

EVALUATION OF “LOCAL EMPOWERMENT THROUGH COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY (LECA)” PROJECT

A ChildFund project funded by the
Australian Department of Foreign
Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	3
LIST OF ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS.....	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
1. Background	5
2. Project Evaluation Methodology	5
3. Key Findings	6
4. Learning, Challenges and Recommendations.....	7
INTRODUCTION.....	11
1. Project Background.....	11
2. Project Evaluation	13
METHODOLOGY	16
1. Data collection approach	16
1.1 Participation in the evaluation.....	17
Table 1: Evaluation Participants	17
1.2 Methods and Participants.....	17
1.3 Analytical Framework	18
Table 2: Six dimensions analysis	18
2. Limitations.....	19
FINDINGS.....	20
1. Six dimensions analysis	20
Table 3: Three dimensions analysis (drawn from the young authors, young researchers, teachers, village authorities, DESB officials and PAR youth).....	20
Table 4: Six dimensions analysis (drawn from ChildFund Laos staff directly concerned with the project)	20
1.1 Relevance	21
1.2 Efficiency	24
Table 5: Budget (in USD).....	25
Table 6: Direct participants.....	25
Table 7: Project workplan analysis (green = 14 outputs achieved; yellow = 2 outputs partly achieved, and red = 2 outputs not achieved	26
1.3 Effectiveness.....	27

Table 8: LECA project indicator and SEL program indicator analysis	27
Table 9: Lao language test scores from young authors' self-assessment	29
1.4 Impact	37
1.5 Sustainability.....	39
1.6 Organisational Learning	42
LEARNING, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS	43
1. Learning and Recommendations	43
For ChildFund to take action.....	43
For the young author activity to continue.....	45
For the youth-Led PAR activity to continue.....	46
For the young researcher activity not to continue this way.....	46
2. Challenges and Recommendations.....	47
Table 10: Integrating 7 steps of creative writing into 3 steps of mainstream writing in school.....	47
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION	49
ANNEXES	52

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

External consultant (Ounkham Souksavanh) would like to thank all young authors, teachers, young researchers, young participatory action researchers, parents and village authorities in Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province and Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province for their active participation in the evaluation of the LECA project. In spite of time constraints, one day per village or school managed for different groups in sequence, all of them worked actively and cooperatively, in focus group discussions, individual interviews and activities throughout the course of the evaluation. Also thank you the DESB officials in Khoun District and Huameuang District for their coordination with the partner secondary schools for the project evaluation to happen as planned and their involvement.

Much appreciate the involvement and cooperation of Program Quality and Evaluation Manager, Sydney-based Social, Emotional Learning Technical Advisor, 2 project staff, Ex-Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Innovation Manager, HR Manager, Finance Manager and Management of ChildFund Laos. Thank you Senior Program Development and Inclusion Officer Business Development Officer (Miss Casey Morrison) for her “internal” desk review and case study done in advance of the external evaluation. Last but not least, special thanks to Senior Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer (Mr. Chasy Somwhang) of ChildFund Laos for all his effort exerted to prepare all materials and logistics needed, coordinate with the district government partners, partner village authorities and young researchers, and involve himself in the evaluation all the way to the end of evaluation.

Ounkham Souksavanh
Independent Consultant
Training, Coaching and Evaluation
Empowerment of Community for Transformational and Sustainable Development

LIST OF ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS

CBM	Community-Based Monitoring
CFL	ChildFund Laos
CWIS	Creative Writing in School
CYP	Child and Youth Participation
DEL	Development Effectiveness and Learning
DESB	District Education and Sports Bureau
HR	Human Resource
LECA	Local Empowerment through Community Accountability
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MTR	Mid-Term Review
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development-Development Assistance Committee
PAR	Participatory Action Research
R4L	Ready for Life
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Background

Local Empowerment through Community Accountability (LECA) is one of the development projects implemented by ChildFund Laos. It is quite a unique project with having experienced 3 variations during the 3-year implementation period from 2017 – 2020. The original LECA was to establish a Community-Based Monitoring (CBM) mechanism per target village to monitor ChildFund Laos' activities across all the projects. The CBM (comprised of 1 adult monitor and 2 young monitors) was established in 13 villages (in Nonghet District), 9 villages (in Khoun District) of Xiengkhouang Province and 15 villages (in Huameuang District) of Huaphanh Province. In June 2018, LECA had its 1st variation due to the changes in the ChildFund Australia Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework and approach (from an integrated approach to a project-focused approach). In September 2018, the LECA project experienced the 2nd variation, as ChildFund Laos trialed a new Child and Youth Participation approach and technologies. Again, in September 2019, the project experienced the 3rd variation that was due to changes in funding and the program direction and a call from ChildFund Australia to close the LECA project a year earlier. The 3rd variation affected the goal, objectives, approach (no more CBM) and timeframe (July 2017 - June 2020 instead July 2017 – June 2021). Finally, the project goal was adapted to specifically adopt *creative writing activities into partner secondary school curriculum as a means to strengthen facilitation capacities among teachers, and improve Lao language skills, critical thinking skills, and imagination skills among students*. The objectives of the project are revised accordingly:

Objective 1

- *1A: Participating teachers understand the principles and objectives of creative writing and can facilitate creative writing workshops.*
- *1B: Participating secondary school students demonstrate improved learning behaviours and skills around literacy in Lao language.*

Objective 2: *To build the capacity of children and youth to better learn about and understand key development issues that affect them.*

Finally, the LECA project had 3 main activities: the creative writing for the young authors/secondary school students, the tablet-based online platform research for the young researchers/community youth and the youth-led Participatory Action Research (PAR) for the PAR youth/community youth. It was expected these activities would contribute to meeting the 2 objectives of the project above.

2. Project Evaluation Methodology

In June 2020, ChildFund Laos entrusted an external independent consultant to undertake the final evaluation of the LECA project. The evaluation design was based on the OECD-DAC criteria in order to assess Relevance, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impact and Sustainability of the project,

as well as Organisational Learning and to draw lessons learned, challenges and recommendations. The evaluation employed mixed participatory methods. The scope of the evaluation consists of the project's 3rd variation indicators, the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) indicators at the sector level and desk review. Visual aid/photos regarding project activities, a numerical scale (1 – 10), reading game, focus group discussion and individual interview were used to facilitate the data collection from 30 young authors (from 3 secondary schools), 7 youth researchers (from 4 villages), 26 PAR youth (from 2 villages), 17 parents (from 7 villages), 16 teachers (from 3 secondary schools), 5 village authorities (from 4 villages), 2 DESB officials (from 2 districts) and 8 ChildFund Lao staff. The fieldwork or data collection in the communities commenced on 3 June 2020 and ended on 12 June 2020. Following, a debriefing was held at ChildFund Laos Office on 15 June 2020.

3. Key Findings

Despite a range of challenges, for example 3 variations (its goal and objectives and timeframe affected) and the COVID-19 lockdown during the implementation, it has been well managed to achieve substantial results, yet it has great learnings in relation to Sustainability and Organisational Learning.

Based on a numerical scale (1 – 10)¹, focus group discussions and individual interviews, the LECA project has achieved the six dimensions as follows:

- **Relevance** average score is over 8 points (high): the project is addressing the real needs of youth—secondary students' Lao language skills through the creative writing process. The research activities—tablet-based online platform and Participatory Action Research also empowered the young researchers and PAR youth to better understand the issues that affect them and their communities.
- **Efficiency** average score is 7.5 points (high): the project outputs/activities are fully achieved 85.5% and the budget spent 92.7% at the point evaluated (yet the project still has some more time to implement). The proportion of implementation at this degree in the difficult situation, including the COVID-19 lockdown is considered efficient.
- **Effectiveness** average score is 9 (very high): there are 7 performance indicators, of which 6 are fully achieved and 1 is partly achieved. On top of that the project has contributed to fully achieve 1 selected indicator and partly achieve 4 selected indicators of the SEL program outcomes. Given that Effectiveness is even beyond the project results framework.
- **Impact** average score is over 8 points (high): Improved knowledge, skills and confidence are claimed. The young authors have improved their Lao language skills and test scores (increased from 1 – 4 points) and broadened their imagination. Some changed their perception completely; for example previously they believed only highly educated people were able to write stories, but now, they are proud that they also can write stories. They become more confident to express their views, ask their teachers for

¹ Scores: 1– 2 very low; 3 – 4 low; 5 – 6 medium, 7 – 8 high; 9 – 10 very high

advice. They practice imagining, thus thinking more clearly through the creative writing process. The young researchers and PAR youth have changes in their confidence and better understanding of issues that affect them. Significantly, the PAR youth were confident in presenting PAR results to their village authorities and villagers for seeking solutions. As a result, Sonkhua and Phiengdee villages initiated their action plans to deal with the issues—drug and not enough water. For example, one PAR youth member said “I am very lucky and happy being part of the research activity that makes me brave to think and speak. Before joining the activity, I came to the village meetings, I was never in the meeting room but outside. Now I am a person who presents information [PAR results] to village authorities and villagers, and leads them to discussing. It is a big change in me”.

- **Sustainability** average score is 6 (medium). However, it is a big gap between minimum (2.7) and maximum (8.1). The difference is explained from two different points of view: The low score by the young authors and researches in Huameuang district comes from the viewpoint on the institutional capacity; District Education and Sports Bureau (DESB), the schools and communities are not ready yet to continue, but still need more support from the project. The higher score by other groups, particularly the PAR youth comes from the perspective on the individual capacity; all knowledge, skills, confidence that the youth have developed or gained through the project—creative writing and research—will continue one way or another.
- **Organisational Learning** score is 5 points (medium): The staff acknowledged that they have learned substantially from the project in terms of technical knowledge and experiences in new approaches and working with DESB, partner schools and communities. But learning at the organisational level is less. For example, learning how to support project frontline staff to work more effectively and efficiently to deliver quality outcomes to remote poor communities is very little. Instead, project frontline staff are overloaded with too much paper work and compliances. They need more support and understanding from Finance and HR as well as Management to enable them to pay more attention to quality of work for the communities. On top of that, ChildFund has not yet learned enough about 3 variations of the project affecting the project goal, objectives and timeframe. It is difficult to encapsulate all reasons behind such variations and make it clear to the government partners and even to the project staff.

4. Learning, Challenges and Recommendations

- Learning on sustainability: The LECA project did not do enough to the institutional level (DESB, schools and communities) to the degree that can ensure sustainability within a given timeframe. Recommendation: ChildFund should look back to project design and approaches that it used “help or harm?” Good intention to help is not enough, but analysis of good intention and approaches not to create community dependency on the project is most important. Whatever is done either intentionally or unintentionally to make communities unable to continue is considered “harm not help”. Therefore,

ChildFund should pay more attention to improving this area in a timely manner for all projects being implemented or to come in the future.

- Learning on project variations: ChildFund has not yet learned enough about 3 variations of the LECA project in terms of potential and actual impacts, particularly to the sustainability aspect. Recommendation: ChildFund should look back to the LECA project design, risk analysis, strategy and approach. For example, a Community-Based Monitoring (CBM) with community monitors and young monitors (from 2018 – 2019) as a community accountability mechanism is already a good strategy. But, it is just a question of the approach to empowering the mechanism to be strong not dependent on the project provided stipend and telephone credit of 70,000 LAK (about 9 USD per month).
- Learning on the LECA approach change: The original LECA project was originally designed as a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) mechanism to provide technical support and guidance across all projects. Due to ChildFund's change in program direction, its approach becomes more sector-focused with stand-alone projects, and all the projects solely are responsible for their M&E. Then, the LECA has turned into a stand-alone project rather than an MEL mechanism. Recommendation: ChildFund should rethink MEL should not be a project or the like, but an organisational MEL to be able to provide technical support to all projects in the direction towards Accountability to communities and back donors, Partnership and Sustainability.
- Learning on frontline staff's capacity and expected outcomes at the community level: Frontline staff play a very important role in determining quality outcomes at the community level where ChildFund wants to see changes. Frontline staff still need technical capacity. Recommendation: ChildFund should give more priority staff capacity building regarding *community development facilitation skills, ownership, accountability and sustainability*. These areas will be key to quality outcomes at the community level. The Human Resource (HR) should facilitate the staff capacity needs assessment on a yearly basis and also on ad-hoc basis in order to fill a capacity gap when staff turnover occurs.
- Learning on support provided by Finance and HR. It is difficult for project frontline staff to question and encapsulate what are the must, for example donor compliances and/or what are internal created procedures. There are 3 issues related: difficulty to get advance approval, overloaded paper work required and per diem lower than the actual accommodation cost at the community level. Recommendation: ChildFund Laos Finance and HR department should re-examine what is the must for compliance and what can be simplified in order to facilitate and encourage program staff to deliver outcomes in a timely manner. In other words, the policy should encourage program staff to work at the grass-root level, not to hinder them from playing their role in more engaging with communities.
- Learning on challenges the LECA project faced: encountered 3 variations within 3 years due to the MEL framework change and ChildFund Australia's program direction change, quite frequent staff turnover, and the COVID-19 situation. Despite such challenges, the project was managed to achieve 85.5% of the outputs: 6 performance indicators exceeded, and 1 performance indicator partly achieved, and 5 outcome indicators partly

achieved of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) sector. Recommendation: ChildFund Australia and Laos need to further learn about causal factors underlying good project management. Also be more critical of performance indicators (1 – 4)—how were they formulated and calculated to have such percentages? Why do such performance indicators not have baseline?

