Chapter 3

Introduction to Lao PDR and Thailand
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Lao - Country Profile

Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is located in the heart of the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia. It shares a border of 505 km long with China to the north, 435 km long with Cambodia to the south, 2,069 km long with Vietnam to the east, 1,835 long with Thailand to the west, and 236 km long with Myanmar to the northwest. The country stretches for 1,700 km north to south, with an east-west width of over 500 km at its widest and only 140km at the narrowest point. Lao PDR has a land area of 236,800 square kilometers, three-quarters of which is covered by mountains and plateau. It is a tropical country, with its weather being influenced by the monsoons which result in a rainy season from approximately May to October.

Figure 1.14: Map of Laos
Lao PDR was established in 1975, after the fall of the Kingdom of Laos, following decades of war. The Constitution of Lao PDR, which was promulgated in 1991, recognizes the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP) as the leading nucleus of the political system.

The Government of Lao PDR is taking a development approach that guarantees the rights of all citizens, while at the same time promoting national unity. The Government’s long-term overarching goal is to exit the group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) by 2020 through sustained equitable economic growth and social development, while safeguarding the country’s social, cultural, economic and political identity.

Lao PDR is administratively structured into four levels: central, provincial, district and village levels. At the provincial and capital level the administration is run by a governor, the district by a chief administrator and the village by a village chief. Currently there are 16 provinces and 1 Capital City, 142 districts, 10,500 villages and 953,000 households. The state is secular, but the population is predominantly Buddhist.

**Population**

The 2005 census reported the population at 5.6 million, up 23 percent from the 1995 census, showing an average annual growth rate of 2.08 percent. Fertility rates by place of residence are shown in Table A. If the population were to continue to grow at the same rate, it would double in approximately 34 years.

**Table A: Total Fertility rates by location**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Residence</th>
<th>Fertility Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural, on road</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural, off road</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lao PDR has a relatively young population, with 39 percent of the population under 15 years of age. One of the most prominent cultural features is ethno-linguistic diversity. The 2005 census identified 49 distinct ethnic groups, categorized in four main ethno-linguistic groups: the Lao-Tai, the Mon-Khmer, the Sino-Tibetan family and the Hmong-Iu Mien.

According to the 2005 census, the Tai-Kadai group, also referred to as the ‘Lao-Tai’ ethno-linguistic group, accounts for 64.9 percent of the nation’s total population. Because of differential population growth rates, however, among children between the ages of 0 and 16, the Lao-Tai represent only 59.8 percent. Hence, the non Lao-Tai population is growing more rapidly than the Lao-Tai population.

One of the most significant demographic changes can be seen in the ethnic composition of primary school enrollments. In the school year 1999/2000, Lao-Tai constituted over 73 percent of primary school enrollment, but this figure had fallen to under 63 percent by 2005/2006. By contrast, Mon-Khmer had risen from just under 18 percent to over 24 percent and the Hmong-Iu Mien and Sino-Tibetan rose from under 9 percent to 13 percent. The fertility rates given in Table 4 above make it quite clear that these demographic trends, which drive enrollments, will continue at least some decades into the future. The average current household size is 5.9 persons (5.7 persons for urban households, 5.9 persons for households in rural areas with roads, and 6.1 persons in rural areas without roads). Almost 73 percent of the population lives in the rural areas.
Table B : Population by Ethnicity, Total and Age 0-16 Cobort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethno Linguistic Group</th>
<th>Number of Ethnic Groups</th>
<th>Percent in Total population</th>
<th>Percent in population Age 0.16 years.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lao-Tai</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon-Khmer</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sino-Tibetan</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong-lu Mien</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/No answer</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Economy**

**Economic Growth** - Lao PDR is predominantly a rural society with an agriculture-based economic structure. Improvement in social conditions and the creation of income, especially in rural areas are top government priorities. The integration of rural areas into the national market economy is central to eliminating widespread poverty. Thus, rural development, both its social and physical dimensions, is considered key to the eradication of mass poverty and sustainable improvement in social well-being.

Since 1999 the economic growth (GDP per capita) has been moderately strong (average annual growth of 5 percent), following several years of decline associated with the Asian economic crisis of 1997.

From the mid 1980s, with introduction of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in 1986, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) displayed relatively steady growth until the 1998/1999 fiscal year as a result of the Asian Economic Crisis. The Lao economy recovered the following year and has shown consistent growth since 1999 as well as a rise in GDP er
capita of over 50 percent from 2000 to 2005 (US Dollar value). According to the human development index in 2005, Lao PDR was ranked 133 among 177 countries, up from the 141 of the 173 countries in 1993.

**Changing Structure of the Economy** – Since the introduction of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in 1986, the industrial and service sectors have experienced high rates of growth, while the agricultural sector has shown a rapid decline. Still, as of 2005 agriculture contributed the largest share of the national economy, accounting for more than 44 percent of the GDP. Agriculture accounts for 70 percent of all hours worked and 80 percent of the labor force.

**Labor Force** - The economically active population comprises 67 percent of the population aged 10 years and older (58 percent in urban areas, 69 percent in rural areas with roads and 73 percent without roads). By far the largest categories of employment are ‘unpaid family workers’ (46 percent) and “own account workers” (self-employed, 42 percent).

Further detail on the population by economic activity is shown in Figure 5 below. In the past decade there has been relatively low internal migration, except for a substantial migration into Vientiane Capital City, coupled with the impact of Village Consolidation Schemes in the Focal Site Development Programme.

Overall internal migration recorded in 2005 was the same as in 1995. There is a small net emigration (estimated at approximately 0.1 percent), mostly people from rural to urban areas in the southern provinces. The movement of people from rural areas in the South across borders to urban areas has been encouraged by “the opening of borders, impact of globalization, labor market demand and widening economic differentials within and between countries” Many diverse factors, including natural disasters (mainly floods and droughts), unbalanced population growth (mainly high population growth in more remote areas with low economic growth) and strains on education and employment opportunities, have increased internal migration and both legal and illegal external migration.
Only 1.4 percent of the economically active population is counted as “unemployed”. This can be attributed to the nature of the labor market: (a) There is little in the way of unemployment “benefits”; (b) There is a large informal labor market; and (c) For many people, it is possible quite literally to live for some time off the “fruits of the land”.

**National Development**

In 1996, the 6th Lao People’s Revolutionary Party Congress called for the Country’s national long-term development goal: To graduate from the ranks of the LDCs 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. Foundations have been laid for the building of the country to:

- Move consistently towards a market-oriented economy;
- Build up needed infrastructure throughout the country; and
- Improve the well-being of the people through greater food security, extension of social services, environmental conservation, and enhancement of the multi-ethnic population’s spiritual and cultural life.

National development efforts have taken place in three stages. These stages are closely interlinked and need to be developed simultaneously to ensure the progressive transition from an isolated, subsistence-based rural economy to a production and services economy that can coherently achieve the 2020 goal.

The first stage was the establishment and implementation of the NEM, which was launched by the Government in 1986 in order to gradually transform the economy from a centrally-planned to market-oriented model. The second stage involved the structural transformation and capacity-building of the economy, with a focus on developing transport and communications networks, promoting national and regional integration, and moving towards becoming a full economic partner among countries in the region. The third stage involves “people-centered and sustainable development” which includes the achievement of basic food security, the preservation of natural resources and decentralization of
development responsibilities to enable greater public participation. The immediate aim is to enhance conditions everywhere in the country, enabling the multi-ethnic population to have access to what are considered the basics of sustainable development; food security, market opportunities, education and health.

**Poverty and Social Development**

Poverty is multidimensional and manifests itself in different forms. It is more than a problem of inadequate income. In 2001, the Lao Government defined poverty as follows:

“*Poverty means the lack of essential needs of daily lives such as the lack of foods (possession of foods that are less than 2100 calories/head/day), the lack of clothing, the non-possession of permanent accommodations, unaffordable fees of medical treatments in case of illness, unaffordable payments for self education as well as that of members of the family and unavailable conditions for convenient communications.”*

Quantitative data on the incidence of expenditure, consumption or income poverty (henceforth referred to as *income poverty*) in the Lao PDR are compiled through the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Surveys (LECS) conducted in 1992/1993 (LECS 1), 1997/1998 (LECS 2) and 2002/2003 (LECS 3). The incidence of income poverty (headcount index) declined from 46 percent in 1992/1993 to 39 percent in 1997/1998 and to 34 percent in 2002/2003. This impressive declining trend in poverty incidence, if continued, would enable the country to achieve the Millennium Development Goal 1 of reducing the proportion of people below the poverty line by half by 2015 (as compared to 1990). Some basic indicators on poverty and poor district classification based on this definition are shown in Table C below:
Table C: Poverty and Poor District Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators (in %)</th>
<th>Type of District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47 Poorest Districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Poverty Incidence (proportion of poor households)</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average population share (district population/total populations)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average poor population share (district poor/total poor population)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of district to total population</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of poor to total poor population</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of poor</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Like income, other dimensions of poverty have shown considerable improvements in the past decade. Life expectancy now exceeds 60 years, as compared to 50 years in 1990. During the same period infant mortality declined from 120 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 82. Under-five mortality declined from 163 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 115, and
maternal mortality declined from 650 to 350. Adult literacy rose from 43 percent to 53 percent, with both men and women sharing in the improvement. The net enrollment in primary education has increased from 61 percent to 85 percent in 2004/2005.

