC with the criteria for teacher academic titles so that the assessment of teacher performance can be carried out in a systematic way. It is crucial for DTE and DoP to collaborate and undertake this task.
4. CONCLUSION

While the NTC document is an excellent start, it is a vision statement which now needs to be transformed into a practical hands-on tool for assessing teacher performance, both in school and in other education contexts. Such implementation of the NTC will be critical for the enhancement of teacher professional development and to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. However, the numbers of unqualified and untrained teachers in Lao PDR makes continuous professional development through in-service training an essential first step before the NTC can be applied universally across Lao education for assessing teacher performance. These teachers face difficulties in performing their duties and there is therefore a need for upgrading and professional development programs in order to help them gain the knowledge and skills relevant to their work. There are many such teachers who have not had the opportunity to upgrade their professional competencies continuously and systematically. This has made it difficult for them to assimilate and perform new techniques and methods in teaching and to develop beyond a very basic academic knowledge in their subject areas. Consequently, strengthening professional development is one of the five key strategic areas in the TESAP plan.

4.1 Recommendations

- The most urgent tasks are to develop practical guidelines as to how to use measurable indicators with the NTC; and then to train evaluators how to use these guidelines to assess teachers. These tasks should be carried out in cooperation with key educational stakeholders at central and local levels.

- To support the implementation of the NTC as a tool for assessing teacher performance, TEI staff need to be trained how to use the NTC to evaluate their students at the end of their training so that each new graduate is aware of their own starting point in terms of the competencies.

- The NTC should be the basis for an evaluation process leading to the award of teaching academic titles; and teachers should receive appropriate rewards linked to their performance.
• The NTC should be reviewed, re-published and re-distributed every five years so that teacher trainers and schoolteachers are up-to-date with professional requirements.
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Sabaidee!
Hello!

Teaching Competency Standards in the Lao PDR

SEAMEO INNOTECH
Manila 16 March 2009

Daravone Kittiphanh
Teacher Education Department
Ministry of Education, Lao PDR
Demographics of Lao PDR

- Area: 236,800 km²
- Population: 5.6 million people
- Ethnicity: 55% Lao; 45% Ethnic Groups
- Structure: 16 provinces; 141 districts; 10,000+ villages
- Economy: GDP $2,000 per capita
The Education System

• General education
  - Pre-school (creche and kindergarten)
  - Primary school (grades 1-5)
  - Lower secondary school (grades 6-8)
  - Upper secondary school (grades 9-11)

• Technical and vocational education and training (including teacher education)

• Higher education

• Non-formal education

Teacher Education

• Pre-service training
  - Pre-school teacher training 8+3 program will be replaced by 11+2
  - Primary teacher training 11+1, 8+3 and 5+4 programs will be replaced by 11+2 and 8+3
  - Lower secondary school teacher training 11+3 program with five subject specialisation streams
  - Upper secondary school teacher training 11+5 program

• Professional development activities
  - In-service training workshops through donor funded projects and agencies
  - Teacher Upgrading Program (TUP) for under-qualified staff
  - Meetings and networks
Introduction to Teaching Competency Standards

• The Lao PDR National Charter of Teacher Competencies (NTC) was developed through a substantial consultation exercise involving many teachers, teacher educators and other stakeholders at central and local levels, led by an international consultant.

• The NTC lists the key abilities, qualities and skill areas in which each teacher should be competent.

Purpose of the NTC

• To promote good teaching practice
• To guide teachers over the career-long process of their professional development
• To underpin the development of accredited teacher training programs
• To be used with performance indicators as a basis for determining salary and incentives
Elements of the NTC

The NTC organises key abilities, qualities and skills into three groups, each of equal importance:

- Teachers’ characteristics and professional ethics
- Knowledge of children
- Subject knowledge and practical wisdom

Policy Support for Teaching Competency Standards

- National Teacher Education Reform Strategy 2006-2015
- Education Sector Development Framework
Evaluation and Assessment of Teachers

- The NTC has been distributed nationwide
- Guidelines on how to use the NTC to assess teacher performance have still to be finalised
- Example indicators and case summaries for each competency are being developed
- A system for awarding academic titles to teachers has also been developed

Conclusion

- The NTC needs to be transformed into a practical hands-on tool for assessing teacher performance
- The NTC can also be used to guide the continuous and systematic professional development that all teachers need
Recommendations

It is recommended that:

• Guidelines are developed for the use of the NTC
• Evaluators are trained in the use of the NTC
• The NTC is used as a tool for measuring teacher performance
• The NTC becomes the basis for an evaluation process leading to the award of teacher academic titles
• The NTC be reviewed, re-published and re-distributed every five years

Thank you very much for your attention

Khob chai lai lai
Dear Experts:

Pleasant greetings!

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO INNOTECH) is mandated to promote cooperation among the Southeast Asian nations through education, science, and culture. It provides training and research programs to expand its range of flexible learning courseware for the region and contributes to the achievement of the goals of international development agenda.

One of the Center’s SEAMEO INNOTECH LEARNTECH II Regional Education Program (SIREP) projects for financial year (FY) 2009 is a research project focusing on a meta-analysis of teaching competency standards in the region, paying particular attention to systems of developing, implementing, assessing, and monitoring the said standards that envision to provide transformative teacher professional development in Southeast Asian countries in the context of an increasingly decentralized educational management system. The research project led by SEAMEO INNOTECH’s Research Studies Unit (RSU) shall foster active and continuing dialogs with experts to promote greater harmony and the integration of teacher professional development standards in the region.

In this regard, we would like to ask you to complete the following questionnaire by either supplying the necessary information or checking the box that corresponds to your answer to each question. Please be reminded to answer all the items as completely and as accurately as possible. Please do not leave any item unanswered.

Should you have any difficulty with or questions regarding the survey, please contact Dr. Ethel Agnes P. Valenzuela by email at ethel@seameo-innotech.org or Ms. Bernadette Caraig at det@seameo-innotech.org or by phone at numbers (+632) 9247681 to 84. Your answers will be treated as strictly confidential. Please complete and return the questionnaire on or before March 6, 2009 to SEAMEO INNOTECH’s RSU by fax at (+632) 9287692 or by email at ethel@seameo-innotech.org or det@seameo-innotech.org.

Very truly yours,

DR. ETHEL AGNES P. VALENZUELA
Research Specialist/Head
Research Studies Unit
Part I. Elements of Teaching Competence

What skills should a competent teacher in your country possess? Please check the statements that correspond to the competencies that a teacher should possess to be considered competent in your country. (Multiple responses are allowed.)

a. Pedagogical skills

- Selects/States long-term goals and short-term measurable objectives based on a prescribed national and/or school curriculum
- Uses creative and innovative instructional strategies that are appropriate to a lesson’s objectives and students’ abilities, interests, and learning styles
- Selects and uses appropriate resources and available technologies when teaching to suit students’ abilities, interests, and learning styles
- States the objectives of lessons and skills that the students need to master in relation to past and future lessons
- Gives concise but clear directions for students to follow
- Explains concepts, terms, vocabulary, and principles related to lessons clearly and provides examples when necessary
- Provides guided practice when necessary and review at appropriate intervals of time
- Uses up-to-date and accurate information in teaching lessons

Other competencies related to pedagogical skills, please specify. Teachers should:

- set learning objectives and outcomes that match the real-life situations of the students
- teach lessons sequentially and attractively while taking account of student learning
- provide children with learning opportunities both within and outside school hours
b. Assessment of Student Performance

☐ Checks students’ understanding, processes, and products by asking comprehension questions and requiring practical application of skills

☒ Measures students’ progress systematically using a variety of appropriate assessment methods and instruments

☐ Provides feedback about students’ performance and making specific recommendations for improvement

☐ Uses assessment results to determine if objectives were met and/or if reteaching is necessary

Other competencies related to assessment of student performance, please specify.

Teachers should:
- assess student progress in relation to the basic learning competencies identified in the National Curriculum
- record student achievement systematically

c. Classroom Management

☒ Promptly begins instruction and completes non-instructional duties with minimal loss of instruction time

☒ Efficiently manages student behavior by ensuring that students obey classroom rules and procedures cooperatively and anticipating conditions that can lead to conflict and using appropriate intervention strategies

☐ Encourages active and ensures equitable student participation by varying roles in the instructional process (facilitator, coach, audience) in relation to the content and purpose of instruction

☐ Establishes and maintains timelines for task completion and standards for consistency, correctness, neatness, and form

☒ Demonstrates respect and consideration for all students and provides constructive criticism when necessary

☐ Maintains a physical environment conducive to learning within the limitations of available facilities

☒ Communicates clearly, correctly, and coherently
Other competencies related to classroom management, please specify.

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

**d. Professionalism/Professional Development**

- [x] Participates in professional organizations to improve knowledge and enhance skills
- [ ] Provides leadership in identifying and resolving issues and problems facing education (local, national, regional)
- [ ] Completes assigned tasks on time and adheres to local personnel policies and procedures
- [x] Adheres to written local and national policies and laws and regulations
- [x] Exhibits professionalism with peers, administrators, and parents/guardians by demonstrating respect and consideration for and interest in those whom he/she interacts with
- [x] Promotes cooperation between parents/guardians and the school and the community

Other competencies related to professionalism/professional development, please specify.

Teachers should:
- be socialistic, living by the same personal values that they expect from their students
- have high expectations of their students and support them in their development as learners who are striving to achieve their potential through their learning
- improve their teaching through self-evaluation and through reflection on observation, comments and advice of colleagues and others
- be role models of morality and integrity within society, contributing to the development and guidance of the community by promoting local arts, cultures, and traditions

**e. Are there other competencies that a teacher should possess? Please specify.**
Teachers should have knowledge of children and teachers should:

- understand child development
- understand rights of children
- be aware of the effects of the environment and health on children’s learning
- develop good inter-personal relationships with students
- encourage interaction among students within the classroom
- ensure that children have a significant degree of control over their own learning and should support learning through group work and investigation
- support children with special educational needs
- encourage children and pay attention to their creativity

Part II. Determining Teaching Competency Standards

1. How are the standards covering teaching competencies developed in your country? Please specify.

   The Lao PDR National Charter of Teacher Competencies (NTC) contains thirty competencies which are grouped under three sets of key abilities, qualities and skills each of which is equally important to others. The three sets are i). Teachers’ characteristics and professional ethics, ii). Knowledge of children and iii). Subject knowledge and practical teaching wisdom. Each group is made up of ten competencies. After extensive consultations and interviews with relevant stakeholders, including teachers and community members, the NTC was developed within the Ministry of Education as part of the work towards establishing an overall Teacher Education Strategy and Action Plan. Please refer to the country report for detail.

2. Which of the following processes were used to implement teaching competency standards in your country? Please check the statements that correspond to your answers. (Multiple responses are allowed.)

   - [x] Policy directives from the education ministry
   - [x] Consultations with key experts/officials
   - [ ] Laws/Issuances from the national government
Others, please specify.

The National Charter of Teacher Competencies were developed following a substantial consultation exercise at the central (the Ministry) and local levels in six provinces which was led by an international consultant. The process included interviews, observation, formal meetings, reading of documents and literature and study tours. A wide range of key education stakeholders gave their views including teachers, local community groups, members of Teacher Education Institutions, Provincial Education Services (PES), District Education Bureau, Teacher Upgrading Centres, the Ministry of Education officials, non-government organization and agency staff. However, while the NTC is well developed and widely distributed, additional work now needs to be done so that guidelines are developed showing how the competencies can be an assessment tool and training then needs to be given to those who will be assessing teachers

Part III. Policy Support for Teaching Competency Standards

Are there policies being implemented in your country to promote the use of competency-based teaching standards? Please check the statement that corresponds to your answer.

Yes  No

If yes, please specify.

The National Charter of Teacher Competencies (NTC) was included in output 4.2 in component 4: strategy for continuing professional development in the Teacher Education Strategy 2006-2015 and Action Plan 2006-2010 (TESAP). TESAP indicates that the NTC will support continuous professional development at all levels of the education system. TESAP was incorporated into the National Education System Reform Strategy in 2007 and forms the basis of the teacher education strategy within the draft Education Sector Development Framework currently being prepared.

Part IV. Implementation of Teaching Competency Standards

1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of competency-based teaching standards? Please check the statement that corresponds to your answer.

Yes  Positively; they are in favor of implementing competency-based teaching standards.

No  Negatively; they are not in favor of implementing competency-based teaching standards.
Please explain your answer.

The NTC was published and distributed nationwide and was partly utilised in course design and activities for pre-service and in-service. There is a widespread view that the understanding and use of the competencies will improve teaching and teacher education. However, education stakeholders have not been trained to use the competencies to evaluate teacher trainees and teachers’ performance. Currently, the Department of Teacher Education is in the process of development of example indicators and case summaries for each competency statement. There is a need to develop a practical guideline for implementing to Lao teacher competencies. In order to do so, it is fundamental to disseminate, trial and implement the NTC in central, provincial, district and school levels.

2. How are teachers informed/orientated about your country’s teaching competency standards? Please check the statements that correspond to your answers. (Multiple responses are allowed.)

- [x] Training/Workshops
- [ ] Mentoring/Coaching
- [ ] Policy directives
- [ ] Information, education, and communication materials (e.g., letters, brochures, information kits, handbooks/guidebooks)

Others, please specify.

Although the NTC was published and distributed nationwide, there is no specific dissemination being carried out to explain the content of the NTC. It was regarded as a part of TESAP which was disseminated through formal meetings at the Central and local levels.

Part V. Monitoring and Assessment of Competency-Based Teaching Standards

1. How are teaching competency standards used to check each teacher’s performance? Please specify.

Although the NTC was published and distributed nationwide there is no formal implementation guideline developed. A system of monitoring and assessment of competency-based teaching standards needs to be developed and utilised. Currently, the Department of Teacher Education is in the process of developing example indicators and case summaries for each competency statement to facilitate the monitoring and assessment process.

2. How often does such assessment take place? Please check the box for the statement that corresponds to your answer.
Although the Ministry has developed the NTC, there is no system or mechanism for assessment of teacher performance in place.

3. How are performing teachers rewarded in your country? Please specify

One of the NTC’s objectives is that it be used for promoting teachers. For example, the NTC will facilitate the incorporation of measurement of teacher performance into the design of a system of revised salary scales and incentives for teachers. Along with the development of the NTC, the Department of Personnel (DoP) developed a system for awarding academic titles to teachers. The purpose of the awards is to provide salary enhancement to teachers who demonstrate a particular level of expertise. The awards are categorized into four levels of academic titles - experienced teacher, skilled teacher, expert teacher and senior expert teacher. The criteria for assessment of each title includes performance, attitudes and values, qualification, teaching experience, academic products. Each level of the academic title will receive a salary enhancement on top of the base salary. For example, the first level (experienced teacher) will receive 40% of the base salary. The second level (skilled teacher) will get 60%, the third level (expert teacher) 80%, and the fourth level (senior expert teacher) 100%. This policy was approved by the government and DoP is assessing teachers in order to classify them into the new academic titles. An urgent task for the Ministry is to integrate the NTC with the criteria of teacher academic titles for the systematic assessment of teachers’ performance. It is crucial for DTE and DoP to collaborate and supervise this task.

Thank you for your cooperation.
Exhibit 7

The factors for facilitating the relative success of development leadership and coalitions in the Lao PDR

(15-18 March 2010)

Being an Australian Leadership Award (ALA) scholar and doing my PhD research gave me very privileged but very demanding opportunities. As part of my scholarship I was required to attend a four-day Leadership Development Conference in Canberra (15-18 March 2010). (The conference was a compulsory condition of the ALA scholarship.) In March 2010 I attended the 2010 Leadership Development Conference funded by AusAID and organized by Curtin University of Technology. This Conference was a key annual event, which brought together 182 ALA scholars from 26 different countries across the Asia Pacific region who were studying at Australian Universities. I was selected as one of the three ALA scholars to participate in the panel discussion at the Conference with senior AusAID presenters. The theme of the panel discussion was “Leaders to Leadership-Driving the Process of Development”. I took this chance to share my knowledge and perspectives on how to facilitate the successful development of leaders and leaderships coalitions in the Lao PDR as well as to inform donors about data arising from my research and experience.
Response to a panel discussion: Leaders to Leadership-Driving the Process of Development

From my own experience as a project leader having worked in a number of educational projects funded by different donors, to facilitate the relative success of development leaderships and coalitions in Laos, I think it is important for development partners to recognize the need for leadership development through quality education, rather than the generalized, often spur-of-the-moment workshops, which have operated unsuccessfully in the past through many donors’ projects. This will mean that providing focused knowledge and skills and individual scholarships that link to formal qualifications in higher education in Laos and overseas will be a better approach. These skills and understandings must also be related to the needs of Laos and the ministry that manages the aid program. I believe that through building local leaders’ capacity and capability through carefully targeted individual scholarships, these leaders can participate effectively in all stages of planning, developing and delivering aid-funded projects and programs. This will lead Lao to collective actions to problem solving, support for the work of the development partners that meet the needs of my country and ultimately establishing a sense of local ownership.