- Learning on potential sustainability of the creative writing activity: It is consistent across all groups participating in the evaluation that the creative writing activity helps ethnic students improve their Lao language skills and confidence. However, sustainability is in doubt because the partner schools are not quite ready to carry on. Recommendation: As the LECA project will end in June 2020, and the Ready for Life (R4L) project is still working with secondary schools, the success of creative writing should be continued by the R4L project in schools.
- Learning on potential sustainability of the creative writing activity: According to the DESB official in Khoun District, he recommended that the State allocated budget (70,000 Kip/9 USD per student), 60% of which is for technical support to teachers, so can be used to support teachers to continue the creative writing activity. Recommendation: ChildFund Laos should follow up on this with DESB.
- Learning on activity gap: The LECA project has one indicator relating to writing and reading. But all the secondary schools visited have very few books and materials for students to read. Also the LECA project has no activity specifically to promote “reading”. Recommendation: Activity responding to the project indicator should not be missing in the future. The project design and workplan development should be thoroughly analysed in order to ensure that activities are sufficient to reach all set indicators.
- Learning on potential sustainability of PAR: PAR has brought about a difference in partnership. The villagers and village authorities from Sonkhua and Phiangdee villages were engaged from the beginning to discuss and prioritise issues on which they wanted the PAR youth do research. Both the PAR youth and village authorities have understood “the communities own and drive the transformation while outsiders/project only come and support them conceptually and technically”. This aims at strengthened community accountability, partnership and sustainability. Recommendation: ChildFund Laos should consider PAR as one of the potential ways toward sustainable development. This kind of approach should be introduced to all other projects of ChildFund Laos.
- Learning on expectations to the young researcher activity: The young researchers were expected to communicate and give advice to peers on the issues they researched regarding drug addiction, alcohol/beer consumption, smartphone-based game addiction, early marriage, school dropout, no job opportunities, gambling and driving fast. Therefore, they claim they need more technical support from the project to enable them to do interventions to address the issues relevant to their communities. Recommendation: This should be one of the important lessons learned for all projects. When community members are expected to do interventions, make sure that they are equipped with necessary knowledge and coached until they are confident to do on their own.

- Learning on the young researcher activity and lack of communication: All 7 young researchers were consistent to respond that they had collected data and sent them via internet to ChildFund Laos, but analysed data have neither returned to nor communicated back with them and their communities. Their communities wanted to hear back after they had collected data several times. They claimed that after research, there should have been interventions to tackle issues, such as drug that their communities actually face, and the project should have come to support them to work with the communities for change. The young researchers in Nalaeng and Phakha Neua villages said some people in their communities even misunderstood that they would sell information to ChildFund because of no report back. Recommendation: As misunderstanding is quite significant to the work of ChildFund, ChildFund Laos should urgently send its senior staff to make it clear to all 18 communities before the project ends,
- Challenge to sustainability: 100% of the teachers agree that the creative writing is very useful and effective because it helps students improve Lao language skills which are fundamental to learn all subjects. But when asked, if the schools can continue themselves, they did not provide any indication of their willingness to carry on, but rather had excuses—busy with regular classes and not having training aid (like character model). Recommendation: the 7 steps of creative writing should be integrated into the 3 steps of the mainstream writing in Lao literature. When it is well integrated, it is no longer a burden. How to do it? See the creative writing integration concept (in table 11) below.
- Challenge: Despite the great success of the creative writing activity in Lao language skill development in ethnic students, it has reached only the small number of the students (158) compared to the larger number. If the creative writing is still not integrated into the school curriculum, particularly in Lao literature, great needs of the majority of the students remains unmet. Apart from that the creative writing focus is more on completing imaginative stories, but less on a concept of linking the imaginative story writing to dialogues about real social problems that young students encounter in their real life, such as drug, alcohol/beer, child marriage, migration and human trafficking. Recommendation: Continuation of the creative writing should focus on integration of its steps and instructions into the school curriculum and link imaginative story writing as an analogy to reflect real life problems that students and youth face on these days.
- Challenge: Cash pay approach is an important challenge to sustainability. It is not only the challenge to sustainability, but causes misunderstanding by others in the communities that the young researchers sell data to ChildFund Laos, as they receive monthly stipend (about 9 USD). It seems that this kind of approach is “do more harm than good”. Recommendation: ChildFund Laos should stop the stipend pay approach and seek an alternative.

INTRODUCTION

1. Project Background

Local Empowerment through Community Accountability (LECA) is a unique project that has experienced through 3 variations in the course of the 3-year implementation from 2017 – 2020. In fact, the original timeframe was 4 years from July 2017 – June 2021 for implementation in Nonghet District, Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province and Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province, but it was shortened to 3 years due to ChildFund Australia’s internal transition. The original LECA was to establish a Community-Based Monitoring (CBM) mechanism per target village in order to observe and collect data using a *structured assessment form* through a *tablet-based online platform* regarding activities taken place in communities across all projects. At the time CBM was justified (by ChildFund Australia’s research) to be able to help strengthen the quality and impact of development projects and improve their relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability².

Thus, in line with CBM, the LECA’s original design had its goal *to strengthen ChildFund Laos’ Programming through improved development effectiveness, learning and accountability, and strengthen the capacities of partner communities (including children and youth) to 1) participate meaningfully in decision, 2) hold development actors, community representatives, and local government accountable for, and 3) take greater ownership of development activities that affect them.* Its objectives were formulated in 3 objectives as follows:

Objective 1: *to increase the capacity of ChildFund Laos staff, government partners, and local communities in implementing and supporting the organisation’s programming, and strengthen the ways in which ChildFund Laos is held accountable to communities, stakeholders, local government, donor organisations, and the public,*

Objective 2: *to amplify, assess and mainstream accountability mechanisms among key stakeholders in ChildFund Laos, partner communities and local government, and*

Objective 3: *to strengthen the capacity of children and youth, their communities, ChildFund Laos staff, and local partners to identify, trial and employ innovative methods, tools or activities that can facilitate meaningful and relevant child and youth participation in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ChildFund Laos projects across ChildFund Laos’ projects.*

One adult community monitor and 2 young monitors per target village were selected to play an important role for CBM in collecting data to feed into the tablet-based online platform which includes specific benchmarks to be assessed following the ranks “Strongly Agree” 3, “Agree” 2, “Slightly Agree” 1, “Slightly Disagree” -1, “Disagree” -2, “Strongly Disagree” -3³. On top of that the community monitors and young monitors reported via messaging and telephone about other issues or feedback regarding ChildFund’s activities conducted in their communities. Ever since, the CBM mechanism was established in 13 villages, Nonghet District and in 9 villages,

² The LECA project proposal version updated 14/11/2016, p.2

³ ChildFund Laos’s Community-Based Monitoring: Key Results (2019)

Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province, and in 15 villages, Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province⁴.

In June 2018, LECA had its first variation that was due to the changes in the ChildFund Australia Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework and approach from an integrated approach⁵ to a project-focused approach. The shift of this kind aims at monitoring and assessing specific projects instead of collecting quantitative data across all sectoral projects at the organisational level which do not provide an indication of the quality of projects and significant change actually measured through qualitative methods⁶. Through the first variation, the LECA objectives were revised from 3 to 2 as follows:

Objective 1: *to build the capacity of children and youth, and their communities, to meaningfully participate in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ChildFund Laos activities and projects in their communities, and to strengthen their capacity to better understand key development issues that affect them and*

Objective 2: *To amplify, assess and mainstream accountability mechanisms among key stakeholders in ChildFund Laos, partner communities, and local government.*

In September 2018, the LECA project experienced the second variation, as ChildFund Laos trialed *its new Child and Youth Participation (CYP) approach and technologies*. STELLA-social enterprise was brought in as a capacity development service provider for creative writing skill development for project staff, DESB coordinators and teachers. However, the LECA objectives were still the same.

Due to ChildFund Australia's program direction change, the CBM gradually phased out and completely stopped in 2019, but continued as a young researcher activity with a new purpose (youth better understand key development issues that affect them) only in 18 villages, Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province. Nonghet and Khoun Districts, Xiengkhouang Province have no longer CBM or young researcher activity since then.

Again, in September 2019, the LECA project experienced the third variation that stemmed from some changes in funding and the program direction as well as a call from ChildFund Australia to close the LECA project a year earlier affecting the goal, objectives, approach (no more CBM) and timeframe (July 2017 - June 2020 instead July 2017 – June 2021). As a result, the LECA project goal was adapted to specifically adopt *creative writing activities into partner secondary school curriculum as a means to strengthen facilitation capacities among teachers, and improve Lao language skills, critical thinking skills, and imagination skills among students*. The objectives of the LECA project are revised accordingly:

Objective 1

⁴ ChildFund Laos's List of Young Monitors and Community Monitors by village

⁵ Integrated approach refers to the approach ChildFund Australia and ChildFund Laos were using up until about 2017-2018. It integrates Education, Health, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Child Protection and Participation etc. in every village. This is what the Development Effectiveness and Learning (DEL) Framework focused on using program level indicators.

⁶ ChildFund Australia Organisational Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework version 21.03.2019

- *1A: Participating teachers understand the principles and objectives of creative writing and can facilitate creative writing workshops.*
- *1B: Participating secondary school students demonstrate improved learning behaviours and skills around literacy in Lao language.*

Objective 2: *To build the capacity of children and youth to better learn about and understand key development issues that affect them.*

Under the third variation, it came to the fact that the LECA project would no longer be funded after 2020; therefore, the main focus for the rest of the project life is placed on the innovation activities that can be learned for scalability, replicability and sustainability⁷. Young author activity—Creative Writing in Schools (CWIS⁸), in 2 secondary schools in Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province and in 1 secondary school in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province)—has been scaled up as considered “successful and innovative” in improving the needs of secondary students’ Lao language, imagination and problem solving skills.

The young researcher activity—2 young monitors turned into 2 young researchers (but some newly recruited) per village—is continued on in only 18 partner villages, Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province. In the meantime, in the light of innovation, Participatory Action Research (PAR) led by youth is an add-on to 2 partner villages (two of the 18 existing partner villages) from February – May 2020 in the same District.

2. Project Evaluation

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) was completed in October 2019. In June 2020, ChildFund Laos entrusted an external independent consultant to undertake the final evaluation of the LECA project. Based on the OECD-DAC criteria, the final evaluation aims to assess Relevance, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impact and Sustainability of the project as well as Organisational Learning and to draw lessons learned, challenges and recommendations through the application of mixed participatory methods. The scope of the final evaluation contains:

- 1) Incorporate desk review, including the MTR and other relevant documents into the final evaluation
- 2) Focus on the third variation and conduct fieldwork (in Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province and Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province) with young authors, young researchers, teachers & principals, village authorities, parents, DESB coordinators and project staff: the evaluation assessed four performance indicators under objective 1 (A&B) and three performance indicators under objective 2 as follows:

Objective 1A: *Participating teachers understand the principles and objectives of creative writing and can facilitate creative writing workshops (Education Outcome 3).*

⁷ Attachment 3.18 Project Variation Form – ChildFund Australia Projects

⁸ CWIS started in Nonghet District in 2018. It was successful and expanded to Khoun District in 2019 and Huameuang District in 2020.

- Indicator 1: *75% of teachers implemented the Young Author workshops in line with key facilitation benchmarks.*

Objective 1B: *Participating secondary school students demonstrate improved learning behaviours and skills around literacy in Lao language (SEL Outcome 1).*

- Indicator 2: *50% of secondary school students improve school test scores in Lao Language Studies.*
- Indicator 3: *50% of secondary school students read more in their personal time.*
- Indicator 4: *50% of participants are more confident to read and write in Lao language.*

Objective 2: *To build the capacity of children and youth to better learn about and understand key development issues that affect them (SEL Outcome 1).*

- Indicator 5: *50% of Children and youth involved in project activities can demonstrate an understanding of key issue and changes occurring in the communities that affect them*
- Indicator 6: *50% of Children and youth involved in project activities have taken actions to present or report their perspectives at school-level, community and/or district meetings or events*
- Indicator 7: *50% of Children and youth involved in project activities can identify at least two skills they have gained through their participation in the project which empower them to participate more in their communities*

3) In addition, the evaluation assessed to what extent the project has achieved against the 3 Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) sector outcomes by looking into “relevant” linkages between the 3 performance indicators of Objective 2 and the SEL outcome indicators⁹. Based on the type of links, SEL outcome indicators 1, 3, 4, 5 & 9 (bold) below are chosen to supplement into the scope of the LECA project evaluation [please note that the LECA project was designed before the SEL framework, so it is a challenge for the project to align with the SEL indicators]:

3.1) Social and emotional skills

Outcome: Young people have developed and are developing the social and emotional skills that enable them to cope with challenges and crises, and to positively influence their lives and relationships.