Access to health services, safe water and roads has improved modestly during the past fifteen years. In terms of the MDGs, Lao PDR seems to be on track to achieve the target on under-five mortality, but may have difficulty in meeting the target maternal mortality if the past trend continues. The effects of poverty on poor families are degrading. The consequences of poverty are also detrimental to economic advancement, social harmony and political stability. The development of the productive potentials of the poor, women and other vulnerable groups, would contribute to rapid economic growth and sustainable development. It would reduce negative externalities such as crime, the spread of diseases and environmental degradation. Poverty reduction is to be addressed through policies and programs that help redistribute the growing opportunities, incomes, services and choices to the poor in the multi-ethnic population of the Lao PDR. Therefore, poverty reduction is seen to be economically sound, socially just and politically worthy.
### The Education Sector of Lao - Description of the Education Sector and Structure of the Education System - Figure 1.15 Primary and Secondary School Forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal Age Cohort</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Single Grade Schools

**Incomplete Primary**

- Definition: Primary Schools are “incomplete” if they offer fewer than five grades of instruction.

- Sometimes schools are incomplete because they lack teachers able to teach at the upper grades.

- Sometimes schools are incomplete because they lack classrooms.

- Sometimes schools are incomplete because they lack both teachers and classrooms.

**Complete Primary**

#### Multi-grade Complete Schools

**2 Teacher Model**

- Incomplete schools can be made complete by using multi-grade teaching. For example, one teacher can teach grades 1-2 and another can teach grades 3-5. Or one can teach grade 1. One can teach grades 2-3, and another can teach grades 4-5. Other models can also be found.

**3 Teacher Model**

**Lower Secondary Schools**

**Combined Primary & Lower Secondary Schools**

**Combined Lower & Upper Secondary Schools**

**Upper Secondary Schools**
Following the conventions of the International Standard Classification for Education (ISCED), it comprises:

- 0 – Pre-primary education;
- 1 – Primary education;
- 2 – Lower secondary education;
- 3 – Upper secondary education;
- 4 – Post secondary non-tertiary education
- 5 – First stage tertiary education (bachelor lever); and
- 6 – Second stage of tertiary, leading to advanced research qualification (MA, PhD)

Levels 2 – 5 are sub-divided into forms A, B and C where A leads to several further levels of education, B leads to a “terminal” program C, which does not give access to further education and is expected to lead directly to the labor market.

Pre-primary education consists of crèches and kindergarten schools for three to five year olds, as well as primary schools that provide pre-primary classes. All aim to support the development of children and allow for a smooth transition into primary education.

Primary education consists of five years and is compulsory. Lower secondary education consists of three years, as does upper secondary education. By 2010, the present 5+3+3 system (shown in Figure 1.16 below), with 8 years of basic education, will evolve to the international standard of 9 years of basic schooling through a 5+4+3 structure (shown by the addition of Grade 9 in the red box below).
Post-secondary education in technical schools of one to two years, and three to seven years of tertiary education are offered by technical and teacher training colleges and the National University of Laos (NUOL). Even more than is the case of pre-primary schools, the private...
sector has contributed to the rapid growth of in private post-secondary fee-paying colleges mainly offering programs in business, computing, tourism or English language. In addition to the formal education programs there are non-formal education (NFE) program being offered to out of school youth and adults. The programs include basic literacy and numeracy training and a wide range of other vocational and skills based programs.
Management of the Education System

Figure 1.17 Organization Chart of MOE

Source: Drawn by Kadam Vongdeuane from DOP source
MOE therefore is responsible for formal and non-formal education at all levels, for both public and private education. However under the Government’s de-concentration process, initiated in 2000, MOE shares responsibilities with the Provincial Education Services (PES) and the District Education Bureau (DEB) as stated Article 62 of the new Education Law 2007.

**Private Sector** - The private sector is encouraged to participate and invest in education which is stated in Article 60 and 61 of the new education law.

**Article 60 : Investment Policy**

The Government authorizes individuals, cooperation, and internal and external private organizations to invest in education by establishing schools, learning centers and education institutions; opening teaching-learning in accordance with the national education system and conform to the curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education, in order to provide services to society and get appropriate payment of fees from learners. The investment shall be in different ways in accordance with the Law of enterprises.

**Article 61 : Management principles**

The Government has the responsibilities to define regulations, principles and privileges concerning the organization, the running and the management of private schools, learning centers and education institutions.

**Financing Education**

**Organization and Sources of Public Financing of Education**

In Lao PDR the fiscal year (FY) commences on 1st October and ends on 30th September the following year. Based on instructions from the Office of the Prime Minister and the budget planning system, the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and the Ministry of Finance (MOF) prepare detailed guidelines and send them to the line ministries and
provinces. The line ministries and provinces are responsible for budget preparations at Central and provincial level. This process is shown in Figure 9 below:

MOE is responsible for primary, secondary, tertiary and non-formal education. Based on its annual budget request, a number of quota (civil servant) teachers and education administration are allocated for the education sector. MOE is the largest of fourteen ministries. According to the Revised Education Law 2007, educational administration and management organization composed of: three levels (1) Ministry level; (2) Provincial Educational Services (PES) and (3) District Education Bureau (DEB). There are over 15 departments in MOE (see Figure 8). Each department has its own responsibility, administrative arrangements and relationship to the provincial and district services.

The 1991 Constitution laid the foundation for a national budget based on the concept of a unified, decentralized state. Provinces and districts formulate budgets. The budget, authorized by the National Assembly; defines revenue targets and allocates expenditures for the center and for the provinces. In 2000, the “deconcentration decree” extended this framework by granting provinces wide responsibilities for fiscal management. This decree established “provinces as the strategic unit, districts as the planning unit and villages as the implementing unit.”

The decentralized fiscal structure is based on an “upward revenue sharing” system in which most revenue is collected by the provinces. “Surplus” provinces are to transfer surplus revenues to the center to fund both central government expenditures and transfers to the “deficit” provinces. Provincial governors play a very important role in public financial management. Inter-sectoral budget resource flows are horizontal instead of vertical. The provincial and district governments administer a large proportion of the central assigned taxes.

**Budgeting and Planning**

At the provincial level, the budget amounts spent on each sector (or as a share of total budget expenditure) vary widely across provinces and districts. Such variations have
implications for education expenditure and development. Simplification of the decision-making processes that control the flow of funds from the central level to the school level (via the provincial and district levels) is required along with capacity development.

The PES plans must be approved by the governor’s office, as well as the provincial MOF and the MPI. The PES communication lines with those provincial services are much stronger than with MOE; hence the execution of national policies is highly dependent on governors’ priorities.

Three critical issues remain:

- The development of outcome-oriented budgeting;
- A review of the Deconcentration Decree so as to enhance its authority to ensure (i) equity of resources across provinces and (ii) implementation of national policies in the education sector; and
- A review of resource redistribution mechanisms across provinces.

The procedures of annual budgeting and planning preparation for education in Lao PDR consists of 14 actions that follow a “top-down” process, followed by a “bottom-up”, process, which is finalized with a second “top-down” process. All phases of the educational planning and budgeting process (preparation and adoption) are indicated.

After the National Assembly approves the budget plan, MOF and MPI announce the provincial recurrent and capital budget allocation amounts to all line ministries and provinces. Then the Provincial Finance Services (PFS) and Provincial Planning Services (PPS), in turn, announce the recurrent and investment budget to the PES. Arrangements for the PESs to report to the MOE, Department of Finance (DOF) and the Department of Planning and Co-operations (DPC) are incomplete making the monitoring and tracking of the budget very difficult.

In practice, at the provincial level, the governor has the authority for the allocation, authorization and revision of both recurrent and capital implementations. The implementation education budget is dependent on the governor, as well on the provincial
financial situation; those provinces that have sufficient revenue can implement more easily and effectively.

**Education Finance**

Education is financed out of public resources, with four notable exceptions. First, there is the private sector which has grown very quickly from 2000/2001 to 2004/2005 including school, primary, secondary, technical colleges and universities (as shown in Table D below)

