

Statement

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Minister of Education and Sports
SEAMEO Ministerial Policy e-Forum (SMPeF)
Theme: Education in a Post COVID-19 World

Thursday, 18th June 2020, Vientiane Time: 10:00-12:00

- Excellencies, Ministers,
- Dr. Ethel Agnes Pascua-Valenzuela, Director of SEAMEO Secretariat
- Distinguished participants,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR I am delighted to have been invited to participate in the SEAMEO Ministerial Policy e-Forum (SMPeF) on the theme: Education in a Post COVID-19 World. First of all, I would like to update you all on the COVID-19 outbreak situation in Lao PDR. Like other countries, Lao PDR has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with the first case confirmed on 23rd March 2020. All schools and educational institutions in Laos have been closed on 19th March, three days before the first case was confirmed. Education functionally resumed on 15th May 2020.. This period without education has disrupted the face to face learning of 1,708,501 students enrolled in the pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary and for students in technical-vocational schools/educational institutions throughout the country. The main disruption pertains to the second half of school year 2019-2020. A more prolonged school closure could further put children and young peoples' learning and social well-being at risk. The physical protection of students and education staff from infection from COVID-19 remains the main priority. To date the cumulative number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Lao PDR remains at 19 , with all patients subsequently discharged from the hospital as of the 9th June 2020 without a mortality. Fortunately no new cases have been diagnosed over the last 50 days.

In accordance with the questions that have been posed, I would like to share the experiences of the Ministry of Education and Sports of Lao PDR in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as follows:

1. How did the ministers prepare and manage the whole education system during the disruptions caused by COVID-19?

The COVID-19 outbreak is a rapidly evolving global public health crisis. As such , most governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and save the lives of children and young people while protecting instructors, teachers and professors. We ensured the safety of our children, students, instructors, teachers and professors by closing educational facilities during this period. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the entire Lao education and sport sectors, , with more than one and a half million students staying at home. In order to prepare and manage the education system for this disruption, the Ministry of Education and Sports has established the Ministry's Taskforce against COVID-19 working alongside with the National Taskforce against

COVID-19. These taskforces are under the guidance of the Lao government. In response, the Ministry of Education and Sports advised the closing of schools and sport activities throughout the country for both public and private education institutions from early childhood education to higher education from 19th March 2020. The Ministry of Education understands that the situation for overall education in Laos will be more difficult in times ahead after the first case confirmed of COVID-19 was confirmed.. Hence, the Ministry of Education has two priorities: (1) making sure every single student, teacher and educational staff remain safe and (2) motivating the educational institutions to continue to provide continuity of learning through creating new pathways of learning through distance and online learning opportunities. For example, the education and sports satellite television channel has been established and has broadcast programs to the public from 9th May 2020. This channel was a successful and alternative learning approach used during the lockdown, and reached out to remote schools and students. The satellite television has continued to be used as a form of supplementary learning for students since schools have reopened in May 15th 2020.

2. How did the ministers ensure that the learning takes place, regardless if the learners are in the schools or in their homes?

The COVID-19 pandemic and school closures have made it clear that there is great need for developing distance and online learning materials that can support students in their learning in the case of emergencies and as a means of catching up as part of restarting their schooling. To keep the education continuity and to ensure that the learning takes place, the Ministry of Education and Sports of Lao PDR has advised schools and education institutions to apply a remote learning practice at home including assigning homework to students on a weekly basis, and using distance learning from TV and radio programs developed by the Ministry as well as online learning. These learning activities were sent directly to parents or guardians for the early grades, for the higher grades teachers sent homework to student directly. During the lockdown parents and guardians played a significant role in communications between teachers and students, as well as contributing to educational purpose as a whole. In addition, many schools and educational institutions have used various digital means to deliver education such as Skype, What'sApp, Facebook, messenger, App's meeting, Youtube, video...etc.

For the education in rural remote areas, particularly in mountainous areas of Northern provinces, we allowed teachers to organize small groups of students gathering together to provide guidance on learning using digital communications in combination with raising awareness of COVID-19. All learning activities complied with government advices and the National Taskforce against COVID-19 measures.

The Ministry of Education and Sports has recently developed teaching videos and a radio programme to broadcast through the National Television Channel 1 three

times a week nationwide on selected subjects such as Lao language, English and Mathematics with the primary and secondary curriculum. These videos are also shared through Edu-sport TV online. The Ministry of Education and Sports also developed a webpage for disseminating these resources and COVID-19 infection prevention messages. However, there remains a great need for developing additional learning materials for the immediate and long term in managing and maintaining the delivery of education services during emergencies and furthering regular school education.

3. What are the good practices and solutions that redirected the teacher, educators and learners to continue learning despite the school lockdown?

- Firstly, developing and providing various alternative learning methods for students who live in different context, was successfully created and introduced, while adhering to the curriculum;
- Secondly, using the ICT (Information, Communication and Technology) and digital communications in combination with traditional teaching and learning practices was successfully received and should be considered to be continued to be included in each education system;
- Thirdly, investing in building the capacity of in-service and pre-service teachers on the 21st century skills such as ICT, “computational thinking” and STEM skills is central to furthering and improving educational delivery.

4. What is the reimaged future and how do the ministers transit from the education disruption to the post-COVID-19 world?

- All in all, the outbreak of COVID-19 could be a good opportunity to reflect on the prevention, mitigation and response plan of the education sector to future pandemic situations for our country. Preparing the educational personnel in conducting education in emergency situations for children and young adults from early childhood to adulthood education should be emphasized and be maintained. Investing in and utilizing technology in education should be encouraged.
- The concept of ‘new normal’ will be subsumed into the educational agenda, whereby educational administrators from the central to local level should be well trained in hygiene and sanitation prevention methods and how to cope with Disaster/Hazards in education institutes. These measure should be embedded as routine management tasks, and teachers need to be aware on how to mainstream these important changes into learning activities and for educational purposes.

Last but not least

- We noticed that the SEAMEO centres have abundant learning resources both for individuals and materials particularly relevant to organizing teaching-learning during the emergency. We hope that we could further enhance

cooperation in provision of suitable materials for emergency situations and by incorporating high quality ICT programs into the educational curriculum, and at the same time ensuring the material is engaging and of the highest quality, to improve education provision overall.