Indicators: Young girls and boys (with and without a disability) have improved:

- **Indicator 1: social and emotional competencies**
- Indicator 2: *knowledge, attitude and practices to establish and maintain positive relationships.*

⁹ Based on ChildFund Australia’s MEL Toolkit

- **Indicator 3: confidence, knowledge and skills to think critically about, make responsible decisions and help-see in critical areas, including gender, violence, sexual/reproductive health, digital media.**

3.2) Leadership and action for community change

Outcome: Young people participate in their communities and take action to positively influence change.

Indicators:

- **Indicator 4: Young girls and boys (with and without a disability) have increased confidence and skills to express their views, and listen to others in community forums, groups and/or processes.**
- **Indicator 5: An increased number of young girls and boys (with and without a disability) lead, participate or contribute to positive change in their communities.**
- **Indicator 6: Young girls and boys (with and without a disability) experience positive personal benefits as a result of increased community action and engagement.**
- **Indicator 7: Girls, boys, young women and men (with and without a disability) have equal representation.**

3.3) Enabling environment

Outcome: Duty bearer policies, systems, processes and practices are more inclusive of and accountable to young people and enable the development of their social and emotional competencies

Indicators:

- **Indicator 8: Gender-inclusive changes to government, CSO and/or community policies, structures, systems or practices result in the increased participation of girls, boys, young women and men (with and without a disability) to address social and/or environmental issues.**
- **Indicator 9: Project and partner staff, and relevant duty bearers have improved gender-inclusive knowledge, skills, attitudes and resources to support girls, boys, young women and men (with and without a disability) to develop social and emotional skills and/or model and create respectful relationships with other young people.**

METHODOLOGY

1. Data collection approach

External, independent consultant (referred to as Consultant) worked closely with Senior MEL Officer, Program Quality and Evaluation Manager and Sydney-based Social and Emotional Learning Technical Advisor in order to ensure common understanding of the evaluation scope and design of methodology and methods. The OECD-DAC criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability) and the project performance indicators set out in the third variation plus the relevant outcome indicators of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) program are combined together as the entire landscape for the final evaluation of LECA project. To assess such broad, specific areas, the evaluation employed the mixed methods approach to collecting both qualitative and quantitative data from different segments of the people concerned with the LECA project.

Fieldwork commenced on 3 June 2020 and ended on 12 June 2020, and a debriefing took place on 15 June 2020 at ChildFund Laos Office. Consultant and ChildFund Laos Senior MEL Officer went to the field together collecting data all the way to the end for a period of 10 days following the agreed workplan. The young authors (secondary school students from grades 9 – 12) and the young researchers (selected out-of-school youth and secondary school students, 2 per village) are the primary target of the LECA project evaluation. 30 young authors from 3 partner secondary schools, and 7 young researchers from 4 partner villages participated in the evaluation. 26 Participatory Action Research (PAR) youth (out-of-school youth and secondary students) also took part in the process. 48 key informants were also involved in the LECA project evaluation: within the agreed timeframe of 10 days, the evaluation was managed to take place in 2 secondary schools in Khoum District, Xiengkhouang Province, 1 secondary school in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province and 4 target villages in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province. There were 65 women/girls and 46 men/boys in total participating in the final evaluation of LECA project (see in table 1).

Before the groups and individuals decided to participate in the process, they were introduced to the informed consent—the LECA project evaluation objectives, benefits and risks, confidentiality of their data shared and key questions to be asked. Their right to participate or not, answer or not, withdraw any time as they wish, is fully respected. When agreed, they then signed the informed consent. As for students under 18 who agreed to join the process, their principals signed the informed consent on their behalf.

1.1 Participation in the evaluation

Table 1: Evaluation Participants

Evaluation participants	Female	Male	Total
Young authors	15	15	30
Young researchers	4	3	7
Parents	14	3	17
Teachers	9	7	16
Village authorities	2	3	5
ChildFund Laos staff	3	5	8
District Education and Sports Bureau (DESB) officials	1	1	2
Participatory Action Research (PAR) youth	17	9	26
Total	65	46	111

1.2 Methods and Participants

- 1) Focus group discussion plus photos as a visual aid, a reading game, a numerical scale (1 – 10) were used to facilitate data collection from 20 young authors (10 females) from 2 secondary schools in Khoum District, Xiengkhouang Province and 10 young authors (5 females) from 1 secondary school in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province.
- 2) Focus group discussion plus photos as a visual aid, the facilitating principles from the Creative Writing Manual and a numerical scale (1 – 10) were used to facilitate the process of collecting data from 12 Teachers (6 females) from 2 secondary schools in Khoum District, Xiengkhouang Province and 4 (1 female) from 1 secondary school in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province.
- 3) Individual interview and a numerical scale (1 – 10) were drawn on to facilitate data collection from 7 young researchers from 4 villages (Nalaeng, Phakha Neua, Sonkhua and Phiengdee) in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province. As originally planned, 2 young researchers per village would be involved in the evaluation, but one young researcher in Phakha Neua was out of the village. Therefore, there were 7 instead of 8.
- 4) Individual interview and a numerical scale (1 – 10) were applied for data collection from 5 village authorities from 4 villages (Nalaeng, Phakha Neua, Sonkhua and Phiengdee) in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province. (Note that two village authorities in Phiengdee village joined in the interview).
- 5) Individual interview and a numerical scale (1 – 10) were employed for data collection from 2 officials/coordinators of the District Education and Sports Bureaus in Khoum District, Xiengkhouang Province and in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province.
- 6) Individual interview and a numerical scale (1 – 10) were used for data collection from 8 ChildFund Laos Staff (from Program/Project, HR, Finance, Management)

- 7) Individual interview was applied for data collection from 13 parents of young authors in Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province and 2 parents of young researchers and 2 parents of PAR youth in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province.
- 8) Case study prepared (by Casey Morrison, Senior Program Development and Inclusion a bit earlier than the final evaluation is incorporated into the final evaluation report.

1.3 Analytical Framework

Table 2: Six dimensions analysis

<i>Dimension of Analysis</i>	<i>Key questions</i>
1. Relevance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do project results or outcomes address real needs of ethnic minority boys and girls (with or without disabilities)? Give examples 2. Are the project interventions adapted for the changing local context or changing priority needs? Give examples. 3. What rank is it given (scoring 1 – 10¹⁰)?
2. Efficiency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is it worth the time, finance and efforts? 2. What is the implementation proportions of outputs/activities and finance? 3. Are financial, human, technical and material resources sufficient to produce intended results? 4. What is the most efficient way of achieving results? 5. What rank is it given (scoring 1 – 10)?
3. Effectiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent has the project achieved its performance indicators? 2. What are the main factors that have contributed or limited in achieving the project objectives? 3. What rank is it given (scoring 1 – 10)?
4. Impact	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent has the project achieved its intended outcomes? What has the project contributed to changes at the individual level, the institutional level and policy level? Give examples 2. What are the unintended outcomes of the project both positive and negative? 3. What rank is it given (scoring 1 – 10)?
5. Sustainability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the potential sustainability of project outcomes? Give examples 2. What can be claimed as a potential sustainability evidence? 3. What can be continued by the DESB, partner schools and partner communities after the project?

¹⁰ 1-2 very low; 3 – 4 low; 5 – 6 moderate, 7 – 8 high; 9 – 10 very high.

	<p>4. What are the key factors that have contributed to sustainability?</p> <p>5. What rank is it given (scoring 1 – 10)?</p>
6. Organisational learning	<p>1. To what extent did external and internal factors influence the project outcomes?</p> <p>2. What are main contributing factors to key successes?</p> <p>3. What are main factors underlying key challenges to hindering project goal/objective achievement?</p> <p>4. What rank is it given (scoring 1 – 10)?</p>

2. Limitations

- 1) The numbers of both the young authors and the young researchers participating in the evaluation are relatively small (19%) of the total numbers¹¹. Within a given limited timeframe, the final evaluation could only take place in 4 partner villages (22%) out of 18 in total.
- 2) Due to time limited (one day per village) and long distance to travel, selection of the young authors was done beforehand by responsible teachers. Thus, the young authors selected to participate in the evaluation were students who have completed their written imaginative stories, whereas about 9%¹² who could not write their imaginative stories were not selected to join.

¹¹ The total number of young authors is 158 and the total number of young researchers is 36.

¹² There are 14 students or 9% (of the total 158) that could not write their imaginative stories.

FINDINGS

1. Six dimensions analysis

This section provides details of the youth participants' and key informants' perceptions on Relevance, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impact, Sustainability and Organisational learning. See tables 3 & 4 below in detail.

Table 3: Three dimensions analysis (drawn from the young authors, young researchers, teachers, village authorities, DESB officials and PAR youth)

Six dimensions	Young authors in Khoun(20)	Young authors in Huameuang(10)	Young researchers in Huameuang(7)	Teachers in Khoun(12)	Teachers in Huameuang(4)	Village authorities(5) in Huameuang	DESB official in Khoun(1)	DESB official in Huameuang(1)	PAR youth in Huameuang(26)				
(Range of scores: 1– 2 very low; 3 – 4 low; 5 – 6 medium, 7 – 8 high; 9 – 10 very high)													
											Mean	Min	Max
Relevance	7.5	10	8.3	7.3	7	7.3	8	9	8.3	8.1	7	10	
Efficiency													
Effectiveness													
Impact	7.5	9	7.3	8	9	7.7	8	9	8.3	8.2	7.3	9	
Sustainability	6.8	2.7	3.7	6.5	6	7.7	6	7	8.1	6	2.7	8.1	
Organizational learning													

Note: the groups of the evaluation participants above were not asked for their perceptions on Efficiency, Effectiveness and Organisational learning that are considered irrelevant to their self-assessment of the LECA project. Therefore, with them, more focus was on Relevance, Impact and Sustainability. Parents were not ask about the six dimensions partly as they were not involved in, thus knowing very little about the project, so they were asked about other aspects for supplement (see key questions in Annex 7).

Table 4: Six dimensions analysis (drawn from ChildFund Laos staff directly concerned with the project)

Six dimensions	CFL staff
(Range of scores: 1– 2 very low; 3 – 4 low; 5 – 6 medium, 7 – 8 high; 9 – 10 very high)	
Relevance	8.5
Efficiency	7.5
Effectiveness	9
Impact	8
Sustainability	6
Organizational learning	5

1.1 Relevance

1.1.1 Assessed by young authors, young researchers, teachers, village authorities, DESB officials and PAR youth (in table 3)

Relevance of the project is given the average score¹³ of 8.1 which is high (in table 3). The minimum is 7 (high) while the maximum is 10 (very high). The project is highly relevant to address the real needs of the ethnic students/young authors, particularly Lao language skills that most ethnic students lack. Through the creative writing activity, not only are the young authors improving their writing, but also they are broadening their imagination and analytical thinking skills. Research activities (tablet-based online platform and PAR) also empowered the young researchers and PAR youth to better understand issues that affect them and their communities. (See the following, each of the groups elaborated).

Young authors

The young authors/secondary students in Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province scored 7.5 (“high” in table 3) for Relevance. All 10 students at Phouvieng secondary school in Khoun District are consistent that the project has provided them with access to the important opportunity to enhance their imagination and perception. Thus, they are able to write and complete their imaginative stories evident as a durable storybook printed. Another 10 students at Yuanxai secondary school in Khoun District acknowledge that through the creative writing process they have broadened their thinking and imagination. They are now applying their gained knowledge when learning Lao literature and other subjects, and they understand better.

10 students at Chompheth secondary school in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province scored 10 (“very high” in table 3) for the project relevance to addressing their needs. They claimed that to complete their imaginative stories, they had to do a lot of thinking and consulting with friends and teachers. They acknowledge that the creative writing has helped them with creative thinking, imagination, writing skills and more confidence of expressing their thoughts.

Young Researchers

7 young researchers from 4 villages in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province scored with 8.3 (“high” in table 3) for the relevance of the project regarding the young researcher activity. They have learned a lot from the project through research on different issues. They know social problems better, causes and solutions. They know how to collect data and send them to ChildFund Laos via internet [to feed data into the tablet-based online platform]. They become braver to ask questions to young people in their communities about the following issues: drug addiction, alcohol/beer consumption, smartphone-based game addiction, early marriage, school dropout, no job opportunities, gambling and driving fast. Beside from that they also have learned through the quarterly meeting held at district town. The quarterly meeting is as space for them to update, discuss and agree a periodical issue for research.

¹³ Range of scores: 1– 2 very low; 3 – 4 low; 5 – 6 medium, 7 – 8 high; 9 – 10 very high

Teachers

6 teachers at Phouvieng secondary school and another 6 at Yuangxai secondary school in Khoun District, Xiengkhoung Province scored 7.3 (“high” in table 3) for the relevance of the project: The teachers at Phouvieng secondary school suggests that the creative writing training is very good in addressing the needs of the students because it helps the students in improving Lao language skills, especially writing skills and grammar. The students involved in creative writing are able to organise their ideas better and write their imaginative stories more coherently because they have learned and applied the 7 steps of writing. Through the creative writing activity, they have learned not only writing but thinking more logically. In addition, the students are more responsible for assignments and homework given by teachers, meanwhile the teachers trained to be trainers and coaches in creative writing are improving their teaching methodology in such a way that is more fun and participative in their regular in-class teaching.