**Table D Growth of private educational institutions**

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-School</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>6,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>15,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVET centre</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6,021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical (mid-level)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical (high level)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Private Education, MOE
```

While demand for private, primary and secondary education is fostered by the search for better quality, motivated teachers and discipline, the demand for post-secondary education is motivated by the acquisition of skills in high demand on the labor market (e.g. business management, information technology and English), especially in the fast growing service
sector. Second, in vocational and technical education, teacher training, and higher education, two parallel programs are offered: (a) Daytime, “regular” courses, followed by quota students, admitted in limited numbers based on their scores and benefiting from a scholarship and competition students admitted on the basis of a competitive exam, but not receiving a scholarship; and (b) Evening “special” courses, accessible to all students who have graduated from the relevant level of education (as shown in Table E below).

Table E: Vocational Technical and Higher Education Students by Program and Education Level (2004/2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Quota</th>
<th>Competition</th>
<th>Special Courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocational education (MOE)</td>
<td>1,214</td>
<td>1,153</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational education (other ministries)</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical education (MOE)</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>1684</td>
<td>6,414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical education (other ministries)</td>
<td>1,695</td>
<td>1,133</td>
<td>990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUOL (bachelor program)</td>
<td>3,283</td>
<td>2,823</td>
<td>3,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champasack (bachelor program)</td>
<td>1,023</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Souphanuvong (bachelor program)</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUOL (higher diploma)</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>2,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champasack (higher diploma)</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOE (higher diploma)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9,411</td>
<td>8,503</td>
<td>14,406</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table F below shows that all students, including quota students pay registration fees, in addition students in special courses have to pay fees.

**Table F: Fees by Program and Education Level, 2005/06 (Kip 1000)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Quota &amp; Competition</th>
<th>Special Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum fee</td>
<td>Maximum fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational education (8+3)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical education (11+2 &amp; 11+3)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University (higher diploma)</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University (bachelor program)</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fees are budgeted and used to pay allowances to teachers and non-teaching staff, operation maintenance (O&M) and minor repairs. They represent a significant share of recurrent expenses at those levels.

Third, although primary education is compulsory by law, for both primary and secondary education, parents pay minor registration, graduation and other fees, as do communities, generally in kind (see Section 2.5 Household Financing of Education).

Fourth, multi-lateral and bilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) fund a very high share of the investment budget, as shown in Table 13 in Section 2.4.3 below. External funding is allocated mainly to development projects focusing on primary
education, especially in the poorest districts, but also to vocational, technical and higher education. Considering the contribution of students to the recurrent budget, and the role of external funding in the investment budget, the actual share of public resources going to the education budget is limited. The integration of non-public resources in the public budget tends to overestimate the contribution of public resources to education.

**Structure of Public expenditure on Education**

**Development of the Education Budget**

Public expenditure on education has almost recovered from the financial crisis of the late 1990s. After improving substantially during the first part of the 1990s, overall public experience virtually collapsed with the onset on macro-economic difficulties and was worsened by the Asian financial crisis of 1997 to 1998. Recovery took place during the first half of the decade beginning 2000, and by 2006 and 2007 public educational expenditure has almost recovered its level of 1995, both in relation to GDP and as a proportion of total public spending as shown in Table J below:

**Table G : Lao PDR Public Expenditure on Education 1990/91 to 2006/07 %**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>90/91</th>
<th>94/95</th>
<th>99/00</th>
<th>04/05</th>
<th>05/06</th>
<th>06/07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education budget as % of GDP</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education as % total GOL</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources : Data for 2005-2006 and 2006-07 have been provided by the Moe/DPC. Data for 2004 to 2005 are estimates by MOE reported in UNESCO and ADB 2005b. Data for earlier years are from R. Noonan, *Education Financing in Lao PDR, Part I: Patterns of Expenditure in a Turbulent Decade of Transition (1990-2000), SIDA/World Bank 2001.*
However, this recovery derives from a strong increase in the investment budget and does not imply any improvement in the share of domestic funding or in the ratio of recurrent in investment budget, rather the opposite, as shown in Table J.

**Recurrent versus Investment Budget**

The dominant features of recent public expenditure are the high proportion of capital spending and the high percentage of donor-financed spending. At the beginning of the 1990s, capital spending amounted to less than 5 percent of total public expenditure, with no foreign finding. Since 2004/2005, foreign funds account for over 90 percent of educational investment. As a consequence, 57.8 percent of the total education budget was externally funded in 2005/2006.

It might be observed that the recurrent to investment ratio is declining, as can be seen in Table J in Section 2.4.3 below. If recurrent spending is too low relative to investment, schools will be built in which successful teaching cannot take place due to the lack of operating funds to pay teachers, buy text books, or carry out essential maintenance. However, less than 20 percent of ODA in education consists presently of “classic” infrastructure activity. Most ODA is capacity building or training.

**Structure of the Recurrent Budget**

The recurrent budget essentially pays salaries and benefits, scholarships and O&M expenses for MOE, PEs, DEBs, teacher education institutions (TEIs), vocational and technical institutions (VTIs) and universities. The share of salaries in the recurrent budget has improved recently as a consequence of the increase of salaries. (as shown in figure H)
Table H: Salary and Scholarship increase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>80.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O&amp;M</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculated from MOE data. The rise in salary levels is confirmed by studies including a direct assessment of individual salaries. Average staff salaries are shown in Table I below:

Table I: Average staff salaries by sub-sector (million Kip)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Salaries</th>
<th>Nº Staff</th>
<th>Average staff Salary (ASS)</th>
<th>Ass in GDP/Cap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>11,187.0</td>
<td>2,014</td>
<td>5.555</td>
<td>1.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>154,395.7</td>
<td>27,755</td>
<td>5.563</td>
<td>1.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>91,669.5</td>
<td>15,953</td>
<td>5.746</td>
<td>1.483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>8,245.7</td>
<td>1,048</td>
<td>7.868</td>
<td>1.483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher training</td>
<td>5,827.9</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>8.583</td>
<td>1.617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>28,894.8</td>
<td>1,560</td>
<td>18.522</td>
<td>3.490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>01/02</td>
<td>02/03</td>
<td>03/04</td>
<td>04/05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administration</strong></td>
<td>27,916.0</td>
<td>4,371</td>
<td>6.387</td>
<td>1.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>328,136.6</td>
<td>53,380</td>
<td>6.147</td>
<td>1.158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculated from MOE data.

**Table J: Recurrent and Investment Budget (Billion Kip, 2001/02 to 2006/07)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>01/02</th>
<th>02/03</th>
<th>03/04</th>
<th>04/05</th>
<th>05/06</th>
<th>06/07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education Budget</strong></td>
<td>386.1</td>
<td>451.9</td>
<td>457.5</td>
<td>658.1</td>
<td>1,033.4</td>
<td>1,189.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurrent</td>
<td>184.7</td>
<td>185.8</td>
<td>246.6</td>
<td>304.7</td>
<td>383.1</td>
<td>430.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>201.5</td>
<td>266.1</td>
<td>210.9</td>
<td>353.4</td>
<td>650.3</td>
<td>759.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurrent as % of education</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment as % of education</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% domestically financed</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% foreign financed</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>95.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education budget as % of GDP</strong></td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurrent as % of GDP</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment as % of GDP</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% foreign financed</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education budget as % GOL budget</strong></td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurrent as % GOL recurrent budget</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment as % GOL capital budget</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes:

1. The education budget is calculated as a percentage of total public expenditure, recurrent and investment.
2. Recurrent is calculated as a percentage of total public recurrent expenditure.
3. Capital is calculated as a percentage of total capital expenditure.

The number of scholarships has increased recently, which explains why their share in the budget has remained more or less constant around 7 percent in spite of the increase of salaries.

*Distribution of the Recurrent Budget by Sub-sector*

The share of the recurrent budget allocated to each sub-sector is shown in Table K. Since the beginning of the decade, the shares of the total expenditure allocated to primary and lower secondary education has shown a slight decline and the shares allocated upper secondary and higher education have increased.

As a consequence of the expansion of primary and lower secondary education enrolments as upper secondary, technical and vocational, teacher training and higher education have recently increased. Future budgets will encompass this change whilst continuing to respond to the policy focus on basic education and the achievement of EFA. Through public expenditure management reforms (such as per capita budget allocations for basic education) and improvements in management information systems it should be possible to ensure that, by 2009, Nam Theun II revenues are properly directed to basic social services, including primary and lower secondary education for disadvantaged populations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-sector</th>
<th>94/95</th>
<th>99/00</th>
<th>00/01</th>
<th>01/02</th>
<th>02/03</th>
<th>03/04</th>
<th>04/05</th>
<th>05/06</th>
<th>06/07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECCD</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher education</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFE</td>
<td>Na</td>
<td>Na</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin. &amp; man.</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table K** Source: Estimates based on data from MOE/DOF; figures for 2000/01 are interpolations between 1999/2000 and 2001/02, figures for 2006/2007 are preliminary projections.

**Unit Costs**

Unit costs values of primary education in Lao PDR is 3.2 percent of the GDP per capita, as shown in Table L below. This indicates that the international norms are not being met. The
international developing country ratio for the unit cost of primary education as a proportion of GDP per capita varies from 7 to 14 percent. The ratio for lower secondary for Lao PDR is 3.4 percent compared to a range of 20-24 percent typical of other Asian developing countries. These low unit costs are reflected in the short supplies of teaching and learning resources. Each higher education student costs the equivalent of 8 primary students. While there was a major rationalization of teacher colleges in the late 1990s it is apparent that the cost structure of teacher education needs further attention. Its unit costs substantially exceed any other sub-sector of education, due in part to the high proportion of student-teachers getting a scholarship (quota students).

Table L: GDP per capita

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Cost</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Lower secondary</th>
<th>Upper secondary</th>
<th>TVET</th>
<th>Teacher education</th>
<th>Higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US$</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>103.6</td>
<td>131.3</td>
<td>127.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As % of GDP/Capita</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Brief History of Laos as a Country

Laos traces its history to the Kingdom which existed from the 14th to the 18th century when it split into three separate kingdoms. In 1893, it became a French protectorate, with the three kingdoms, Kingdom of Luang Phrabang, Kingdom of Vientiane and Kingdom of Champasak, uniting to form what is now known as Laos. It briefly gained independence in 1945 after Japanese occupation, but returned to French rule until it was granted autonomy in 1949. Laos became independent in 1954, with a constitutional monarchy under Sisavang Vong. Shortly after independence, a long civil war ended the monarchy, when the Communist Pathet Lao movement came to power in 1975.

Laos is a single-party socialist republic. The capital city is Vientiane. Other large cities include Luang Prabang, Savannakhet and Pakse. The official language is Lao. Most people are Lao with a significant proportion of indigenous religion as well. It is a rising power in electricity to neighboring countries such as Thailand, China and Vietnam and the economy is accelerating rapidly with the demands of its metals. It is a member of the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), East Asia Summit and La Francophonie. Laos applied for membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1997.

Geography

Laos is a landlocked country in Southeast Asia, lying mostly between latitudes 14° and 23°N (a small area is south of 14°), and longitudes 100° and 108°E. Its thickly forested landscape consists mostly of rugged mountains, the highest of which is Phou Bia at 2,818 metres (9,245 ft), with some plains and plateaus. The Mekong River forms a large part of the western boundary with Thailand, whereas the mountains of the Annamite Chain form most of the eastern border with Vietnam. The climate is tropical and monsoon.

There is a distinct rainy season from May to November, followed by a dry season from December to April. Local tradition holds that there are three seasons (rainy, cold and hot) as
the latter two months of the climatologically defined dry season are noticeably hotter than the earlier four months. The capital and largest city of Laos is Vientiane and other major cities include Luang Prabang, Savannakhet and Pakse.

In 1993, the Laos government set aside 21% of the nation's land area for Habitat conservation preservation.\[15\] The country is one of four in the opium poppy growing region known as the "Golden Triangle". According to the October 2007 UNODC fact book "Opium Poppy Cultivation in South East Asia," the poppy cultivation area was 15 square kilometres (5.8 sq mi), down from 18 square kilometres (6.9 sq mi) in 2006.

Laos can be considered to consist of three geographical areas, North, Central and South.

**Administrative divisions**

Laos is divided into 16 provinces (qwang) and one prefecture (Nakhonluang ViengChan) which includes Vientiane Capital (Na Kone Luang Vientiane). Provinces are further divided into districts (muang) and then villages (baan). An 'urban' village is essentially a town.

![Figure 1.18: Province map of Laos](image-url)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Area (km²)</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>10,320</td>
<td>114,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bokeo</td>
<td>Ban Houayxay</td>
<td>6,196</td>
<td>149,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bolikhamsai</td>
<td>Paksan</td>
<td>14,863</td>
<td>214,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>Pakse</td>
<td>15,415</td>
<td>575,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Hua Phan</td>
<td>Xam Neua</td>
<td>16,500</td>
<td>322,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Khammouane</td>
<td>Thakhek</td>
<td>16,315</td>
<td>358,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Luang Namtha</td>
<td>Luang Namtha</td>
<td>9,325</td>
<td>150,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Luang Phrabang</td>
<td>Luang Phrabang</td>
<td>16,875</td>
<td>408,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Oudomxay</td>
<td>Muang Xay</td>
<td>15,370</td>
<td>275,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Phongsali</td>
<td>Phongsali</td>
<td>16,270</td>
<td>199,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sainyabuli</td>
<td>Sainyabuli</td>
<td>16,389</td>
<td>382,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Salavan</td>
<td>Salavan</td>
<td>10,691</td>
<td>336,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Savannakhet</td>
<td>Savannakhet</td>
<td>21,774</td>
<td>721,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sekong</td>
<td>Sekong</td>
<td>7,665</td>
<td>83,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Vientiane Prefecture</td>
<td>Vientiane</td>
<td>3,920</td>
<td>726,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Vientiane Province</td>
<td>Muang Phon-Hong</td>
<td>15,927</td>
<td>373,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Xieng Khaung</td>
<td>Phonsavan</td>
<td>15,880</td>
<td>37,507</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Government and politics

Laos is a communist single-party socialist republic. The only legal political party is the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). The head of state is President Choummaly Sayasone, who is also the General Secretary of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. The head of government is Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong. Government policies are determined by the party through the all-powerful nine-member Politburo and the 49-member Central Committee. Important government decisions are vetted by the Council of Ministers.

Human rights in Laos

The Constitution that was promulgated in 1991 and amended in 2003 contains most key safeguards for human rights. For example, in Article 8 it makes it clear that Laos is a multiethnic state and is committed to equality between ethnic groups. The Constitution also has provisions for gender equality and freedom of religion, for freedom of speech, press and assembly. On 25 September 2009, Laos ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, nine years after signing the treaty. The policy objectives of both the Lao government and international donors remain focused toward achieving sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction.

However, Amnesty International has raised concerns about the ratification record of the Laos Government on human rights standards and its lack of cooperation with the UN human rights mechanisms and legislative measures which impact negatively on human rights. It has also raised concerns in relation to freedom of expression, poor prison conditions, restrictions on freedom of religions, protection of refugees and asylum-seekers and the death penalty.

In October 1999, 30 young people were arrested for attempting to display posters calling for peaceful economic, political and social change in Laos. Five of them were arrested and subsequently sentenced to up to 10 years imprisonment on charges of treason. One has since died due to his treatment by prison guards, while one has been released. The surviving three men should have been released by October 2009, but their whereabouts remains unknown.
Tourism

The tourism sector has grown rapidly, from 80,000 international visitors in 1990, to 1.876 million in 2010. Tourism is expected to contribute US$679.1 million to gross national product in 2010, rising to US$1,585.7 million by 2020. In 2010, one in every 10.9 jobs was in the tourism sector. Export earnings from international visitors and tourism goods are expected to generate 15.5% of total exports or US$270.3 million in 2010, growing in nominal terms to US$484.2 million (12.5% of total) in 2020.

Recently, Laos has become popular with tourists for its relaxed style of living and reputation for having elements of the "original Asia" lost elsewhere. The official tourism slogan is "Simply Beautiful". The main attractions for tourists include Buddhist culture and colonial architecture in Luang Prabang; gastronomy and ancient temples in the capital of Vientiane; backpacking in Muang Ngoi Neua and Vang Vieng; ancient and modern culture and history in The Plain of Jars region (main article: Phonsavan); trekking and visiting hill tribes in a number of areas including Phongsaly and Luang Namtha; caves and waterfalls near Thakhek; relaxation, the Irrawaddy dolphin and Khone Phapheng Falls at Si Phan Don or as they are known in English, the Four Thousand Islands; Wat Phu, an ancient Khmer temple complex; and the Bolaven Plateau for waterfalls and coffee.

Luang Prabang and Wat Phu are both UNESCO World Heritage sites, with the Plain of Jars expected to join them once more work to clear UXO has been completed. Major festivals include Laos New Year which is celebrated around April 13–15 and involves a Water Festival similar but more subdued than that of Thailand and other South-East Asian countries.

The Lao National Tourism Administration, related government agencies and the private sector are working together to realise the vision put forth in the country's National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan. This includes decreasing the environmental and cultural impact of tourism; increasing awareness in the importance of ethnic groups and biological diversity; providing a source of income to conserve, sustain and manage the Lao
protected area network and cultural heritage sites; and emphasizing the need for tourism zoning and management plans for sites that will be developed as ecotourism destinations.

Laos is known for its silk and local handicraft products - both of which are on display in Luang Prabang’s night market, among other places. Another specialty is mulberry tea.

**Demographics**

The term "Laotian" does not necessarily refer to the Lao language, ethnic Lao people, language or customs, but is a political term that also includes the non-ethnic Lao groups within Laos and identifies them as "Laotian" because of their political citizenship. Laos has the youngest population of any country in Asia with a median age of 19.3 years.

Laos' population was estimated at 6.8 million in early 2009, dispersed unevenly across the country. Most people live in valleys of the Mekong River and its tributaries. Vientiane prefecture, the capital and largest city, had about 740,010 residents in 2008. The country's population density was 27/km$^2$.

**Languages**

The official and dominant language is Lao, a tonal language of the Tai linguistic group. However only slightly more than half of the population can speak Lao, the remainder speaking various ethnic minority languages, particularly in rural areas. The written language is based on Khmer writing script. Midland and highland Lao speak an assortment of tribal languages. French, still common in government and commerce, is studied by many, while English, the language of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has become increasingly studied in recent years.

**Health**

Male life expectancy at birth was at 63.2 and female life expectancy was at 65.9 in 2007. Healthy life expectancy was at 54 in 2006. In 2006, two fifths of the population were not
using an improved water resource. Government expenditure on health is at about 4% of the GDP. Its amount was at US$ 18 (PPP) in 2006.

**Religion**

Of the people of Laos 67% are Theravada Buddhist, 1.5% are Christian, and 31.5% are other or unspecified according to the 2005 census. Buddhism has long been one of the most important social forces in Laos.

Theravada Buddhism along with the common animism practiced among the mountain tribes, coexists peacefully with spirit worship. Christians are mostly restricted to the Vientiane area, and Muslims to the Myanmar border region. Christian missionary work is regulated by the government.
Thailand – Country Profile

Thailand - Officially the Kingdom of Thailand and formerly known as Siam, is a country located at the center of Southeast Asia. It is bordered to the north by Burma and Laos, to the east by Laos and Cambodia, to the south by the Gulf of Thailand and Malaysia, and to the west by the Andaman Sea and the southern extremity of Burma. Its maritime boundaries include Vietnam in the Gulf of Thailand to the southeast and Indonesia and India in the Andaman Sea to the southwest.

The country is a kingdom, with most recorded reigns in the world; a constitutional monarchy with King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the ninth king of the House of Chakri, who has reigned since 1946, making him the world's longest-serving current head of state and the longest-reigning monarch in Thai history. The king is officially titled Head of State, the Head of the Armed Forces, an Upholder of the Buddhist religion, and the Defender of all Faiths.