In addition, as a woman being an ALA scholar and doing Ph. D also makes a big difference to me and my organization and system as well as my culture where women’s voices are rarely heard. Undertaking research by project at RMIT University provides me a great opportunity for my professional and scholarly knowledge development, becoming a more knowledgeable and skilled practitioner and contributing to improvement in practice in the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, studying at the Ph. D level empowers me as I understand more and contribute to the development process, particularly in the education sector. I am now recognized as a key technical official in education. This allows me to makes a significant contribution to my workplace because of my increased knowledge, skills and credibility and enables me to participate in decision-making and policy formation processes, which ultimately leads to contributions to national education development as well as to the socio-economic growth of my country.

I think the opportunity for targeted leadership programs flowing from a closer relationship between groups of women and higher education already has had an important impact on women’s roles in promoting women’s decision-making and leadership in the Ministry of Education and Laos. For instance, many educational projects at the MoE are led and managed
by women who have studies Master’s Degree in Australia, such as Ms Chanthavone, a project director for Basic Education for Northern Communities Project funded by EU, Mrs Khampaseuth, a project manager for EDP II supported by the World Bank, and the second prize winner for the best project team in 2009 for ADB projects in Laos is managed by four strong women. These achievements show the link between higher education scholarships/strong women and effective aid delivery.

In terms of my Ph. D research I have negotiated and networked with senior officials and technical staff at the Ministry of Education, Provincial Education Services, and District Education Bureau. I have listened to school teachers and principals as well as community members and leaders, trying to find a better way to strengthen school leadership capacity. My research has operated at the central and local levels in my education administrative system, which illustrates the importance of encouraging, working with and listening to coalitions of educational leaders at each level in order to solve the huge range of problems challenging school improvement. It also highlights the need to listen to the needs and perceptions of local communities in the management of aid. Too often decisions have been made by donors and government officials based in Vientiane, the capital city, based on inadequate and uninformed information about the needs of Lao communities.

Finally, I expect workshops of this nature and my research will contribute to a better understanding of:

- the dynamics of leadership in development
- the importance of skilled and motivated educational leadership at the centre and at the local level
- the need to have well informed, well educated, like-minded colleagues challenging current aid delivery paradigms
- how to target aid more effectively
- the needs of local leaders and communities and their contribution to aid focus and delivery
- how donors will be able to target aid more efficiently and effectively.
Leadership Development Conference

Panel Discussion: Leaders to Leadership – Driving the Process of Development
Day 1: 15 March 2010, 1.10 – 2.30pm

Background
The panel discussion will follow the themes of the Leadership Program: Developmental Leaders, Elites and Coalitions (LPDLEC) program. The program was established in July 2009 with funding from the Australian Government. It builds on work previously undertaken by the Leaders, Elites & Coalitions Research Program (LECRP) which was initiated in 2007 following extensive consultations with leaders and key stakeholders which made clear the need to know much more about the nature and provenance of progressive and developmental leaderships.

To date, interest in leadership work has tended to focus mainly on the role and characteristics of individual ‘leaders’ with little understanding of leadership as a process. Accordingly, the work of the LPDLEC is focused much more directly on ‘leadership’ as a political process which is central in (a) promoting developmental political settlements and coalitions; and (b) in shaping appropriate institutional arrangements to help resolve the many collective action problems which define the challenges of delivering security, peace, growth and essential services to poor people, especially in weak and fragile states.

Format
1. Joint presentation from Steve Hogg and John Davidson (15-20 minutes) on the Leadership Program: Developmental Leaders, Elites and Coalitions (LPDLEC) program.
2. A presentation from Gillian Brown, AusAID Senior Gender Advisor (10 minutes) on gender and leadership.
3. Three ALA Scholars each have five minutes to respond on the role of leaders, from their own experience (total of 15 minutes).
4. The remaining time will be open to the floor for questions/discussion - panel members not to be viewed as experts but as instigators for open discussion (35 minutes).

Session Facilitator

Dr Tanveer Ahmed
Dr Tanveer Ahmed is a psychiatry registrar and writer. He is a former television journalist who currently writes a regular opinion column for the Sydney Morning Herald related to political and social affairs. He is also a visiting fellow for the Centre for Independent Studies.

He is regularly asked to speak around the country on topics such as leadership, international affairs and the future of geopolitics as well as social topics pertaining to mental health and multiculturalism.

He is an appointee to the Advertising Standards Board and is a previous national representative for junior doctors with the Australian Medical Association. He was chosen by a Prime Minister’s committee in 2006 as one of a hundred future leaders of Australia.
Panelists

**John Davidson**, Assistant Director General - Office of Development Effectiveness, AusAID

John Davidson is the Head of the Office of Development Effectiveness, an independent unit within the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) charged with measuring and reporting on the effectiveness of Australia’s overseas aid program.

Immediately prior to this appointment he spent three years working as a Senior Public Sector Specialist in the World Bank, based in Washington DC. Prior to joining the Bank, he worked on, and mostly in, the South West Pacific for the previous 15 years, including: four years as the Head of the Australian aid program in Papua New Guinea; three years as Head of the Australian aid program in Fiji; and prior to that, two years as the AusAID representative in Tonga.

Principal areas of interest include: governance and public sector reform related activities; politics of development; leadership; service delivery in decentralised governance systems; alternative activity delivery modalities; and team management.

**Steve Hogg**, Assistant Director General - Governance and Leadership Branch, AusAID

Steve Hogg has been working in AusAID since 1992. He has worked in a number of country program and policy areas. He has had postings to Vanuatu (1st Secretary, 1997-1999), PNG (Counsellor, 2002-2005) and was seconded to DFID from 2005-2008. In DFID, Steve headed up the Fragile States policy unit, provided high level advice to the Middle East and North Africa program and worked on political governance and leadership issues. Steve is currently Assistant Director General, Governance & Leadership Branch and is the Program Director for the ‘Leadership Program: Developmental Leaders, Elites & Coalitions’. Steve has been working on leadership issues in developing countries for a number of years and is informed by some 20 years experience in shaping Australian and international aid policies, strategies and programs.

**Gillian Brown**, Principle Gender Advisor, AusAID

Gillian Brown has recently been appointed as AusAID’s Principal Gender Adviser. She joins AusAID after twelve years in the World Bank’s East Asia and Pacific Region Social Development Unit, during which she lived and worked in Indonesia and the Mekong Region, and also spent several years based in DC working on other countries in the Asia Pacific region. During her time at the World Bank she was the Regional Gender Coordinator for the East Asia and Pacific Region and represented the region on the Bank’s Gender and Development Sector Board. Before joining the World Bank, Gillian worked for several years in Indonesia as a Gender and Social Development consultant after completing her post graduate research in Central Java. She has also lived and worked in rural Bangladesh and southern Somalia. Gillian’s graduate and post-graduate degrees are in Agricultural Engineering and she has worked extensively on a broad range rural development, infrastructure, and community development projects, and carried out research on various gender-related topics.

**Ms Davarone Kittiphanh**, Deputy Head of Second Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP II) Office, Ministry of Education, Lao People's Democratic Republic

Ms Davarone Kittiphanh is the Deputy Head of the Second Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP II) in the Ministry of Education, Lao PDR. She is currently a PhD student at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). Daravone has senior roles in several education projects funded by development partners including AusAID, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). Davarone has been an English language teacher and trainer where she has developed a wide range of expertise including teaching English to adults, English language curriculum and materials development, conducting training of trainers for English teachers and skills in competency-based assessment. She is a Fulbright Scholar (1997-99), an Australian Leadership Award Fellow (2007), and is currently a recipient of an Australian Leadership Award Scholarship.

**Miss Sharin Shajahan Naomi**, Staff Researcher, Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC, Bangladesh
Sharin Shajahan Naomi is studying in Masters of Arts in Human Rights at Curtin University of Technology. She completed a Bachelor in Law from the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2007. During the study period, she was involved with a number of leading human rights NGOs in Bangladesh - empowerment of law through common people, manusher jonno and ain o salish kendra. Sharin Shajahan Naomi has worked as a street law trainer, research assistant and office executive on different human rights projects of these NGOs and has represented her university and Bangladesh in several international events including the Regional Henry Dunant Memorial Moot Court Competition in Delhi, Asia Cup 2007 and Conference in Japan, Training on Economical, Social and Cultural Rights in Nepal.

Sharin Shajahan Naomi was a member of law review (student organization for human rights, based on university of Dhaka) and Dhaka University Moot Court Society. She is also contributor to national English daily of Bangladesh ‘the daily star’.

In 2007, she joined Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC, Bangladesh (the largest NGO in the world). As research associate, she has been involved on number of research projects of BRAC legal aid – human rights lawyering, justice system of Chittagong Hill Tracts, legal remedy in rape cases, etc. Along with the career in BRAC, She is an advocate of the court of Bangladesh. In future, she expects to work for the effective legal aid intervention for poor women, specially indigenous women of Bangladesh.

**Mr Stanley Pirione (participation yet to be confirmed),** Under Secretary in Strategic Policy & Planning, Ministry of Public Service, Solomon Islands

- Currently undertaking a PhD in Business Management at Southern Cross University with a research topic of “Workforce Planning and its Impact on Public Service Delivery”.
- Previously held positions as the Deputy Commissioner of Labour and the Chief Industrial Relations Officer with the Ministry of Labour, Trade and Employment.
- (at 35) was the youngest under secretary to be appointed in Solomon Islands in 2007
In June 2010 I was again invited to participate in the 3rd Australian Leadership Awards Fellowship Seminar hosted by ACU funded by AusAID. The seminar was held between 3-4 June at St Joseph’s Centre for Reflective Living, Baulkham Hills in NSW. This seminar was part of the professional development program for educational leaders primarily from South East Asian countries. As an alumni I was honoured to deliver the keynote presentation, actually the first presentation of the seminar. The keynote presentation discussed educational leadership contexts and examined how education leadership emerged in the Lao PDR from the education perspective and how donors might work more effectively. It was another significant event in my research journey. I took the opportunity to distribute my knowledge and experience gained from my research project with fellows from the development and academic communities who were regarded as influential change agents in their respective countries. I also gained new insights and a clearer focus for my own research through active discussion and interaction with fellows and lecturers from ACU and other PhD candidates. The fellows were from developing countries such as Laos, Cambodia and Timor Leste, who held leadership positions in their respective countries and who mainly worked in aid development in their workplaces. These fellows came from a university, the public sector and international non-government organizations (INGOs). The audience found my presentation valuable and interesting. For example, one of the ACU lecturers said that it was a very stimulating and engaging presentation. A fellow from the National University of Laos claimed that my research was very powerful. Most participants contributed comments and shared discussion and experience as they had similar problems and challenges. Originally I was asked to give a 30 minute presentation and 15 minutes for discussion but the actual session lasted for one hour!
3rd AUSTRALIAN LEADERSHIP AWARDS FELLOWSHIP SEMINAR
Educational leadership in South East Asia: issues, challenges and ways forward
3-4 June, St Joseph’s Centre for Reflective Living, Baulkham Hills, NSW

SEMINAR PROGRAM

DAY ONE: Thursday 3 June

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00-9.15 am</td>
<td>Welcome Opening: ALA Fellows 2010 Norberta Belo</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.15-10.00 am</td>
<td>ALAF Alumni Keynote: Daravone Kittiphanh</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Challenges of developing educational leaders in the Lao PDR</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chair: Alongkot Soseng Inh</td>
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<td>10.00-10.30 am</td>
<td>Alumni Reply</td>
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<td>Chair: Alongkot Soseng Inh</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30-11.00 am</td>
<td>Morning tea</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.00-12.30 pm</td>
<td>Professional Work-plans 1, 2, 3, 4 &amp; 5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chair: Jack Frawley</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.30-1.30 pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.30-3.30 pm</td>
<td>Professional Work-plans 6, 7, 8, 9 &amp; 10</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chair: Jack Frawley</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.30-4.00 pm</td>
<td>Afternoon tea</td>
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<td>4.00-onwards</td>
<td>Cultural night preparations</td>
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DINNER PROGRAM: St Joseph’s Centre for Reflective Living

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.30-7.00 pm</td>
<td>a. Pre-dinner drinks</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.00-8.30 pm</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.30-9.00 pm</td>
<td>a. Awards Ceremony: Mick Bezzina</td>
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DAY TWO: Friday 4 June

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>9.00-9.45 am</td>
<td>Director’s Keynote: Mick Bezzina</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Chair: Ou Sokhim</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.45 – 10.30 am</td>
<td>ALAF Alumni Keynote: Dang Thi Kim Anh</td>
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<tr>
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<td>When Local meets Global: Challenges and Opportunities for Educational</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Leadership in Vietnam/ South East Asia</td>
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<td>Chair: Mao Pouthyroth</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30-11.00 am</td>
<td>Morning Tea</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.00-12.30 pm</td>
<td>Collaborative Writing 1, 2, &amp; 3</td>
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<td>Chair: Charles Burford</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.30-1.30 pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.30-2.00 pm</td>
<td>Collaborative Writing 4</td>
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<td>Chair: Charles Burford</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.00-3.00 pm</td>
<td>Professional Attachment Organisation: Reflections</td>
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<td>Chair: Anne Benjamin</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.00-3.30 pm</td>
<td>Afternoon tea</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.30-4.30 pm</td>
<td>Conclusion, discussion, reflections, farewell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chair: Mick Bezzina</td>
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The Challenges of Developing Educational Leaders in the Lao PDR

3rd Australian Leadership Awards Fellowship Seminar
St Joseph’s Centre for Reflective Living, Baulkham Hills, NSW
3 June 2010

Daravone Kittiphanh
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University
Introduction

Aim of the presentation:

1. Discuss educational leadership context
2. Examine how educational leadership emerges in the Lao PDR from the education perspective and how donors might work more effectively

Foundation

*Leadership does not occur in a vacuum. The place where and the time in which leadership is created influences how the leaders and followers go about co-producing leadership. It also affects why it is done and for what purpose* (Jackson & Parry 2008).
Socio-Cultural Context

Culture

• **Importance of age**
  Respect is the clue and leadership accepted on the basis of age.

• **Male / female roles**
  The women who did gain positions did so, not necessarily on account of their gender or competence, but because of their family name, which indicates the importance of social position within the Lao society (Bäcktorp 2007).

• **Egalitarian vs hierarchical systems**
  Leadership is located in a cultural framework of hierarchy where the playing field is deliberately not level and is likely will never be so.

Political context

**Criteria for the appointment of leaders:**

• commitment to ideological values,
• political knowledge and expertise in area of specialization,
• capacity to *act* in the leadership position,
• demonstrated commitment to the principle of collective decision making,
• physical and mental capacity
Educational Context

• Since the arrival of a colonial government in 1893 Lao education has been at the mercy of external imported ideology:
  – colonial ideology;
  – socialist ideology and
  – a development ideology instigated by donors, loan providers and consultants embedded in the system.

Educational Leadership

Broad Scope of leadership

• *Educational leadership is a broad term reflecting analytical, critical, and innovative thinking to improve the performance of educational institutions* (Jazzar & Algozzine 2006).

Leadership and Institutions

• *The relationship between leadership and institutions is very important because development is shaped by institutions which are determined by political process* (Leftwich & Hogg, 2008).

Leadership: Local Vs Imported

• The Lao education must be designed by the Lao through their political processes

• Donors should recognize the need for educational leadership development and involvement at all stages of planning, developing and delivering aid-funded projects and programs.
Developing Educational Leaders

• Building local leadership by
  – providing focused knowledge and skills
  – individual scholarships that link to formal qualifications in tertiary and higher education in Laos and overseas.
  – Fostering strong local networks

• So that educational leaders can respond to the complex socio-political-cultural context in which they work.

Challenge for educational leadership at the local level

• Getting to know/understand expectations from the system and community
• Working with limited support and resources
• Exercising a degree of autonomy
• Developing resources
• Developing as a professional leader
• Low salary and poor incentives
• Significant cultural attitude and practices
• Language diversity (remote and mountainous areas)

➢ So these challenges have impact on school leaders to carry out their duties.
Conclusion

It is important for donors and government to recognize the need for leadership development in the education sector in order to build its capacity to facilitate education development and the work of donors. In addition, the failure to distinguish that development is political process and ineffective local leaders might result in inappropriate donor policies.

Thank you very much for your attention

Khob chai lai lai
Exhibit 9

Unhusking rice: the process of tapping into intercultural perspectives from South East Asian educational leaders
(15-17 February 2011)

This is another joint conference paper that my Vietnamese fellow, a senior research fellow from ACU and I wrote to submit for the 1st International Conference in Exploring Leadership and Learning Theories Asia 2011 held between 15-17 Feb 2011, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The paper was a refereed conference paper (It is now under review for publication). The senior research fellow attended and presented the paper on behalf of my Vietnamese colleague and me. This paper describes the development of a specific unit embedded in the Australian Leadership Award fellowship professional development program, an analysis of the participants’ emerging views and perspectives around intercultural educational leadership, and the implications that these views have for further research.
The bulk of theory and practice around educational leadership is drawn almost exclusively from narrowly conceived Western beliefs, philosophies and understandings (Walker & Dimmock, 2002). The same could be said for theories and practices around intercultural leadership. Interculturalism is concerned with the intersection and linking of cultural ‘worlds’; the ‘space’ in which the overlap occurs; and, the teaching and learning that takes place within this space. Educational leaders who continually move into and interact within the intercultural educational space create the openings for real engagement and dialogue between educators, community members, parents, children, and educational administrators. Through the AusAID funded Australian Leadership Awards Fellowships (ALAF) program, Australian Catholic University’s Centre for Creative & Authentic Leadership has, since 2007, hosted three professional development programs for educational leaders primarily from South East Asian countries. At the core of these programs has been the exploration of interculturalism and intercultural leadership. This paper will describe the development of a specific module embedded in the ALAF professional development programs, an analysis of emerging views and perspectives around intercultural leadership and the implications that these views have for further research.

Keywords: interculturalism, educational leadership, intercultural leadership

Background: the Australian Leadership Awards Fellowship program

The goal of the AusAID’s Australian Leadership Awards Fellowships (ALAF) Program is to develop appropriately trained current and aspiring leaders who, in the short-to-medium term will be in a position to advance key regional policy issues. Each ALAF Fellow is either a current leader or an aspiring mid-career professional who has considerable input into the shaping and delivery of his/her country’s policies and initiatives within their area of expertise. ALAF Fellows hold positions of leadership in their respective countries, in a range...
of organisations including government and non-government organisations, and within a range
of sectors including the health, education and business. ALAF Fellows must have the support
of their organisation, be prepared to spend a short period of time in Australia, and possess a
good level of English language skills that will enable them to participate fully in all of the
program activities.

Since 2007, Australian Catholic University’s (ACU) Centre for Creative & Authentic
Leadership (CCAL) has hosted three programs and thirty-four ALAF Fellows from India,
CCAL, as the Host Organisation, has brought considerable scholarly expertise and reputation
to the program, as well as an extensive background, track record and international experience
in leadership development. CCAL’s ALAF programs are practice-based, informed by
leadership principles and practices that shape effective educational leaders and will enable
educational leaders to work more effectively in education systems and to better manage the
competing demands of education bureaucracies and their communities. ALAF Fellows have
participated in a short intensive professional program, skills development, peer-to-peer
learning, knowledge sharing, professional attachments and leadership training. Professional
attachments provide an opportunity for each ALAF Fellow to gain direct practical experience
through participation in the negotiated activities in Australian educational contexts.

AusAID’s Better Education policy states that ‘education provides the foundation for
economic growth and self-reliance. It has additional benefits in health, governance, gender
equality, stability and security, and in fostering effective states’ (2007, p.5). Therefore, high
quality educational leadership at all levels is a priority imperative, and is pivotal for
improving educational, social and economic outcomes in developing countries.

CCAL and ALAF: strengthening leadership capacity
CCAL has had a different focus for each of its three ALAF programs. In 2007 it was on the
‘new basics’ of leadership which Sergiovanni (2001), a leading writer on the school as a
community, describes as managing complexity, leading with ideas, and developing social
capital. The program focused on the ‘new basics’ of educational leadership in the areas of
organisational structure, management and decision-making processes, curriculum, and
teaching and learning. In 2008, the program shifted to focus on educational leaders’ influence
and authenticity within their own spheres of influence. According to Duignan (2006, p. 150)
influential leaders ‘live by high ethical standards’ while authentic leadership is “knowledge based, values informed, and skilfully executed” and requires “professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration” (Begley 2001, p. 353). Authentic leadership “acknowledges and accommodates in an integrative way the legitimate needs of individuals, groups, organisations, communities and cultures” (Begley 2001, p.354). The aim of CCAL’s 2008 ALAF program was therefore to assist Fellows to analyse their respective leadership challenges using values-based and ethical frameworks in order to integrate values and culture into future education policy and decision-making. In the 2010 program, the focus shifted to system leadership. System leaders demonstrate a range of capabilities which are seen as more than simply possessing particular knowledge and skills or having the potential to do something; it means demonstrating that one can actually do it. Duignan (2006) made a distinction between competency and capability based programs as competency being about delivering the present based on past performance while capability is about imaging the future and bringing it about. Competency is about control; capability is about learning and development. Competency is about fitness for other people’s purpose, while capability is about judging fitness of the purpose itself.

CCAL’s ALAF programs have been a combination of the academic study of leadership with the study of roles and community expectations in developing countries, engagement with the social and cultural dimensions of education in Australian educational organisations, and the opportunity for reflective practice. The programs are significant because of their contribution to the capacity strengthening and ongoing development of influential and authentic system leaders in decision-making, administration and management. The programs have supported and enhance educational leadership in developing countries through creating and encouraging local initiatives in leadership development leading towards improved educational systems and the quality of education. What the programs have also done is to address the imbalance where the bulk of theory and practice in educational leadership is “drawn almost exclusively from narrowly conceived Anglo-American beliefs, philosophies and understandings (Walker & Dimmock, 2002, p. 199). From this has emerged an overlapping view of leadership that embraces aspects of East, West and Indigenous perspectives.
Interculturalism defined

Interculturalism is concerned with the intersection and linking of cultural ‘worlds’; the ‘space’ in which the overlap occurs; and, the teaching and learning that takes place within this space. Interculturalism ‘is an idea that proposes an encounter between cultures that take place from fundamental characteristics, matrices, and unique aspects of each individual culture’ (Coll, 2004, p. 27). To be engaged in an intercultural process “is a releasing experience for each of the cultures involved leading to an awareness of the limits that are inherent to our own cultures and worlds” (Coll, 2004, p. 28). From this basis meaningful dialogue can occur in order to shape and negotiate the development of the intercultural space. This requires intercultural reasoning that “emphasises the processes and interactions which unite and define the individuals and the groups in relation to each other” (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006, p. 476). It is “a way of talking about the knowledge systems of two cultures working together’ (Marika, Ngurruwutthun, & White, 1992, p.28) where the “work of analysis and of acquiring knowledge applies to others as much as to oneself” (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006, p. 477). In 1989, Wunungmurra, who at that time was an Indigenous adult educator, stated that:

We cannot hold back change which will happen whether we like it or not. But as a minority society we can adapt by finding common ground with the majority society. It is through an exchange of meanings that we can produce a ‘two way’ school curriculum. In an exchange of knowledge both sides learn from each other instead of knowledge coming only from the Balanda side. But Yolngu and Balanda knowledge will only come together if there is respect for our knowledge and where Aboriginal people are taking the initiative, where we shape and develop the educational programs and implement them’ (Wunungmurra1989, p.12).

To illustrate his point, Wunungmurra represented this concept of interculturalism as two overlapping circles, where the two worlds, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, intersect.

![Figure 1: Two Ways model (Wunungmurra, 1989, p. 12)](image)

Chan et al (2008, p.72) analysis of leadership metaphors point towards the existence of a combined space “where hybrid forms of knowledge and skills are enriched”. This
combined space “is an intercultural space where leadership is informed by both the specific culture in which it is located, and western theories and leadership practice from which it is influenced.” Chan et al (2008, p. 72) conclude that “this calls for leaders to develop mutuality and to be polychronic. Leaders will be required to juggle many of the demands that occur in this intercultural space”.

The Intercultural Leadership module

A specific module on intercultural leadership has been developed in two of the three ALAF programs hosted by CCAL. Interculturalism emerged as a topic of interest from the 2007 ALAF program, and has been explored subsequently in 2008 and 2010 programs.

The 2007 ALAF program consisted of a module that examined the relationships between leadership and societal culture, and the influences of societal culture on leadership. Fellows were asked to investigate the influence societal culture has had on educational leadership, and what this might mean in an increasingly globalised world through the medium of metaphors which drew on the their own cultural symbols, monuments, images and emblems,. In addition to metaphors, Fellows made frequent reflective journal entries, and also participated in collaborative writing activities. These processes were continued in subsequent ALAF programs and are the data source of this analysis.

Reflective Journals

Reflective writing was an opportunity for Fellows to think critically about what they do and why. It offered a record of events and their reactions to them and data on which to base reflective discussion. Engaging in open and collaborative discussion about the program and regularly writing in their journal were viewed as processes that enable Fellows to become reflective leaders. The Fellows’ journals provided an opportunity to make explicit their position on a range of ideas and issues. Their journals were viewed as being a summary of daily activities connected to leadership issues and leadership development. Some important points were made prior to commencing journal entries. Fellows were encouraged to make a journal entry every day, spending at least 20 minutes daily making the journal entries. Journal entries were posted on a ‘basecamp’, a commercial on-line information portal, on a weekly basis, which allowed Fellows and program staff to access the journals in order to discuss ideas and issues the Fellows raised. In addition, writing guidelines constituted a template for Fellows to describe learning activities, evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of their
observations, and plan how these events might be useful, especially in terms of their leadership development (Frawley, 2009). One Fellow’s journal entry illustrates both the reflexive practice and an intercultural challenge:

I remember, for me it was a very challenging experience to deal with the intercultural situation in [organisation’s name] during the initial days. India is a very diverse society with hundreds of cultures and I always had experiences of different cultures. The elements of openness and respect to other cultures are part of every Indian culture. It was not difficult for me then to accommodate or assimilate a different culture into my life. Nowadays one could see many ‘empowered’ Indians in the cities as ‘ambassadors’ of foreign cultures. When I started dealing with this ‘new culture’ I found it extremely difficult. But it was important for me to accept the situation as it is and to work from the organisational perspective that incorporates both local and global in its approach. And I realise that the relationship between the local and global is necessary in this globalised era.

(ALAF Fellow S, journal entry 4, 25 August 2008)

Metaphor Workshops

The starting point for metaphor development, was considering an Indigenous metaphor on ‘both ways’ education. In the mid 1990s the Yolngu people of north east Arnhem Land in Australia, shared the metaphor of Ganma as a way of explaining the both-ways philosophy.

Ganma is the name of a lagoon where salt and fresh water meets. Water is a symbol of knowledge in Yolngu philosophy, and the metaphor of the meeting of two bodies of water is a way of talking about the knowledge systems of two cultures working together (Marika, Ngurruwuthun, & White, 1992, p.28)

Using the ‘ganma’ metaphor as a catalyst, Fellows developed metaphors which drew on their own cultural symbols and traditions. In subsequent workshops, metaphors were again used as a way of exploring a number of issues and questions around intercultural perspectives of leadership that had been developed through their interactions within the program. The ALAF programs hosted have aimed to provide Fellows with values, attitudes, knowledge and skills in educational leadership that will enable them to infuse their systems and organisations with a commitment to the highest ethical and moral standards and, at the same time, facilitate
efficient and effective leadership and administrative practices. Emphasis is on the praxis of educational leadership and administration, emphasising a moral and ethical framework. The underlying views include that leadership is a process of dynamic interaction among people, and is essentially dissipative and engages in a process of raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation. Leadership is viewed as having a moral dimension with a focus on, and a commitment to ethics, purpose, values and beliefs. In this regard, leaders are committed to values within organisation, and authority of felt obligations and duties derived from widely shared professional and community values, ideas and ideals (Segiovanni, 1992). This requires a moral commitment based on proactive responsibility; personal and professional authenticity; an affirming, critical, and enabling presence to workers and work (Starrat, 2004). Leadership behaviours include encouraging follower participation in goal setting, encouraging independent action and encouraging teamwork and that there is a focus on the fundamental worth of the follower—that the follower has intrinsic value (Duignan, 2006). These are the ‘western’ leadership theories that infuse and inform the ALAF program which, in most cases, is taught by Australian academics, scholars and practitioners steeped in the field of educational leadership.

For the metaphor workshops, Fellows worked individually or in groups to develop their own metaphors, guided by a number of steps and key questions (Chan et al, 2008). First, Fellows discussed what characteristics they wished to describe. They discussed how leadership is viewed and defined from within their own culture, paying attention to who is an educational leader, the kind of leadership needed within their own organizations, and what educational leaders do. Second, Fellows developed a metaphor that addressed their ideas and concerns. They then illustrated the metaphor and finally shared, explained, and discussed the metaphor’s main ideas (Frawley, 2009).

In 2010, two Cambodian Fellows used as a metaphor for interculturalism the traditional Khmer house. They explain the metaphor as follows:

There are many different styles of Traditional Khmer House in Cambodia. One tends to choose each style of house based on their resources and preference. The nuclear family, in rural Cambodia, typically lives in a rectangular house that may vary in size from four by six meters to six by ten meters. It is constructed of a wooden frame with gabled thatch roof and walls of woven bamboo or wood. Khmer houses typically are raised on stilts as much as three meters for providing space for people to relax (a nap) during day time, protection from annual floods in rainy season, wild and fierce animals. Wooden staircases provide access to the house. The steep thatch roof overhanging the house walls protects the interior from rain and sun. Typically a house contains three rooms separated by partitions of woven bamboo. The front room serves as a living room used to receive visitors and guests, the next room is the parents’ bedroom, and the third is for unmarried daughters. Sons sleep anywhere they can find space. Family members and neighbors
work together to build the house, and a house-raising ceremony is held upon its completion. The
houses of poorer persons may contain only a single large room. Food is prepared in a separate
kitchen located near the house but usually behind it. Toilet facilities consist of simple pits in the
ground, located away from the house, which is covered up when filled. Any livestock is kept
below the house. These values are well captured in each constructor before starting to build the
house. We can imagine “Intercultural leadership” as being like a “Traditional Khmer House”. A
strong and beautiful house needs a strong foundation. With a strong foundation we can build a
big, multi-storey house. The foundations of intercultural leadership are the self-esteem and values
of people in a particular group. Without strong self-esteem and good values, we (leaders) cannot
be great. To support the roof, every house needs poles. Strong poles are able to support strong
roofs. We cannot design a roof as big or as elaborate as we want if the poles are not strong
enough. In addition to strong poles, we need the right number and size of poles. Lifting more
poles allow the house to be bigger. In intercultural leadership, the poles represent the knowledge
and skills, personal qualities and understandings of Indigenous and non- Indigenous people. With
comprehensive skills, knowledge, and authentic understanding, these people (leaders) become
greater and greater. The house is the result. Leaders cannot achieve great results unless they have
outstanding skills and knowledge. The poles themselves cannot be stronger unless there are walls,
and above the wall rafters need to be put in place to support the roof. In Intercultural leadership,
the walls represent teamwork and the rafters represent relationships that are the nurturing of
intercultural understanding. This metaphor is helpful to explain the interdependence among
different aspects of intercultural leadership: self-esteem, values, knowledge, skills and authentic
understanding. Therefore, we need to understand this and look at intercultural leadership as a
whole. To become a superstar leader, everyone needs to focus on all characteristics of
Intercultural leadership together (Ul and Khoun, 2010).

