

Kingdom of Laos
Ministry of National Education
Vientiane

FOR UNESCO

Report on Laos

Technical Seminar on Wastage and Student
Drop-outs.

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Introduction

This study is mostly based on the statistics of elementary education compiled for a ten year period from 1956 to 1965.

The problem of pupil wastage and drop-outs is a typical problem for Asian countries and for developing countries generally. This problem certainly exists in Laos. It is mostly conditioned by the social and economic problems of the country.

To have a better understanding of the Laotian problem it would be useful to recall the main factors on which the school attendance depends. These are population and the general economy.

1 Demographic Factors

From an estimate of UNESCO missions the Laotian population has been approximately as follows:

Table 1 Population of Laos

1956	2,092,000	1961	2,400,000
1957	2,140,000	1962	2,460,000
1958	2,210,000	1963	2,542,000
1959	2,260,000	1964	2,680,000
1960	2,322,000	1965	2,825,000

The Laotian population is increasing and will continue to increase rapidly.

But - the infant mortality is still important, being 35 per 1000 among the

children old enough to go to school (less than 15 years old) against 28 per 1000 for the total population.

II Economic Factor

The economy and the resources of Laos, a land-locked country, are until now, very poorly developed. About 86 percent of the population are farmers, usually half-educated; only 4 percent belong to the secondary (manufacturing) sector and 10 percent to tertiary sector of the economy (i.e. service and commerce).

As most of the population live in farm areas, the need of child labor is still very important. The Laotian children traditionally help their parents in the fields.

Later on we shall return to this problem in more detail.

Table II
Number of Pupils by Grade from
1956 to 1965

A - Total

Fiscal Year	P.1	P.2	P.3	P.4	P.5	P.6	Total
1956	39,789	15,371	9,981	4,062	3,232	2,732	75,167
1957	33,925	18,064	13,273	5,354	3,441	3,147	77,204
1958	43,447	18,290	19,447	5,885	4,233	4,655	95,957
1959	40,109	20,454	18,433	9,089	6,181	5,036	99,302
1960	37,201	19,152	14,593	8,889	6,203	5,270	91,313
1961	37,279	17,431	14,189	8,130	6,006	5,277	88,321
1962	52,462	20,089	14,630	9,006	6,249	5,769	108,603
1963	57,980	22,446	15,168	8,949	6,262	5,980	117,111
1964	62,757	24,988	17,196	9,779	6,758	6,238	128,040
1965	67,008	28,807	20,895	12,115	8,298	7,279	144,769

Table II Continue

B- Boys

Fiscal Year	P-1	P-2	P-3	P-4	P-5	P-6	Total
1956	29,167	11,320	7,363	3,064	2,469	2,093	55,476
1957	24,001	12,945	10,011	3,932	2,624	2,365	55,881
1958	30,825	12,877	14,417	4,316	3,211	3,623	69,269
1959	27,820	13,312	13,180	6,895	4,850	3,926	69,983
1960	24,254	12,721	10,394	6,398	4,714	3,941	62,422
1961	24,821	10,566	8,890	4,868	4,139	3,603	56,887
1962	33,690	12,852	9,533	6,151	4,361	3,999	71,034
1963	37,564	14,268	10,042	6,045	4,273	4,174	76,544
1964	39,503	16,096	11,285	6,588	4,589	4,386	82,612
1965	41,698	18,500	13,736	8,281	5,821	5,225	93,449
	62.22%	60.76%	65.73%	68.35%	70.16%	71.78%	64.82%

C- Girls

1956	10,622	4,051	2,618	998	763	639	19,691
1957	9,924	5,119	3,259	1,422	817	782	21,323
1958	12,622	5,413	5,030	1,569	1,022	1,032	26,688
1959	22,289	7,142	5,253	2,194	1,331	1,110	29,319
1960	12,947	6,431	4,199	2,491	1,494	1,329	26,891
1961	12,458	6,865	5,299	3,262	1,867	1,674	31,425
1962	18,502	7,237	5,097	2,915	1,888	1,770	37,569
1963	20,416	8,178	5,126	2,904	1,989	1,806	40,567
1964	23,254	8,892	5,911	3,391	2,169	1,852	45,428
1965	25,310	10,307	7,159	3,834	2,477	2,054	51,320
	37.78%	39.24%	34.27%	31.65%	29.86%	28.22%	35.18%

III Primary Education

We must give some explanation of the system of the Primary Education in our country, to understand the different problems about pupil wastage and drop-outs. Children 6 to 14 years of age are subject to compulsory education.