Thailand is the world's 50th largest country in terms of total area (slightly smaller than Yemen and slightly larger than Spain), with a surface area of approximately 513,000 km² (198,000 sq mi), and the 21st most-populous country, with approximately 64 million people. The largest city is Bangkok, the capital, which is also the country's center of political, commercial, industrial and cultural activities. About 75% of the population is ethnically Thai, 14% is of Chinese origin, and 3% is ethnically Malay; the rest belong to minority groups including Mons, Khmers and various hill tribes. The country's official language is Thai. The primary religion is Buddhism, which is practiced by around 95% of all Thais.

Thailand experienced rapid economic growth between 1985 and 1995 and is a newly industrialized country with tourism, due to well-known tourist destinations such as Ayutthaya, Pattaya, Bangkok, Phuket, Krabi, Chiang Mai, and Ko Samui, and exports contributing significantly to the economy. There are approximately 2.2 million legal and illegal migrants in Thailand. Thailand has also attracted a number of expatriates from developed countries.
Figure 1.19 Map of Thailand
History

The region known as Thailand has been inhabited by humans at least since the Paleolithic period, about 40,000 years ago. Similar to other regions in Southeast Asia, it was heavily influenced by the culture and religions of India, starting with the kingdom of Funan around the 1st century CE.

After the fall of the Khmer Empire in the 13th century, various states thrived there, such as the various Tai, Mon, Khmer and Malay kingdoms, as seen through the numerous archaeological sites and artifacts that are scattered throughout the Siamese landscape. Prior to the 12th century however, the first Thai or Siamese state is traditionally considered to be the Buddhist kingdom of Sukhothai, which was founded in 1238.

Following the decline and fall of the Khmer empire in the 13th–14th century, the Buddhist Tai kingdoms of Sukhothai, Lanna and Lan Xang (now Laos) were on the ascension. However, a century later, the power of Sukhothai was overshadowed by the new kingdom of Ayutthaya, established in the mid-14th century in the lower Chao Phraya River or Menam area.

Ayutthaya's expansion centered along the Menam while in the northern valley the Lanna Kingdom and other small Tai city-states ruled the area. In 1431, the Khmer abandoned Angkor after the Ayutthaya forces invaded the city. Thailand retained a tradition of trade with its neighbouring states, from China to India, Persia and Arab lands. Ayutthaya became one of the most vibrant trading centres in Asia. European traders arrived in the 16th century, beginning with the Portuguese, followed by the French, Dutch and English.

After the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767 to the Burmese, King Taksin the Great moved the capital of Thailand to Thonburi for approximately 15 years. The current Rattanakosin era of Thai history began in 1782, following the establishment of Bangkok as capital of the Chakri dynasty under King Rama I the Great. According to Encyclopædia Britannica, "A quarter to
a third of the population of some areas of Thailand and Burma were slaves in the 17th through the 19th centuries."

Despite European pressure, Thailand is the only Southeast Asian nation that has never been colonized. This has been ascribed to the long succession of able rulers in the past four centuries who exploited the rivalry and tension between French Indochina and the British Empire. As a result, the country remained a buffer state between parts of Southeast Asia that were colonized by the two colonizing powers, Great Britain and France.

Western influence nevertheless led to many reforms in the 19th century and major concessions, most notably being the loss of a large territory on the east side of the Mekong to the French and the step-by-step absorption by Britain of the Malay Peninsula.

20th century

The losses initially included Penang and eventually culminated in the loss of four predominantly ethnic-Malay southern provinces, which later became Malaysia's four northern states, under the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909.

In 1932, a bloodless revolution carried out by the Khana Ratsadon group of military and civilian officials resulted in a transition of power, when King Prajadhipok was forced to grant the people of Siam their first constitution, thereby ending centuries of absolute monarchy.

During World War II, the Empire of Japan demanded the right to move troops across Thailand to the Malayan frontier. Japan invaded the country and engaged the Thai Army for six to eight hours before Plaek Pibulsonggram ordered an armistice. Shortly thereafter Japan was granted free passage, and on December 21, 1941, Thailand and Japan signed a military alliance with a secret protocol wherein Tokyo agreed to help Thailand regain territories lost to the British and French. Subsequently, Thailand undertook to 'assist' Japan in its war against the Allies, while at the same time maintaining an active anti-Japanese resistance
movement known as the Seri Thai. Approximately 200,000 Asian labourers (mainly romusha) and 60,000 Allied POWs worked on the Thailand–Burma Death Railway.

After the war, Thailand emerged as an ally of the United States. As with many of the developing nations during the Cold War, Thailand then went through decades of political instability characterised by coups d'état as one military regime replaced another, but eventually progressed towards a stable prosperity and democracy in the 1980s.

**Politics and government**

The politics of Thailand are currently conducted within the framework of a constitutional monarchy, whereby the Prime Minister is the head of government and a hereditary monarch is head of state. The judiciary is independent of the executive and the legislative branches.

**Administrative divisions**

Thailand is divided into 76 provinces, which are gathered into 5 groups of provinces by location. There are also 2 special governed districts: the capital Bangkok (Krung Thep Maha Nakhon) and Pattaya, of which Bangkok is at provincial level and thus often counted as a province.

Each province is divided into districts and the districts are further divided into sub-districts (tambons). As of 2006 there are 877 districts and the 50 districts of Bangkok (khet). Some parts of the provinces bordering Bangkok are also referred to as Greater Bangkok (pari monthon). These provinces include Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Samut Prakan, Nakhon Pathom and Samut Sakhon. The name of each province's capital city (mueang) is the same as that of the province. For example, the capital of Chiang Mai province (*Changwat Chiang Mai*) is *Mueang Chiang Mai* or *Chiang Mai*. The 76 provinces are as follows:
Figure 1.20 Provinces of Thailand

Central

1. Ang Thong
2. Bangkok (Krung Thep Maha Nakhon), Special Governed District of
3. Chai Nat
4. Kamphaeng Phet
5. Lopburi
6. Nakhon Nayok
7. Nakhon Pathom
8. Nakhon Sawan
9. Nonthaburi
10. Pathum Thani  
11. Phetchabun  
12. Phichit  
13. Phitsanulok  
14. Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya  
15. Samut Prakan  
16. Samut Sakhon  
17. Samut Songkhram  
18. Saraburi  
19. Sing Buri  
20. Sukhothai  
21. Suphan Buri  
22. Uthai Thani

East

1. Chachoengsao  
2. Chanthaburi  
3. Chonburi  
4. Prachinburi  
5. Rayong  
6. Sa Kaeo  
7. Trat

West

1. Kanchanaburi  
2. Prachuap Khiri Khan  
3. Phetchaburi  
4. Ratchaburi  
5. Tak
North

1. Chiang Mai
2. Chiang Rai
3. Lampang
4. Lamphun
5. Mae Hong Son
6. Nan
7. Phayao
8. Phrae
9. Uttaradit

Northeast (Isan)

1. Amnat Charoen
2. Buri Ram
3. Bueng Kan
4. Chaiyaphum
5. Kalasin
6. Khon Kaen
7. Loei
8. Maha Sarakham
9. Mukdahan
10. Nakhon Phanom
11. Nakhon Ratchasima
12. Nong Bua Lamphu
13. Nong Khai
14. Roi Et
15. Sakon Nakhon
16. Si Sa Ket
17. Surin
18. Ubon Ratchathani
19. Udon Thani
20. Yasothon

South

1. Chumphon
2. Krabi
3. Nakhon Si Thammarat
4. Narathiwat
5. Pattani
6. Phang Nga
7. Phatthalung
8. Phuket
9. Ranong
10. Satun
11. Songkhla
12. Surat Thani
13. Trang
14. Yala

Education

Thailand enjoys a high level of literacy, and education is provided by a well-organized school system of kindergartens, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools, numerous vocational colleges, and universities. The private sector of education is well developed and significantly contributes to the overall provision of education which the government would not be able to meet through the public establishments. Education is compulsory up to and including age group 14, and the government provides free education through to age group 17.
Thailand has never been colonized, and its teaching relies heavily on rote rather than on student-centered methodology. Education in a modern sense is therefore relatively recent and still needs to overcome some major cultural hurdles to ensure further development and improvement to its standards.

The establishment of reliable and coherent curricula for its primary and secondary schools is subject to such rapid changes that schools and their teachers are not always sure what they are supposed to be teaching, and authors and publishers of textbooks are unable to write and print new editions quickly enough to keep up with the volatile situation.

The issue concerning university entrance has therefore also been in constant upheaval for a number of years. Nevertheless, education has seen its greatest progress in the years since 2001. Most of the present generation of students is computer literate, and knowledge of English is on the increase at least in quantity if not in quality.

There has been concern in recent years regarding the low IQ scores of many Thai youth. A study in the Nation newspaper reported that the "Department of Health and the Department of Mental Health will (make) an effort to combat low intelligence, after it found the average IQ level among many youths was lower than 80. In 2006, the Vice Minister for Education Watchara Phanchet reported that "the average intelligence quotient (IQ) of Thai children, somewhere between 87 and 88 points, remains in the "low average" category when ranked internationally. Further, with the exception of the well-educated wealthy class, the level of English speaking remains quite low.

**Language**

The official language of Thailand is Thai, a Kradai language closely related to Lao, Shan in Burma, and numerous smaller languages spoken in an arc from Hainan and Yunnan south to the Chinese border. It is the principal language of education and government and spoken throughout the country. The standard is based on the dialect of the central Thai people, and it is written in the Thai alphabet, an abugida script that evolved from the Khmer script.
Several other dialects exist, and coincide with the regional designations. Southern Thai is spoken in the southern provinces, and Northern Thai is spoken in the provinces that were formally part of the independent kingdom of Lannathai.

Thailand is also host to several other minority languages, the largest of which is the Lao dialect of Isan spoken in the northeastern provinces. Although sometimes considered a Thai dialect, it is a Lao dialect, and the region in which it is traditionally spoken was historically part of the Lao kingdom of Lan Xang. In the far south, Yawi, a dialect of Malay, is the primary language of the Malay Muslims. Chinese dialects are also spoken by the large Chinese population, Teochew being the dialect best represented.

Numerous tribal languages are also spoken, including those belonging to the Mon-Khmer family, such as Mon, Khmer, Viet, Mlabri; Austronesian family, such as Cham, Moken, and Orang Asli, Sino-Tibetan family such as Lawa, Akhan, and Karen; and other Tai languages such as Nyaw, Phu Thai, and Saek. Hmong is a member of the Hmong-Mien languages, which is now regarded as a language family of its own.

English is a mandatory school subject, but the number of fluent speakers remains very low, especially outside the cities.

**Religion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thailand has a prevalence of Buddhism that ranks among the highest in the world. The national religion is Theravada Buddhism. According to the last census (2000) 94.6% of the total population are Buddhists of the Theravada tradition. Muslims are the second largest religious group in Thailand at 4.6%. Thailand's southernmost provinces – Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and part of Songkhla Chumphon have dominant Muslim populations, consisting of both ethnic Thai and Malay. The southern tip of Thailand is mostly ethnically Malay, and most Malays are Sunni Muslims. Christians represent 0.5% of the population. A tiny but influential community of Sikhs in Thailand and some Hindus also live in the country's cities, and are heavily engaged in retail commerce. There is also a small Jewish community in Thailand, dating back to the 17th century.

**Culture**

Thai culture has been shaped by many influences, including Indian, Lao, Burmese, Cambodian, and Chinese.

Its traditions incorporate a great deal of influence from India, China, Cambodia, and the rest of Southeast Asia. Thailand's national religion Theravada Buddhism is important to modern Thai identity. Thai Buddhism has evolved over time to include many regional beliefs originating from Hinduism, animism as well as ancestor worship. The official calendar in Thailand is based on the Eastern version of the Buddhist Era, which is 543 years ahead of the Gregorian (western) calendar. For example, the year AD 2011 is 2554 BE in Thailand.

Several different ethnic groups, many of which are marginalized, populate Thailand. Some of these groups overlap into Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia and have mediated change between their traditional local culture, national Thai and global cultural influences. Overseas Chinese also form a significant part of Thai society, particularly in and around Bangkok. Their successful integration into Thai society has allowed for this group to hold positions of economic and political power.