Four teachers at Chompheth secondary school in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province scored 7 (high) for the project relevance due to the fact that the creative writing activity helps the students improve their writing and their confidence. The students who are involved in this activity have improved their learning of Lao literature. They are able to read and write better than ever before.

Village Authorities

5 village authorities from 4 villages scored 7.3 (“high” in table 3) for the project relevance by reasoning that the youth who are involved in the project [young author, young researcher and PAR activities] become a “role model”. They become more clever, mature and confident when they join the village meetings. However, there are some of the youth remaining less confident in speaking out. For example, in Sonkhua and Phiengdee villages, there are about 3 out of 28 PAR youth that are still shy of speaking and sharing their ideas. The village authorities in Sonkhua and Phiengdee villages could explained in more detail of what the PAR youth were doing because they had participated in the process: they were interviewed, involved in discussions for problem solving [regarding *drug addiction* in Sonkhua and *not enough water* in Phiengdee], whereas the authorities in Nalaeng and Phakha Neua villages knew in general about what the young researcher were doing—collecting data from village youth and sending to ChildFund.

DESB Officials

The DESB official in Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province scored 8 (“high” in table 3) for the relevance of the project. They reason that the creative writing is very good in helping the students improve their Lao language. The students are able to write better than before. The teachers also acknowledge they have learned from this activity. The DESB official in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province gave the score of 9 (very high) for the relevance of the project. She elaborated that the creative writing is very relevant to responding to the needs of both the teachers and the students because it helps improve teaching and learning Lao language. Improved Lao language skills are important for all ethnic students. She also said “when observing the classes at Chompheth secondary school, the teachers observed were using teaching aid better and the students enjoyed learning more”.

PAR Youth

26 PAR youth scored 8.3 (“high” in table 3) for the project relevance regarding the PAR activity [from February – May 2020] implemented in Sonkhua and Phiengdee villages in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province. PAR in Sonkhua village is on drug (methamphetamine) addiction while PAR in Phiengdee village is on drought (not enough water). The PAR youth participating in the LECA evaluation acknowledge that PAR is helping address the most important problems that their villages face. They also understand how to collect data, analyse and present PAR results to villagers and village authorities. Many of them become more confident than before; they dare to express and ask villagers and village authorities at the village meetings.

Limitations

However, as for the creative writing activity, some young authors/students are unable to write or complete their imaginative stories, and some teachers have not fully understood the creative writing concept and instructions, thereby being unable to guide students to write successfully. Due to that, some of the imaginative stories have not been completed as planned: Phouvieng secondary school has 64 young authors expected to complete 32 imaginative stories (2 young authors per story), but 26 (81%) complete because 12 students could not write. Chompheth secondary school expects 25 imaginative stories to be completed by 50 students, but 24 (91%) completed because 2 students could not complete 1 imaginative story. Regarding the young researcher activity, all 7 young researchers are consistent that they had collected data and sent them via internet to ChildFund Laos, but analysed data have neither returned to nor communicated back with them and their communities. There are no “planned” interventions to deal with specific issues affecting young people or the communities based on what the young researchers have studied. The young researchers in Nalaeng and Phakha Neua villages claimed that they have not had enough knowledge and power to influence or convince their communities to change, so they still need much more support from ChildFund Laos and district officials.

Although the scores for the project relevance are between 7 (high) and 10 (very high), a few missing points or gaps are significant given the limitations mentioned above. This indicates that the project has not yet addressed the true needs of young researchers and communities.

1.1.2 Assessed by ChildFund Laos staff directly concerned with the LECA project (in table 4)

2 senior ChildFund Laos staff concerned with the LECA project scored 8.5 (over “high” in table 4) for the project relevance. This score is fairly consistent with the average core of 8.1 (in table 3) given by the young authors, young researchers, teachers, village authorities, DESB officials and PAR youth. The ChildFund Laos staff expressed that the creative writing activity helps the students improve their literacy—writing and reading Lao, as they are intensively supported to go through the process of thinking, discussing, writing, editing and finalising their imaginative stories. The LECA project is considered to contribute a great deal to empowering the young authors, young researchers and PAR youth to write the imaginative stories and conduct research. For example, the imaginative storybooks printed and community-led development through PAR are evident.

However, the ChildFund Laos LECA project staff responded that the creative writing activity has reached only the small number of the students (158). If the creative writing has not yet been integrated into the school curriculum, particularly the Lao literature, great needs of the maturity of students will not be met. One of the LECA project staff also reflected that the creative writing focus is more on completing imaginative stories, but less on a concept of linking the imaginative story writing to dialogues about real social problems that young students encounter in their real life, such as drug, alcohol/beer, child marriage, migration and human trafficking. The latter (the creative writing links to a real life) is a missing part of the creative writing process, partly because the LECA project does not have a specific indicator to capture this essence.

1.2 Efficiency

Efficiency is scored 7.5 (“high” in table 4). The ChildFund Laos staff claim that it is worth the finance, the time and the effort because it is human resource investment—what the young authors, young researchers and PAR youth have benefited from the project in terms of knowledge and skills is valuable and sustainable. During the period of 3 years, the project has provided a unique opportunity to 42 community monitors, 73 young monitors, 158 young authors, 35 teachers, 36 young researchers, and 28 PAR youth. Such participants have learned through new technologies and innovative approaches including the tablet-based online platform research, creative writing and PAR with the purposes of improving their Lao language, imagination and analytical thinking skills. It was claimed that skills of this kind enable them to be more valuable for the benefit of the individuals indeed and the collective to some extent. However, it is still a question of continuation at the institutional level, such as schools and communities.

Despite a lot of tough challenges including ChildFund Australia’s program direction change from the integrated approach to the project-focused approach, followed by the project’s 3 variations, senior project staff turnovers (3 times), a call from ChildFund Australia to close the project 1 year earlier, and the full country lockdown measure by the government due to the COVID-19 pandemic (with no international and inter-provincial travel, and no project activity allowed in communities from 30 March – 3 May 2020), the LECA project has been well managed. The budget spent up to the end of May 2020 is 670,738 USD (92.7%) compared to the budget planned, yet the expenditure is only up to May 2020 (see table 5) while the financial year end is the end of June. There are 372 direct participants (the community monitors, young monitors, young authors, young researchers, PAR youth and teachers) benefiting from the LECA project (see table 6). Up to this point, the total disbursement to date and the number of direct participants, the project has invested 1,803 USD per person. The LECA project has 18 outputs, of which 14 are 100% achieved, 2 are 70% achieved and 2 are not achieved—the total percentage of the project outputs achieved is 85.5% (15.4/18) (see table 7). As for unachieved outputs 1.12 & 1.13 (in table 7) are about organising a community event and a national reading fair that were not allowed due to the country lockdown to contain COVID-19 (through the social distancing measure/more than 10 people gathering not allowed). Under such conditions as

mentioned, the project has achieved 85.5% of the 18 project outputs compared to the budget spent 92.7%. Considering the achievement, investment and circumstances, the project efficiency is high.

Table 5: Budget (in USD)

2018			2019			2020 (up to May)			Total		
Planned	Spent	%	Planned	Spent	%	Planned	Spent	%	Planned	Spent	%
216,211	223,492	103.4	278,462	277,158	99.5	229,047	170,088	74.3	723,720	670,738	92.7

Table 6: Direct participants

District	No. of Community Monitors	No. of Young Monitor	Young authors	Young Researchers	PAR Youth	Secondary school teachers	Total
	July 2017 – June 2019		July 2019 – June 2020				
Nonghet	18	26					
Khoun	9	18					
Huameuang	15	29	158	36	28	35	
Total	42	73	158	36	28	35	372

Table 7: Project workplan analysis (green = 14 outputs achieved; yellow = 2 outputs partly achieved, and red = 2 outputs not achieved)

<p>Output 1.1 Young Author CWIS approach pilot finalised.</p> <p>Activity 1.1.1 All guidebooks, manuals, illustrations, and facilitation materials are available in Lao and English. This collection of materials has been developed in collaboration with Stella. There are two sets of materials: Approach 1 and Approach 2. The set to be used in this project is Approach 1.</p> <p>Output 1.2 Young Author CWIS ToT 1 conducted in partner secondary schools.</p> <p>Activity 1.2.1 PWT facilitates ToT to teachers at each partner secondary school: see Annex for breakdown of numbers per school, class, and teaching group. Activity 1.2.2 PWT and teachers plan participants and agenda for following ToTs and workshops Activity 1.2.2 PWT purchases and prints workshop materials and delivers to teachers</p> <p>Output 1.3 Teachers deliver first set of workshops.</p> <p>Activity 1.3.1 Teachers conduct first set of workshops with their student groups as per the agenda set in the previous output Activity 1.3.2 Teachers present back written work to PWT for review and documentation</p> <p>Output 1.4 Young Author CWIS ToT 2 conducted in partner secondary schools.</p> <p>Activity 1.4.1 PWT facilitates ToT Activity 1.4.2 PWT and teachers reflect on previous workshop and make adjustments to agenda as needed</p> <p>Output 1.5 Teachers deliver second set of workshops.</p> <p>Activity 1.5.1 Teachers conduct second set of workshops Activity 1.5.2 Teachers present back written work to PWT</p> <p>Output 1.6 Young Author CWIS ToT 3 conducted in partner secondary schools.</p> <p>Activity 1.6.1 PWT facilitates ToT Activity 1.6.2 PWT and teachers reflect on previous workshop</p> <p>Output 1.7 Teachers deliver third set of workshops.</p> <p>Activity 1.7.1 Teachers conduct third set of workshops Activity 1.7.2 Teachers present back written work to PWT</p> <p>Output 1.8 Young Author CWIS ToT 4 conducted in partner secondary schools.</p> <p>Activity 1.8.1 PWT facilitates ToT Activity 1.8.2 PWT and teachers reflect on previous workshop</p> <p>Output 1.9 Teachers deliver fourth set of workshops.</p> <p>Activity 1.9.1 Teachers conduct fourth set of workshops Activity 1.9.2 Teachers present back written work to PWT</p> <p>Output 1.10 District-level end of semester learning session with teachers.</p> <p>Activity 1.10.1 Teachers, select students, and PWT meet to reflect on learnings and challenges, and decide on future implementation plan</p> <p>Output 1.11 Design and publication of stories produced by each secondary school.</p> <p>Activity 1.11.1 Edit stories and translate stories into English Activity 1.11.2 Send stories for layout and design Activity 1.11.3 Print and digitalise stories [not done yet]</p> <p>Output 1.12 Young Author community event.</p> <p>Activity 1.12.1 Conduct school-based event that showcases the final products of the workshop to other teachers, students, parents, and local government partners.</p> <p>Output 1.13 Engagement in national annual reading/literacy event/fair.</p> <p>Activity 1.13.1 Teachers and students present their work at national literacy event or literary fair</p> <p>Output 2.1 Young Researcher Group formed</p> <p>Activity 2.1.1 Young Researchers recruited from existing and new villages, 2 per village, 1 male and 1 female, all under 24 years. Activity 2.1.2 Young Researchers sign contracts.</p> <p>Output 2.2 Young Researcher Workshops</p> <p>Activity 2.2.1 Triannual workshops conducted with Young Researchers where tablets are distributed, checked, loaded, and instructions on data collection given; YRs select research questions, and discuss the results of previous surveys. Activity 2.2.2 Stipends paid to YRs – 70,000 LAK per month. Activity 2.2.3 Data credit given to YRs – 10,000 LAK per month</p> <p>Output 2.3 Young Researcher Research Report Produced</p> <p>Activity 2.3.1 Data collected via KoBo and collated Activity 2.3.2 Data analysed by PWT and summary report produced Activity 2.3.1 Report shared among YRs in format for public dissemination and use [not done yet]</p> <p>Output 2.4 Research</p> <p>Activity 2.4.1 (Action) Research work conducted on key cross-cutting issues in ChildFund Laos program areas in order to understand these key issues from the perspectives of the lived experiences our CFL partner communities – Young Researcher also participate in the process.</p> <p>Output 2.5 Internal Review and External Evaluation</p> <p>Activity 2.5.1 Conduct internal review of project impact from FY1718-1819 Activity 2.5.2 Conduct end of project evaluation</p>
--

Note that for the rest of the project life, the activities under outputs 1.11 & 2.3 partially achieved (in yellow) will continue. The activities under output 1.12 & 1.13 (unachieved) were not allowed to organise the large number of people due to the country lockdown for COVID-19 containment.

1.3 Effectiveness

The LECA project effectiveness is scored 9 (“very high” in table 4). All 6 performance indicators (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 7)) of the LECA project variation 3 exceed the targets, and 1 performance indicator (6) is partly achieved. One outcome indicator of the SEL program¹⁴ is fully achieved and 4 are partly achieved. See table 8 (Green = excess or fully achieved and yellow = partly achieved).