Collaborative writing
A structured writing activity was developed in order to address some of the problems the
Fellows had when working on a complex written task. Written tasks were complex in the
topics and in the languages they were expressed in. All Fellows used English as a second
language (and in some cases this was in addition to two or three other languages), and the
level of competence varied from Fellow to Fellow. The first structured activity was a
brainstorming exercise where Fellows identified issues and topics of interest that resulted in
an extensive list. From this list four topics (or big ideas) were identified and four writing
groups were formed: gender equality; globalization; intercultural leadership; and, culture
values. For each of these topics, contributors (including Fellows, staff and ALAF alumni)
were invited to comment on what was know about the big idea; what questions were there
about the big idea; and what were the commonalities and differences across the countries.
Fellows writing on the topic of gender equality in relation to leadership concluded that
cultural perspectives, education opportunities and leadership positions:

are the main elements affecting women’s roles in leadership. In formal education, which is the
key to many aspects of modern society, women are seriously under-represented. In traditional
Cambodian cultural perspective, girls are expected to perform more domestic chores than boys,
thus opportunity costs are high when girls attend school; a girl’s future role is perceived to be that
of a wife and mother, not to work to support her family, thus parents may not choose to invest in
their daughter’s education. Girls’ resulting lack of qualifications and skills severely restricts their
opportunities in the labour market. Men dominate all professional fields and decision-making
positions. The lack of skills for women leads to a limited women’s representation in leadership
role from both local and national level, therefore it provides a limited space for women to
advocate for gender equality and policy development. The lack of gender policy mainstreaming
into different ministries to provide an open space for women to take their leadership roles is one of the key challenges. The national constitution of Cambodia provides a framework of gender equality, relevant gender policies and strategies have been developed and created but they are not reconciled with overall government strategies and not consistent across all sectors, together with the no support or allocation of associate budget will produce a little ownership by the executing ministry. Moreover, the enforcement of gender mainstreaming and the development of mechanism to ensure the implementation of gender policy and the strategic plan have not yet been established. As the results of these, the gender policy is only in paper and limited practices have been put in place (Ul and Mao, 2010).

Emerging themes, ideas and issues

What has become apparent over the three programs is that the Fellows’ perspectives and insights are informed by leadership theories gained from their participation, their past experiences and their current leadership positions in their home countries. Therefore, fellows are in a strong position as they become a link between the leadership knowledge and practice in their countries, and the West, in this case Australia. Based on their perspectives and insights Fellows are concerned with authentic and ethical leadership practices and the desire to blend these practices with their own cultural traditions and practice. At the same time as insiders they value their cultures and traditions as well as recognise a growing openness to new ideas and exposure to both East and West.

Based on Fellows insights and perspectives, there are some consistencies in data about leadership approaches and practices, and the layers of complexities inherent in them within the various cultural contexts. These can be best described by a broad but borderless concept, culture – broad in the sense that the concept encompasses other themes, and borderless in the sense that that concept could merge or overlap with other concepts not explicitly addressed by the Fellows such as religion and politics.

Culture: age, hierarchy, gender

The Intercultural Leadership module explicitly defines culture this way: culture is a way of life of a group of people--the behaviours, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next. Within the broad frame of culture, Fellows have addressed the issues of age, hierarchy and gender. One Fellow wrote:

The topic that stands out for me is cultural constraint in relation to gender and leadership. In Cambodia society, women are still resisted by people in leadership position and this because of behavior, culture and context of each working environment view towards women as a leader. If a female leader wants to be a strong leader, she has to be twice as good as men. Moreover, we can see not many women are in the leadership positions because of low education level, more work on family and cultural responsibilities and less opportunity given to them. There are also some constraints in working as a young female leader like in my case; I used to work for a non-formal education project which one of my staff who is the same age as my father. I had to be flexible to
Culturally, male roles and female roles were seen as important but it was acknowledged that this often acted to restrain people, especially women. Some women seek to challenge traditional roles while others will chose to be leaders only within ‘appropriate’ spheres. To empower women is an issue in many countries. For example, in the Lao PDR female leadership is not commonly seen, especially at the local level although the government emphasizes the policy for gender equity and equality so that men and women equally contribute to the national socio-economic development. This issue still remains problematic even though the government has created a space for women by establishing a Lao Women Union in all organizations from the central to the local levels. In Laos gender equality is viewed as being important, particularly in the area of education, but in practice it is rather difficult to handle, especially in rural areas where the majority of people are in poor living conditions and dominated by traditional behaviours, beliefs and values. Seniority is another important trait that limits the acceleration of socio-economic development of the country. For instance, in the consideration of the people for promotion or further education, gender and seniority are accepted as the key elements within the set criteria. The concept of seniority is related leadership because it implies that strong emphasis is placed on experience for a leadership position, which seems to be part of the influence process. It is good though in some circumstances, but it also leads to the discouragement for many young and talented staff in terms of seniority.

**Further research: principles and practice of intercultural leadership**

CCAL’s ALAF program has progressively developed views and perspectives on interculturalism and intercultural leadership, by using the program’s intercultural ‘space’ for teaching and learning. In this space, Australian academics informed by Western beliefs, philosophies and values interact with educational leaders from different cultural worlds. This approach has developed overtime and is now central to the ALAF program with the *Intercultural Leadership* module being co-taught (ALAF alumni and an Australian academic) and with the philosophy of interculturalism and educational leadership as the foundations of the program. The 2010 *Intercultural Leadership* module has a number of aims including discussing and assessing the relevance of West-inspired theories on leadership for different
cultural contexts; considering if there are differences within Fellows’s countries in the ways in which leadership is defined and practised and, if so, identified the differences; identifying existing theories on leadership and learning which have a non-West origin; and discussing and defining interculturalism and developed appropriate capabilities for leadership in intercultural contexts. Through the means of reflective journals, metaphor workshops and collaborative writing Fellows have developed their ideas which can be stated as a set of principles for application within their own organisations:

Principle 1. The foundations of intercultural leadership are the self-esteem and values of people in a particular group. Without strong self-esteem and good values, we cannot be great.

Principle 2. Intercultural leaders respect and value the diversity of individual cultures and encourage mutual and authentic understanding.

Principle 3. Intercultural leaders nurture and encourage positive and authentic relationships.

The bulk of theory and practice around educational leadership is drawn almost exclusively from narrowly conceived Western beliefs, philosophies and understandings (Walker & Dimmock, 2002) and consequently there is very limited research around leadership in each of the Fellow’s country. The intercultural leadership principles developed through the analysis of ALAF Fellows views and perspectives from CCAL’s programs goes part way to addressing this imbalance, but it is only a start. These principles need to be furthered research, especially in relation to what interculturalism can add to our understanding and practice of educational leadership. This requires ongoing cultural encounters.
References


A Journal Article
This joint publication was based on the joint conference presentation entitled “Intercultural Metaphors: Leadership Perspectives from South East Asia”, presented at the international conference on New Metaphors for Leadership in Schools conducted from 30th September to 2nd October 2008, Melbourne, Australia. The Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL) journal was interested in our paper and asked me and my colleagues to submit it for publication as there was not much research done on leadership in other cultures.

Since I was in Melbourne I acted on behalf of the four Lao fellows who attended an educational leadership fellowship seminar at ACU in 2007 to revise the Lao leadership metaphor- thian. My Vietnamese colleague, a senior research fellow and I also revised the paper following comments from ACEL editors. Our joint paper on “Leadership is a Sacred House: South East Asian cultural metaphors on Educational leadership” was published in Journal of the Australian Council for Educational Leaders: Leading and Managing, Volume 14 No. 2 Spring/Summer 2008, pp.61-73. This article explores cultural definitions of educational leadership through the use of metaphors. It describes the AusAID funded 2007 Australian Leadership Award Fellowship program, the Fellows and the program’s content.

The article provides a broad overview of the leadership literature that the Fellows explored during the program, with a particular focus on Systems Leadership. The metaphor process is outlined and the Fellows metaphors are identified and described. The article concludes with a distillation of leadership qualities and characteristics, and points towards further research, discussion, and debate on intercultural leadership.
Leadership is a Sacred House: South East Asian Cultural Metaphors on Educational Leadership

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ABSTRACT: This article explores cultural definitions of educational leadership through the use of metaphors. It describes the AusAID funded 2007 Australian Leadership Award Fellowship program, the Fellows and the program’s content. The article provides a broad overview of the leadership literature that the Fellows explored during the program, with a particular focus on Systems Leadership. The metaphor process is outlined and the Fellows metaphors are identified and described. The article concludes with a distillation of leadership qualities and characteristics, and points towards further research, discussion, and debate on intercultural leadership.

Introduction

This article explores cultural definitions of educational leadership through the use of metaphors, and in the context of an Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) initiative. In 2007 Australian Catholic University’s (ACU National) Flagship for Creative and Authentic Leadership was successful in receiving funding from AusAID to host an Australian Leadership Award Fellowships (ALAF) Program. The ALAF Program aimed to provide significant insights into the unique relationship between education systems, the bureaucracies that administer them and the developing countries of the Southeast Asian region. The ALAF Program was practice-based, informed by leadership principles and practices that shaped effective educational leaders. The Program aimed to enable educational leaders to work more effectively in education systems and to better manage the competing demands of education bureaucracies, and the systems and their communities. Graduates of the ALAF Program will have a valuable impact in strengthening the capabilities and capacities of their respective organisations. In addition, a comparison by the Fellows of education within their countries of origin will assist them to better define and understand the influence of societal culture on educational leadership and administration. Developing and strengthening the leadership capacities of educational leaders will impact positively on education and assist in improving educational outcomes.

This article describes the 2007 ALAF program, the Fellows and the program’s content. It then provides a broad overview of the leadership literature that the Fellows explored, with a particular focus on Systems Leadership. The metaphor process is outlined and the Fellows metaphors are identified and described. The article concludes with a distillation of leadership qualities and characteristics, and points towards further research, discussion, and debate on intercultural leadership.

The 2007 Program

AusAID’s Better Education policy states that ‘education provides the foundation for economic growth and self-reliance. It has additional benefits in health, governance, gender equality, stability and security, and in fostering effective states’ (p.5). Therefore, high quality educational leadership at all levels is a priority imperative, and is pivotal for improving educational, social and economic outcomes in developing countries. Improved education systems and improved quality of education relies on visionary, influential and competent educational leaders. Educational capacity building to strengthen the leadership capabilities of key personnel in authentic and influential roles in educational organisations, systems and institutional leadership positions in developing countries requires the development and implementation of sound, distinctive and visionary leadership programs. The Project provided the Flagship with an opportunity to deepen and broaden its links with leaders and professionals in the Asia Pacific region. AusAID’s aims for the ALAF initiative are:

- to develop appropriately trained current and aspiring leaders who will be in a position to advance key regional policy issues, and to provide current leaders and/or mid-career professionals with high quality, flexible, responsive and continuing access to Australian ideas or expertise to assist them (AusAID, 2006, p.5).

The Flagship responded to these aims by developing a comprehensive Program that focused on educational leadership. In July 2007, a total of ten Fellows from Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Timor Leste attended the ALAF program at the Flagship for Creative and Authentic Leadership, Sydney, Australia. Each Fellow was either a current leader or an aspiring mid-career professional who had considerable input into the shaping and delivery of his/her country’s educational services. Fellows held positions of leadership in their respective countries and within a range of education sectors including the school, university and government departments.
The Fellows were nominated by their organisations and came with its full support. In the 2007 ALAF Program, there were two Fellows from Timor Leste: one a General Practitioner providing health care at a small clinic as well as being involved in some health worker training; and the other, a Deputy Director of Student Services at a teacher training institution. There were two Fellows from Vietnam: one an English language teacher at a provincial high school; and the other, a lecturer in English Language at a university. From Cambodia, there were two Fellows both of whom worked as project officers for an NGO. Of the ten, six were male and four were female with an age range of early 30s to early 50s. All Fellows had postgraduate qualifications with two having Masters from Australian institutions.

The Program was titled Mastering the new basics in educational leadership. Sergiovanni (2001), a leading writer on the school as a community, promotes the idea that educational leaders must master the ‘new basics’ of leadership which he describes as managing complexity, leading with ideas, and developing social capital. The Program was a combination of academic workshops and a professional attachment arrangement, and occurred over three stages. Workshops included the topics of authentic leadership, educational leadership and responsible governance; and cross-cultural perspectives on educational leadership. Authentic Leadership examined the nature and characteristics of an organisation’s culture and the challenges of encouraging, implementing and sustaining change in entrenched cultures in a changing world. Educational Leadership and Responsible Governance examined issues concerning leadership and governance in contemporary educational contexts. Cultural Perspectives on Educational Leadership explored the questions of: How is leadership understood by other cultures? Are there places where cultural values naturally conflict with the requirements of local culture? How can local cultural expectations of leadership be accommodated by Western leadership theories? What aspects of leadership transcend cultural boundaries? Professional Attachments (PAs) provided an opportunity for each Fellow to gain direct practical experience through participation in negotiated activities in Australian educational contexts. Fellows negotiated mentoring activities with their mentors. Fellows reflected on the leadership issues that were identified during the PAs and were encouraged to discuss the new ways of knowing that emerged from the process. This allowed for a dynamic exchange of information and professional reflection between the Fellows and their mentors.

The guiding beliefs of the ALAF is that leadership will remain too narrowly conceived unless there is an attempt to understand it as being partially derived from, and influenced by societal culture (Walker & Dimmock, 2002) and that established educational leadership discourse has been dominated by Western perspectives oblivious to the cultural diversity that characterises the contemporary world (Collard, 2007). To address these beliefs in the academic program, Fellows explored the leadership literature, investigated systems leadership, and developed metaphors to describe what they felt leadership was all about from their own cultural perspectives. This latter activity was the focus of Cultural Perspectives on Educational Leadership.

Leadership Literature

Within this paper, leadership theories refer to how leadership works. For the ALA Fellows – and for the purpose of the program - the academic program identified and described these theories. Broadly speaking, trait theory holds the view that leaders are born with or have charisma or specific traits, abilities, and skills (Stogdill, 1974). The behavioural view of leadership is that leadership capability can be learned, rather than being inherent (Merton, 1957). The situational theory sees leadership as a matter of situational demands and the emergence of a leader as a result of time, place, and circumstance (Yukl, 1989). The process view of leadership is that it is a process of dynamic interaction among people, and is essentially dissipative (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990). The values category believes that leadership has a moral dimension with a focus on, and a commitment to ethics, purpose, presence, values and beliefs (Starrat, 2004; Duignan, 2006).

Fellows also investigated the concept of Systems Leadership. Systems Leadership is understood as being exercised in five major domains: identity, education, stewardship, community and future focus. In each of these domains, systems leaders demonstrate a range of capabilities: personal, relational, professional, organisational. These capabilities are founded on a value-based and ethical framework designed to integrate values and culture into future education policy and decision-making. System leaders recognise the importance of the connections between different issues, different individuals and different institutions. They understand that it is these connections that create systems, which are more than the sum of their parts. Stephenson (2000, p.2) described capabilities as an all round human quality, an integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities and understanding used appropriately and effectively – not just in familiar and highly focused specialist contexts but also in response to new and changing circumstances. Duignan (2006) identified capabilities as more than simply possessing particular knowledge and skills or having the potential to do something. It means demonstrating that one can actually do it. Duignan (2006) made a distinction between competency and capability based programs as competency being about delivering the present based on past performance while capability is about imagining the future and bringing it about. Competency is about control; capability is about learning and development.
Competency is about fitness for - usually other people’s purpose - capability is about judging fitness of the purpose itself.

In terms of one focus of the ALAF programme – Cultural Perspectives on Educational Leadership - and in the context of Systems Leadership, there seemed to be something lacking in the discussion, and that was the absence of a cultural perspective.

The metaphor process

In a recent study, Ribbins and Zhang (2006) found that, in China, there were several forms of societal culture that impacted on the formation of the head teachers from Chuxiong, a remote Chinese province. Dimmock and Walker (2005, p. 13) define societal culture as referring to ‘those enduring sets of values, beliefs and practices that distinguish one group of people from another’. Drawing on the work of Ribbins and Zhang (2006) ALAF Fellows were asked to refer to their own societal culture, especially symbols, monuments, images and emblems to construct a metaphor for educational leadership.

To introduce the Fellows to the concept of metaphor in an educational context, an Indigenous Australian example was discussed. The ‘ganma’ metaphor originates from the Yolngu in North East Arnhem Land, and is a way of exploring education and curriculum from a cultural perspective.

Ganma is the name of a lagoon where salt and fresh water meet. Water is a symbol of knowledge in Yolngu philosophy, and the metaphor of the meeting of two bodies of water is a way of talking about the knowledge systems of two cultures working together (Marika, Ngurrwuthun, & White, 1992, p.28)

This way of talking, or put another way, a philosophy of education is known as both ways/two ways.

We cannot hold back change which will happen whether we like it or not. But as a minority society we can adapt by finding common ground with the majority society. It is through an exchange of meanings that we can produce a 'two ways' school curriculum. In an exchange of knowledge both sides learn from each other instead of knowledge coming only from the Balanda side. But Yolngu and Balanda knowledge will only come together if there is respect for our knowledge and where Aboriginal people are taking the initiative, where we shape and develop the educational programs and then implement them (Wunungmurra, 1989, p.12).