Government and Administrative Structure

The provisions relating to constitutional government and monarchy laid down in the 2007 Constitution specified three basic concepts regarding the governmental structure of Thailand.

- First, the monarch is regarded as Head of State, Head of the Royal Armed Forces and is a Buddhist but upholder of all religions.
- Second, a bicameral National Assembly, which is comprised of Members of the Council of Ministers and Members of the Senate, administers the legislative branch.
- Third, the Prime Minister, as head of the government and chief executive, oversees the executive branch, including the Council of Ministers, which is responsible for the administration of 19 ministries and the Office of the Prime Minister.

Figure 1.21 presents the organizational structure of the Royal Thai Government following reform of the bureaucratic system in 2002.
Within the Ministry of Education, three following departments previously under its supervision prior to the bureaucratic reform are now under the supervision of other ministries. The Department of Physical Education was moved to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports. The former Office of the National Cultural Commission has been upgraded to the Ministry of Culture. At present, religious affairs are under the auspices of two agencies, the Department of Religious Affairs under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, and the Office of National Buddhism, an independent public agency directly under the Prime Minister.

The Royal Thai Government attaches great importance to educational provision and promotion. It is hoped that an increasing educational access and quality will enable Thai people to pursue lifelong learning as well as to think critically, make rational judgments and live in harmony with other members of society.
Educational System, Standards and Quality Assurance

Under the present education system, various types and methods of learning are offered to learners regardless of their economic, social and cultural backgrounds. Education approaches are classified as formal, non-formal, and informal. All types of education can be provided by educational institutions as well as learning centers organized by individuals, families, communities, community or private groups, local administration organizations, professional bodies, religious institutions, welfare institutes; and other social institutions.

Formal Education

Formal education specifies the aims, methods, curricula, duration, assessment, and evaluation conditional to its completion. Through both public and private bodies, formal education services are mainly provided to those within the school system, at both basic and higher education levels, and in both general and vocational streams.

Formal education services in Thailand are provided in various formats for several target groups including: (1) mainstream education, in both general and vocational streams, provided for general students in regular schools; (2) basic education for children with special educational needs including special education for gifted and talented students; special education for students with disabilities provided by special schools, special centres and inclusive schools; and welfare education for disadvantaged students provided by Welfare Schools and Border Patrol Police Schools; (3) education for ecclesiastics and educational provision by several religious institutions; (4) specialized education provided by specific agencies other than the Ministry of Education; and (5) international education provided by using languages other than Thai (generally English) as a medium of instruction.
Mainstream Education

Mainstream education is provided for general students in regular schools in both general and vocational streams. Formal general education is provided at all levels, from pre-primary to higher education while the formal vocational education is provided only at some levels, from upper secondary education to higher education. In the academic year 2006, there are approximately 14 million students in formal schooling at all levels of education.
At present, the teaching-learning activities of basic education in the general stream follows the 2001 Curriculum for Basic Education (Grades 1-12); and the 2003 Curriculum for Pre-primary Education while the teaching-learning activities of basic education in the vocational stream follows the 2002 Curriculum for Vocational Education.

Organized for the 3-5 age group, the 2003 Curriculum for Pre-primary Education focuses on preparing children in terms of their physical, intellectual, emotional/mental and social readiness.

The 2001 Curriculum for Basic Education covers 12 years of basic education (Grades 1-12), and is divided into four three-year stages, consisting of 1,000-2,000 hours per year. In this curriculum, the knowledge and skills specified in Section 23 of the National Education Act have been grouped into eight subject areas: Thai Language; Mathematics; Science; Social Studies; Religion and Culture; Health and Physical Education; Art; Career/Technology-Related Education; and Foreign Languages. Activities that focus on responding to the learner’s specific interests are also included.

In the general stream of basic education, career and technology-related education is offered to school children at both the primary and secondary levels to provide them with work experience and basic knowledge for career preparation and technological applications.

Starting at the upper secondary level, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Thailand follows the 2002 Curriculum for Vocational Education (at the lower certificate and associate degree levels). Both levels focus on competency and specify the standards of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal attributes required by students in their future careers.

The standards in the mentioned Curriculum cover nine fields, comprising trade and industry, commerce, arts and crafts, home economics, agriculture, fisheries, business and tourism, textiles, and ICT. Students studying in these fields will have an opportunity to take part in hands-on training in cooperating factories or companies for at least one semester. To expand opportunities for students, a number of entrepreneurs and educational institutions are
offering a dual education programme, where students engage in on-the-job training for half of their total study period.

Formal technical and vocational education and training is conducted at three levels; upper secondary, leading to the lower certificate of vocational education; post-secondary, leading to a diploma or the associate’s degree in vocational education; and at university level, leading to a degree.

According to the 1999 National Education Act, technical and vocational education and training are provided in educational institutions belonging to both the public and private sectors, enterprises, or those organized through co-operation of educational institutions and enterprises.

In summary, vocational education is provided through the normal programme, the dual-vocational training (DVT) programme, and the credit accumulative programme.

In addition, special vocational education is offered in Sports Schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, and in Dynamic Arts and Fine Arts Colleges under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture.

**Basic Education for Children with Special Educational Needs**

Since promulgation of the 1999 National Education Act, greater attention has been focused on children having special educational needs, with efforts given to the development of education for the gifted, the disadvantaged and the disabled.

The Ministry of Education has announced criteria and procedures for providing facilities, media, services and other forms of educational aid, as well as for budget allocations in these areas.

- **Special Education for Gifted and Talented Students**

  If full and appropriate support is given, gifted and talented persons will become invaluable national resources generating tremendous benefit to the country. Thailand attaches great importance to diversified and commensurate development of these persons.
The 1999 National Education Act specifies that education for specially gifted persons will be provided in appropriate forms in accord with their competencies. The Act also states the significance of providing suitable curricula and distributing budgetary allocations in line with the requirements for such education.

Support given to gifted and talented persons in Thailand may be divided into the eight following categories:

1) Establishment of Special Schools for Gifted Persons: Among 26 Special Schools for Gifted Persons that were set up, the number of schools specially arranged for sciences and mathematics, sports and music is 13, 11 and 2 respectively.

2) Provision of a school within the School Programme: Regular schools are required to set up special classes, develop specific curricula, and revise the teaching-learning process and assessment for gifted persons in various fields, including language, science and mathematics. At present, around 150 of both public and private schools provide such a programme.

3) Provision of special activities, tuition sessions and competitions: Several public and private agencies, including 1) the Promotion of Academic Olympiads and Development of Science Education Foundation under the Patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Galyani Vadhana Krom Luang Naradhiwas Rajanagarindra; 2) the Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology (IPST); and 3) the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA), organize special activities, tuition sessions and competitions for gifted persons, such as the Academic Olympiad Camps, science camps, exploring centers and competitions in science or mathematics.

4) Provision of Advanced Placement Programme: This programme is based upon the cooperation between secondary schools and universities that allow secondary students to take courses organized for the first-year university students and receive credits which can be accumulate when they further their study at the bachelor degree level.
5) Provision of Specific Curricula: Some universities provide specific curricula which focus on research studies in specific areas or an Honors programme.

6) Research Studies and Development of the Body of Knowledge: The Office of the Education Council has conducted several projects on research and development aimed at developing curricula for gifted and talented children in the School within the School Programme. The findings from the research studies as well as the body of knowledge were integrated into the strategic proposal to develop the gifted and talented children (2008-2012) to be proposed to the Council of Ministers in the very near future.

7) Establishment of Centers and Institutes for Research and Development of Gifted Persons: Such Centers and Institutes were established by several agencies such as the Faculty of Education of Chulalongkorn University, and the Faculty of Education of Srinakharinwirot University.

8) Provision of Scholarships in Thailand and in Foreign Countries: The scholarships offered include the ‘Development and Promotion of the Scientific and Technologically Talented’ Project; the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) Project; the Academic Olympiads Project; and other scholarships offered by several public and private agencies.

In 2004, the Royal Thai Government established the National Centre for the Gifted and Talented under the Office of Knowledge Management and Development, a public organization under the aegis of the Office of the Prime Minister.

The Centre was later amalgamated with the National Institute for Brain-Based Learning and renamed as the Institute for Gifted and Innovative Learning (IGIL). The Institute sets up development standards and models to develop, promote and support the potential of gifted persons.

In line with Section 32 of the 2003 Ministry of Education Bureaucratic Administration Act, a Ministerial Rule was issued. Under the Ministerial Rule, a Board chaired by the Minister
of Education and joined by concerned agencies was appointed to be responsible for the promotion of education for gifted persons.

It is expected that the Board, together with the Institute for Gifted and Innovative Learning will be able to formulate policies, deal with administrative work, provide financial support and coordinate between the agencies concerned, to develop the gifted persons, which in turn will be beneficial to the country in the long run.

**Special Education for Disadvantaged Students**

Several agencies are attempting to provide education for those who are socially and/or culturally disadvantaged. These include the Ministry of Education, the Border Patrol Police Bureau and the Department of Social Development and Public Welfare (previously known as the Department of Public Welfare). In addition, non-governmental organizations such as Suan Kaew Monastery Foundation, the Foundation for Children and the Rajpraachasamasai Foundation also play a very important role in educational provision for the disadvantaged students.

Most disadvantaged students study in a number of public regular schools, called *Inclusive Schools* while the rest study in *Welfare Schools and Border Patrol Police Schools*.

The Welfare schools offer education for disadvantaged students who are deprived of the opportunity to attend regular schools. Free education, food, clothing, equipment, textbooks and other necessities are provided, and in most cases accommodation is also provided. Special vocational training relevant to future employment in the locality of a particular school is usually included.