Table 8: LECA project indicator and SEL program indicator analysis

LECA Project Indicators	SEL Outcome Indicators
<i>LECA Indicator 1: 75% of teachers implemented the Young Author workshops in line with key facilitation benchmarks [based on 5 principles].</i>	SEL Indicator 1: Social and emotional competencies
<i>LECA Indicator 2: 50% of secondary school students improve school test scores in Lao Language Studies.</i>	SEL Indicator 3: Confidence, knowledge and skills to think critically about, make responsible decisions and help-seek in critical areas, including gender, violence, sexual/reproductive health, digital media.
<i>LECA Indicator 3: 50% of secondary school students read more in their personal time.</i>	SEL Indicator 4: Young girls and boys (with and without a disability) have increased confidence and skills to express their views, and listen to others in community forums, groups and/or processes.
<i>LECA Indicator 4: 50% of participants are more confident to read and write in Lao language.</i>	SEL Indicator 5: An increased number of young girls and boys (with and without a disability) lead, participate or contribute to positive change in their communities.
<i>LECA Indicator 5: 50% of Children and youth involved in project activities can demonstrate an understanding of key issue and changes occurring in the communities that affect them</i>	SEL Indicator 9: Project and partner staff, and relevant duty bearers have improved gender-inclusive knowledge, skills, attitudes and resources to support girls, boys, young women and men (with and without a disability) to develop social and emotional skills and / or model and create respectful relationships with other young people.
<i>LECA Indicator 6: 50% of Children and youth involved in project activities have taken actions to present or report their perspectives at school-level, community and/or district meetings or events</i>	

¹⁴ Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) which is at the program level. The final evaluation is designed to look at the SEL outcome indicators in addition to the scope of the LECA project variation 3 as relevant.

LECA Indicator 7: 50% of Children and youth involved in project activities can identify at least two skills they have gained through their participation in the project which empower them to participate more in their communities	

1.3.1 LECA Indicator 1: 75% of teachers implemented the Young Author workshops in line with key facilitation benchmarks [based on 5 principles¹⁵]. This indicator is achieved exceeding the target; 94% of 16 teachers (from 3 secondary schools) participating in the project evaluation are able to recall what they did to facilitate the young author workshops in line with the 5 principles of creative writing. For example, the phrases repeatedly heard from the teachers related to the concept and practice are:

learner-centered approach, encourage students to think and do themselves, encourage students to work as team and learn from friends, support students to use their full potential to think as clearly as possible, ensure students' understanding of the steps of writing (7 steps), get students' participation, use photos to stimulate imagination, encourage students to discuss in groups and exchange thoughts, encourage students to think and get more information to write their stories, work and reflect together, energizer before learning, encourage students to pay attention to grammar and editing, encourage students to think and draw (if possible), encourage students to ask questions, and give storytelling to students to stimulate their imagination.

¹⁵ 1) 90% of work done by students and only 10% by teachers: imagination, planning, writing, submitting stories and grammatical editing. 2) Understand and accept uniqueness of individual students in learning: some students need more support than others and teachers are able to accommodate such different needs. 3) Understand and accept different thinking and thoughts of individual students: Some students need a lot of time to think before they can write. Some are able to write, speak and think at the same time. Perceive differences of this kind as normal, encourage students to perceive so, and be able to accommodate them. 4) Respect students' thoughts: teachers' role is to make students' thoughts easily understood by readers. Teachers must not say "this is not good; change it now". 5) Encourage students to learn from peers, their families/parents/siblings, adults and others whom they know. Teachers' role is to ask if students need advice on how to develop relations and/or approach their peers, families/parents/siblings and adults in the community in order to seek more knowledge.

1.3.2 LECA Indicator 2: 50% of secondary school students improve school test scores in Lao Language Studies. 9 (90%) out of 10 students at Phouvieng secondary school have improved their Lao language test score from 1 – 3 points while 1 student has remained the same. 6 (about 67%) out of 9 students at Yuangxai secondary school have improved their Lao language test score from 1 – 2 points while 3 have remained the same. All 9 students (100%) at Chompheth secondary school have improved their Lao language test score from 1 – 4 points. 24 (about 86%) out of the total 28 secondary school students/young authors involved in the creative writing have improved their Lao language test score. This indicator is achieved exceeding the target. See table 9 in detail:

Table 9: Lao language test scores from young authors' self-assessment

Phouvieng School				Yuangxai School				Chompheth School			
Person	Score		Different points	Person	Score		Difference points	Person	Score		Difference points
	Before	Now			Before	Now			Before	Now	
1	2, 5	5, 8	3	1	5, 7	6, 7	1	1	6	8	2
2	4, 6	5, 7	1	2	5, 6	ni	Ni	2	5	8	3
3	3, 6	5, 8	2	3	6, 7	8, 9	2	3	6, 7	7, 8	1
4	5, 6	7, 8	2	4	7, 8	7, 8	0	4	5	7	2
5	5, 6	8, 9	3	5	6, 7	8, 9	2	5	5, 6	ni	Ni
6	6, 7	8, 9	2	6	6, 7	8, 9	2	6	6, 7	8, 9	2
7	6, 7	8, 9	2	7	6, 7	6, 7	0	7	5, 6	8, 10	3, 4
8	8, 7	7, 8	0	8	6, 7	6, 7	0	8	4, 7	8, 9	4, 2
9	6, 7	7, 8	1	9	5, 6	6, 7	1	9	6, 7	8, 9	2
10	4, 5	6, 7	2	10	5, 6	7, 8	2	10	6	9	3
9 out of 10 have improved score from 1 – 3 points			90%	6 out of 9 have improved score from 1 – 2 points			67%	100% have improved score from 1 – 4 points			100%

(Note: 1 – 10 points are the test score standards in Laos. The students' scores are kept confidential. They were asked to give one or two scores for comparison between "Before" and "Now" as they remembered. "ni" (not identified) that is the person who did not give his/her score. "ni" is omitted from the analysis. "0" remains the same).

1.3.3 LECA Indicator 3: 50% of secondary school students read more in their personal time. This indicator is achieved twofold compared to the target; 100% of 30 secondary school students/young authors reported spending more time reading since they have joined the creative writing activity. Reading more helps them write Lao and their imaginative stories better. When asked about stories and books that they have read or are reading, most stories they named are in the Lao literatures/schools' books and in the imaginative storybooks provided by ChildFund Laos. The following tables show the increased number of **short stories and books** that each of the individual students (from 3 secondary schools) had and have read before and during their involvement in creative writing:

At Phouvieng secondary school

No. of students	Before involvement in creative writing	During involvement in creative writing
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kampha Phee Noi • Chieng Mieng • Grasshopper and monkey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All short stories in Lao literature • Fiction • Blind elephant • Rabbit and turtle • Chieng Mieng • Critical writing instructions • Poems
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dancing bird • Rabbit and turtle • Kampha Phee Noi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love of Mr. Sun • Noi's adventure • Magical girl • Imaginative story: Ghost in Landwood Village • Imaginative story: Anlita's adventure • Tiger and monkey • Mark Namtao Pong
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chiengyan and fart • Kampha Phee Noi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yeu grandfather and mother • Mark Namtao Pong • Ghost • News
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 daughters • Kampha Phee Noi • Phavad Sun Don 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MasiOud's adventure • Cat ploughs • Phou Thao Phou Nang • Blind elephant • Phaya and Chieng Mieng
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kam Pha Phee Noi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ko's revenge • Chieng Mieng • Yeu grandfather and mother
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ghost • Giant face 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MasiOud's adventure • Sang Sin Sai • Phou Thao Phou Nang • Chieng Mieng
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lao literature • Revolution of Lao hero • Folktale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lao literature • News from Facebook • Imaginative stories • Fiction
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kam Pha Phee Noi • Nam Tao Pong • Poems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anlita's adventure • Magic girl • News • Imaginative story: Ghost in Landwood Village • Non-fiction
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dinosaur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lao literature

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kampha Phee Noi • Khoun Boulom
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dinosaur • Sang Sin Sai 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kampha Phee Noi • Eternal love of Sithon and Manola • Chieng Mieng • Miss Tabfa • Khoun Boulom

At Yuangchai secondary school

No. of students	Before involvement in creative writing	During involvement in creative writing
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lao literature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ase Kalang De • Eternal love of Sithon and Manola Troup no. 2
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chieng Mieng • Nam Tao Poug • 12 daughters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bird's child • Vietnamese literature • Revenge • Trader and lazy horse • History of Vientiane • Kam Pha Phee Noi • Cultural folktales
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phou Thao Phou Nang 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dab Sai Fa • Return to throne • Kampha Phee Noi
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champa Ci Ton • Eternal love of Sithon and Manola 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lion King • Updates on COVID-19 • Return to throne • Mr. Jetlai
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lao literature • Sisters • Chieng Mieng 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ase Kalang De • Miss Phomhom • Miss Boa • Updates on COVID-19 and lockdown • Troup no. 2
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The deaf • Jail escape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring • Phou Thai Phou Nang • Fiction
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orphan • 12 daughters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imaginative story: revenge • Phou Thao Phou Nang • Cobra and farmer • Chieng Mieng
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Miss Phomhom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orphan • 2 sisters • Lunar limb
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phou Thao Phou Nang 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dab Sai Fa • Nam Tao Poug • Kampha Phee Noi
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Sin Sai • Miss Taeng On 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imaginative stories • Kampha Phee Noi • Spring • Yeu grandfather and mother • Nam Tao Poug

At Chompheth secondary school

No. of students	Before involvement in creative writing	During involvement in creative writing
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beautiful forest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chicken and glass Mr. Chanphanith Imaginative story: creating demon Leu Si
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kampha Phee Noi Lunar limb 2 sisters Chieng Mieng 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smell national flower Nam Tao Poug Chieng Mieng The poor and the rich Ase Kalang De Other short stories
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lao literature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make billionaire Kampha Phee Noi
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kampha Phee Noi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> White elephant Chieng Mieng Miss Tan Tai Other short stories
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The poor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My efforts Chieng Mieng Lao literature
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orphan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chieng Mieng Lao literature Nam Tai Poug
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lunar limb Kampha Phee Noi 2 sisters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kalang De Nam Tao Poug Chieng Mieng Kampha Phee Noi Sang Sin Sai
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kampha Phee Noi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brave man Lao literature Other short stories
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Danger of unexploited ordnance Chieng Mieng 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What youth should know Rural child goes to school in town Poor child Hero of Laos
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 sisters Elderly Phia Tang 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kampha Phee Noi Lunar limb Love stories Sang Sin Sai Smell national flower

Despite the achievement of the set indicator of the project, all the secondary schools visited have very few books and materials for students to read. Also the LECA project has no activity specifically to promote “reading”.

1.3.4 LECA Indicator 4: *50% of participants are more confident to read and write in Lao language.* A reading game was applied to assess the reading part of this indicator. 7 (70%) out of 10 students at Phouvieng secondary school are confident¹⁶ in reading a selected imaginative

¹⁶ Confidence in reading: loud enough to hear and understand and reasonable reading speed

story based on the reading game. 9 (90%) out of 10 students at Yuangxai secondary school are confident in reading a selected imaginative story. All 10 (100%) students at Chompheth secondary school are confident in reading a selected imaginative story. Therefore, the proportion of the students with confidence in reading is 26/30 (87%) which is achieved exceeding the target. Regarding writing skills, the proportion of the young authors able to write and complete their imaginative stories is 144/158 (91%) (2 students per story and 72/79 stories completed). In addition, all the teachers interviewed responded that the students who have been involved in the creative writing activity are improving their Lao language and dare to ask in classes. It concludes that this indicator is achieved exceeding the target of 50% in both reading and writing respects.

1.3.5 LECA Indicator 5: *50% of Children and youth involved in project activities can demonstrate an understanding of key issue and changes occurring in the communities that affect them and SEL Indicator 1: Social and emotional competencies.* These two indicators, especially the LECA objective is twofold achieved compared to the target of 50%. 100% of 7 young researchers and 26 PAR youth participating in the project evaluation understand key issues that are threatening them and their communities as a whole. The issues that they have studied and mentioned are as follows: drug [methamphetamine or *yaba*] addiction, drought (not enough water), smartphone-based game addiction, alcohol/beer, early marriage, no job opportunities, gambling and driving fast. Their common growing concern is about drug (methamphetamine) addiction which is prevalent across many villages. There have been no effective measures so far dealing with this issue. One incident because of drug is that the drug addict burnt his own house, from which fire spread to 23 other surrounding houses burnt completely; this happened in 2019 in Sonkhua village, Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province before the PAR activity.

The PAR youth participating in the LECA evaluation acknowledge that through PAR they have understood the problems better, root causes and consequences. They become more confident in thinking, speaking at the village meetings, asking questions and engaging with others for seeking solutions to the problems. They are able to collect data from the different groups (elderly, village authorities, parents and children/youth), analyse such data using the problem tree exercise and present to the village meetings. They then started some activities themselves, such as distributing drug prevention messages in Konkhua village and discussing with villagers possible options to deal with “not enough water” in Phiengdee village. Importantly, they are clear that PAR guides them in the way the communities own and drive the transformation process while outsiders/project only come and support them conceptually and technically. This implies “changing mindset”. The youth (both men and women) have developed fundamental skills through research activities in terms of recognizing their strengths, boosting their confidence, understanding problems better, analysing situations and starting solving problems. All of these are specific skills including in Social and Emotional Learning.