For economic and financial reasons the law of 1951 fixes compulsory education at completion of six years, which means that the young Laotian child must have completed all the elementary grades before he may leave school.

Our elementary education is divided in two cycles, three years for each. During the first cycle, called primary cycle, the teaching is done only in Lao. In the second cycle, they start to have 8 to 10 hours of French each week, so the pupils can pass the examination at the end of the elementary training. In the competitive examination to enter the 7th grade, almost all the tests are still given in French. The primary schools (3 years of study: P.1, P.2, and P.3) are quite numerous in the rural areas, though the schools which have 6 complete years of study or "Groupe Scolaire" are not so widely distributed. Only in the urban centers do we have "Groupe Scolaire". For example, in 1964-65 there were 169 "Groupe Scolaires" (6 years: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6) and 2320 primary schools (3 years).

The primary schools represent 72% of all the elementary institutions of the Kingdom, which means that the complete elementary education is mostly for the towns and is not available to the children who live in the villages.

The analysis of table II shows, at first sight, a regular increase of enrollment for both boys and girls, except in 1960 and 1961. During the

period many schools were closed because of political and military events in the country. A few hundred elementary schools, including 25 "Groupes Scolaires" passed out from the control of the Ministry of Education those two years. But since 1962 the number of schools and the number of pupils have increased. Nevertheless, the actual development of Elementary education impeded by the following factors:

- a) Lack of qualified teachers.
- b) Shortage of suitable equipment.
- c) Communication difficulties with the rural sectors
- d) Wastage and drop-outs of the pupils

It is this last point which interests us the most in this study.

The Importance of the Problem

The problems of the drop-outs and the repeaters are among the most important problems of education in Laos. It is not enough to enroll the largest possible number of children but it is necessary to see that all these children have an opportunity to carry on their studies, at least, up through the elementary grades as our present law is for 6 years of compulsory education.

The figures on size of classes in table II, show that 39,789 pupils were in P1 in 1956. But those reaching P6 in 1961 numbered only 5,277. Therefore there is a wastage of 85% during the six years of study. We can ^{see} another example. For 1960, 37,201 pupils were in P1 and in 1965 only 7,279 were enrolled in P6, a loss of 80.70%. These losses are really surprising. But it is much the same for all developing countries. Another surprising

phenomenon is, for example, that there were 62,757 pupils in P1 in 1964 and that in 1965 there were only 28,807 pupils in P2. Thus, there is a very important loss between the first and the second year of study: (54.15%).

Table III. Percentage of Loss in the Number of Pupils

<u>Total</u>			
<u>Year</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1956	P1	39,789)	85.60%
1961	P6	5,277)	
1960	P1	37,201)	80.70%
1965	P6	7,279)	
<u>Boys</u>			
<u>Year</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1956	P1	29,167)	87.80%
1961	P6	3,603)	
1960	P1	25,254)	80.00%
1965	P6	5,225)	
<u>Girls</u>			
<u>Year</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1956	P1	30,622)	84.50%
1961	P6	1,674)	
1960	P1	12,947)	84.40%
1965	P6	2,054)	

Table II (A) shows another irregularity. In 1958 the number of pupils in P3 is higher than in P2 in 1957. This is certainly due to the fact that some pupils must have been kept back for a year in P3; because after three

years of study there is an examination at the end of the first cycle before entering P4.

On another hand, the reinstatement of two provinces, Sam Neua and Phongsaly in 1957-58 brings an important contribution in P3. We normally expect a delay or a drop-out of 15 to 20% from one year to another, but in our country it is much greater. It is very important for the seminar organized by the original office of UNESCO to take this problem into the consideration and to find a suitable solution. The pupil wastage and the drop-outs during the study are noticeable not only among the pupils, but also in comparison between boys and girls, between rural and urban sectors.

1. Comparisons between girls and boys

As shown by table II, for each grade, the relative numbers of boys and girls are very different. In 1965 we have the following percentages:

Table IV

Percentage of Boys and Girls by Grade in 1965

<u>Sexes</u>	<u>P1</u>	<u>P2</u>	<u>P3</u>	<u>P4</u>	<u>P5</u>	<u>P6</u>	<u>Total</u>
Girls	37.78	39.24	34.27	31.65	29.86	28.22	35.18
Boys	62.22	60.76	65.73	68.35	70.14	71.78	64.82

This table shows the different percentages of girls and boys. There is an increase from P1 to P6 in the percentage of boys. Also there are more girls who are kept back for one year in the first classes than in those toward the end of the primary grades. For the boys it is the reverse. As they get

older, their school work is less satisfactory than that of the girls.

