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INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY
SERVICES
REFERENCES

EDUCATION
KINGDOM OF LAOS

Back in the 14th Century, Hinayana (Theravada or Way of the Elders) Buddhism was introduced to Laos when King Fa-Ngoum (1353-73) married the daughter of the King of neighboring Cambodia. The land of the Lao then was called the Kingdom of Lané Xang or Land of the Million Elephants. Through the centuries, invasions and wars and the interrelationships of the different peoples of Southeast Asia brought many changes in control over and size of the realm. By 1707, it was split between the Kingdoms of Luang-Prabang in the north and Vientiane in the south. By 1831, the Chinese Empire exercised sovereignty over Luang-Prabang through the An-Namense (people of the Pacified South or Viet-Namense) and Vientiane was a Province of Siam. When the Siamese moved into Luang-Prabang, an appeal to the French Republic resulted in a French Vice-Consulship being established in February 1887. Then Vientiane became a French Colony. With the Franco-Siamese Treaty of October 3, 1893, Luang Prabang became a French Protectorate. Both parts of the Land of the Lao were a component of the French Indo-Chinese Federation in 1899. World War II brought temporary ceding of two Provinces to Thailand on March 11, 1941 and occupation by the Japanese on March 9, 1945.

When the Chinese disarmed the Japanese, they established a Government in the northern part of Laos on September 2, 1945. After return of the French and Chinese withdrawal, a Franco-Laotian modus vivendi was signed on August 27, 1946 which led to promulgation of the May 11, 1947 Constitution of the Kingdom of Laos and preparations for Gradual transfer of responsibility from the French to the Lao. The July 19, 1949 Franco-Laotian Convention recognized the independence of Laos which became an associated State in the French Union on February 2, 1950. Laotian soil was invaded in April 1953 by the communist Viet-Minh. A military agreement on cessation of Hostilities was signed in Geneva on July 20, 1954 leaving the communists in control of most of the northeastern Provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua until an October 1957 compromise resulted in reassertion of National sovereignty over these areas. Completion of the transfer of sovereign functions from the French to the Lao occurred under terms of the Paris Agreements of December 29, 1954. On September 29, 1956, a revised text of the constitution was adopted and became effective 15 days after promulgation.

Under that instrument, the King is the "supreme head of the State" charged with exercising National sovereignty of the people, "in conformity" with Constitutional provisions. "Buddhism is the State religion" with the King-- who "must be a fervent Buddhist"--as its "High Protector." The King's Council, to advise on legislative proposals and assist in other ways, is appointed by the Crown with half the members being designated by the National Assemblée.

Like Deputies and Ministers, the Kings Counselors may "initiate laws. "Royal authority is exercised "through the intermediary" of the Ministers. The King "designates" the President of the Council of Ministers (Prime Minister) who forms the only after a vote of confidence of the National Assembly." The National assembly, "elected every five years by universal suffrage, "has a Standing Committee which continues to function after closing of a session with authority "to control Government operations." The "law guarantees the independence of the judiciary authority in relation to the legislative and executive authority." Under Constitutional Article 6, "The official language is the Lao language." As a matter of policy, the Royal Government retained French as its language of international communication and provided for French as well as Lao in the school curriculum.

Official Bodies Concerned with Education. - The Ministry of National Education (Ministere de L'Education National) functions under the general direction of a member of the Council of Ministers--the Minister (Ministre) of National Education. Repositories of the intellectual heritage and teachers of the people traditionally were the senior Buddhist monks (bonzes) and some former religious leaders who had resumed lay status. In the pagoda--the center of community life--were the monastery, the sanctuary, and the frequently opensided pavilion (hocherk). The latter was used for classes and other community activities as well as religious services. In the Protectorate era, French authorities initially handled responsibility for education thry introduced with the help of An-Namesse staff, and Buddhist leaders continued with pagoda schools. When the Bonze Teacher Training School was founded in Vientiane in 1909, steps were taken to integrate the first (3-year) cycle of primary schooling with the Government system. By 1916, village 3-year primary schools began to be established followed later with a few second (3-year) cycle programs introduced at the primary level. The first 3-year secondary course based on the 6-year primary program was established in Vientiane in 1921. With addition of another year in 1924, this institution became the first secondary "college".