The Border Patrol Police Schools are under the supervision of the Border Patrol Police Bureau, Royal Thai Police. So far, the Border Patrol Police Bureau has established 714 Border Patrol Police Schools. Normally, a Border Patrol Police School will be transferred to the Ministry of Education on the condition that there are permanent school buildings, a sufficient number of students and a better quality of life of people in the nearby area. Out of
714 Border Patrol Police Schools, 473 schools were transferred to the Ministry of Education, and 52 schools were abolished.

As for the disadvantaged students in Inclusive Schools and Welfare Schools under the supervision of the Office of the Basic Education Commission, they are divided into 10 types comprising (1) children forced to enter the labour market, (2) children who are sex workers; (3) deserted children; (4) children in the Observation and Protection Centres; (5) street children; (6) children affected by HIV/AIDS; (7) children of minorities; (8) physically abused children; (9) impoverished children; and (10) children affected by narcotic drugs.

**Special Education for Students and Disabilities**

The budget for students with disabilities was allocated by the Office of the Basic Education Commission from two main sources: the regular budget and the Educational Fund for Students with Disabilities. Formal education for students with disabilities is provided in Inclusive Schools as well as Special Schools.

In accordance with 1999 National Education Act, people with disabilities are entitled to receive all levels of education. The Bureau of Special Education Administration classified children with disabilities into 9 types in accordance with their disabilities. These include: (1) hearing impairments, (2) mental impairments, (3) visual impairments, (4) physical impairments or health-related impairments (5) learning disabilities (LD), (6) autism, (7) emotional and behavioral disorders, (8) speech and language disorders and (9) multiple disabilities.

**Inclusive Schools**

Inclusive Schools are regular schools that are willing to accept children with disabilities. There are currently 18,618 Inclusive Schools. In providing education for the disabled, these schools are also assisted by the Special Centres and Special Schools in terms of teachers, training, materials and facilities and coordination with concerned agencies such as the National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security.
Special Schools

Special Schools are specially arranged for students with disabilities. There are currently 43 special schools which are classified into four types of disabilities as follows: (1) Special Schools for those with Mental Impairments, (2) Special Schools for those with Hearing Impairments; (3) Special Schools for those with Visual Impairments and (4) Special Schools for those with Physical Impairments. In practice, however, children with all types of disabilities will be accepted in these schools. Special schools are essential for students with disabilities who need accommodations.

Non-Formal Education

Non-formal education services are provided by both public and private bodies. Under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, the Office of the Non-formal and Informal Education is the main agency in charge of non-formal and informal education. This office offers services to various target groups through traditional methods and through e-Book, e-Library and e-Learning.

Primarily, the services provided by the Office of the Non-formal and Informal Education target primarily those outside the school system, i.e. infants and pre-school children, the school-age population who have missed out on formal schooling, and the over-school-age population. Currently, such services have been expanded to cover specific target groups, including prison inmates, the labour force, the disabled, conscripts, agriculturists, the aged, Hill Tribes people, local leaders, slum dwellers, Thai Muslims, religious practitioners, those having no opportunity to further their studies in formal schooling after compulsory education, Thai people in foreign countries, and other special groups, as well as students in the formal school system.

The Office of the Non-formal and Informal Education offers three main types of non-formal technical and vocational training programmes:

1) Non-Formal Programme for Certificate in Vocational Education: Non-formal education activities leading to the Certificate in Vocational Education are provided through
distance learning to lower secondary school graduates, both the unemployed and those working in public organizations and private enterprises. This programme requires at least three years of study, except when there is a transfer of academic performance or experience;

2) Short-Course Vocational Training programme: Short-course vocational training is provided in many areas by both public and private institutions and agencies. These courses are offered from three hours to one year and are designed to serve the needs for self employment and to articulate with formal programmes in order to serve lifelong learning; and

3) Interest Group Programme: Teaching and learning activities are organized according to the individual needs and interests of the general public. Those having the same interests can form a group of five to fifteen persons and receive training of up to 30 hours.

Generally, the following non-formal educational services are provided by the Office of the Non-formal and Informal Education: Provision of Non-Formal Education for Pre-School Children; Provision of Fundamental Education for Literacy; General Non-Formal Education; and the Non-Formal Technical and Vocational Education and Training Programme. In addition, several agencies responsible for education services, welfare and public services also provide vocational training activities concerned with quality of life improvement.

The Bureau of Special Education Administration under the supervision of the Office of the Basic Education Commission, the Ministry of Education is responsible for 76 Special Centers in 76 provinces. The Special Centers render services at the centers; in Inclusive Schools; at home; and in hospitals. They also organize meetings/seminars to provide knowledge for parents of the disabled and relevant agencies; and conduct research and formulate the curriculum for short-term training for the disabled.

As mentioned above, non-formal education is also specially arranged for children with disabilities. Apart from the Ministry of Education, special education for the disabled students is provided by several other agencies including the Department of Social Development and Public Welfare under the supervision of the Ministry of Social
Development and Human Security, as well as by some demonstrations schools, municipal schools and private foundations. Moreover, some hospitals also organize classes for children with disabilities resulting from chronic conditions.

**Informal Education**

Informal education enables learners to learn by themselves according to their interests, potential, readiness and the opportunities available from individuals, society, environment, media or other sources of knowledge as follows:

- Informal education programmes provided by libraries, museums and science/technology centers, etc. as well as by mass media (radio, television, newspapers and magazines, etc).

- Informal education programmes of community learning networks i.e. community learning centers, village reading centers, sub-district health offices, sub-district agricultural offices, as well as natural learning sources in each community.

- Learning from various sources as follows: 1) local wisdom which includes culture and the body of knowledge in each community; 2) local media which plays an important role in passing on knowledge and social values through several kinds of performance; 3) families which are learning sources from birth for all people; and 4) networking through cooperative activities.

- Several ministries are involved in providing informal education to promote lifelong learning, through information dissemination, educational activities or academic and professional programmes for different target groups relating to the responsibilities of each organization.

- New lifelong learning sources have been established, while existing ones have been improved and developed in accordance with Section 25 of the National Education Act, which requires the State to promote the running and establishment, in sufficient number and with efficient functioning, of all types of lifelong learning sources.
According to the Bureau of Educational Standards and Learning Development, there are approximately 3,200 learning sources in Thailand, comprising public libraries (864), museums (293), art galleries (21), zoological gardens (45), public parks (1,260), botanical gardens (70), science and technology parks, sports and recreation centres (91), national parks (95), and more than 450 other sources of learning. Efforts have been made to enable individuals to learn at all times and in all places through several sources.

Included among the new lifelong learning sources are

1. The Office of Knowledge Management and Development, a public organization under the aegis of the Office of the Prime Minister. At present, it comprises six separate entities namely 1) Institute for Gifted and Innovative Learning (IGIL); 2) Thailand Knowledge Park; 3) National Discovery Museum Institute; 4) Thailand Creative and Design Centre; 5) Thailand Centre of Excellence for Life Science; and 6) Centre for the Promotion of National Strength of Morals, Ethics, and Values: This centre has been established to promote morals and ethics through the interaction of public and private sectors throughout the country.

2. The National Science Museum Organization, a state enterprise under the supervision of the Ministry of Science and Technology, operates the four following museums: 1) The Science Museum; 2) The Information Technology and Telecommunications Museum; 3) The Natural History Museum; and 4) The Environment and Ecology Museum.

3. The Bangkok Children’s Discovery Museum, established by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration in 2001 to help children develop their ideas and gain experience in adapting to an urban environment and the country’s economic and social development.

Several new public libraries have also been established, and services in all libraries have been improved. For example, free internet service is provided in all libraries.
Chalermrachakumari libraries and other public libraries, while many higher education institutions are also developing e-libraries and living libraries.

Through the initiation of HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, several botanical gardens have been established to protect, explore, collect, plant, preserve, conserve and utilize local botanical species.

Supported by the Plant Genetic Conservation Project Office under the Royal Chitralada Palace, this activity involves the original natural forest and distributes plants throughout the country in all floristic regions outside the responsibility of the Royal Forest department. Plants are distributed to government agencies, research centres, experiment stations, academy institutes, schools, temples or other areas where people come together to protect plant genetic.

Several other types of lifelong learning sources have also been renovated and improved, including museums and historical parks under the supervision of the Department of Fine Arts, arts and cultural centers, sports and recreation centers, as well as museums of Natural Science.

**Linkage among Three Types of Education**

The 1999 National Education Act acknowledges the importance of all types of education. Relevant agencies and educational institutions are therefore working to create links between formal, non-formal, and informal education systems. Credit accumulated by learners will be transferable within the same or between different types of education, regardless of whether the credits have been accumulated from the same or different educational institutions, including learning from non-formal or informal education, vocational training and work experience.

It is expected that access to education will be increased from the transfer of learning outcomes to and from all types of education. In so doing, credits can be accumulated and transferred within the same type or between different types of educational approaches and learning.
A more flexible educational system, with the ability to transfer learning outcomes and validate experience, will help increase access to and create links between all types of education. This will learning but also eventually lead to a learning and knowledge based society. The reform of non-formal and informal education is necessary to cultivate the culture of lifelong learning and create a learning society.

Levels of Education

Basic Education

In 2002, in accordance with the National Education Act, 12 years of free basic education was made available to students throughout the country for the first time.

Basic education covers pre-primary education, six years of primary, three years of lower secondary, and three years of upper secondary education. The current compulsory education requirement covers six years of primary and three years of lower secondary education. Children are expected to be enrolled in basic education institutions from age seven through the age of 16, except for those who have already completed Grade Nine. Basic education is provided before higher education by the following institutions:

- Early childhood development institutions i.e. childcare centers, child development centers, initial care centers for disabled children or those with special needs and early childhood development centers operated by religious institutions or by other agencies.