2. Comparisons between rural and urban sectors.

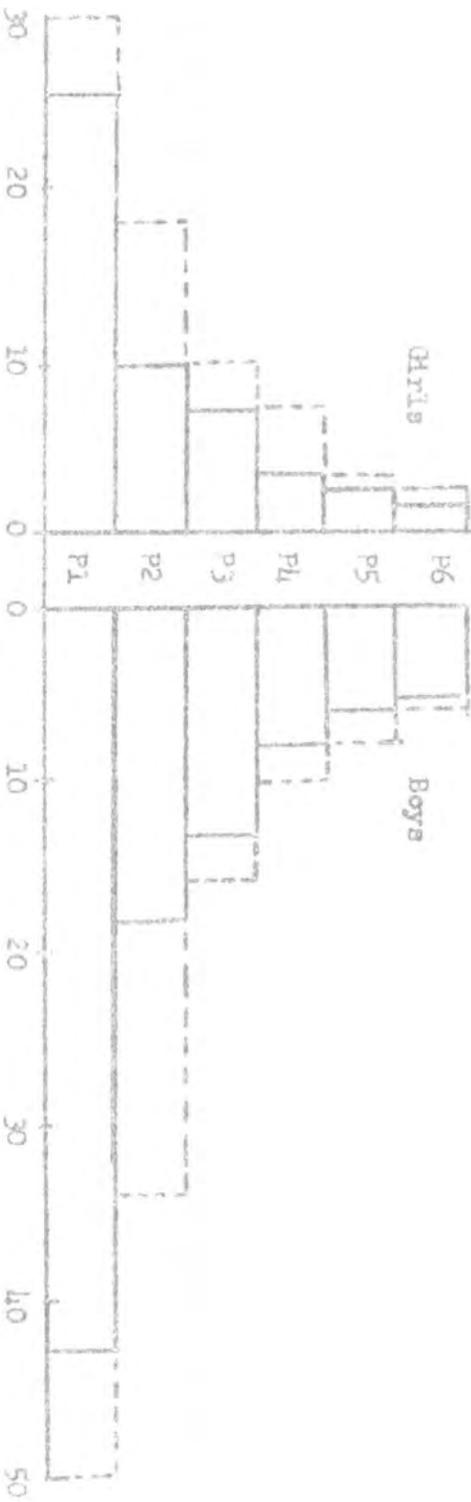
At the beginning of our report we said that the primary schools represented 72% of all the elementary schools of the Kingdom. This explains importance of the great number of pupils in the rural areas.

The schools in the big urban centers are mostly "Groupes Scolaires" with all six grades. For this reason we have the following percentage for 1965 for all elementary pupils.

Percentage of pupils in 1st cycle	80%
Percentage of pupils in 2nd cycle	20%
Percentage of pupils in urban centers	27%
Percentage of pupils in rural schools	73%

Though the loss and the repetition of a year are important in the urban centers, they are more so in the rural areas. There are about 33% of pupils who are repeaters in the rural schools against 20% in the urban centers.

Graph II



Pyramid of the size of Grade by sex and by year (In thousands)

Projected for 1970

Summary of Research Efforts

The Ministry of Education is well aware of the drop-out situation and is trying to find a way to resolve this problem in increasing the percentage of children in school according to the economic possibilities and reducing the wastage in the primary grades. Since 1962 the Reform Act of that year has been the basis of efforts to solve these problems. The main points of the act are:

- Extension as widely as possible of 3 years of education, starting with rural educational centers in the villages.

Training of teaching monks, who are very respected in the villages, and who do not cost anything to the government.

- Training of actual teachers, with pedagogical courses during the long vacations.
- Large scale publication and distribution of pupil books.
- Teaching by radio.
- Moderate extension of the 2nd cycle of education (in French) which must be of such quality that these pupils can continue into the secondary and higher education level (see graph II).

Orderly expansion of the complete schools "Groupes Scolaire" so that we can have 1 for 10 or 12 three-year primary schools.