At the metaphor workshop Fellows were presented with the ‘ganma’ metaphor and the discussion that has taken place over the last twenty years. From this example, Fellows were able to distil certain characteristics of how Indigenous education was viewed in a remote context. The focus was then brought back to a discussion on educational leadership in which characteristics of influential and authentic educational leaders were identified.

Fellows worked individually and in groups to develop metaphors and were guided in the process by a number of steps and key questions. Firstly, Fellows discussed what were the characteristics they wished to describe. They discussed how educational leadership is viewed and defined from within their own culture, paying attention to who is an educational leader, the kind of leadership needed within their own organisations, and identifying what educational leaders do. Secondly, Fellows had to develop a metaphor that would address their ideas and concerns. They then illustrated the metaphor, and finally the metaphors were shared, explained and discussed.

The metaphors: leadership identified and described

Timor Leste metaphors

From Timor Leste two metaphors emerged: leadership is a *kaibauk* – a Timorese crescent crown; and leadership is an *uma lulik* – a Sacred House. *Kaibauk* is a symbol of power, authority, justice and equity that has been worn by Timor Leste people from generation to generation especially traditional leaders; sacred men – *nai lulik* or *amo lulik* – who derived their power and legitimacy through descent and ritual knowledge as well as their role as holders of sacred history; religious leaders; and, modern political leaders. *Uma lulik* reflects power of the old men and women and the respect shown to them as authorities for families and social communities. Their
traditional belief is that *uma lulik* will protect the elderly and inspire them to act evenly in decision making without involving young adults and children. Their decision and advice will influence and provide a quality life for the community. They interpret that *uma lulik* transforms people to become more mentally and physically mature to serve and to transform social life in harmony and in a peaceful environment.

Timor Leste culture reflects numerous influences, including Portuguese, Roman Catholic, and Malay, as well as the indigenous Austronesian and Melanesian cultures of Timor. Timor Leste culture is heavily influenced by traditional beliefs and practices, for example *kaibauk* and *uma lulik*, although the Roman Catholic influence is also strong. From two different cultures, Timor Leste and Western Catholicism jointly bring together the new composite concept on how to lead. On one hand leaders need to develop the concept of a mutuality to enrich hybrid forms of knowledge and skills, and, on the other hand, maintain original culture from ancestors. This calls for visionary, creative and influential leaders.

*Cambodian metaphors*

Two metaphors also emerged from Cambodia: leadership is a *kuk* – a white heron-, and leadership is *Bayon*. For one, leadership is a cadre of *kuk* flying in line in the sky. The heron leader steadily leads the team and the rest follow. For the other, leadership is *Bayon*. *Bayon* is an historical temple that has four smiling faces and is one of the temples that were built during the Khmer empire in the twelfth century under the rank of Jayavarman VII, the King of Cambodia. It is believed that Cambodian temples including *Bayon* were built by the spiritual power or the intervention of the god; therefore, it is assumed that Jayaraman must have connected to the god and acknowledged him as the god-king.

In the Cambodian metaphor, the leading *kuk* swoops ahead with in a clear direction, is a shining role model, and is able to influence others to accomplish the objective. In the social and cultural environment of Cambodia, where the hierarchy is the accepted norm, a decentralized management system can be uncomfortable as leaders are not confident to be empowered and empower others. People assume to be told by the superiors and the superiors assume to direct their staff. The same model applies in the classroom, which reflects in a way that students are being taught to be non-assertive and uncritical. Hierarchical leadership influences them. As a result, it would be difficult to have a good resource of young people to fulfil competent leadership roles in the next generation. Thus, there is a power relationship between education and the hierarchy system that both influence leadership.

The lack of equity and role model of women in the decision making position is also an issue. Female education has been less valued especially in the rural and remote areas where poverty exists and this has even been worse among minority groups, which drives fewer women into leadership roles. Khmer traditionalists compare a Cambodian girl to white cotton wool, while boys to a gem. When white is muddied it can never be washed to purity and cleanliness. Gems, on the other hand, can be cleaned to shine brighter. Such attitudes can transfer to a bias in the professional role that the deed men performed is expected to be accepted while women’s condition is seen differently.

Age is another issue which could negatively impact on leaders, especially female leader because most Cambodians are Buddhist. Respecting elders is ethical behaviour, similarly to Confucius in China. Older people expect to be respected by the young. Young people could challenge with their new ideas for a positive change towards leadership. Being a woman and young is a double disadvantage in terms of leadership.

In the second Cambodian metaphor, *Bayon* is an historical temple that has four smiling faces representing the quality of the leadership in Cambodian context. It is one of the wonderful temples that were built during the Khmer empire in the twelfth century under the rank of Jayavarman VII, the King of Cambodia. It is believed that Cambodian temples including *Bayon* were built by the spiritual power or the intervention of the god; therefore, it is assumed that Jayavarman VII must have connected to the god and acknowledged him as the god-king. It is a feature of leadership in Cambodia culture and is understood that leaders must be born or assigned by spiritual power, therefore non-anointed people could not be leaders.

Another feature of *Bayon* is the four smiling faces with positive out-looking at different directions. It is understood that a leader needs to have a clear vision with positive thought; and holistically rather than partially look at things from one direction to make a decision. It is also understood that leader must have *prum vihear thor* – hidden insight of the four smiling faces -which means that the leader must have four significant personal qualities that enable them to lead others effectively. Firstly, *meta* is the quality that is fulfilled by love, openness and forgiveness to others; secondly, *karuna* is the quality that reflects sympathy and empathy to those who are in the difficult situation; thirdly, *mutet* is the quality that having positive thought and be happy to see others grow; fourthly, *naphek* is the quality of equality and equity, which always thinks of and treats others equally.

In traditional and cultural contexts, *prum vihear thor* is wisdom that the Cambodian elderly usually provide to a new couple during the wedding ceremony. New couples need to be trained themselves to build parenthood with *prum vihear thor* in order for them develop their children morally and socially. This concept of *prum vihear thor* is also an ancient Cambodian education practice taking place in the pagoda. With the religious thinking of fine-tuning oneself, individuals are advised “Help yourself first the Buddha will help you”. This is
understood that “The more you help yourself, the more power you can influence others, and the more your life is lifted”. Since there has been no research on Cambodian leadership including educational leadership, Cambodia tends to adopt western leadership styles, which is mainly based on business perspectives. Cambodia needs to look back to the past experience of leaders, represented by Bayon, with a positive out-look for the future and with prum vihear thor.

Laos metaphor
For the Lao Fellows, leadership is a thian – a candle – that is made of beeswax with a cotton string in the middle. It looks very simple but it has power. In Laos, people make thian by hand – they lay the beeswax in the sunlight until it is soft and then roll it up with the cotton string. When the weather is cold, thian become hard; thian are soft when the weather is hot. Thian has many meanings. They represent light and success for the people as well as the country. Thian are used in many traditional and religious events and are a symbol of Buddhist Lent at temples. Lao light thian to show their respect for the Buddha and for wishing their ancestors peace and prosperity.

In the Lao metaphor, the light of a thian shines forever as does enduring leadership, but the light of the thian has to struggle against the wind or rain. This illustrates the hardships and obstacles that a leader has to encounter. As described earlier, thian can be hard or soft (depending on the environment); this shows flexibility and adaptability in a leader. The Lao believe in following the Buddhist Middle Way philosophy, avoiding extremes. Leadership is a gift to be shared. The light from one candle is not bright enough in a big dark room. If we light many candles, the room is brighter. Therefore, leadership should be shared and cooperative at all levels of an organisation in order to bring success. Thian are also placed on the top of phakhuan (flower arrangement) at a baci or soukhuan ceremony. This activity is not only a religious event, but also a collective activity where family and invited guests gather to share food and happiness. This indicates that leadership is about relationships, caring about people and family. In the education sector, the thian is used as a symbol of education because people believe that thian bring light and development into our lives as well as our country. A red thian is part of the logo of the Ministry of Education. Education improves people’s lives and contributes greatly to the nation’s socio-economic growth. Education is also seen as a powerful instrument for achieving poverty reduction, as well as an important arena for reducing inequality and improving health and social well-being (United Nations Development Programme, 2008). In terms of educational leadership, the thian promotes learning and lifelong learning. We always see our selves as learners because there are many things to learn everyday in order to keep ourselves up to date with developments in education. We think that a good educational leader is a good learner who is prepared to make sacrifices for the education of others. When we think of leadership, we expect a leader to be knowledgeable, capable of establishing a clear vision and inspiring others and bringing light into our organizations. The light or brightness of the candle shines the way to the future, provides a pathway to knowledge, skills and abilities and can be a significant influence on people to accomplish the goals of their organization. The light of the thian shines indefinitely, as does inspiring leadership. In Lao education, leadership is seen as a caring gift to be shone across the Ministry, the broader education system, friends and family.

Vietnamese metaphor
The Vietnamese Fellows described leadership as cay tre, the bamboo tree, to represent their ideal metaphor. Among many things typical of Vietnam such as ao dai (traditional dress), non la (conical hat), and nuoc mam (fish sauce) cay tre best captures their understanding of leadership. Tall and shiny green, cay tre often has a straight trunk with its top shooting towards sunlight, and it is also extremely flexible. It is easily bent but not easily broken, which makes cay tre a widely-used material in Vietnamese life. Also thanks to this quality, cay tre is tough and it can stand strong wind and even storms. Cay tre can flourish in any kind of soil, no matter how barren the soil or how harsh the climate. To the Vietnamese, bamboo is an indispensable material in daily and socio-cultural life. With its natural characteristics, bamboo is used to produce many things essential for Vietnamese people’s life, from small things like toothpicks, chopsticks, bowls, baskets, lampshades, flower vases, to furniture like beds, tables, chairs, and even to build houses. One can easily see in a typical Vietnamese village the sight of a man taking a break from work to smoke tobacco out of his water-bamboo pipe. One can also notice at a glance how people create swing pillars from bamboo for games like danh du (swing).
for young people in various Vietnamese cultural festivities.

_Cay tre_ since time immemorial has also been part of the Vietnamese spiritual life. During _Tet_ (Vietnamese Lunar New Year), _cay neu_ (a bamboo tree with decoration on top) is erected in front of each house to drive away bad spirits and evils. With the protection of _cay neu_ all the members can enjoy a happy _Tet_. After seven days, a grand ceremony is held to bring down _cay neu_. These rituals also mark the end of _Tet_. _Cay tre_ is also used to produce joss-sticks for use in worshipping of ancestors. The joss-stick once burnt on the altar creates the link between the alive and the deceased. The tradition, hence, is the embodiment of Vietnamese spiritual beliefs in birth, life and after-life concepts, i.e. reincarnation, which is part of Buddhism, a religion a great many Vietnamese follow. As _cay tre_ has long been with the Vietnamese people, through a long history of adapting to the environment, fighting against foreign invaders using weapons made from _cay tre_, building up a rich culture, it conveys a number of spiritual, cultural, historical and societal meanings, which are all interconnected, to Vietnamese people.

The _cay tre_ metaphor helps convey the two Vietnamese Fellows’, who are both practising teachers, perspectives of educational leadership in a Vietnamese context where education is highly valued and where the first University named the Temple of Literature was built as early as in 1070.

Firstly, a number of educational leadership characteristics can be distilled from the metaphor by looking at the big range of bamboo trees and examining how the bamboo ranges grow, just from one first root, one tree grows, then the second and third shoots continue to come out. After some time, a whole thick range is formed, which makes it hard for one to identify which one is the first tree, or which is the tallest. This embodies the fellows’ view that an educational leader can be anyone working in the field of education who has the capabilities to lead others or is exercising actual leadership. That person may be a leader in position, such as a Principal, or simply any teacher. “To lead” here means to influence, inspire, empower, and motivate others, either other educational workers, teachers or students, to contribute towards the goals of the educational institutions or of an educational program of which they are members.

This first point also leads to the second one – that educational leadership is about relationship, especially in a culture like the Vietnamese that values relationship and collectivism, and that leadership can be shared just like _cay tre_. It is important to emphasise that the positive relationship must come from the real love and care for people; for the teachers, that is the love and care for students and their learning. Teachers should inspire and empower them through schooling so they can become leaders themselves. _Cay tre_ live in ranges to form strong walls; similarly, a leader should create such strong relationship among their team. Leaders should also share the leadership, just like one _cay tre_ sharing the sunlight and nutrition with surrounding _cay tre_.

Thirdly, an educational leader should be someone with a clear vision of the future and that vision must be shared with the team. The _cay tre_ metaphor also captures this aspect. The _cay tre_ in a range, tall, straight and shiny green, all point towards sunlight, and create strong walls. For education, to realise the vision, an educational leader must have a great influence on a large number of people by their integrity. A common saying in Vietnamese culture is ‘_Thuong bat chinh, ha tac loan_’ – (If the leader does not have integrity, the followers will do wrong things). Influential leaders ‘live by high ethical standards’ (Duignan, 2006). Just like _cay tre_, they can form a strong range, and each has a their own space within the range because each has straight trunk, sharing the sunlight and soil, and not taking others’ space.

This feature that all the _cay tre_ are straight and upright also reflects the Vietnamese Fellows’ view that teachers as leaders must be role models – leading by modelling. This is necessary in Vietnamese culture where teaching is regarded as one of the noblest jobs and that teachers are generally seen by society as role-models. By this and together with the view of visionary and shared leadership, influential leaders can help lift people to another level of their capacity, from where they are to where they should be and can be. And also because of this very feature of _cay tre_, Vietnamese people often associate it with the concept of the “gentleman” in the traditional Vietnamese society, being strong willed, resilient, upright, calm, and at ease. Interestingly, this reflects the patriarchal element in Vietnamese culture, in which males are dominant and commonly regarded as the breadwinner or the pillar of the family, and most of the leaders in position are also male. This is a reflection of Confucious influence resulted from nearly a thousand years of Chinese occupation in Vietnam. (Borton, 2001; McLoughlin, 2003). Though _cay tre_, in its traditional sense, is associated with the gentleman, the Vietnamese Fellows believe leadership must be gender-neutral to help promote gender-equality in society and that those core qualities as having strong will, resilience, adaptability and flexibility, integrity can as well be applied to woman leaders.

The use of bamboo as a material for many daily life products can symbolize other educational leadership characteristics. The most prominent characteristic is that leadership means transformation – just by looking at the final products like a fine delicate flower vase or a bowl made from bamboo, one could hardly imagine they are made from rough straight bamboo trees. Another aspect is that leaders should be able to carry out different tasks, or wear many hats, just like the multi functions the _cay tre_ serves. Though this is typical in the Vietnamese polychronic culture, the Vietnamese Fellows believe that educational leaders while being able to
juggle many things at one time, must still be present heart and mind, as that will help the leaders build strong relationship with people they work with.

In the age-old Vietnamese culture, an educational leader must also be culturally aware. He or she should be able to lead others so that they treasure learning. To realise this, leaders should always project positive philosophy of life and of learning, including the attributes of optimism and enthusiasm. It is like shiny green *cay tre* which always strives for sunlight. They should be the kind of leader who “maintains a positive outlook and views challenges as opportunities” (Duignan, 2006). In the Southeast Asian cultures heavily influenced by Confucius, the view that anyone can be taught and everyone has potential to learn permeates education philosophy. To be culturally aware, educational leaders also need to address many other important cultural factors specific to Vietnamese. One such aspect is the awareness of “face” – roughly described as “a quality that reflects a person’s reputation, dignity, and prestige” (Kwintessential, 2008). The concept of face though strange in Western cultures, is very important in the Vietnamese culture. Educational leaders should be aware of how to save face, give face to people, and to avoid situations that make people lose face. For example, leaders must learn not to reprimand people, even those with poor performance, in public to save their face. They better do it in more sensitive ways. They must also know how to show their respect to the seniority, as part of Vietnamese culture, and at the same time, learn to empower the young. In so doing, the leaders can build good relationship with people and earn their respect.

In summary, with its multiple meanings to Vietnamese people’s traditional life, *cay tre* as a cultural metaphor reflects many layers of the two Vietnamese Fellows’ view of educational leadership in the Vietnamese context. All of the educational leadership characteristics are interlinked and mutually affect each other.