Dislocations of war left the Nation with few schools, few teachers, and few textbooks at the time of independence. The French Cultural Mission continued to handle most educational matters until the Franco-Lao Cultural Agreement was signed on February 6, 1950. Then the Royal Government assumed general jurisdiction over primary education. Shortly before the Paris agreements of December 29, 1954, (promulgated by the President of the Council of Ministers) established organization for the Ministry of National Education and of Sports and Youth.

An Office of Director-General of National Education was established in the Ministry in 1956 and Order No. 356/PC of December 21, 1956 made Ministry organization the subject of re-planning. With the cooperation of the first UNESCO Mission, the Ministry presented its March 1957 Five Year Plan for educational development to the central authority concerned with domestic development and related foreign aid--the Planning Office. Secondary education remained under French guidance until April 13, 1957 when a new Franco-Lao Cultural Agreement was signed.

With this action, the Ministry assumed responsibility over official and nongovernmental education in the Nation with the French Republic furnishing teaching staff on request of the Royal Government. When Sports and Youth activities were transferred to the Ministry of National Defense in 1957, the name of the education Ministry became Ministry of National Education. In addition to the Planning Office, various Ministries have responsibilities related to education:

Finance--integration of budgets on or related to education into the National budget

Interior--with each Province (Khouang) being under a Provincial Governor (Chaokhouang) who distributes instructions from the various parts of the Government, including the Ministry of National Education National Defense--with a National Military Academy established in Dong Hene in 1951.

Public Works--school construction and maintenance with guidance from the Ministry of National Education, and Religious Affairs--religious instruction in pagoda schools.

Article 21 of the Constitution states that "The President of the Council (of Ministers) and each of the ministers direct one or more ministerial departments..." For example, the Minister of National Education simultaneously has held such other portfolios as Public Health and Religious Affairs. When a new Government is formed, a new Royal Decree is promulgated concerning distribution of portfolios and related functions among the Ministers.

Under Constitutional Article 19, the King's designee for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers names Ministers for appointment by Crown "after a vote of confidence of the National Assembly..." Before assuming office, Government members are required to take a specified loyalty "oath at the principal pagoda of Vientiane..." In the executive branch, Ministers are responsible to the President of the Council of Ministers. Term of office is indefinite and depends on National Assembly confidence.

Articles 20-23 include provisions related to qualifications, responsibilities, and rights of Ministers. "There is no incompatibility between the office of member of the Government and the mandate of Deputy" except that Deputies "serving as members of the Government or being candidates for such office may not participate in the vote of confidence or in votes on motions of censure." Ministers "direct one or more ministerial departments and can initiate laws." They are responsible before the National Assembly collectively for the general policy and individually for their personal acts." National Assembly refusal "to accord its confidence to the Government, or the vote of a motion of censure, involves the resignation of the entire Government" with the resigning Government assuming "conduct of current affairs until the installation of the new government". Government members "are legally responsible for crimes and offenses committed in the exercise of their functions" and "may be indicted by the National Assembly and tried by the King's Council acting as a High Court of Justice within the conditions fixed by law." Under Article 29, National Assembly Deputies may "constitute

special committees to handle all inquiries and investigations in the various administration and public services." Article 37 precludes a Minister from being a King's Counselor,

Organization.—To advise the Government, the Minister of National Education, and the Ministry, there is an Advisory Committee for Education. In addition to the Minister of National Education as Chairman, the Minister of Religious Affairs, and the former Ministers of National Education, the Advisory Committee for Education includes representatives of Buddhist religious leadership, the King's Council, and the National Assembly. It may have working committees under the chairmanship of the Director-General of National Education. Such working committees have authority to call upon expert assistance in dealing with various National Education projects.