These efforts seem to be well under way with the help of UNESCO which sends now and again its experts to check the efficiency of education in our country.

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- Karachi Plan.
- Report from the Rural Affairs Department, Ministry of Rural Affairs.
- Report from the Public Health Department, Ministry of Public Health.
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- Long-term projection of education in Laos, Bangkok, December 1964, UNESCO.

Analysis of Problems

In part A of this study we can review in a few words the problems which interest us:

- The wastage is more important in rural sectors than in urban ones.
- The repetition of the first year, is very important.
- The drop-outs during the schooling are more numerous in the villages than in the towns.

The percentage of loss between classes is higher among the girls than among the boys.

The motives are as follows:

1. Economic Problems

In the rural sectors, not many children go to school. Laotian parents use them as labor to work in the fields or to do the housekeeping. Their way of life is so that they have to keep at home at least, one of every three children. Though education in Laos is free of charge, the farmers still think that to send their children to school, costs them some expense. The children must be dressed properly, at home in the country-side they are almost naked. They must feed them or prepare their meals at regular hours. But when the children stay at home, they go fishing, help their parents and eat late.

During the harvest of December and January, their attendance at school is very low. Very often parents send their children to school in two groups: with five children they have they will send three of them for about three or four years so the children can write and read Laotian, then they leave school and the other two go

The Laotian farmer is not really poor, but he has a closed economy and has no money income or is not interested in trading. Thus he does not have money to buy what his children need to go to school.

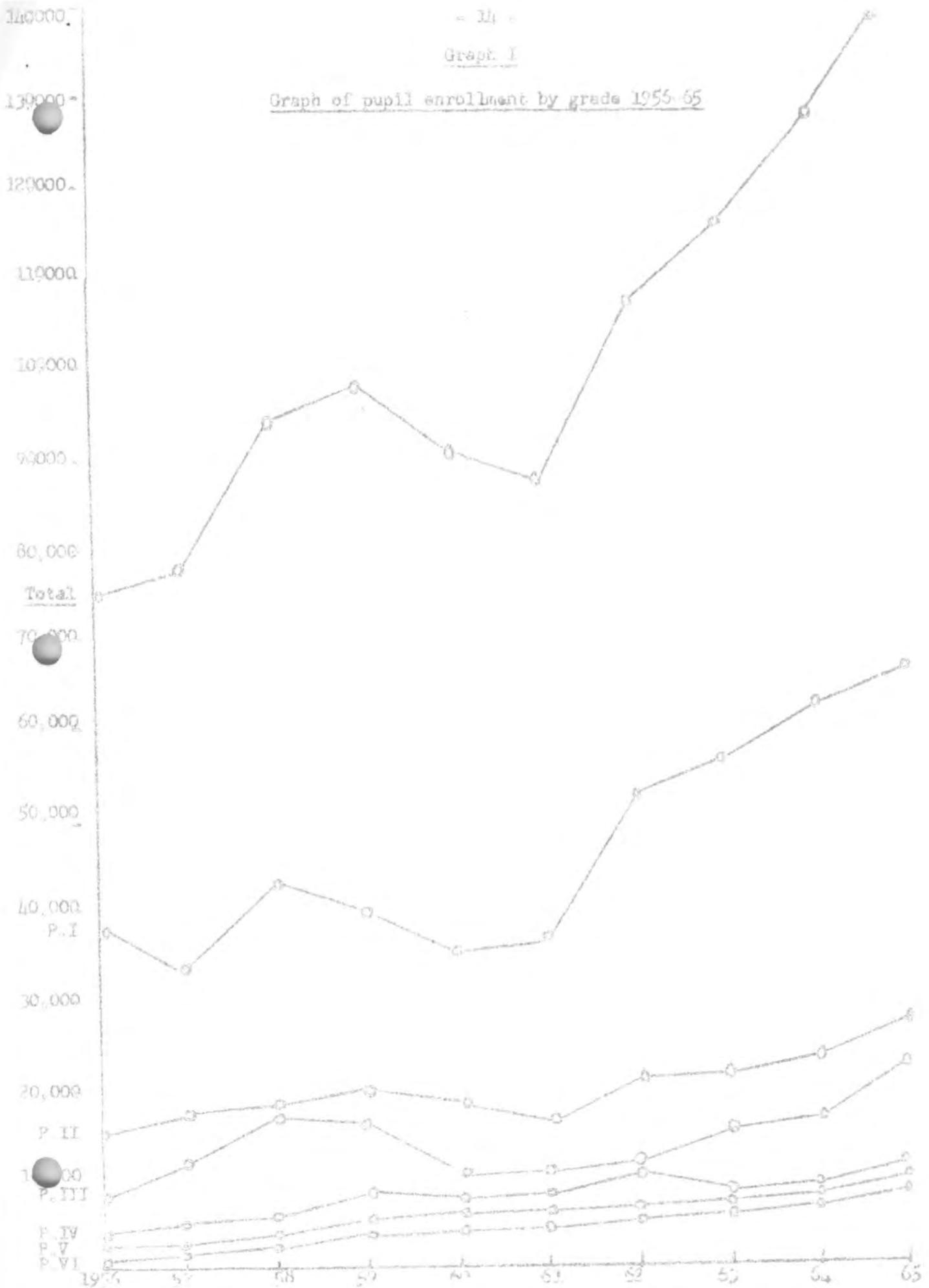
A child at home works for the family. But when he is at school, he will not have opportunity to work for the family and his efforts are wasted. This attitude still exists in the far-away sectors and the mountains where there are not many roads.