**Conclusion: the metaphors distilled**

A number of cultural characteristics can be identified from the metaphors that reflect traditional aspects of leadership. These aspects focus on elements such as the role of age, gender, status and knowledge play in leadership. For example, in the Timor and Laos metaphors elders have a special status, and are expected to show leadership, especially in relation to rituals and ceremonies. The Vietnamese metaphor identifies the patriarchal element of culture in which males are expected to take a leadership role, while the importance of ritual and ceremonial knowledge is identified in most of the metaphors. In terms of leadership theories, discussions around traditional aspects of leadership focus to a large extent on traits where leaders are born with innate qualities or because of their status assume leadership roles.

All the metaphors focus on the leadership capabilities that are required for leadership in the various cultural contexts. From a leadership theory, most of these are aligned to a ‘values’ perspective especially in relation to morals, ethics and presence. In the metaphors, leaders were required to be visionary, creative, influential, inspirational, adaptable, resilient, optimistic and ethical. Good leaders build good relationships, exercise shared leadership, and encourage the growth of young leaders. In addition, good leaders are devoted, play many roles, and project a positive philosophy of life and learning.

These metaphors point towards the existence of a combined space – much like that described by the *gamma* metaphor – where hybrid forms of knowledge and skills are enriched. This is an intercultural space where leadership is informed by both the specific culture in which it is located, and western theories and leadership practice from which it is influenced. This calls for leaders to develop mutuality and – from a Vietnamese perspective – to be polychronic. Leaders will be required to juggle many of the demands that occur in this intercultural space, and remain present (Starratt, 2004). What is interesting in this development is the leadership capabilities required for an intercultural workplace, and how cultural requirements – such as those of ‘saving face’ – will be addressed. These metaphors act as a catalyst to further advance research, discussion and debate on intercultural leadership.

**References**


Workshop Materials
These workshops were conducted in Phonthong (18 February 2011) and in Sing (24 February 2011). They were attended by school and community leaders, some officials from the district education bureau and provincial education services. (Most of these leaders had been involved in and/or supported my field research.) The key focus of the workshop was to share knowledge gained during my research project, to obtain feedback from research participants and, at the same time, fill some minor gaps in my existing data.

The workshop materials were written by hand on bush papers as there was very limited technology in the two districts. There were two highlights of the workshop content. First, I used maps, photos and descriptions to detail the two research sites: Phonthong and Sing districts. The second focal point of the workshop content was the table of critical school leader relationships that I developed in Stage 2. The table not only showed the preliminary research findings but it also generated discussion, elicited clarification and prompted future recommendations for the improvement of school leadership.
1. ການເຂົ້າໃໝ່ສັ່ງເດືອນການລະບຽບການກັບເຈົ້າສະໝັກວິຊາງນັ້ນ
ສາມາດເຄື່ອງສອງສົມບາດແຫ່ງການ
ການດັ່ງງານນາຍຂາຍໃດກໍ່ໄດ້
ຫ້ອງການຖືອມຕິ່ນ.

2. ເກາະນັ້ນສັ່ງເດືອนການລະບຽບການ
ການປະຊຽງສະດ້ານ ວຽກເທົ່າການ
ດ້ວຍຫອງການວິຊາງນັ້ນ ນັກຂາຍ
ສາມາດເຄື່ອງສອງສົມບາດແຫ່ງ
ການດັ່ງງານນາຍຂາຍໃດກໍ່ໄດ້
ຫ້ອງການຖືອມຕິ່ນ.
1. ຈັດແນວຂອງທາງການກົດລັງສານການເກ້ະມາດແລະການເກົ່າຂອງການະສັດລັງສານດ້ານການປະຊາຊົນ?
2. ມີຂະນະທີ່ແກ່ນັ້ນໃນການຈ່າຍຕ຺ງລັງສານແລະການແກ່ນສັດລັງສານ?
3. ຜື່ນແນວຂອງທາງການກົດລັງສານດ້ານການນິທະນາການແລະການເກົ່າຂອງການະສັດລັງສານ?
4. ພິດທານຈະກະດູເອົາການກົດລັງສານແລະການເກົ່າຂອງການບໍລິການປະຊາຊົນ?

* * *

ພັດທະນາງານເງິນສາຊາດລັດຖະບານ

ພັດທະນາງານເງິນສາຊາດລັດຖະບານ

ທາງການປະຊາຊົນລັດຖະບານ

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<th>รายการ 3</th>
<th>รายการ 4</th>
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<td>พฤศจิกายน</td>
<td>ธันวาคม</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

หมายเหตุ: ตารางนี้แสดงเกี่ยวกับการจัดการงานตามเดือนต่างๆ อย่างละเอียด.
This workshop was a new information sharing activity within the Ministry of Education (MOE). The MOE and National University of Laos (NUOL) officials were eager to know about the research findings and the Research by Project mode. The workshop was held on 1 March 2011 at the English Language Resource Centre, MOE in Vientiane Capital. The workshop materials were presented using a power point presentation because this technology was available at the centre. The workshop content was similar to the workshops that I had presented in Sing and Phonthong, but I made two additions. First, I invited one of my supervisors to give a presentation on the By Project mode of post-graduate research and my research. I also modified my presentation by adding additional information about what I had used Research by Project and Practitioner Action Research. These modifications were intended to provide useful insights for senior MOE officials and NUOL academics about the important link between research, practice and the need for improved educational outcomes. There were four highlights at the MOE workshop: the photos and maps display of the two research sites, the table of critical relationships of school leaders, research methodology and general discussion. Feedback was supportive and very positive.
ការប្រកបដោយអ្នកប្រឹក្សាមួយនឹងការស្វែងរកការប្រកបដោយអ្នកប្រឹក្សាមួយ
ដោយការស្វែងរកប្រការសិក្សាត្រូវបានកាត់ក្រោមៗ។

ជាមួយនឹងការប្រកបដោយអ្នកប្រឹក្សាមួយអ្នកប្រឹក្សាមួយ
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ដោយការស្វែងរកប្រការសិក្សាត្រូវបានកាត់ក្រោមៗ។
لامERM CPR លទស CAMPOA

ប្រើប្រាស់ប្រើដើម្បីកម្រិតលទសការដោយការសារិប្បីបំពាក់ដ៏ស្រូស្រុត។ ការពន្លឺប្រព័ន្ធទំព័រការបញ្ជាក់ណាមួយបំពាក់មើលបាននៅក្នុងការពន្លឺ។ ការសារិប្បីបំពាក់ដ៏ស្រូស្រុត ឬស្រូស្រុតដ៏ស្រូស្រុត ការពន្លឺប្រព័ន្ធទំព័រការបញ្ជាក់ណាមួយបំពាក់មើលបាននៅក្នុងការពន្លឺ។ ការសារិប្បីបំពាក់ដ៏ស្រូស្រុត ឬស្រូស្រុតដ៏ស្រូស្រុត ការពន្លឺប្រព័ន្ធទំព័រការបញ្ជាក់ណាមួយបំពាក់មើលបាននៅក្នុងការពន្លឺ។ ការសារិប្បីបំពាក់ដ៏ស្រូស្រុត ឬស្រូស្រុតដ៏ស្រូស្រុត ការពន្លឺប្រព័ន្ធទំព័រការបញ្ជាក់ណាមួយបំពាក់មើលបាននៅក្នុងការពន្លឺ។ ការសារិប្បីបំពាក់ដ៏ស្រូស្រុត ឬស្រូស្រុតដ៏ស្រូស្រុត ការពន្លឺប្រព័ន្ធទំព័រការបញ្ជាក់ណាមួយបំពាក់មើលបាននៅក្នុងការពន្លឺ។ ការសារិប្បីបំពាក់ដ៏ស្រូស្រុត ឬស្រូស្រុតដ៏ស្រូស្រុត ការពន្លឺប្រព័ន្ធទំព័រការបញ្ជាក់ណាមួយបំពាក់មើលបាននៅក្នុងការព

(White & Smoke, 2005)
1. រូបមន៍រឿងក្នុង៖

2. ស្រុកប្រឹងប្រ័ត្រសោភៃ ៖

3. ស្លឹកក្រុងសោភៃ ៖

4. លេខទី៩៨: ទូទៅគឺជាពិសេសក្នុងការប្រការជាមួយគ្នា យើងត្រូវបានរការចូលរួមប្រការជាមួយគ្នារបស់ក្រុមអារម្មណ៍ឯកសារក្នុងរយៈពេលស្តុកក្រុងសោភៃ
សំដីសម្រាប់ទីក្រុង

1. គឺដែលសម្រាប់សម្រេចការ
2. អ្នកមានប្រយោជន៍នៃសំណូលនិងអំពីប្រយោជន៍។
3. និងមានប្រយោជន៍នៃសំណូលនិងអំពីប្រយោជន៍។
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<td>៩ ការ</td>
<td>២. ប/ប្រែអំពីសារសិក្សា</td>
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<td>១៤ ការ</td>
<td>៥. រឿងមុខវាយមិនមាន (មិនមាន)</td>
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ឧបសម្រាប់មិនឈ្នះដំណើរការ
(Research By Project)

មានប្រភេទជាអំពីភាពនេះ:
• សង្គមស្រុកឈ្នះដំណើរការដោយមិនឈ្នះដំណើរការដោយសម្រាប់ដំណើរការសម្រាប់ការបណ្តាលបណ្តាលដោយសម្រាប់ការបណ្តាលបណ្តាលដែលមានអំពីមីកូនមិនឈ្នះដំណើរការ,
• បណ្តាលបណ្តាលការបណ្តាលបណ្តាលដោយមិនឈ្នះដំណើរការមីកូនដោយសម្រាប់ការបណ្តាលបណ្តាលដោយសម្រាប់ការបណ្តាលបណ្តាលដែលមានអំពីមីកូនមិនឈ្នះដំណើរការ,
• បណ្តាលបណ្តាលការបណ្តាលបណ្តាលដោយមិនឈ្នះដំណើរការបណ្តាលបណ្តាលដោយមិនឈ្នះដំណើរការដែលមានអំពីមីកូនមិនឈ្នះដំណើរការ.

វិធីដំបូងដ៏ធំបំណុល

- មានឈ្មោះថាមិនត្រូវការជាតិបក្សដ៏ធំបំណុលដោយធ្វើការការងារធ្វើមិនត្រូវ
  (Practitioner Action Research) ដែលធ្វើឲ្យការងារគឺឯកសារ (Schon, 1983 ក្រុម 129).
- ការវិជ្ជាចៅដែលមាន 2 ផ្លូវធំដែល ការចាញ់អាកាសធាតុប្រសើរ និង
  ការប្រើប្រាស់ ការប្រើប្រាស់អាកាសធាតុគឺដ៏ធំបំណុល.
- ការវិជ្ជាចៅធ្វើដោយប្រើប្រាស់ការគោរពវិជ្ជាចៅធ្វើដ៏ធំបំណុល
  (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).
- មិនសមារមាន់ស្រាប់អាកាសធាតុធំបំណុល និងមានឈ្មោះ្តូចបំផុត ការ
  ធ្វើដោយអាកាសធាតុធំបំណុល (Coghlan & Branick, 2005; Coghlan &
  Keating, 2008).
- ដំបូងធ្វើផ្ទាល់ការឈ្មោះ 3 នៃ្របស់: ការធ្វើអាកាសធាតុ, ការប្រើប្រាស់ និង
  ការសម្រាប់អាកាសធាតុ (រំពឹង និង វិស័យសំខាន់ដ៏ធំបំណុលជាច្រើន
  និង វិស័យទូទៅក្នុងទីក្រុង)។
เลือกมีวิจัย

- ระบบจำกัด และ ระบบบันทึกทรัพยากรภูมิ
- ลิขสิทธิ์ทรัพยากรภูมิ
- ระบบสุสานทางภูมิ
- ระบบพืชแคระจำแนก (Cherry, 1999)
- ระบบสังเคราะห์ระดับ (บิดั้ง ด้วังจากนายใบ และ ต่างประเทศ, เอกสารสะท้อนท้าทาย, บิดั้งเจ้าของลูกสุนัข ลำ และ ผู้นำมิตรที่มีจากการเรียนรู้ข้อมูล)
ការសិក្សាទូទៅ៖

• ការសិក្សាអំពីការសិក្សាទូទៅប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់និងចូលការស្រាប់ចាក់ការបញ្ជាក់ប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់និងប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់៖ ត្រូវ ១ ប្រការៀប និង ២ ប្រការៀប។ ប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់ដែលមានមូលដ្ឋានច្បាប់ការសិក្សាវាងប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់។ យើងប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់ក្នុងការសិក្សាទូទៅ។

• ការសិក្សាអំពីការសិក្សាទូទៅក្នុងពេលប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់និងចូលការស្រាប់ចាក់ការបញ្ជាក់ប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់៖ ជាទំនើប់ការស្រាប់ចាក់ការបញ្ជាក់ប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់។ យើងប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់ក្នុងការសិក្សាទូទៅ។

• ការសិក្សាអំពីការសិក្សាទូទៅប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់និងចូលការស្រាប់ចាក់ការបញ្ជាក់ប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់៖ ត្រូវ ១ ប្រការៀប និង ២ ប្រការៀប។ ប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់ដែលមានមូលដ្ឋានច្បាប់ការសិក្សាវាងប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់។ យើងប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់ក្នុងការសិក្សាទូទៅ។

• ការសិក្សាអំពីការសិក្សាទូទៅក្នុងពេលប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់និងចូលការស្រាប់ចាក់ការបញ្ជាក់ប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់៖ ជាទំនើប់ការស្រាប់ចាក់ការបញ្ជាក់ប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់។ យើងប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់ក្នុងការសិក្សាទូទៅ។

• ការសិក្សាអំពីការសិក្សាទូទៅប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់និងចូលការស្រាប់ចាក់ការបញ្ជាក់ប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់៖ ត្រូវ ១ ប្រការៀប និង ២ ប្រការៀប។ ប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់ដែលមានមូលដ្ឋានច្បាប់ការសិក្សាវាងប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់។ យើងប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់ក្នុងការសិក្សាទូទៅ។

• ការសិក្សាអំពីការសិក្សាទូទៅក្នុងពេលប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់និងចូលការស្រាប់ចាក់ការបញ្ជាក់ប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់៖ ជាទំនើប់ការស្រាប់ចាក់ការបញ្ជាក់ប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់។ យើងប្រការៀបប្រការៀប់ក្នុងការសិក្សាទូទៅ។
Project Related Activities
Exhibit 12

An internship at AusAID

(9-23 March 2010)

My internship at AusAID’s head office in Canberra was another rewarding and practical learning experience. I spent a ten-day internship at AusAID’s office in March 2009. I was the only ALA scholar who was invited by AusAID to undertake an internship. Because of issues related to security clearances it was the first time that a foreign student had spent time in the AusAID head office. To solve the security clearance issue an AusAID staff member was assigned to escort me around. For ten days he had to pick me up and send me home at the entrance gate and had to report my check in and check out time. He even escorted me to the ladies because I did not have a security card. I felt very well-looked after with high security protection!

This occasion gave me an opportunity to explore aid planning and delivery from a donor’s perspective. I also gained important insights into how a donor prioritizes and manages its aid which were very relevant to my research. Furthermore, I learnt about current AusAID strategies when working with a partner country. For instance, AusAID used a range of modalities such as a traditional project funding, direct funding and Sector Wide Approaches known as SWAPs. I also provided information about the leadership context in the Lao PDR and how donors support the education sector.

I was based in the Leadership Program: Developmental Leaders, Elites and Coalitions (LPDLEC), where I also learnt and shared knowledge about leadership in development through daily discussions with senior and junior staff. For example, I worked closely with Steve Hogg, AusAID Assistant Director General, Program Director of Governance and Leadership Branch who was very enthusiastic to have me join his division and was very satisfied with the outcome of my internship. As part of the internship condition to demonstrate my learning outcomes I wrote the report outlining the leadership context in Laos as well as attempting to provide some answers to fundamental questions about how leadership emerges in the Lao PDR from the education perspective and how donors might work more effectively. AusAID commended my report and the internship, as indicated in the attached letter.
23rd July 2010

To whom it may concern

Re: Ms Daravone Kittiphanh’s Internships with the Leadership Program: Development Leaders, Elites and Coalitions, AusAID, 9th - 23rd March 2010

The Leadership Program: Developmental Leaders, Elites and Coalitions (LPDLEC) had the good fortune of providing an Internship for Ms Daravone Kittiphanh’s (Inaugural Intern) in March of 2010. Daravone’s Internship provided tangible benefits to AusAID, the LPDLEC and, it is hoped, that the experience was equally beneficial to her professional development. The Internship afforded Daravone the opportunity to learn about AusAID, LPDLEC and more broadly gave her an understanding of policy processes, aid delivery approaches, decision making process and priorities from a donor’s perspective.

