



Representatives from UNESCO Bangkok, Kobe University, international organisations and development partners gather at the workshop.

Laos seeking sustainable funding for early childhood research

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The Ministry of Education and Sports will continue cooperating with Kobe University and UNESCO Bangkok to explore sustainable financing mechanisms to ensure Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) research following the government's 5 percent funding increase.

Speaking at a workshop on exploring ECCE sustainable financing mechanisms yesterday, Japanese education expert from Kobe University, Mr Keichi Ogawa, praised the Lao government for its recent increased funding for the ECCE research framework.

But this is still lower than in neighbouring countries.

Mr Ogawa advised Laos to increase its education spending by 1 percent of its GDP annually year to ensure a financially sustainable ECCE research framework.

The research framework is based on sustainable ECCE financing mechanisms identified in literature reviews and framework studies on innovative ECCE financing in 2015 and the World Bank's Systems Approach for Better Education Results.

Speaking at the workshop, Director General of the Department of Planning of the Ministry of Education and Sports,

Dr Bounpanh Xaymounry, said ECCE research was an important part of expanding in-depth understanding of policies and strategies for teacher development and the spending of official development assistance for education development in Laos and Asean countries.

Representatives from international organisations and development partners updated the meeting on the preliminary findings of Laos' country study on sustainable financing mechanisms for ECCE and 'Education for All'.

Since 2013, UNESCO Bangkok and Kobe University have collaborated and conducted research projects on education administration

and finance, and teacher allocation with financial support from Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

Under these research projects, guidebooks with a focus on basic education in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam were developed and a regional synthesis report published.

As a follow-up to the series of research collaboration, UNESCO Bangkok will conduct a new research project on exploring sustainable financing mechanisms for ensuring ECCE for All in Asean countries under the umbrella of the 2017 MEXT/UNESCO project with Kobe University.

Ministry pushes for more students in science, agriculture

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The Ministry of Education and Sports is encouraging students wanting to study overseas to take courses in science and agriculture, so these areas can be strengthened in pursuit of social and economic development.

Director General of the Student Affairs Department, Prof. Dr Khamlusa Nouansavanh, told *Vientiane Times* that most students are interested in business management, administration and finance, and their numbers are expected to increase.

"They are the most popular fields for Lao students, including those studying abroad. Meanwhile, relatively few students take courses in engineering, information and communications technology (ICT), and agriculture."

According to a report from the Student Affairs Department, the number of students and officials studying overseas has increased, with 5,186 taking courses in foreign countries in 2015, 5,042 in 2016, and 6,160 in 2017. The number of people taking courses abroad in the fields of business management, administration and finance increased from 1,134 in 2015, accounting for 30 percent of all students, to 1,185 people in 2016, representing 36 percent of all students.

Some 507 people took courses in engineering, construction and production in 2015, while 584 people registered for these subjects in 2016. However, the number of students enrolling in ICT

and agriculture courses has decreased in recent years. ICT students decreased from 381 in 2015 to 218 in 2016, while 104 students took courses in agriculture and veterinary studies in 2015 and 97 in 2016.

"Officials at the Student Affairs Department are collecting details of the number of Lao students who took courses in each of these fields in 2017, and will report the figures later," Prof. Dr Khamlusa said.

Lao students have taken courses in 29 countries, funded by government scholarships, exchange scholarships, personal financing, and the state and private sectors.

Vietnam, China, Thailand, Japan and Korea are the top five most popular places for Lao students to take bachelor, master's and PhD degrees, as well as other higher education courses.

Over the five years from 2012-16, Lao students and officials took more academic courses in Vietnam than in any other country. Vietnam also provided more scholarships to Laos than any other country, followed by China and Thailand.

In response, the ministry is endeavouring to increase the number of students abroad enrolled in the areas of science, ICT and agriculture to build the workforce in those areas. The ministry will also encourage more people to enrol in vocational programmes across the country and plans to expand training opportunities for women and girls, ethnic groups, and people in rural areas, to meet the needs of the job market.

Authorities mull ways to entice tourists during Visit Laos Year

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The Tourism Marketing Department under the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism has held talks with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the possibility of exempting more countries from tourist visa requirements during Visit Laos Year.

The department's Director General Mr

Soun Manivong told *Vientiane Times* recently the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is looking into the matter.

Mr Soun said the department had also met with representatives of the hotel and tourism sectors as well as members of the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry to discuss price promotions during Visit Laos Year.

At present, the citizens of only four countries do not need a tourist visa to enter Laos.

According to a recent report from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the government has waived the visa requirement for ordinary passport holders from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden for the duration of 2018, hoping to boost tourist

arrivals from the four Scandinavian countries.

The unilateral visa exemption will be effective for just one year from January 1 to December 31, throughout Visit Laos Year 2018.

The government hopes to attract at least 5 million foreign visitors this year, an increase from the 4.8 million tourists expected in 2017.

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