1.3.6 LECA Indicator 6: *50% of Children and youth involved in project activities have taken actions to present or report their perspectives at school-level, community and/or district meetings or events. SEL Indicator 4: Young girls and boys (with and without a disability) have increased confidence and skills to express their views, and listen to others in community forums,*

groups and/or processes. These indicators are partly achieved because of COVID-19 (country lockdown/social distancing) which made two activities of the young authors¹⁷ impossible. Such activities were cancelled. 7 young researchers participating in the project evaluation have not presented research findings, but basically reported what they did when possible at the village meetings; however village authorities and villagers did not have interaction.

According to the internal secondary data review tracing back [before LECA project variation 3], both the community monitors and young monitors¹⁸ reported to ChildFund Laos for follow-ups regarding the quality of project activities based on a structured assessment with the certain benchmarks¹⁹ set on tablets, and through trainings, workshops and learning exchanges they strengthened their confidence and capacities.²⁰ Additionally, they also reported by messaging service and telephone for other issues and feedback concerning ChildFund Laos’s work²¹.

28 PAR youth studied 2 issues—drug addiction and drought (not enough water) in Sonkhua and Phiengdee villages. What they appreciate the most is about the fact that they become more confident to express, ask questions and analyse causes and impacts of the problems more clearly. They are able to analyse data, prepare and present PAR findings (in the problem tree form) twice at the village meetings in the participatory way that could engage villagers and village authorities in discussing and planning to start to solve the problems. According to the youth-led PAR report, the village authorities and villagers in both Sonkhua and Phiengdee had discussed seriously the issues. They have come up with action plans to address the issues for their villages:

For Sonkhua village

- 1) *Review and develop the rule and regulations of the village to deal with drug issues*
- 2) *Village authorities meet monthly about drug issues*
- 3) *[PAR] youth produce drug prevention messages on pieces of paper and display to raise awareness in the community.*
- 4) *[PAR] youth meet weekly.*

For Phiengdee village

- 1) *Separate rubbish—non-biodegraded and biodegraded. They would dig pits far from the stream side for non-biodegraded rubbish like plastic items.*
- 2) *Each of the villages will do rule and regulations on:*
 - *Waste management*

¹⁷ *Activity 1.12.1 Conduct school-based event that showcases the final products of the workshop to other teachers, students, parents, and local government partners and Activity 1.13.1 Teachers and students present their work at national literacy event or literary fair*

¹⁸ Young monitors later continues as young researchers with no more monitoring role, but research) only in Huameuang District, Huaphanh Province.

¹⁹ *Examples of benchmarks set out on tablets: ChildFund Laos staff behaviour was appropriate and respectful for the duration of the activity? Children were given opportunities to voice their ideas and opinions? Will this activity benefit your community?*

²⁰ “Internal” final evaluation desk review (May 2020)

²¹ Community-Based Monitoring: Key Results (June 2019)

- *Animal raising (to move their animal fences from the Namlaem stream side)*
 - *No allow dead animals to throw into the water.*
- 3) *Discuss their villagers about rule and regulations*
 - 4) *Meet quarterly in order to exchange their experience about waste management in their own villages.*
 - 5) *Promote plant to replace died trees*
 - 6) *Stop cutting trees*
 - 7) *Allocate forest: restriction area, preservation area and area for use*
 - 8) *Reduce slash and burn farming*
 - 9) *Prevent forest fire (in dry season)*
 - 10) *Promote livestock raising and cash crop plantation*

1.3.7 LECA Indicator 7: *50% of Children and youth involved in project activities can identify at least two skills they have gained through their participation in the project which empower them to participate more in their communities. SEL Indicator 3: Confidence, knowledge and skills to think critically about, make responsible decisions and help-seek in critical areas, including gender, violence, sexual/reproductive health, digital media.* The LECA indicator is achieved exceeding the target while the SEL indicator is partly achieved. All 7 (100%) young researchers participating in the project evaluation named more than 2 knowledge or skills they have gained from their involvement in the project, for example: interview (asking questions) skills, analytical skills, advice (communication) skills and usage of new technology (tablet). Because they did research on different issues, such as drug, games, gambling, driving fast, early marriage, they are more aware of living their life, and they become a role model for others in their communities. All 26 PAR youth (100%) participating in the evaluation named what they have gained through PAR a lot more than 2 knowledge and skills, for example: **how to ask questions *confidence in speaking at meetings *dare to answer* data collection and analysis*Problem solving thinking *planning for action for clean water *Problem tree analysis *how to understand a problem, its causes and effects on people, for example not enough water caused by people cutting trees around the water source *how to prepare data to present.* The village authorities in Sonkhua and Phiengdee villages also praised that the [PAR] youth are very different; they become more confident in asking, presenting and explaining at the village meetings. Given the evidence, the LECA indicator is twofold achieved while the SEL indicator is considered partly achieved because of the fact that “critical thinking skill” of both young researchers and PAR youth still needs to be further strengthened.

1.3.8 SEL Indicator 5: *An increased number of young girls and boys (with and without a disability) lead, participate or contribute to positive change in their communities.* This indicator is considered partly achieved by the fact that 28 PAR youth (both 19 women and 9 men), after training and coaching, are able to approach to collecting data from the different groups (e.g. elderly, village authorities, parents and children/youth in their villages), collate, analyse collected data into the problem tree structure, and present to village meetings regarding drug issue in Sonkhua village and drought (not enough water) in Phiengdee village. The PAR youth are growing their knowledge, skills and leadership; for example they facilitated the meetings by

engaging with village authorities and villagers to seek solutions to such problems. As a result, community action plans to deal with the issues—what, how, who and when—were discussed.

[PAR just started in February 2020; it was disrupted by the country lockdown of COVID-19 (from 30 March – 3 May 2020) and resumed by mid May. Unfortunately, the LECA project will end in the end of June 2020, but the PAR process still needs more time and support to the communities to develop a sense of and establish community ownership and accountability to deal with the problems that they face.]

1.3.9 SEL Indicator 9: *Project and partner staff, and relevant duty bearers have improved gender-inclusive knowledge, skills, attitudes and resources to support girls, boys, young women and men (with and without a disability) to develop social and emotional skills and/or model and create respectful relationships with other young people.* This indicator is partly achieved. Both ChildFund Laos staff and government partners’ staff have applied the concept of gender inclusion. The young people (men and women), youth (male and female) and children (boys and girls) are given fairly equal opportunities to be involved in the LECA project. That is, there are 42 community monitors, of whom 29 are men and 13 are women. There are 73 young monitors, 37 of whom are women. The number of the young authors is 158, half of which is female. The number of the young researchers is 36, half of which is female. In the PAR youth groups, 19 are female and 9 are male. This indicates the ChildFund Laos and government partner staff are always aware of gender inclusion and put into practice throughout the course of the project.

The community monitors and young monitors were trained and supported to be a community-based monitoring to monitor and assess if ChildFund Laos’ work benefited their communities. The young researchers were trained to conduct tablet-based structure research on several issues and provide advice to peers in their communities. The PAR youth were trained and coached to conduct PAR to create deeper understanding of drug and drought (not enough water) and engage with village authorities and villagers to seek solutions. Through PAR, they have also learned and enhanced their intercultural competence by developing a sense of understanding and respect for diversity which resembles the foundation of doing PAR and even living a life (see footnote)²².

²² Youth-Led Participatory Action Research report draft. The example of intercultural activity: **“Magic leaf”**: This is an activity designed for youth participants to enhance their perceptions—how to look more deeply into two leaves and identify sameness, similarity and difference between them. The process is that each of the youth participants will be asked to seek 2 leaves (from a plant). Ideally if they can find two leaves identical [mission impossible] or at least similar. Then, they have to identify sameness, similarity and difference in the two leaves as detailed as possible. Each will take turn presenting what they have found. Each will present in the way he/she is guided to say, **e.g. “I am a mango leaf” I am the same with it in [.....] or similar to another in [.....], but I am different in [.....].**.....”. This activity will give the opportunity to youth participants to practice deeper involvement with such a simple thing like leaf in a different way or in a more detailed and conscious manner that is fundamental to be developed in a researcher. Conclusion: This activity will not only enhance participants’ perceptions to look at the world differently, but also help develop a sense of respect to “oneself” and others, and boost awareness of the nature of uniqueness [like we can never find one leaf identical to another, humans alike].

1.4 Impact

Assessed by the groups of young researchers, young authors, PAR youth, teachers, village authorities and DESB staff, Impact of the project is scored the average 8.2, minimum 7.3 and maximum 9 (in tables 3) for the project impact. Also, the ChildFund Laos staff gave a score of 8 “high” (in table 4) which is consistent with the other groups. They are ranked from “high” to “very high” which indicates the great impact of the project.

Important changes are brought about mainly in participating youth:

- As a result of the creative writing activity, most young authors/students involved in the project evaluation acknowledge that they read, write and speak Lao better [the test score increases from 1 – 3 points at Phouvieng secondary school, 1 – 2 points at Yuanxai secondary school and 1 – 4 points at Chompheth secondary school]. They know Lao grammar better. They are more confident to express their views and respect other people’s opinions when at meetings; they dare to ask their teachers for advice and know how to work as team to complete their imaginative stories. They practice imagining, thus thinking more clearly through the creative writing process.
- Based on what the teachers at Phouvieng and Yuangxai secondary schools responded that the students who are involved in the creating writing activity become better organised. They are more responsible for assignment given, compared to those not involved. The teachers also found that it is easier to instruct these students to work in groups to complete certain assignments because they get the point quickly.
- Three young authors out of 10 at Phouvieng secondary school claimed that they had changed their belief completely. Previously they believed only highly educated people or professors were able to write stories. Now, they are proud that they can write stories as well.
- Four young authors out of 10 at Phouvieng secondary school explained that they apply learning of the creative writing to their life: it is a lot more than writing but a thinking, learning and fighting process of trying to overcome tough situations in imagination, such as demons or devils attacking their villages. In the thinking, consulting and writing process, they acted as if they were real characters inside their imaginative stories. When they were not clear or got stuck in terms of thinking and writing, they consulted with teachers and friends. They use the creative writing process—7 steps—as a model of thinking and doing to overcome difficulties²³. Also they said they become more conscious of doing things like managing their time and organising their household chore and study better—what should be done first and later.
- *One Young Author said, “When compared to the past in normal classes, where I also wrote stories but only by strictly following the rules of the textbook, I can imagine more, without*

²³ Creative writing steps: step 1—it is a key character’s normal life; step 2—there is something wrong happening to the key character’s community; step 3—the key character goes out and deals with the demon/tough situation; step 4—the key character fights against with the demon/tough situation and loses; step 5—the key character seeks new knowledge and fighting technique; step 6—they key character returns to fight against with the demon and wins, and step 7—the key character and his community return to their normal life.

limitations, and create a story with characters I like.” Quotes taken from Young Authors also demonstrate their understanding of writing as a process of development that they felt empowered to engage in after participating in project activities, “[Before], I was not really interested in creative writing, because I did not have the knowledge and skills, and I was afraid that after completing my stories, people might not be interested in reading them...However, now after participating the LECA activity – creative writing in my school, I feel more confident in writing, know the steps of writing. Teachers have always offered advice and suggestions, and edit my stories.”²⁴

- The greatest impact that Nida described, however, was the impact on her own life. “Before I was so shy and too afraid to speak up. I didn’t dare to talk out openly,” she said. “But even though I was shy, [when I heard about the Young Researcher project], I wanted to join in order to become braver and gain experience.” Asked what it was like to conduct interviews at the beginning, Nida reported, “It made me so nervous at the beginning! My heart would beat fast and it would be hard to convince myself to go and do the interviews.” But now, after gaining more knowledge and experience, Nida says this is no longer a problem. “Now it’s not like that at all. I feel much more confident now.”²⁵
- Seven young researchers participating in the project evaluation were consistent that they had learned a lot from the project, such as more confidence and more understanding about issues that they had studied. One young researcher said “My learning in school is better because I dare to ask teachers”.
- Although the village authorities (from Phakha Neua, Nalaeng, Sonkhua and Phiengdee villages) do not know in detail of what the young researchers were doing, they considered these youth as a role model in terms of being not associated with drug. The young researchers are able to collect information about social problems and work with ChildFund Laos staff.
- Changes in the PAR youth are quite significant: they have more analytical and critical thinking skills than before. They dare to ask questions and follow-up questions to dig further when interviewing villagers and when at the village meetings. Among 28, more than half become outspoken, whereas the beginning (February 2020) very few dared to speak out. PAR empowered them to be stand on stage more confidently presenting PAR results to villagers and village authorities and discussing solutions to the issues. One PAR youth member said “I am very lucky and happy being part of the research activity that makes me brave to think and speak. Before joining the activity, I came to the village meetings, I was never in the meeting room but outside. Now I am a person who presents information [PAR results] to village authorities and villagers, and leads them to discussing. It is a big change in me”. The village authorities from Sonkhua and Phiengdee villages also affirmed a lot of changes in most PAR youth (more than 90%) in terms of confidence, majority, thinking and speaking at the village meetings.
- ChildFund Laos staff also suggested that the project has impacted at the individual level. For example, there are changes, especially in the young authors, young researchers and PAR

²⁴ “Internal” final evaluation desk review (May 2020)

²⁵ ChildFund Australia Case Study prepared by Casey Morrison dated 1/6/2020

youth in terms of knowledge, perception and skills. However, at the institutional level (DESB, community and school) the impact of project has not been evident.