During Daravone’s time with LPDLEC she gained a deep understanding of LPDLEC and afforded her the opportunity to consider the implications of applying some of the Program’s key hypotheses and implications to the Lao context. In a high quality exit report, Daravone provided LPDLEC with insightful and useful information on leadership, gender, culture and the political context to education development and leadership issues in Lao. The report went on to make key recommendations for applying some of the LPDLEC key concepts and implications to the Lao education sector.

The internship also provided Daravone the opportunity for an exchange of ideas and knowledge in her meetings with a range of AusAID program officers and senior executives. Daravone met with AusAID officers from a range of areas including thematic groups (eg Gender Unit, Education and Scholarships Unit) and regional offices (eg Asia) and the Lao desk. Daravone also spent time with some AusAID policy makers who explained the aid decision making processes and key areas of interest of the Australian Government in the development context. I received very positive feedback from both Daravone and the AusAID officers involved. I understand Daravone also had the opportunity to discuss the Program and the ALA scholarship program at a meeting with a senior Lao diplomat at the Lao embassy here in Canberra.

Yours sincerely,

Steve Hogg

ADG Governance & Leadership Branch/Program Director LPDLECPDLE
Internship report:

Developmental Leaders, Elites and Coalitions in the Lao PDR

Daravone Kittiphanh
April 2010

Supervisors:
David Hodges
Bill Vistarini

This report is in confidence.
Developmental Leaders, Elites and Coalitions in Lao PDR

1. Introduction

The Lao People’s democratic Republic (Lao PDR) was constituted in 1975, but the country can trace its history as far back as the mid-14th century when it was unified as kingdom of Lan Xang (literally million elephants) under King Fa Ngum (Stuart-Fox, 1997). Today, the country has a market-economy and privatization implanted into a heritage of colonialism and a socialist revolution. The Lao PDR is a peaceful and stable country (unlike Thailand; Cambodia) in which change and development is happening without the heavy repression that occurs in some regional countries (Burma, Vietnam) and where religion is possible and tolerant (unlike some of the things that happen in Malaysia - caning of women for extramarital affairs or drinking beer). When looking back over how education has grown based on my research, I would suggest that Lao education characteristics have been impositions of the colonial ideology, socialist ideology and now recently a development ideology instigated by donors, loan providers and consultants embedded in the system. In recent years the education sector has received more attention than the past and has made progress in offering a wider access to people. The major focus has placed on managerial and technical improvement and has not widely recognized the importance of local leadership capacity development in promotion of economic growth and social development. This report discusses leadership context as well as aims to provide some answers to the following fundamental questions in the Lao context examining how leadership emerges in the Lao PDR from the education perspective and how donors might work more effectively. The fundamental questions are:

1. What factors facilitate or frustrate the emergence of progressive developmental leadership and coalitions, rather than predatory, collusive or rent-seeking ones?

2. What factors shape the relative success or failure of development leadership and coalitions?

3. What, if any, are the common empirical characteristics of development leaderships?

4. What policy and operational implications flow from these insights?

5. What, if anything, can or should external agents do to facilitate the emergence of developmental leaders and coalitions?
2. Leadership context
There is neither single leadership definition nor context. Based on my experience, reading and reflections whilst in Australia, the contexts in which leadership are to be exercised should be identified. The context will have a major influence on what can be achieved.

In the Lao education context, leadership is mainly shaped by cultural and political contexts.

2.1. Cultural context
Culture still has strong influence on educational leadership. As Lao culture is one in which people are respected because of age, position, authority and within the family the leader is always lead by male (father), I think educational leadership is influenced by authority, position, seniority and is a male dominated. The authority has the right to control, command and make decisions. The following descriptions only demonstrate some examples in which leadership practiced in some cultural contexts based on my observations and experience.

- **Youth vs age**: Respect is the clue and leadership accepted on a basis of age. In some contexts it may be necessary to wait for or to co-opt the elders. Seniority plays an important role in educational leadership and senior officers have more official advantages than junior officers, especially in job promotion, provision of professional opportunities and upgrading. Although a young leader may have a more senior position and more authority than an older officer, he/she still has to show respect to the senior person. It is also common to see senior officers stay in educational leadership for extensive periods. In addition, leadership positions tend to be rotated among the senior officials and it is rare to see them demoted. It has been observed by foreigners that this practice has become static and has de-motivated young competent and capable leaders who demonstrate leadership skills.

- **Male roles and female roles**: These may be important and act to restrain people, especially women. Some women will seek to challenge traditional roles; other women will chose to be leaders only within ‘appropriate’ spheres. In the Lao PDR, by GOL policy, women take priority over men for promotion, but in practice this rarely happens. There is no balance between men and women in educational leadership, especially at the top level. Female leadership is not commonly seen, especially at the local level although the government emphasizes the policy for gender equity and equality so that men and women equally contribute to the national socio-economic
development. This issue still remains problematic even though the government has created a space for women by establishing a Lao Women Union in all organizations from the central to the local levels. However, the majority of women have been responsible for the reproductive spheres of society, having the main responsibilities for providing food for the families. In addition, poverty and perceptions of the little use of educating girls constituted other obstacle for girls’ education which continued to produce gendered patterns in Laos (Bäcktorp, 2007). Male attitudes and male-dominated political structures have prevented women from becoming equal partners in the development of the country. It has been observed that the situation slightly changed since the government has incorporated women into production outside of domestic life. Bäcktorp (2007) claims that the women who did gain positions did so, not necessarily on account of their gender or competence, but because of their family name, which indicates the importance of social position within Lao society. This point signals the complexity of any attempt to instigate change in women’s role and status. However, it is demonstrated how different systems of power communicate with each other and how different discourses engage and sometimes conflict with each other in the Lao situation. Bringing Lao women, including ethnic women into mainstream and enhancing their roles and status, has proven to be difficult and is taking longer than expected in order for them to break through the glass ceiling. This has more to do with lack of political will and a lack of clear strategies.

- **Egalitarian vs hierarchical systems**- This may be critical and constrain people, especially those who work at the grassroots level. This may also create tensions for outsiders who are from a society where everybody has equal voice or freedom of speech. The Lao educational administrative system may be hierarchically structured at both central, province and district levels. However, it is possible to lessen these boundaries in the system by establishing good networks and relationships. In a Lao context, personal networks and relationships are critical tools because they create a relationship of trust and mutual support. Relationships are the currency of business and social life in the Lao PDR. When resources and information are inadequate, relationships count a lot. In order to get things done, personal contacts and family relationships are drawn upon in all aspects of daily life, from obtaining information to finding a job. Through this relationship people become friends and colleagues and form stronger networks as they develop and share common views and values. This is
a key ingredient for collective action development. I recalled what I have learnt as a civil servant in the Lao PDR when I was taught to practice the principle of collective decision making and building solidarity at work. But in reality it was sometimes hard because our understanding about leadership is located in a cultural framework of hierarchy where the playing field is deliberately not level and is likely will never be so.

2.2. Political context

Leadership is exercised in a variety of political contexts. They may enhance or limit the way in which leadership is exercised. In addition to authority, seniority, position and male domination having an impact on leadership, in the Lao context there is the political dimension. In the Lao education context, an educational leader must be a Party member and senior Party members tend to be male. Education leadership is strongly influenced by all these socio-political-cultural factors and this can cause tensions when Lao educational leaders have to work with foreign consultants. In the Lao PDR, the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party, the major policy-making body in the country, plays an important role throughout the national educational planning process. Therefore, its decision-making has an impact on education policy and practice and usually the information about its decision-making is not widely spread out. This practice can create a tension for a foreign consultant or advisor who comes from an open system where information is easy to access and where debate is encouraged and leaders can be challenged. On the other hand, the Lao political context can be seen as a comparatively closed system where open debate is rarely possible and leaders’ decisions must be accepted. However, many problems are discussed informally. While leaders develop, emerge and elected in Western societies, Lao leaders are appointed. There are five generic criteria for the appointment of educational leaders including commitment to ideological values, political knowledge and expertise in area of specialization, capacity to act in the leadership position, demonstrated commitment to the principle of collective decision making, and physical and mental capacity. In addition, upward mobility is very limited due to the static culture/society among political and civil spheres. This may frustrate the emergence of progressive developmental leadership and effective coalitions as well as improvement in the education development. To facilitate the growth of the developmental leadership in the Lao political context that support the work of donors, it is important to have high commitment to development by government as well as donors. In addition, it is critical for leaders to recognise a growing openness to new ideas and exposure to political system from
both east and west. Perhaps one approach worth considering is the Lao belief in following the Buddhist Middle Way, avoiding extremes and promoting compromise. The leaders need to be flexible and adaptable. The ensuing flexibility is to be encouraged.

To sum up, in all of the cultural and political areas leadership may require challenging the status quo or it may require acceptance and understanding of the norm and working within its parameters. Accepting the norm does not necessarily mean weak or poor leadership. It may mean more effective leadership meaning that leadership is practical and adaptable. Each context is difficult and the leadership style adopted, or that is possible, will require decisions on how to achieve the development goals.

3. Developmental leadership and coalitions

I have learnt about a new concept of leadership which I found relevant to the Lao education development context. Developmental leadership does not mean the ‘great man or woman’ of history. Nor is it to be understood as a ‘technical’ process. Rather, it is a political process that involves the capacity to mobilise people and resources and to forge coalitions in the pursuit of progressive development goals. It is envisaged that the processes and forms of this leadership directly influences the type and quality of institutions and state building, and are hence central to achieving the goals of economic growth, political stability, security and inclusive social development.

From the above insight, I understand that the relationship between leadership and institutions is very important because development is shaped by institutions which are determined by political process (Leftwich & Hogg, 2008). Therefore, it is important for donors to understand the political context in a recipient country in order to implement aid effectively. For donors to be politically aware and responsive in other cultures is not easy as it involves understanding language, key relationships, rules and regulations (which are both formal and informal), procedures and process in an organization. For instance, to contribute to the Lao education development sector supported by donors, the Lao education system and policies must be designed by the Lao through their political processes with support and advice when they need or want it from donors. The role of leadership is to identify key issues with a deep analysis process, which involve key stakeholders at central and local levels. Leaders need to able to set their own visions and goals for education development so that the central and local levels share similar views and values through their political processes. Many times this
planning process has been done by donors and officials at the central levels. I remember when I was involved in the planning process for the first education sector development framework in 2008. This process was led by a consultancy team with the involvement of key technical staff from each department to participate in group discussions and a series of workshops based in Vientiane; and the first draft of the education sector development framework was in English and then translated into Lao. This example indicates that the education sector allows donors to take a lead in its education development with limited involvement of the grassroots level.

To assist Lao to be fully responsible in its education development I think it is important for development partners to recognize the need for leadership development and involvement at all stages of planning, developing and delivering aid-funded projects and programs. This means that recognising and working with likely individuals at each level are important instead of trying to strengthening vague capacity building by training everyone in workshops. For instance, I learnt from my research that it is important for a system to have someone to work with school leaders on the ground, listening, observing and assisting in problem solving in order to strengthen the school leadership capacity in running an effective school. I found this approach was an effective way to learn the reality of the situation so that it would eliminate disjunction between donors’ program and reality of the context. From my research I also learnt that lack of consulting at grassroots level results in critical local perceptions and needs being over looked. Therefore, it is crucial to select and train an appropriate person by consulting with concerned ministry departments that manage aid program. This kind of training needs to be linked to carefully targeted formal tertiary qualifications and the training must be responsive to the needs of the local levels. In my opinion, it is also important for development partners to recognize the need for leadership development through quality education, rather than the generalized, often spur-of- the-moment workshops, which have operated unsuccessfully in the past through many donors’ projects. This will mean that providing focused knowledge and skills and individual scholarships that link to formal qualifications in tertiary and higher education in Laos and overseas will be a better approach. These skills and understandings must also be related to the needs of Laos and the ministry that manages the aid program. I believe that through building local leaders’ capacity and capability through carefully targeted individual scholarships, these leaders can participate effectively in all stages of planning, developing and delivering aid-funded projects and programs. This will lead Lao to collective approaches to problem solving, support for the
work of the development partners that meet the needs of my country and ultimately establishing a sense of local ownership.

Having said what should be done to support the Lao education sector to achieve its education development goals, the sector needs capable and knowledgeable developmental leaders who understand their own political context and are enabled to negotiate and coordinate with donors and other local key stakeholders. In this connection, it is crucial for the Lao education system to have the right people or leaders who have strong networks with good education background and working experience because these leaders have to deal with different types of relationships across different levels in their political context as well as development partners. In other words, it means that the leaders need to have a cluster of networking so that it is important for a group of leaders to have representatives or links at all levels of an organization so that they are able to articulate and solve problems via collective action. This is especially important in the education sector if national education goals are to be accomplished. It is also significant for educational leaders to build coalitions among other leaders in their political context in order to receive support and achieve organizational goal. According to Leftwich & Hogg (2008) coalitions (formal or informal) are groups of leaders and organizations which come together to achieve objectives, which they could not achieve on their own. They are therefore the key political mechanism by which collective action problems are resolved. They are often facilitated by the existence of prior networks. It is important to note that there are examples of these networks being established and having a significant impact on donor funded education projects in the Lao PDR. However, care needs to be taken when applying Western concepts of leadership in a markedly different context.

4. Factors that facilitate development leaderships and coalitions

The following sections illustrate how developmental leaders emerge and form coalitions. It has been observed that education through individual scholarships is the key factor that facilitates the growth of developmental leaders and coalition in the education sector. “Scholarships are important for promoting development and fostering enduring people-to-people relationships. Well-targeted, gender-balanced scholarships can be an effective, valuable form of aid-they equip recipients to become leaders, provide access to advanced learning and build a better understanding of a developed economy” (Australian Agency for International Development, 2008, p. 12). The high degree of education and personal networks formed through higher education and teacher education institutions have been key factors that
have driven cooperation in the education sector. The following sections provide some information about different scholarship programs which have been contributed to the developmental leadership and coalitions in the education sector.

4.1. Individual scholarships in higher education
Since 1975 Laos received military protection, financial aid, education and technical assistance from socialist brother nations (Rehbein, 2007). Higher education remained dependent on foreign input (Evans, 2002). Between 1975 and 1985 around 700 Lao were sent to study in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, while another 1,200 studied in Vietnam (Rehbein, 2007). Many graduates from this era have now held senior positions in the education sector. For example, the former minister of education got a Ph.D from Vietnam. The Director General of the Department of Planning and Cooperation receives a Masters’ Degree from the former Soviet Union and the Director General of Teacher Education also gets a Ph. D from the former Soviet Union. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union forced the young socialist nation to shift policy direction in order to fulfill socio-economic development. This policy change led to a new direction for education development, which was required to serve a labour market rather than the administration. Since Laos became a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997. The country has opened to the West for economic assistance and the investment in the country’s development programs. The Lao PDR has turned again to western aid to support its system of higher education. The government has sent people to study in both capitalist and socialist countries which provided scholarships, including Australia, US, Japan, Thailand, China and Vietnam. For example, Australian government has provided three types of scholarships to Laos: Australian Development Scholarships (ADS), Australian Leadership Awards (ALA) and Endeavour Scholarships. Combined ADS and ALA will offer around 40-45 places in Australian Universities. Whereas, the Chinese scholarships have covered the majority of the higher education, offering more than 100 places in Chinese universities, particularly at the Bachelor levels. It has been noticed that studying in China has become a new destination for the young generation. These changes in policy will probably also contribute to the development of Lao future leaders, envisaging how these emerging leaders will bring politically acceptable benefits from a powerful socialist neighbor. This approach will meet modern Western philosophies of leadership and education, both of which might challenge the Lao Buddhist Middle Path Way and traditional Lao notions of leadership. Chinese
approaches will not be easy to resist. It will be interesting to see which model or which combination of models emerges as the dominant paradigm.

In addition, the opportunity for targeted leadership programs flowing from a closer relationship between groups of women and higher education already has had an important impact on women’s roles in promoting women’s decision-making and leadership in the Ministry of Education and Laos. For instance, many educational projects at the MoE are led and managed by women who have studies Master’s Degree in Australia, such as Ms Chanthavone, a project director for Basic Education for Northern Communities Project funded by EU, Mrs Khampaseuth, a project manager for EDP II supported by the World Bank, and the second prize winner for the best project team in 2009 for ADB projects in Laos is managed by four strong women. These achievements show the link between higher education scholarships and coalitions and networks of strong women and effective aid delivery.