Assisting the Minister of National Education are an Office of the Minister and Permanent and Private Secretariats. Under the Minister's general supervision is the Director-General of National Education who is responsible for Ministry operations. Under the Director General of National Education are (1) Administrative Offices concerned with accounting, files and correspondence, foreign relations, personnel, plans and projects, social work, and for the main branches of education:

Primary and Adult Education—including responsibility for the basic education campaign and foreign aided Pilot School programs Secondary Education—concerned with administration of most of the secondary schools--an Apprentice School in Savannakhet and in Vientiane, the Lycee Pavie and the Teacher Training School at Vientiane, a Provincial "College" (secondary level) in each of 5 Provinces (Luang-Prabang, Pakse, Savannakhet, Thakhek, and Xieng-Khouang), and the Technical School in Vientiane Teacher Training--Other than that under the Department of Secondary education, and Higher Education—to plan for department of the National institution of higher learning

In the evolving organizational plan, other bodies under the Director-General of Education serve in a liaison capacity with the Departments:

Fine Arts Office—with the Literacy Committee forming the nucleus for a Lao Academy of Fine Arts

Libraries and Museums Office—with the projected National Library and National Museum to be attached, and National Institute of Research—with the related National Center of Education as a first step and serving as teacher training institution and a university nucleus.

For each Province or group of Provinces, there is an Inspector-General acting as the Ministry's representative on educational matters assisted by one or more inspectors.

Authority, Responsibility, and Functions. — Among "duties" of Laotians specified in the preamble of the 1947 constitution were "attention to work and education, integrity and observation of the law." These duties were reaffirmed in the 1956 revision. Other policy on or affecting education is established in National Assembly Laws, Royal Orders, Orders of the President of the Council of Ministers, Education Decisions and Circulars of the Minister of National Education, Regulations, and related changes. Among them are:

Order No. 6 of January 27, 1949 promulgating the Civil Service Law related to recruitment, appointment (with a 2-year probationary service prior to confirmation), promotion (with education personnel in cadet and higher grades being appointed and promoted by Royal Order and in secondary and junior grades by Education Division) and retirement.

Orders No. 19 and 20/CR of July 7, 1950 No. 26/CR of July 13, 1950, No. 33/CR of July 18, 1950, No. 241/64 of September 19, 1951, No. 140 and 141 of April 20, 1954, Decision No. 244/ED of July 21, 1954, and Order No. 34 of February 18, 1957, establishing (1) posts for National Education including Ministry personnel at Headquarters and field staff such as assistant inspectors, primary school inspectors, primary school teachers, student teachers, teachers qualified by license or certificate (who also are employed as school administrators), and other (auxiliary or supplementary) teachers; (2) qualifying examination requirements after probationary service; and (3) pay rates

Law No. 12 of April 9, 1951, promulgated by Royal Order No. 112 of April 26, 1951:

Article 1. Elementary primary education (first 3-year cycle) in Laos shall be compulsory and free for Laotian children of both sexes who are over the age of 6. It can be provided either in official schools, or in regularly established private schools.

Article 2. Every community situated within a radius of 1 kilometre from an official school shall be liable to compulsory education.

Article 3. All supplies of material and labor for the building of schools shall be furnished by all the persons registered within a radius of 5 kilometres.

Article 4. Every village possessing an elementary school shall maintain adequately at its own expense, the school, the furniture and the master's lodging.

Article 5. Any infringement of the obligations laid down in the present Law shall render the offender, after a warning, liable to a fine of 20 kip.

In the event of the offense being repeated, a fine of double that amounts all be imposed.

Law No. 108 of January 26, 1952 amending the 1951 Law by inserting the following at the beginning of Article 2:

Every village agglomeration having a sufficient number of pupils to justify the establishment of an elementary school, and every Tasseng (group of villages under an elected administrator), shall, so far as the budget permits, be provided with an official elementary primary school.

Order No. 217 of August 23, 1952 on Provincial administration under the Ministry of the Interior

Decisions No. 130/ED and 131/ED of April 27, 1954 establishing duties of Governing Bodies for secondary schools

Circulars No. 442/ED of April 12 and No. 502/ED of April 27, 1955 defining duties of teaching advisory committees for secondary schools

Order No. 351/89 CR of October 19, 1954 on partial or total boarding awards, non-boarding maintenance grants, and subsidiary awards to laotian pupils in Government schools

Order No. 167/PC of June 24, 1955 on functions of secondary school principals and responsibility to the Provincial Governor for certain local matters and to the Director of the Ministry's Department of Secondary Education for technical matters

Order of June 30, 1958 providing for a National University in Vientiane (named after King Sisavang Vong and administratively under the Minister of National Education) to include a certain number of schools (such as a School of Medicine), centers (such as the National Center of Political Science, Administration, and Law), and constituent organs

Decision No. 394/ED of August 11, 1958 on the Pilot Schools Program to introduce new educational influences into the primary school system through the experimental method and with foreign aid, and

Order of the President of the Council of Ministers of March 1959 concerning the National Center of Education then under construction.