In spite of positive changes as mentioned above, the young researchers in Nalaeng and Phakha Neua suggested that the young researcher activity is very good for them to learn. But, it has not impact their communities. Apart from data that they collected and sent to ChildFund Laos to analyse, they found a lack of communication from ChildFund Laos. Their communities wanted to hear back after they had collected data several times. They said some people in their communities even misunderstood that they would sell information to ChildFund. They claimed that after research there should have been interventions to tackle issues, such as drug that their communities face, and the project should have come to support them as they are not strong enough to convince the communities to change.

1.5 Sustainability

1.5.1 Assessed by young authors, young researchers, teachers, village authorities, DESB officials and PAR youth (in table 3)

Sustainability is the area given scores different across the different groups participating in the project evaluation. Among the young authors, young researchers, PAR youth teachers, village authorities and DESB staff, the average score is 6 (medium). The minimum is 2.7 (very low) while the maximum is 8.1 (high) (see in tables 3). It is a big gap between the minimum and maximum.

20 young authors at Phouvieng and Yuangxai secondary schools in Khoun District scored with 6.8 (almost high) for Sustainability by explaining that knowledge of creative writing would continue in them although the project ends. However, they are not sure if their schools can continue the creative writing activity after the project. In comparison, 10 young authors at Chompheth secondary school in Huameuang District gave a score of 2.7 which is considered very low: they have just been involved in the project since February 2020, and did not believe that sustainability is possible. They did not think their school/teachers could continue without project support. They said “teachers are busy with regular teaching and schools do not have materials”.

7 young researchers scored 3.7 (low) for Sustainability with by giving their reasons that knowledge and skills they have gained from the project would continue in them to some extent. But, sustainability would not be possible because it is a tablet-based online platform; the tablet was taken back and they do not know what to do next.

16 secondary school teachers in both Khoun District and Huameuang District are quite consistent in scoring 6.5 and 6 (medium) for Sustainability. When asked, the schools have no plans at all after the project. They reasoned that they are very busy with regular in-class teaching. Some said they do not have creative writing training aid, such as character models and stationeries, and thus it is difficult to continue the creative writing activity without project

support. [100% of the teachers agree that the creative writing is very useful because it helps students improve Lao language which is fundamental to learn all subjects. But when asked, if the schools can continue themselves, they did not provide an indication of their willingness to carry on, but rather had excuses—this makes a big question?—what else is more important than “students can learn better”. Although some teachers, particularly 3 Lao literature teachers, claimed that they are adapting their teaching by making classes more fun to learn through games and self-exploration (learned from the creative writing activity), yet the score of 6.5 and 6 did neither reflect nor convince how the creative writing would sustain at the school level].

2 DESB from Khoun District and Huameuang scored Sustainability with 6 (medium) and 7 (high). They considered that the creative writing activity is very useful for students to improve Lao language skills. Although they are skeptical about continuation of the creative writing activity by teachers, they will try their best supporting the school principals and teachers to think more creatively. For example, each school receives a yearly State allowed budget which is calculated 70,000 (0.9 USD) per student, 60% of which is for technical support to teachers. This might be of use for creative writing continuation.

7 village authorities scored 7.7 (high) for Sustainability as they pointed it out that both young researchers and PAR youth are different from what they had ever been in terms of knowledge and confidence. Therefore, knowledge that the young researchers and PAR youth have gained from the project would continue in one way or another in them.

26 PAR youth scored 8.1 (high) for Sustainability which is higher than all other groups. They have learned a great deal from their involvement in PAR. They expressed knowledge, skills and capacity they have gained will continue in life with no doubt. In spite of a short period of time, the PAR activity has brought about a difference in the PAR youth’s capacity and [a cultivated concept of new development modality that the community must not be dependent on outsiders/projects which is clear to the PAR youth and village authorities]. See the quotes below taken from the PAR report:

In Sonkhua Village:

- *“I am very lucky and happy being part of the [PAR] activity that makes me brave to think and speak. Before joining the activity, I came to village meetings, I was never in the meeting room but outside. Now I am a person who presents information [PAR results] to village authorities and villagers, and leads them to discussing. I am very proud of myself”.*
- *“I have learned a lot of things from this [PAR] activity. Now I know how to ask questions and follow up [why] questions to get more information from villagers”.*
- *“I am changing a lot compared to the past. I dare to ask and think better. I understand causes and impacts of the [drug] problem”.*
- *“I am more confident in speaking and asking villagers at village meetings”.*
- *“I have learned the problem tree analysis. It helped me understand better”.*
- *“I have learned how to tell stories to disseminate [drug prevention] information to others about yaba [methamphetamine]”.*

- *“I have learned a lot of things, for example how to read the problem tree out to village meetings”.*
- *“I am very happy being part of the [PAR] activity. This activity gives us a big opportunity to learn. I know how to collect data from villagers and to produce drug prevention messages”.*
- *“Knowledge I have learned is useful for myself and my family. I am more aware of causes and effects of the drug”.*
- *“I dare to think, ask questions and express. Knowledge from this [PAR] activity can be used for living as it helps me think more carefully. Thank you for this good project”.*

In Phiengdee village

- *“This [PAR] activity makes us know our village’s problem clearer and identify what to do to solve it by ourselves”.*
- *“The [PAR] activity makes us have more knowledge and ability to see the importance of proving evidence, seeking factors of the problem through asking questions and observation”.*
- *“I like this [PAR] activity that brought the village authorities from 5 villages to discuss how to work together to improve quality of Laem stream water”.*
- *“Since I have joined the [PAR] activity, I have a lot of new knowledge, for example problem tree, data collection from villagers, understanding about drought caused by people”.*
- *“I have learned to develop my capacity to explore and understand why the problem occurs”.*
- *“I know about drought which impacts on people, animals, plants and how to contribute to solving the problem”.*
- *“I am involved in research, starting to ask questions and going through analysis. I realise that the water stream is very important to life”.*
- *“I have learned a lot from this [PAR] activity, for example the importance of forest at the source of water and impacts of littering on the water stream”.*
- *“I know about Namlaem stream’s problem related to rubbish thrown by villagers living in the 5 villages”.*
- *“I feel more comfortable to ask the village head and talk to people in my village”.*
- *“I am able to think and observe better because of this activity [PAR]”.*
- *“I am more confident in expressing my thoughts”.*

1.5.2 Assessed by young authors, young researchers, teachers, village authorities, DESB officials and PAR youth (in table 3)

2 ChildFund Laos staff gave a score of 6 (medium) for Sustainability. They agree that a lot of positive changes have arisen at the individual level (young authors, young researchers and PAR youth), and sustainability is highly possible in these groups. But, sustainability at the institutional level—DESB, schools and communities—is less possible because ChildFund Laos through the LECA project did not do enough to the institutional level to the degree that can ensure sustainability. Due to that DESB, schools and communities are not quite ready to carry on, especially the creative writing activity that is considered innovative, fun, effective to improve ethnic students’ Lao language skills.

1.6 Organisational Learning

Through the LECA project, Organisational learning is scored 5 (“medium” in table 4) by ChildFund Laos staff. Project staff have learned a great deal from the project in terms of technical knowledge, new approaches and experiences in collaboration with DESB, partner schools and communities. But learning at the organisational level is less. Day-to-day frontline management is quite hard in terms of work in remote communities, travel, coordination and compliances required. But all these are not learned in order to support project frontline staff to work more effectively and efficiently. Instead, project staff are overloaded with too much paper work and compliances whereby their focus on attention to quality of work with communities (where outcomes need to be produced) becomes little. So, project staff claim that they really need more support and understanding from Finance and HR as well as Management to enable them to manage quality of work for the sake of communities. [If the project continues this way, it will significantly impact quality of work. Therefore, it is important for Finance and HR to simplify procedures in order to free up frontline staff to think more about approaches (for sustainability) and work more with people on the ground. Likewise, HR needs to look closely at capacity needs of frontline staff in order to ensure quality outcomes.]

ChildFund has not yet learned about 3 variations of the LECA project. LECA was originally a 4-year project. It has experienced 3 variations and through the 3rd variation its goal, objectives and timeframe are affected. Its timeframe was shortened to 3 years instead of 4. It is difficult to encapsulate all reasons behind such variations and changes occurred and make it clear to government partners and even to project staff. Therefore, a lot of questions about the LECA project design, clear risk analysis and direction change arise. Potential and actual impacts due to such changes have not been learned enough yet through the LECA project experience.

LEARNING, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LECA is a relatively small project but a great learning!

1. Learning and Recommendations

For ChildFund to take action

1.1 Learning on sustainability: Sustainability is an area with varied scores from 2.7 “very low” to 8.1 “high” given by the different groups (young authors, young researchers, PAR youth, teachers, village authorities, DESB officials and ChildFund Laos staff) participating in the project evaluation. Those who gave the moderate and high scores looked at sustainability highly possible at the individual level, whereas those who gave the low scores looked at sustainability from the point of view that DESB, partner communities and partner secondary schools are not ready to continue activities after the project, for example the creative writing. That is because of the fact that the LECA project did not do enough to the institutional level to the degree that can ensure sustainability within a given timeframe. Recommendation: ChildFund should look back to project design and approaches that it employed “help or harm?” Good intention to help is not enough, but analysis of good intention and approaches not to create community dependency on the project is most important. Whatever is done either intentionally or unintentionally and makes communities unable to continue is considered “harm not help”. Therefore, ChildFund should pay more attention to improving this area in a timely manner for all projects being implemented or to come in the future.

1.2 Learning on project variations: ChildFund has not yet learned enough about 3 variations of the LECA project in terms of potential and actual impacts. LECA was originally a 4-year project and shortened to 3 years. Its goal and objectives are also changed. It is basically understood that ChildFund Australia’s changes in funding and program direction, and yet it is difficult to encapsulate all reasons behind such variations and changes occurred and make it clear to government partners and even project staff. Recommendation: ChildFund should look back to the LECA project design, risk analysis, strategy and approach. For example, a Community-Based Monitoring (CBM) with community monitors and young monitors (from 2018 – 2019) as a community accountability mechanism is already a good strategy. But, it is just a question of the approach to empowering the community accountability mechanism to be strong not dependent on the project stipend and telephone credit of 70,000 LAK (about 9 USD per month) given to each of the young researchers.

1.3 Learning on the LECA approach change: The original LECA project was originally designed as a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) mechanism to provide technical support and guidance across all projects. But, when ChildFund changes its program direction, its approach becomes more sector-focused with stand-alone projects, and all the projects solely are responsible for their M&E. Since then LECA has turned into a stand-alone project rather than

an MEL mechanism. Recommendation: ChildFund should rethink MEL should not be a project or the like, but an organisational MEL to be able to provide technical support to all projects in the direction towards Accountability to communities and back donors, Partnership and Sustainability.

1.4 Learning on frontline staff's capacity and expected outcomes at the community level: Frontline staff play a very important role in determining quality outcomes at the community level where ChildFund wants to see changes. Frontline staff still need technical capacity. According to the 2019 district staff capacity needs assessment, there are 10 priority capacity areas that call on ChildFund Laos to respond to: 1) Planning, 2) Facilitation skills, 3) Monitoring & evaluation, 4) Report writing, 5) Problem solving skill, 6) Training of trainers, 7) English learning, 8) Time management, 9) Computer, and 10) IT & communication. Recommendation: First, ChildFund should give more priority to number 2 (Facilitation skills) which focuses more on development of skills to facilitate community's meaningful participation, ownership, accountability and sustainability. Doing so will be key to quality outcomes at the community level. Second, HR should facilitate the staff capacity needs assessment on a yearly basis and also on ad-hoc basis in order to fill a capacity gap when staff turnover occurs.

1.5 Learning on support provided by Finance and HR. It is difficult for project frontline staff to question and encapsulate what are the must, for example donor compliances and/or what are internal created procedures.

- The first issue is, frontline staff found difficult at times to have advance approval and transfer while Finance clarified that the advance request was quite often urgent. One frontline staff experienced twice the transfer was not made in time, but activities were already scheduled and set up to happen in the communities. Recommendation: Both Finance and Program should discuss and solve this unsolved issue. Common understanding and shared goal need to be developed together, as at the end of the day where changes want to be seen are in communities, so more time, more efforts, more attention and more support have to go to communities. In nature, working with government partners and remote partner communities, there can be urgent condition and schedule changes, especially during COVID-19, so urgent finance requests can happen as well. Therefore, support sectors, particularly Finance should be able to accommodate needs that arise.
- The second is, project staff have overloaded paper work required by Finance, for example registration forms that prevent them from being fully involved in activities happening. For example, when PAR activities took place in the communities, project staff were often busy with the required registrations, receipts and so on, they did not really get themselves involved in the process. Recommendation: Paper work should be re-examined which one is the must and which one can be simplified in order to free up project staff to pay more attention to activities that ChildFund cares about in order to deliver quality outcomes to communities.
- The third is about accommodation cost. At times, project staff have to overnight at guesthouse in the community, for example in Sonkhua village. But, the accommodation cost is higher than the amount allowed by the finance policy. Project staff ended up

paying the variance while the amount of per diem is also very small (just enough for very basic meal). This policy is more or less discouraging project staff to stay in communities, but in fact project staff should stay for a longer period in communities in order to understand and figure out ways of working more effectively, efficiently and sustainably. Recommendation: ChildFund Laos should revise this policy that can provide sufficient per diem for staff to comfortably stay and work in communities or accommodate actual accommodation cost. For example at the basic guesthouses in Sonkhua village, accommodation per night is 50,000 LAK (about 6 USD), ChildFund Laos policy only covers 40,000 LAK (about 4.5 USD), and per diem at village level is 50,000 LAK (about 6 USD for 3 meals) that is insufficient). Due to that staff had to pay the variance themselves.