1.2. Scholarships for a cadre of teacher trainers and education administrators

There is a need for more teacher trainers as well as a need for more to own higher degrees for teacher education in the Lao PDR. Under the Teacher Training Enhancement and Status of Teachers Project funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), the target for this Project is 60 persons with Masters’ degree and 10 persons with doctorates (Asian Development Bank, 2002). So far 58 staff from eight Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), Provincial Education Services, Faculty of Education at the National University of Laos (NUOL) and the Ministry of Education (MOE) have completed studies for Masters degrees (Department of Teacher Training, April 2008). The Masters Program was a joint project between the Stockholm Institution of Education, Sweden and National University of Laos (NUOL) in co-operation with Umeå University, under the supervision of the Department of Teacher Education (DTE) at the MOE. The role of the Faculty of Education, NUOL was to provide venue for face to face sessions in Laos, to provide Lao lecturers and thesis supervisors from relevant institutions, and to provide co-teaching, co-supervision and mentoring. The three cohorts of Masters’ degree students undertook a three-month study period at SIE Stockholm and Umeå University in Sweden. The overall purpose of the program is to contribute to the implementation of “education for all” in Laos. The more specific objective is to establish a cadre of teacher trainers and education administrators who can contribute to the ongoing reform process. Academically the program aims at increasing
the graduates’ understanding of educational reforms in general, particularly on teacher education, and how to understand and assess teaching, learning and curricula in order to improve practice. Through this program graduates will develop their professional competence by learning more about the relationship between school, teacher education, culture and nation building.

It seems the proposed PhD program is unlikely to be implemented because Sida had already supported this program through the NUOL. As a consequence, the MOE requested an increase in the number of Masters’ degree scholarships and development of a BEd course for TEI teacher trainers who hold 11+3 qualifications - eleven years of schooling and three years of teacher training. The forth cohort of the Masters’ program was ran through a Thai university for students whose English language skills were not sufficiently strong to gain admission to the SIE/NUOL program. While the fifth cohort of the Masters’ Program at the Faculty of Education, NUOL has been developed over the past year. The NUOL Faculty of Education has also offered a part-time Bachelors’ degree for TEI staff. The aim of this program is to improve the professional qualifications of MOE and TEI staff aiming that all teachers in TEIs should hold a professional qualification, at least at BEd level. However, due to the uncertainties of ongoing funding arising from the decision by Sida to phase out its operations in the Lao PDR by 2012, the cadre of teacher trainers with higher degrees is likely discontinued although this project has been recognized as one of the core elements for improving quality of teacher education and ultimately contribute to enhance teaching and learning at schools. This changed policy will make it harder for the MOE to upgrade TEIs to become higher education institutions aiming to enhance the status of teachers and uphold the importance of their roles and positions in line with Teacher Education Strategy and the National Education System Reform Strategy. More importantly, it is very challenging for Lao teacher education to be able to compete and link with regional and international standards. The MOE aims to upgrade one TEI to a university level for Teacher Education so that it can be replaced DongDok Teacher Training College which now has been merged to the NUOL as the Faculty of Education. Dongdok teacher training college was a well-known institution for teacher education which produced many current educational leaders in the education sector. For instance, the current Minister of Education was once a Director of Dongdok Teacher Training College. The female Vice Minister of Education gained her first degree from this institution and was a teacher in the same College. In addition, the Director General of the Department of Pre-school and Primary Education and the Director General of the Department
of Secondary Education graduated from Dongdok. Since the constitution of the NUOL it has been observed that the Faculty of Education has become less popular, which also creates a big impact on upper secondary teacher supply and demand nation wide. There are real challenges here for donors and existing Lao leadership coalitions.

1.3. Scholarships for remote teachers
Since many ethnic areas are in remote areas and schooling is difficult due to poverty, linguistic and cultural differences, the Lao-Australian Basic Education Project (LABEP) established an initiative by providing scholarships and additional tuition for 300 trainee teachers. The Project provided an adapted 8+3 program to suit remote ethnic group context for trainees who had completed 8 years of schooling. In addition, because few students in target villages and from ethnic group have more than 5 years of schooling, a new 5+4 program was developed to ensure candidates with less than 8 years of schooling could participate (Ministry of Education, 2007). The introduction of the 5+4 model enabled young people, especially women, from ethnic communities to gain access to teacher training opportunities which where otherwise not available to them, ensuring a sustainable supply of teachers in remote villages. Within this program a new sandwich style delivery mode in which trainees spent alternative semester in Teacher Education Institutions and their schools during 3 years of training. These Community-Based Semesters provided trainees with an integrated program for theory and practice during their training. They also maintained community links and increased the likelihood of retention and completion. Students were supported by Pedagogical Advisors for methodological and pedagogical aspects while TEI staff administered the scholarships and tuition fund. Although this initiative was seen as a good practice as it would assist school-aged children, particularly ethnic children in remote isolated rural areas to reach basic education, the risk was that the graduates would not secure a salaried position as they had to be recruited as civil servants. Teacher vacancies rely on a quota system approved at the central and then allocates to provinces and districts respectively. In order to deal with this risk, the MoE prepared a Ministerial Decree stating that preference was to be given to the LABEP graduates for teacher recruitment. The successful recruitment and training of 300 remote ethnic teachers would have a significant support on the effective of primary education as Lao is the medium of instruction at schools because those teachers can speak students’ language. Those teachers also ensure the learning of Lao and other subjects effectively, especially at early grades.
Following the initiative established by the LABEP project, the Teacher Training and Enhancement and Status of Teachers (TTEST) Project supported by Sida launched a remote teacher scholarships project in response to the supply of teachers in remote areas. The overall goal of the project is to ensure that school aged children are provided with a learning opportunity to attend a primary school in their village or in a neighbour village, so that all children in the villages achieve compulsory primary education by 2015. The TTEST project has offered 115 scholarships for primary teachers in 115 villages in 47 poor districts. Ethnic students from project target villages or neighbour villages were selected and now are trained in 3 TEIs under an 8+3 primary teacher training programme over three years. A student who receives the scholarship must sign a contract or an agreement with his/her family to go back to teach in their village upon the completion of the programme witnessed by village authority, District Education Bureau and Provincial Education Services. By the end of the project, hopefully graduates will be recruited to be teachers in their villages or nearby villages.

From the above narrative it can be seen that development partners and the MOE can invest and train more teachers but there is no guarantee that these graduates will all be recruited as civil servants or that they will continue to receive support and facilities for their professional development and welfare as they received during the life of a project life. In terms of recruitment the Government has demonstrated its firm commitment to the EFA goals by announcing the creation of an additional quota of 5,000 new staff for the fiscal year 2009-10 (Ministry of Education, 2009). However, some difficulties may be faced to find and place teachers in especially remote areas, such as providing incentives to individuals from ethnic groups to undertake teacher training and return to a teaching job in their home village. This initiative calls for key concerned stakeholders in the Lao political system to be well-informed and take collective actions to support the work of development partners and continue to improve education in remote areas and nationwide. My research makes it clear that to educate people is a more sustainable approach and a key factor that underpins the coalitions as they will develop a common political and social value system. With knowledge and skills gained from education they will survive in a real world and empower them as future leaders. In addition, providing scholarships for ethnic girls or women will make a significant contribution to women's role in development. Many times when I traveled to my research site in Sing district in ethnic villages I encountered a situation where I viewed myself as a complete stranger when I tried to speak to women and children, they just either
gave me a smile or a puzzled look because they do not understand my language. I was wondering how women, particularly in remote ethnic areas have a voice in a Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) if they do not speak Lao since the MOE has decided to apply a VEDC initiative through the Catalytic Fund Education For All – Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) Program in 56 poor districts. The establishment of VEDC will enable greater private and community participation and ownership in education. The role of VEDC will involve in school management through the process of developing school improvement plans, procurement of locally-sourced building materials and labour for construction as well as managing school block grants. In addition, the VEDC will assist in following up school attendance and promoting a safe, clean and child-friendly school environment.

In conclusion, it is important for donors to recognize the need for leadership development in the education sector in order to build its capacity to facilitate education development and the work of donors. In addition, the failure to distinguish that development is political process and ineffective local leaders and coalitions might result in inappropriate donor policies. I hope this report provides some insights into and knowledge about of the role of leadership in the Lao education development and contribute to better informed short and long term donor policy.

References


Exhibit 13

Fund raising for a school construction project
(January-February 2011)

The idea of raising funds emerged from my research. I didn’t plan it in advance. I encountered a situation in Chik village, Phonthong district when the school and community received a heart breaking result as a consequence of a donor decision not to support their school construction because of its location – the donor said it was too remote and therefore too difficult to transport construction materials in the rainy season.

With assistance from my supervisors I wrote a letter and sent it to my friends and my supervisors’ friends to raise some funds to help Chik school. My supervisors and I expected to raise about Au$2,000 but we received about Au$6,000. Originally the funds were raised to help only Chik school construction but we had such a large amount of money we decided to divide Au$5,950 to support 2 districts: Au$4,950 [about 39,105,000 kip] to Phonthong and Au$1,000 [about 7,920,000 kip] to Sing districts.

On 20th February 2011 one of my supervisors and I travelled to Phonthong district to hand over 25,000,000 kip to Chik school and 14,500,000 kip to Koung school. The hand-over ceremonies were witnessed by a deputy DEB director, community and school leaders and villagers. On 24 February 2011 the remaining money was given by me to five schools in Sing district: Namai, Chome, Houylongkao, Houylongpasang and Houylongmai schools in front of DEB senior official, community and school leaders. Details of this fund raising project were included in my letters, with some photos and agreements from the community and schools in two districts.
Chik school needs help for school construction

Chik village is one of the remotest villages in Phonthong district, Champasak province. The village is located 23 km from the district centre and 7 km from the main road. The school offers primary education program (grade 1-5) and one kindergarten class. The school and the community are seeking help for school construction because it has been a pending issue for the community. The school construction started since June 2006 but has not been completed due to lack of funding. The school needs an office for teachers, a new classroom for kindergarten children, furniture, books, water pump and toilets. The school is desperate to receive funding from donors because it is complied with their criteria. The pictures below show current condition of the school. Your contribution will make a difference for the school and the community including 180 pupils with 81 girls and 8 teachers (5 females) and 1,560 community members (837 females).

The unfinished concrete building on the left is for primary education classrooms. The wooden building on the right was built in the old regime and now is used as a teaching kindergarten. The below picture on the left shows inside the kindergarten class where students have to sit on floor because there is no furniture. The picture on the right is the only road access to the village. In rainy season a ferry crossing is needed because the water level in the river blocks the road.
If you are interested in help the school please contact:

Chik School construction committee

1. Mr. Khamlek Pkomphithak (a deputy village chief)
2. Mr. Bouaphan Bokkhanthone (a chair of Parent Association)
3. Mr. Bounthavy Somsack (a principal)

Mobile phone: (001186520) 6681376
Ban Chik, Phongthong District, Champasak province

Or

Daravone Kittiphanh
PhD student
E-mail: kdaravone12@gmail.com
Mobile phone: (001185620) 55921174 (Laos) or 0437512914 (Australia)
Mailing address: P.O Box 7974
Vientiane, Lao PDR

or 332 Barkly St, Brunswick
Victoria 3056
Australia

Or

Bill Vistarini
E-mail: billtamvista@bigpond.com
P.O. Box 7
Warrnambool, Vic 3280
Dear all,

9 March 2011

I just got back from Laos yesterday afternoon after a successful trip. Like Bill, I would like to thank all of you for your generosity to help Chik and Koung [foreigners can pronounce Gung] schools in Phonthong district and five schools in Sing district. I was so astonished and impressed when Bill told me in Pakse last month that he received money about Au$6,000 from friends everywhere [we originally hope to raise about Au$2,000]. This contribution has made my PhD research very meaningful and really makes a big difference for local community in rural remote areas. Without your assistance as well as support from family, friends, supervisors (Bill and David), and colleagues, my research project will not become reality.

The idea of raising funds emerged from my research and I didn’t plan in advance. I encountered a situation in Chik village when the school and community received a heart breaking result as a consequence of a donor decision not to support their school construction because of its location (too remote and hard to transport construction materials in the rainy season). Originally the fund was raised to help only Chik school construction. After consultation with local educational authorities and community we decided to divide Au$5,950 to support 2 districts: Au$4,950 [about 39,105,000 kip] to Phonthong and Au$1,000 [about 7,920,000 kip] to Sing districts.

As the fund raising was initially started from Chik school, a large amount of money would go to support Chik school and the remaining would support other schools based on their needs. On the day we went to Chik village, the community was waiting for us and kept calling a District Education Bureau deputy director to find out what time we were coming and how
much they would receive because they had to prepare a formal agreement. At Chik village 25,000,000 kip was presented to a village chief and a school principal in front of community members. This amount was considered to be a huge amount for the community and the school, which they didn’t expect and never received such a huge amount of money before. As indicated in Bill’s e-mail, the community decided to renovate their kindergarten and they would provide labour and local materials including wood. This donation was a big relief for the community and school and it was only enough to start with the foundation of the kindergarten classrooms. However, it was a remarkable memory to see how happy the local people were when they received the money. Bill and I felt like we brought magic to the village. The hand-over was well-documented signed by me, the village chief and in witness of DEB deputy director (see the attachment).

On the same day we handed over 14,500,000 kip to Koung school. Like Chik village, the school and community in Koung village didn’t know how much money they would receive from us. They only expected about 2,000,000 kip from us. However, the amount they received was the biggest fund they ever had. The previous donation was only 8,000,000 kip (from a teacher’s relative who live in the US). The school and community planned to use money to put doors and windows in the classroom, build a classroom floor and dig an underground well for students and teachers so they can have clean drinking water. The community insisted that we should join them for a small celebration as they cooked four ducks, offered us some fresh coconut juice and water melon as well as some beautiful wishes. The hand-over was well-documented signed by me, the village chief and in witness of DEB deputy director (see the attachment).

In Sing district I handed over Au$1000 [about 7,920,000 kip] and €150 [about 1,642,500 kip from my brother in-law and his friends who have worked for European Union in Morocco] to five schools as follows:
1. Namai school 1,915,000 kip
2. Houaylongmai School 1,915,000 kip
3. Chome school 1,912,500 kip
4. Houaylongkao school 1,910,000 kip
5. Houaylouangpasang school 1,910,000 kip
In total 9,562,000 kip
The donation given to each school was considered to be a significant amount for the schools in rural remote areas. The schools and community didn’t know that I would give them some money. I didn’t have time to visit each school so I handed the money to the school principals and village chiefs at my workshop at Namai school. The hand-over was witnessed by the DEB officials and all participants. I asked the principals and village chief to sit together and write their agreement how they would use the given money. The following lists were a summary of their plan to use the money donated (See agreement signed by the researcher, school principal and village chief with red stamp in witness of the DEB official for details of their plan and activities for using the money given).

- Purchasing textbooks and teacher manuals
- Purchasing notebooks for students
- Building toilets
- Buying sport equipment
- Buying stationery such as A4 paper, pen, pencils, scissors, bush papers, scotch tape, markers, colour pencils, buckets for fetching water, hand towels…etc.
- Fixing school furniture such as tables and benches
- Buying filing cabinets
- Fixing school roofs
- Buying trees to plant around schools

I told people in two districts that I would go back to check progress how they would spend the money to improve their schools. After six months I hope to provide you a follow up report on their progress.

Once again thank you very much for your support. It was good the fund given directly to school and they planned to use it based on their actual needs.

Best wishes,
Daravone
საქალაქო ადგილი: თბილისი რაიონი
სახელი: ლეთგვარი გირიქიში
თარიღი: 04/07/11

გარემო: თბილისი რაიონი. გირიქიში დარჯაა. ადგილი მიღწევა ფართო და რავლით.

იდგა: ნათაეთ. მარჯვენა მინრიმში.

სახელი: ართიანი.

სახელი: 25.000.000.000 ლ. (ლურჯი წამოქმედ)

ჯერი: ჯომხრის თავშები. ქართული ტყით. საშუალებით მეტი ხმა, თანდათან მოხდუ.

თანამდებობა: კონტაქტითან დახმარება 0-5 წლაში შეეხება მათ თანამდებობა.

პირველი სტრატეგია: თბილისი რაიონი გამოჩენილი მაღალმთის მიზნით.

თარიღი: 20/07/11

1. თავმჯერად გამოჩენა

2. ადგილობრივი დამუშავება

შემდგომ პერიოდში სამთავრობო ჯგუფ

1. თავმჯერად გამოჩენა

2. ადგილობრივი დამუშავება