2. Social Problems

The parents not only do not send their children to school but they assist indirectly in increasing the wastage. The family's structure in Laos is very firm. The father is quite authoritative, the mother only does the house-keeping and takes care of children. The girls are not entitled to go to school as are the boys. In a family of six children, for example, with four boys and two girls, the latter will not go to school. They must help their parents.

Graph. I

Graph of pupil enrollment by grade 1955-65



In the rural areas the Laotian women are still considered as subordinate to their husbands. That is why in the country there are so few girls going to school. The Laotians are Buddhists; They have a very great faith in Buddha, and they prefer to send their children to the pagoda rather than to the public school.

Very often in the villages, the school is in the pagoda and the monks are the teachers. The girls, even when they are babies, are not allowed to come near or touch a monk. It is the tradition that the women are made to be good mothers and not "great erudites".

3- Sanitary Problems

Modern medicine is not very developed in the rural areas. Medical consultation does not exist in the schools. The infantile mortality rate is still high, 35 per 1000 in one year. If there are 35 children who die during the school year, there are more than 35 who leave school. Because when a brother or sister dies, surviving brothers or sisters are asked to stay with their parents.

On the other hand, the contagion of some illness is greater at school, where the children are all together, than in the family, in a Laotian village which is usually ventilated and clean, though the modern conditions of hygiene are not known. But the children's clothes and food are greatly neglected. The children who have work intellectually need more hygienic care than those who live in the natural. We think that is why there is a bigger wastage of children in the rural sectors.

4. Educational Problems

There are various problems. The three main ones are: the position of the family status, the material situation and the professional situation.

a) Position of the family status

If we look back on table LI (A) we can see what the difference in number of pupils between the 1st and 2nd years is very high (in 1965: 58.50%). This is caused by keeping the children for a second year in about 55% of the cases and there are about 65% more children in P1 since the rapid establishment of educational rural centers (CREC). The repetition of the first year is important because the children first come to school too old in the rural sectors and too young in the urban sectors. The age for admittance has been officially fixed at six years. But very often, in the towns, some parents bring their children who are not 6 years old, with false birth certificates. As there are ^{not} many kindergartens, parents do that to avoid having the children home during their working hours. When the children are admitted to the school, they have to be kept back for one year. But in the country the big children, not being able to work with the smaller ones, get discouraged, and after a few months, leave the school.

It is also difficult to obtain exact birth certificates in the villages, because they are not all checked. Often the births are not recorded right away. They start to establish identity certificates only when the teacher asks for them.

b) Material Situation

In the urban centers there is a nearly insurmountable crisis due to lack of school buildings. Though there is an increase of 3% annually in the number of classes in the towns, this falls behind the increase of pupils which is of 18-20%. This increase comes from the fact that many areas are unsafe and thus people come to the towns. To avoid refusing to receive the pupils, we use the half-day system, one session in the morning, one in the afternoon. We do that mostly for the lower grades.

Each pupil works for 4 or 5 hours per day. But that causes a repetition for one year and a big loss during the first primary cycle (40 to 54%). The classes are overcrowded. Sometimes there are 60 to 80 pupils in one class.