1.6 Learning on challenges the LECA project faced: encountered 3 variations within 3 years due to the MEL framework change and ChildFund Australia’s program direction change, quite frequent staff turnover, and the COVID-19 situation. Despite such challenges, the project was managed to achieve 85.5% of the outputs: 6 performance indicators exceeded, and 1 performance indicator partly achieved, and 5 outcome indicators partly achieved of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) sector. Recommendation: ChildFund Australia and Laos need to further learn about causal factors underlying good project management. Also be more critical of performance indicators (1 – 4)—how were they formulated and calculated to have such percentages? Why do such performance indicators not have baseline?

For the young author activity to continue

1.7 Learning on potential sustainability of the creative writing activity: It is consistent across all groups participating in the evaluation that the creative writing activity helps ethnic students improve their Lao language skills and confidence. However, sustainability is in doubt because the partner schools are not quite ready to carry on. Recommendation: As the LECA project will end in June 2020, and the Ready for Life (R4L) project is still working with secondary schools, the success of creative writing should be continued by the R4L project in schools where it is working.

1.8 Learning on potential sustainability of the creative writing activity: According to the DESB official in Khoun District, he recommended that the State allocated budget (70,000 Kip/9 USD per student), 60% of which is for technical support to teachers, so can be used to support teachers to continue the creative writing activity. Recommendation: ChildFund Laos should follow up on this and use this as an entry point to start discussing with DESB, partner schools and/or extended schools under the R4L project.

1.9 Learning on activity gap: The LECA project has one indicator relating to writing and reading. But all the secondary schools visited have very few books and materials for students to read. Also the LECA project has no activity specifically to promote “reading”. Recommendation: Activity responding to the project indicator should not be missing in the future. The project

design and workplan development should be thoroughly analysed in order to ensure that activities are sufficient to reach all set indicators.

For the youth-Led PAR activity to continue

1.10 Learning on potential sustainability of PAR: PAR has brought about a difference in partnership. The villagers and village authorities from Sonkhua and Phiengdee villages were engaged from the beginning to discuss and prioritise issues on which they wanted the PAR youth do research. Both the PAR youth and village authorities have understood “the communities own and drive the transformation while outsiders/project only come and support them conceptually and technically”. In other words, PAR aims at strengthened community accountability, partnership and sustainability. Recommendation: ChildFund Laos should consider PAR as one of the potential ways toward sustainable development. This kind of approach should be introduced to other projects being implemented. ChildFund Laos already has in-house resource, Mr. Chasy Somwhang, Senior Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer who has gained experience from his involvement in PAR all the way to the end of consultancy.

For the young researcher activity not to continue this way

1.11 Learning on expectations to the young researcher activity: The young researchers were expected to communicate and give advice to peers, but they were not trained in the topics regarding drug addiction, alcohol/beer consumption, smartphone-based game addiction, early marriage, school dropout, no job opportunities, gambling and driving fast. They admit they do not know much about such issues, therefore need much more technical support from the project for them to be able to do activities to address specific issues that their communities face. Recommendation: This should be one of the important lessons learned for all projects. When community members are expected to do interventions, make sure that they are equipped with necessary knowledge and coached until they are confident to do on their own.

1.12 Learning on the young researcher activity and lack of communication: regarding the young researcher activity, all 7 young researchers are consistent that they have collected data and sent them via internet to ChildFund Laos, but analysed data have neither returned to nor communicated back with them and their communities. Their communities wanted to hear back after they had collected data several times. They claimed that after research there should have been interventions to tackle issues, such as drug that their communities actually face, and the project should have come to support them to work with the communities for change. The young researchers in Nalaeng and Phakha Neua villages said some people in their communities even misunderstood that they would sell information to ChildFund because of no report back. Recommendation: ChildFund Laos should urgently send its senior staff to make it clear to all 18 communities before the project ends, as misunderstanding is quite significant to the work of ChildFund [although the evaluation just heard from the youth in 2 villages].

2. Challenges and Recommendations

2.1 Challenge to sustainability: 100% of the teachers agree that the creative writing is very useful and effective because it helps students improve Lao language skills which are fundamental to learn all subjects. But when asked, if the schools can continue themselves, they did not provide any indication of their willingness to carry on, but rather had excuses—busy with regular classes and not having training aid (like character model). [The question is, what else is more important than “students can learn better”]. Recommendation: the 7 stages of creative writing should be integrated into the 3 steps of the mainstream writing in Lao literature. When it is well integrated, it is no longer a burden. How to do it? Workshop(s) should be organised to introduce “know how” to teachers to have a sense of integrating the 7 steps of creative writing into the 3 steps of mainstream writing instructions. See the creative writing integration concept (in table 11) below:

Table 10: Integrating 7 steps of creative writing into 3 steps of mainstream writing in school.

7 steps of creative writing	3 steps of writing in Lao literature
Step 1: it is a key character’s normal life	Step 1: Introduction
Step 2: there is something wrong happening to the key character’s community	Step 2: Body of story
Step 3: the key character goes out and deals with the demon/tough situation	
Step 4: the key character fights against with the demon/tough situation and loses	
Step 5: the key character seeks new knowledge and fighting technique	
Step 6: they key character returns to fight against with the demon and wins	
Step 7: the key character and his community return to their normal life.	Step 3: Conclusion

2.2 Despite the great success of the creative writing activity in Lao language skill development in ethnic students, it has reached only the small number of the students (158) compared to the larger number. If the creative writing is still not integrated into the school curriculum, particularly in Lao literature, great needs of the majority of the students remains unmet. Apart from that the creative writing focus is more on completing imaginative stories, but less on a concept of linking the imaginative story writing to dialogues about real social problems that young students encounter in their real life, such as drug, alcohol/beer, child marriage, migration and human trafficking. The latter (the creative writing links to a real life) is a missing part of the creative writing process, partly the training did not focus and partly because the LECA project does not have a specific indicator to capture this essence either. Recommendation: Continuation of the creative writing should focus on integration of its steps and instructions into the school curriculum as suggested in (2.1) above and link imaginative story writing processes as an analogy to learn and reflect real life problems that students and youth face on these days.

2.3 Challenge: Cash pay approach is an important challenge to sustainability. It is not only the challenge to sustainability, but causes misunderstanding by others in the communities that the young researchers sell data to ChildFund Laos, as they receive monthly stipend (about 9 USD). It seems that this kind of approach is “do more harm than good”. Recommendation: ChildFund Laos should stop the stipend pay approach and seek an alternative.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion: Although the LECA project experienced a range of challenges, for example 3 variations (its goal and objectives and timeframe affected) and the COVID-19 lockdown during the implementation period of 3 years, it has been well managed to achieve substantial results. Yet some important issues relating to Sustainability and Organisational Learning need to be addressed. Relevance, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Impact of the project are ranked by the young authors, young researchers, PAR youth, teachers, village authorities, DESB officials and ChildFund staff from “high – very high” using a numerical scale (1 – 10)²⁶. But its Sustainability and Organisational Learning are ranked at “medium”:

- **Relevance** average score is over 8 points (high): the project is addressing the real needs of youth—secondary students’ Lao language skills through the creative writing process. When non-Lao speaking/ethnic students have improved Lao language skills, they can overcome difficulties to learn other subjects and pursue higher education. The research activities (tablet-based online platform and PAR) also empowered the young researchers and PAR youth to better understand the issues that affect them and their communities.
- **Efficiency** average score is 7.5 points (high): the project outputs/activities are fully achieved 85.5% compared to the budget spent 92.7% (at the point evaluated). It means that the proportion of implementation at this degree in the difficult situation, including the COVID-19 lockdown is considered efficient.
- **Effectiveness** average score is 9 (very high): there are 7 performance indicators, of which 6 are fully achieved and 1 is partly achieved. On top of that the project has contributed to fully achieve 1 selected indicator and partly achieve 4 selected indicators of the SEL program outcomes. Given that Effectiveness is even beyond the project results framework.
- **Impact** average score is over 8 points (high): Improved knowledge, skills and confidence are claimed by the fact that the young authors have improved their Lao language skills and test scores (increased from 1 – 4 points) and broadened their imagination. Some changed their perception completely; for example previously they believed only highly educated people were able to write stories, but now, they are proud that they also can write stories. They become more confident to express their views, ask their teachers for advice, and know how to work as team. They practice imagining, thus thinking more clearly through the creative writing process. Regarding the young researchers and PAR youth, they have changes in their confidence and better understanding of issues that affect them. Significantly, the PAR youth were confident in presenting the PAR results to their village authorities and villagers for seeking solutions. As a result, Sonkhua and Phiengdee villages initiated their action plans to deal with the issues—drug and not enough water. For example, one PAR youth member said “I am very lucky and happy being part of the research activity that makes me brave to think and speak. Before

²⁶ Scores: 1– 2 very low; 3 – 4 low; 5 – 6 medium, 7 – 8 high; 9 – 10 very high

joining the activity, I came to the village meetings, I was never in the meeting room but outside. Now I am a person who presents information [PAR results] to village authorities and villagers, and leads them to discussing. It is a big change in me”.

- **Sustainability** average score is 6 (medium). However, it is a big gap between minimum (2.7) and maximum (8.1). The difference is explained from two different points of view: Regarding the low score by the young authors and researchers in Huameuang district, it comes from the viewpoint on the institutional capacity; DESB, the schools and communities are not ready yet to continue and still need more support from the project, whereas the higher score by other groups, especially the PAR youth comes from the perspective on the individual capacity; all knowledge, skills, confidence that the youth have developed or gained through the project—creative writing and research—will continue one way or another.
- **Organisational Learning** score is 5 points (medium): It is acknowledged by the staff that they have learned substantially from the project in terms of technical knowledge, new approaches and experiences in working with DESB, partner schools and communities. But learning at the organisational level is less. For example, learning how to support project frontline staff to work more effectively and efficiently to deliver quality outcomes to remote poor communities is very little. Instead, project frontline staff are overloaded with too much paper work and compliances. They claim that they need more support and understanding from Finance and HR as well as Management to enable them to free up and pay more attention to quality of work for the communities. On top of that, ChildFund has not yet learned enough about 3 variations of the LECA project affecting the project goal, objectives and timeframe. It is difficult to encapsulate all reasons behind such variations and make it clear to the government partners and even project staff.

Recommendation: Priority should be given to Sustainability and Organisational Learning. For Sustainability, ChildFund in the future should focus more on systems approaches to addressing different partners’²⁷ institutional capacities and ownership so that they will be able to continue positive outcomes after the project. First, what ChildFund can do practically is look back to the existing approaches, the existing capacity and the internal support mechanism more critically using the reminder “if not sustainable is harm not help” to guide the process. Second, build on the positive outcomes, for example from the community youth monitoring activity, the creative writing activity and the youth-led PAR activity. Third, more focus on advocacy for the government partners to buy in and institutional capacity building for sustainability.

For Organisational Learning, through the LECA project implementation and this evaluation, there are significant scenarios for learning both positively and negatively. The community youth monitoring activity, the creative writing activity and the youth-led PAR activity should be learned and extracted into an integrated approach (to sustainability) for government partners, partner communities and schools to buy in. The integrated approach should be institutionalised

²⁷ For example, the government partners’, partner schools’ and partner communities’ institutional capacity and ownership for sustainability.

and consistent across all projects under ChildFund Laos. Apart from that, there are some significant scenarios for learning and improving, for example:

- Due to overloaded paper work and compliances, the frontline project staff do not have enough attention to technical parts and engagement with the community. Definitely this affects quality of ChildFund Laos' work as a whole.
- Due to the 3 variations of the project and the changed program direction, the timeframe was cut by 1 year (3 years instead of 4). This significantly impacts the activities, outcomes of the project, especially the sustainability aspect.
- Due to the country lockdown for the COVID-19 containment, when travel was not allowed, what alternative methods could be? [The imaginative stories (the creative writing activity) was managed to finalise with the partner schools through WhatsApp, and the PAR activity was also managed this way during the lockdown. This can be a good example to build on for preparedness, readiness and response to the COVID-19 lockdown if it happens again].

ANNEXES

Annex 0: Case Study prepared by Casey Morrison

Annex 1: Tool for young author

Annex 2: Tool for participating teachers

Annex 3: Tool for young researchers

Annex 4: Tool for village authorities

Annex 5: Tool for DESB official

Annex 6: Tool for ChildFund Laos staff

Annex 7: Tool for parents