Within the legal framework, the annual National budget for education developed in the first instance by the Director-General of National Education after taking into account Provincial budget proposals submitted by primary school inspectors through the Provincial Governors. The Minister adds items for administrative staff and the like and presents the total proposal for staff and materials to the Minister of Finance.

The Minister also collaborates with the Minister of Public Works in developing the budget for school construction and maintenance appearing in the latter's budget proposals. After integration into the total National budget, the Minister of Finance forwards the estimates to the National Assembly for action.

Courses of study, curriculums, and school schedules are prepared in the Ministry with the advisory assistance of foreign aid missions and primary school inspectors. They include provision for certain modifications at the primary level to meet local conditions, Inspectors check the schools for conformance to policy while the Director-General of National Education and other Ministry staff make brief visits to rural schools throughout, the Nation to show National interest in their development. The Ministry regulates employment conditions of school personnel and the system of pupil promotions in keeping with Civil Service Law and pertinent Orders. It has responsibility for enforcement of compulsory education as school facilities become available. Bilateral and multilateral assistance is sought by the Ministry to help meet textbook needs.

Nongovernmental (Private) schools come under Ministry control in keeping with Government Regulations. The Ministry authorizes the opening of such institutions, the appointment of their teachers, and may order school closure for failure to follow Regulations. Primary school inspectors have authority to inspect these schools. Courses of study are recognized as "equivalent" to courses at the same stage in Government supported schools.

Prior to its closure at the time of Japanese occupation on March 9, 1945 the Indo-Chinese University at Hanoi in Viet-Nam served Laos as well as Cambodia and Viet-Nam. Under the July 20, 1954 Geneva military agreement, this University came within the territory of the Northern Zone of Viet-Nam under communist control. Pending development of further education under Sisavang Vong University, Laotian students are sent under Government sponsorship to institutions in Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, the French Republic, the Italian Republic, Japan, the United States of America, and other countries, Some study under bilateral or multilateral scholarship programs or under foreign college or university scholarships. Government scholarships come under the control of a Scholarship Committee in keeping with Royal Order No. 351/89 CR of October 19, 1954. The Minister of National Education is Chairman of the Committee.

The Ministry has operating responsibility for Government supported schools and control responsibility over nongovernmental school, rural center educational activities (3-year primary course for children and classes for adults) and village schools. The nucleus projects and programs for libraries and museums come within its province. Ministry activities allied to research relate to the provision of information to intergovernmental organizations such as the International Bureau of Education and UNESCO and to technical assistance programs under the Colombo Plan, the United Nations and affiliated Specialized Agencies, and the United States International Technical Cooperation Administration.

to intergovernmental conferences such as those of the International Bureau of Education and of UNESCO. A UNESCO Mission serves in an advisory capacity to the Minister and the Ministry. Proposals for bilateral and multilateral technical assistance are prepared by the Ministry and transmitted through the Planning Office. Laotian participation in foreign scholarship programs and approval of candidates for intergovernmental, foreign Government, or foreign university scholarships are made by the Ministry. Its Foreign Relations Office is the liaison with foreign aid missions and services the National Commission for UNESCO.

Administration. -- The administrative Bulletin of Laos (Le Bulletin Administratif du Laos) contains texts of Laws and Orders. The Ministry of National Education sends instructions relating to education to Provincial Governors for distribution to the Provincial Inspectors - general, other inspectors, the Provincial districts (muongs) and school personnel. At the secondary level, instructions are transmitted through the Provincial Governors with heads of secondary schools being directly responsible to the Department of Secondary Education on technical matters. The Advisory Committee for Education and the various foreign aid missions advise the Minister and the Ministry on educational plans and projects. An Inter-Ministerial Committee for National Rural Development Through Fundamental Education provides advice to the Ministry.