- Schools such as state schools, private schools and those under the uruisdiction of Buddhist or other religious institutions; and

- Learning centers i.e. those organized by non-formal educational agencies, individuals, families, communities, community organizations, local administration organizations, private organizations, professional bodies, religious institutions, enterprises, hospitals, medical institutions, welfare institutes and other social institutions.

Higher Education
Higher Education at the diploma, associate, and degree levels is provided in universities, educational institutions, colleges, community colleges, community colleges, and other types of institutions.

A) Associate Degree or Diploma Level
Higher education at the associate degree or diploma level requires two years of study and is offered by Rajabhat Universities, the Rajamangala University of Technology, state and private vocational colleges, as well as colleges of physical education, dramatic arts and fine arts. The majority of courses offered are related to vocational and teacher education.

B) Degree Level
Programmes leading to a degree require two years of study beyond the diploma level, and four to six years of study for those completing upper secondary education or the equivalent.

- The first professional qualification is the baccalaureate, normally attained after four years of study. Five years of study are required in the fields of architecture, painting, sculpture, graphic arts, and pharmacy, with six years required for medicine, dentistry, and veterinary science. In some of these fields, additional study is required to allow for a practicum before professional qualifications are awarded.
- Advanced study of at least one but generally two years, combined with a thesis, leads to the award of a master’s degree.
- A doctorate, requiring an additional three years of study following the master’s degree, is awarded in some fields, while an advanced diploma or certificate, designed for students already possessing a degree or professional qualification, may be obtained after one or two years of course work.

Since the establishment in 1917 of Chulalongkorn University, Thailand’s first tertiary institution, the number of higher education institutions has increased substantially, particularly within the past decade. There are currently 151 higher education institutions under the supervision of the Office of the Higher Education Commission and 94 specialized institutions under the charge of other ministries and agencies.
In addition, 18 community colleges were set up in accord with a government policy prescribed in 2001. The mentioned policy supported the establishment of community colleges in provinces where other opportunities for higher education were not available, to offer the education and training necessary for economic and social development in those communities. Community colleges offer 2-year associate degree programmes suitable for professional development in areas relevant to local economic and social development needs. Several curricula are currently offered in associate degree programmes from community colleges.

Educational Standards and Quality Assurance

The purpose of establishing educational standards is to specify certain qualities in the provision of education, such as desired learner attributes, curriculum, and teaching-learning processes.

So as to ensure quality, institutions are expected to develop excellence within the domain of their regular activities and administrative tasks, whereby it is anticipated that educational quality will flourish. Improvement of quality will be beneficial to direct recipients of the service, including students and parents, as well as indirect recipients, such as employers, individuals, and society as a whole. To ensure improvement in the quality of education at all levels and all types, two major tasks that need to be accomplished are the development of educational standards and the development of a quality assurance system.

There are currently three types of standards: national education standards, and standards of internal quality assurance and for external quality assessment.

National Education Standards

As specified in the 1999 National Education Act, the Office of the Education Council is responsible for proposing national education standards. Consequently, sets of standards were formulated by the Office in cooperation with the offices responsible for basic, vocational and higher education as well as the Office for National Educations Standards and Quality Assessment. With approval from the Council of Ministers on October 26, 2004, agencies
providing education at all levels are expected to abide by the national education standards, which are comprised of three categories:

I. Desirable characteristics of the Thai people, as both citizens of the country and members of the world community, consist of five indicators: 1) sound physical and mental health; 2) required knowledge and skills sufficient for leading a meaningful life and social development; 3) skills in learning and self-adjustment; 4) social skills; and 5) righteousness, public-mindedness, and consciousness of their citizenship of Thailand and the world.

II. Guidelines for educational provision consist of three indicators: 1) development of a diversified curricula and ambiance enabling learners to develop themselves in line with their natural inclinations and to the best of their potential; 2) systematic and effective development of administrators, teachers, faculty staff and educational personnel; and 3) practice of school-based management.

III. Guidelines for creating a learning society/knowledge society consist of three indicators: 1) provision of academic services and establishment of cooperation between educational institutions and community so as to transform educational institutions into a learning society/knowledge society; 2) research and study, promotion of and support for learning sources and mechanisms; and 3) generation and management of knowledge for the benefit of all levels and components of the society.

The national education standards also serve as the basis for setting assessment standards of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. At the moment, all agencies concerned have developed relevant educational standards.

**Internal Quality Assurance**

In 2003, the Ministry of Education announced relevant ministerial regulations for the system, criteria, and methods for internal quality assurance of basic and higher education institutions.
To serve as a basis for external quality assessment, all educational institutions follow guidelines for internal quality assurance standards developed by their supervising agency. Educational institutions are also required to implement an internal quality assurance system comprised of control, audit, and assessment.

In support of this effort, a number of activities have been carried out, including: developing personnel; implementing pilot projects; providing financial support; conducting, monitoring, and advisory tasks; and disseminating documents, media and equipment.

**External Quality Assessment**

External quality assessment of all educational institutions is conducted at least once every five years, with outcomes submitted to the relevant agency and made available to the general public. In conducting these assessments, the “Amicable Assessment Model” was employed by trained external assessors selected from qualified persons from private, professional or academic organizations.

The Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) oversees external quality assessments of both basic and higher education institutions following standards relating to educational achievement (output/outcome); input/process; and efficiency in administration and leadership. Different sets of standards for external quality assessment are used at the basic and higher education levels.

Within the first round of external quality assessment (2001-2005) around 30,000 basic education institutions, 670 vocational education institutions and 300 higher education institutions were assessed. The second round of external quality assessment (2006-2010) has been carried out.

An effective educational system should prepare Thai people with necessary knowledge and skills so that they are able to pursue promising careers and thrive in the knowledge-based society. It is essential that further support and benefits be given to those providing education and improving educational standards and quality of educational institutions at all levels of all types.
Plans and Strategies and Higher Education

The Framework of the Second 15-Year Plan for Higher Education of Thailand covers the period between 2008 and 2022. The goal of the Plan is to raise the quality of the Thai higher education system through several mechanisms and measures.

Highlights of the Second 15-Year Plan include: good governance, financial planning, development of higher education standards and university networking, fostering diversity within a unified system, and supporting university academic freedom.

It is expected that the Framework will lead to the production and development of graduates with the knowledge and skills critical to global competitiveness and sustainable development. The Framework comprises two major parts as follows:

1) The first part covers the local/global socio-economic environment affecting Thai society and higher education system, including: demography; energy and the environment; employment; violence and conflict management; decentralization; students and youth in the post industrialized world (work-based education, community-based education, internship/apprenticeship within the social and real sectors, co-operative education and engineering practice); Sufficiency Economy; And

2) The second part covers nine aspects of the Thai higher education system, including articulation with secondary and vocational education; proliferation of higher education institutions; university governance and management; national competitiveness; financing higher education systems; staff and personnel development; university networks; programmes for Southern Thailand; and learning infrastructure.

The Key factors for success of education at all levels and of all types are supportive government policies and strategies; concrete operational plans; sufficient budget allocations on a continual basis; and support from the several public and private agencies involved. With these factors, it is expected that educational policies of the Ministry of Education will contribute to human resource development and the increased competitiveness of Thailand.
Thai Education and Motivation

Education plays a significant role in Thai nation’s development since early days, formal and religious education was imparted through “wat” (Thai temples). Thai education system and philosophy portray a great impact of Monarchy and Buddhism. As a result it has affected student’s learning styles and motivation. In Thai society The King, the Religion and the Nation are proposed as three important pillars for Thai nationals. As quoted by Sabai, (2009, IV) “Thais are raised from the cradle to respect the trilogy: King, Buddha, and Country”. Therefore, there is no place in Thailand where one can escape a giant portrait of the king, a Thai flag, or a statue of the Buddha”. National religion of Thailand is Buddhism where 95% of the population follows Buddhism. Basic principles of Buddhism emphasises on tolerance towards others, respect for age, seniority, and hierarchy. Therefore, pomposity, arrogance, conflicts and social display of emotions is highly discouraged in a Thai Buddhist society. A teacher’s position is highly respected and considered as being authoritative and knowledgeable (Nguyen, 2005). Thai students are taught to uphold their teachers as demi-gods. Hence, it is evident that the core of Thai education is strongly rooted in its traditional Buddhist faith, utmost respect for the King, family and teachers. That also represents an ideal form of collectivist society as proposed by cross cultural relativist (Triandis, 1995, Markus & Kitayama, 1991; 2003).

It is considered that culture plays an important role in the development of the individual's orientation towards learning (Smith, 1990). Thai culture and its traditions has undoubtedly molded Thai student’s attitude towards teachers and learning to be respectful, polite, but dependent. Dr. Adith Cheosokul, a professor from Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, on September 1, 2002, commented on Thai culture’s effect on student’s behavior by saying that “Thai kids have no courage to question their teachers… the Thais are usually silent in class. I think it's the culture”. Such assumptions has lead local and foreign educator in comparing characteristics of Thai students with western students. Nguyen (2005) describes rote memorization as a common and salient learning style among most Thai students. She also claims that Thai students prefer more structured lessons; discussion and question sessions are discouraged during teaching since Thai students feel uncomfortable in voicing opinion.
out of respect, as compared to their western counterparts. Pennington (1999), states that the problem that persist in Thai education system is teaching methodology, which is obsolete and mainly based on rote memorization. Such practice only cultivates obedience among learners rather than stimulating independent thinking process. A series of studies conducted by office of the National Education Commission (ONEC) also identify Thai class rooms as static and lack student’s involvement in learning, as a result lowering Thai student’s academic competitiveness in the region (Fry, 2002; Wiratchai, 2002; Atagi 2002).