For example, the report below made by the Elementary School of Thongtoun (urban center of Vientiane): 1956-57

Name & Surname of the teachers	Category & Grade	Class	Number of Pupils
Thao Khao Sao	Xe Tri 10e	P1 - A	97
Nang One Chaob	" " 5e	P1 - B	90
Nang Sing	" " 6e	P2 - A	50
Thao Khao Sourivong	" " "	P3 - B	62
Thao Thong	" " 12e	P3 - A	48
Thi Souk	" " 12e	P3 - B	48

You cannot ask the teachers to obtain good results under these conditions. The national budget cannot meet all these needs. Only the assistance of other friendly countries can solve the problems.

In the country, the lack of buildings is unknown as the villagers build schools themselves, even if they are of light construction, within the capabilities of the village. But there it is difficult to get copy-books, pens, slates, etc... as there are no shops. All these things must be given by the government. And the transportation is difficult to some parts of the country.

Another important reason is that the salaries of the teaching staff in the elementary schools are very low compared with the salaries of the other members of the government.

There are not enough qualified applicants to be teachers. Because of the political situation of the country the teachers prefer to find something in other public sectors, more lucrative.

This last reason is in connection with professional motives:

Professional Situation

The professional capacity of the teachers of the primary cycle is low, due to an inheritance of the past.

Only 76% of the ministry teachers (not including emergency teachers) have the certificate based on completion of the primary cycle (6 years) plus 3 to 9 months of practical training. 78% have completed the first cycle

of secondary teaching DÉPC (10th grade) or something similar, and 2% only have completed secondary study (end of 3 more years). It is then difficult to obtain good results with teachers not properly qualified, especially for the teachers teaching in the first cycle. The training given during the holidays seems to improve their capacity. Also, to understand the causes of wastage and the drop-outs from our schools, we must consider the attitude of our civil authorities. If the chiefs of the villages, enforce the law concerning compulsory education, the parents would not go against it and would not dare to encourage dropping out by their children.

E Report On the Ameliorative Measures

The measures taken to reduce the number of drop-outs and repeaters are still very superficial:

- 1) Suspension several years ago of the examinations at the end of each year. Examinations are given only at the end of the 3rd and 6th years.
- 2) The fundamental educators organize meeting with the villagers, to persuade them that education is a necessary and that they should support the schools.
- 3) In some provinces, the civil authorities organize, with the help of the Rural Department, some courses concerning the citizen's civic duty, for the villager. Most of the subjects are about education of the country.
- 4) Conferences have been held concerning the problems of Mexicans' education.

F Suggestions

From what we have just studied the problem of wastage and drop-outs, is subordinate to the living conditions of the population. It would seem difficult to find common remedies for all the countries since they do not have the same social and economic problems.

Still we would like to make some suggestions such as:

1) Recommendations:

a) Educational

- That the teaching program should be adapted to the living conditions of the population.
- That pre-school education should be developed, especially in the urban centers.
- That books should be prepared in such a way that they would cause the children to want to go to the school.
- Try to adapt the organization of the rural school (holidays, time-tables, program) to the local and regional life.
- Make sure the teachers of the rural schools do not feel inferior to the teachers of the urban schools.

b) Family

- That collaboration with the family, which is so useful in school life, should be considered as essential. Meetings with parents, visits to their homes and their participation in the school activities, should be stimulated to create this collaboration.

- That doctors and teachers should be encouraged to spread the teaching of hygiene outside the school, so the grown-up people and the parents will be healthier. They should work the pupils' parents in this campaign for the sanitary, family, social education, using for that the mutual influence of the children with their parents.

That the collaboration between the family and the school should be stimulated; so the parents could help against the disobedience of the compulsory education law.

g) Administrative

-- That the civilian authorities should fight against non-compliance with the compulsory education law, using strong actions against the pupils' parents.

That the administration should organize campaigns showing the usefulness of education.

That effective action should be taken to remedy, as much as possible, the difficulties caused by distance - the scattering of the homes; better places for the school, transportations, school centers etc...

That the delivery of birth certificates should be undertaken as soon as possible.

h) Regional Collaborations

As the problem of wastage and drop-outs is very important, it would be desirable that the countries more advanced should make an effort to help the others with educational materials.

- It would be good to classify all regional countries according to their needs, so they could obtain special attention from other countries or International Organizations.
- To increase the admittance to the primary education, it would be good to study these problems regularly and have the help of experts in the eventual solution of these problems

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