



World Change Starts with Educated Children.®

## School Room Program Laos

### THE NEED

Clean, bright, and well-constructed classrooms that complement competent teachers and quality learning materials have a measurable impact on student achievement.<sup>1,2</sup> Yet in developing countries, it is often the case that schools do not have adequate space to meet local education needs. According to an analysis done by the World Bank, in order to meet the goal of the UN's Education For All (EFA) initiative, universal access to and completion of primary education by 2015, developing countries will need to build unprecedented numbers of classrooms.<sup>3</sup> Room to Read is committed to supporting improvement of educational infrastructure in the countries where we work in order to provide every child the opportunity to reach his or her educational potential.

Educational indicators in Laos are dramatically low and represent a significant barrier to sustainable development and poverty reduction for the country. Insufficient classrooms, the lack of textbooks, and the lack of libraries are the main constraints in basic primary education. According to government policy, the state provides free education through secondary school. The lack of schools and trained teachers, however, hampers this effort.

In addition to overcrowding, classrooms and libraries in Laos are located in old and dilapidated school buildings. In many cases existing classrooms are unusable for a large part of the year because they do not adequately shield children from the elements. The government does not have adequate resources to rebuild or repair all of the aging classroom stock in the country. This is time for learning that is lost and can never be recovered. Room to Read builds new classrooms and libraries in Laos to meet the needs of the students there.

### THE PROGRAM

The goal of the School Room program is to provide children access to safe, dedicated learning spaces to help them achieve their educational potentials. Through the School Room program, Room to Read partners with local communities and governments to build schools. Room to Read shares project management responsibilities with the communities we work in and after construction has been completed all schools are owned and operated by the community or local government.

In Laos, we currently build primary schools. These schools are 4- or 6-room buildings with proper light, ventilation, furniture, blackboards, and toilet facilities. All primary schools include a Reading Room as part of the project, unless the school already has a functioning library.

SR Variant	Through 2009	2010 Target	Total
School Rooms	132	30	162

<sup>1</sup> KNAPP, E. (2007). *SCHOOL BUILDING IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: IS QUANTITY THE ONLY RELEVANT DIMENSION OF THE PROBLEM?* XII ARCHITECTURE & BEHAVIOUR COLLOQUIUM, ASCONA, SWITZERLAND.

<sup>2</sup> EARTHMAN, G. (2004). *PRIORITIZATION OF 31 CRITERIA FOR SCHOOL BUILDING ADEQUACY.* AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION FOUNDATION OF MARYLAND.

<sup>3</sup> THEUNYNCK, S. (2002). *SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES—WHAT DO WE KNOW?* THE WORLD BANK.

## **THE APPROACH**

### *Community Challenge Grant*

Our Challenge Grant model is central to our School Room program. Once a community has been chosen as a School Room project site community members must provide reasonable, but significant, contributions to the project to match Room to Read's funding. Through our Challenge Grant, we hope to engage communities in the School Room project and build the skills that they will need to maintain the new infrastructure. Our Challenge Grant consists of three main components: community participation, community contribution, and maintenance.

In Laos, communities participate in the School Room project through the formation of a School Construction Committee (SCC). The SCC brings together various stakeholders such as school administrators, teachers, and village leaders, to work with each other and with RtR to achieve the goal of construction and establishment of the library. The SCC's primary roles in Laos include mobilizing support for the project in the community, raising cash and in-kind funds for the project, and managing the project site by purchasing and inspecting construction materials, storing and distributing the materials, assigning security guards to prevent theft, hiring skilled and unskilled labor, and coordinating local volunteer labor. Also, every SCC keeps written financial records, daily construction progress notes, and a site visit log. Many skilled laborers volunteer their time when the project site is located in their own communities or provide services at below market rate, helping to reduce the overall costs of the projects.

The community contribution in Laos constitutes about 20 - 25% of the total cost of constructing the school. The contribution is provided both in cash collected by the community and through in-kind donations. In general, the community contribution in Laos includes:

- Cash for purchase of construction materials, paying laborers, and administration fees
- In-kind contribution of construction materials (wood, soil, sand, aggregate) and labor
- Water resources for construction and new toilets—digging of a deep well, water supply, and gravity feed system
- Electricity for construction equipment, including a monthly electricity fee and an electricity generator

To maintain the new school building, the community establishes a maintenance committee before construction has ended. Room to Read assists by providing training for the maintenance committee to:

- Set up a plan to inspect the building at least twice a year
- Raise and set aside funds for future renovations.

Room to Read also makes annual follow up visits for three years to our project sites to evaluate the quality of construction and usage of the building.

In addition, the community creates an Environment Improvement Committee composed of teachers, students, and community members. This committee helps to maintain the fence, school sign, playground and landscaping.

### *Implementation Method*

In 2008 Room to Read Laos fully implemented community-based construction for the first time. This method of construction tends to have the greatest community participation and largest community contribution to the project. The community is highly engaged in the planning, management, and monitoring of the project, and often provides a large community contribution.

Our teams have shared that communities are more engaged in project implementation than they had been in the past, the quality of the construction has improved over previous years, and local school construction committees take the initiative to include classroom improvements like bookshelves and storage cases. Based on these successes, our Lao team is committed to continuing their community-based approach to construction.

SCHOOL PHOTOS:

