

# Community Development for the Well Being of Children - Phase II (2014 - 2020)



## Final Evaluation Report December 2019

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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While hopefully this report presents an accurate picture of the Community Development for the Well-being of Children Phase II project in Nonghet District, any errors contained in this report are solely the responsibility of the authors.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AODN	Asia-Oceania Development Network
ANC	Ante Natal Care
CBD	Community-Based Development
CDWBC-I	Community Development for the Well Being of Children (Phase I)
CDWBC-II	Community Development for the Well Being of Children (Phase II)
CFL	ChildFund Laos
CLTS	Community-Led Total Sanitation
DESB	District Education and Sports Bureau
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESDP	Education Sector Development Plan
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GFWS	Gravity-Fed Water Systems
IMC	Implementation Management Committee
LRF	Lao Rugby Federation
MCH	Mother and Child Health
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCRDPE	National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
OECD/DAC	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee
PCC	Project Construction Committees
PRDPEO	Provincial Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office
PWD	People With Disabilities
SARMeL	Strengthening Adolescent Resilience through Media Literacy in Laos
TBAs	Traditional Birth Attendants
TOR	Terms of Reference
VDC	Village Development Committees
VDMC	Village Disaster Management Committee
VEDC	Village Education Development Committees
VHV	Village Health Volunteer
WLG	Women's Livelihood Groups
WMG	Water Management Groups

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Introduction:** The *Community Development for the Well-Being of Children Phase II Project*<sup>1</sup> (CDWBC-II) has been implemented by ChildFund Laos (CFL)<sup>2</sup>, beginning in October 2014, in Nonghet District, Xieng Khouang Province in the Lao PDR, and is due to end in September 2020. The overall objective of the CDWBC-II Project is to reduce poverty and strengthen sustainable development in Nonghet District through integrated community development and consists of three main components related to: (1) improving access to quality education; (2) Increasing village level participation in district planning and to provide opportunities for children and their communities to identify, manage and implement activities that result in positive changes in the lives of children; and (3) Improving access to improved services including safe water and sanitation, gender equity and livelihoods, and improving maternal and child health and nutrition.

**Evaluation Purpose:** The overall purpose of the evaluation was to assess the implementation of the CDWBC Phase II Project with an emphasis on the achievement of the project objectives, and the extent to which it met OECD criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, as well as identifying evidence of learning and good practices around project implementation and significant changes in terms of gender, education, youth empowerment, health and community ownership as a result of implementing program interventions during the last 5 years which could be used to inform CFL's development work in other districts in the future..

**Methodology, Scope and Respondents:** The methodology used was largely qualitative, involving document review, informant interviews (KIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), an activity for children designed to get their perspectives, as well as observation. A total of 370 people, including 146 children, were interviewed at village level, and several more respondents at District and Provincial levels. Quantitative data was also gathered from Education, Health and District Government sources. A total of 17 sample villages (approximately 63% of the total number of target villages) were visited for more in-depth fieldwork, as well as the District MCH Center, three rural health centers and two secondary schools.

**Evaluation Team:** the evaluation team was comprised of eight members – two local Government staff members, one Provincial Government and one CFL staff member, two consultants, and two additional members hired specifically for their Hmong language abilities as interpreters.

**Challenges:** There were a number of challenges to the implementation of the evaluation, including limited availability of informants at village level due to corn harvesting, the large number of projects involved (26), lack of CFL staff with Nonghet experience (due to the office having been closed), turnover of local Government staff, limited evaluation experience of evaluation team members and language issues. However, these constraints did not seriously affect the overall findings of the evaluation.

**Findings:** As specified in the Terms of Reference (ToR), findings are presented in terms of OECD criteria - relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

**Relevance:** Villagers in all sample villages visited reported that CFL support had a high degree of relevance to their needs, particularly the construction of early childhood education (ECE) facilities<sup>3</sup>, provision of training to teachers, and awareness raising on health and nutrition. This may have been in part because CFL used a Community-Based Development (CBD) approach in the construction of ECE facilities and toilets, involving consultation with villagers who contributed labour and locally available materials. Children and youth interviewed for this evaluation reported that activities related to this were very much relevant to their needs. ChildFund support related to maternal-child health (MCH) was seen by community members interviewed as

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<sup>1</sup> Although called a 'project', CDWBC-II is more a 'program', comprised of at least 26 different projects.

<sup>2</sup> The acronym CFL will be used throughout this report to refer to specific ChildFund Laos involvement. More general support will use the term ChildFund which captures both CFL and ChildFund Australia support.

<sup>3</sup> Primary school construction had been an area of focus of earlier phases, whereas school construction in CDWBC-II was more focused on ECE.

particularly relevant to their needs, including the upgrading of health services through construction of the District MCH Center and equipping of the four health centers, as well as training provided in infant nutrition. However, in terms of livelihood related activities, villagers interviewed only regarded weaving and to a lesser extent, kitchen gardens, as relevant to their needs. However, due to disease and other problems, livestock and chicken raising were not regarded as relevant.

The evaluation also found relevance to Government policies, including Nonghet District development priorities in three main areas: rural development and poverty reduction; infrastructure improvement, including construction of clean water systems; and access to improved education and healthcare services. It was also regarded as a way to support Nonghet District in the move towards achieving its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2020. At the National level, the MOU was also relevant to the eighth National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016–2020) in enabling ‘access to quality education and improved healthcare services’ with a focus on the poor<sup>4</sup>.

### **Effectiveness:**

**Component One** included seven sub-projects focused on (i) improving access to early childhood and primary education by utilising a community-based construction approach, and (ii) improving the quality of child-friendly education. Activities involved construction of ECE facilities, including toilets, provision of education supplies and furniture, and in-service training of teachers. For primary education, the focus was only on training of teachers and principals, with no further construction and renovation of primary schools and toilets. Findings from the evaluation included:

- Construction of ECE facilities and schools with ChildFund support appears to have had a very positive impact on increasing access to education in target villages, with almost 100% of school age children reportedly now attending primary school and enrolment rates in ECE facilities increasing.
- In-service training for teachers and principals has been less effective, with only limited application of child-centred teaching methodologies in target schools (with some exceptions). Reasons for this may include limited follow-up and support after training, as well as poor school leadership.
- Improvement noted in reducing repetition rates in grade 1, which may be an indication that some of the in-service training has had a positive impact, particularly that related to teaching Lao to children from non-Lao Tai ethnic groups.
- Water supply systems and toilets have not been well maintained in several schools. Maintenance of these facilities needs to be given more attention in education projects

**Component Two** included 13 sub-projects focused on empowering children and youth. Key activities involved a range of activities including sports, particularly rugby (ChildFund Pass It Back, which was also integrated with life skills with an emphasis on promoting gender equity), training on child protection and safeguarding, and safe social media use, story writing and photography, as well as life skills. At least two of the projects also linked young people in Nonghet District with young people in other countries, particularly Australia, through sharing of videos and stories (Connect and Global Community). Another activity involved training children and young people in developing writing skills and also monitoring of ChildFund initiated activities. Relevant findings from the evaluation included:

- Young people in Nonghet District have responded positively to projects promoting gender equity, building self-confidence and leadership skills, developing media skills and linking them more to the world beyond.
- However, some adults in authority, including the District Governor, were unhappy with the way in which ChildFund Pass It Back was implemented. ChildFund Laos and the Lao Rugby Federation need to consider develop better strategies to ensure that those in authority are fully informed and more involved.
- Nonetheless, some parents interviewed could see the positive changes in their children as a result of participation in their activities in terms of increased self-confidence and improved health.

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<sup>4</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) 2016–2020. MPI, Laos PDR. 2016. p. 130–133.



- With Ready for Life, ChildFund seems to have learned from past experience and be 'anchoring' this activity within the secondary education system, through making sure the school principal is supportive and having a teacher assigned to support and oversee the peer education process.

**Component Three** involved six projects with key activities including construction of toilets and water supply, training for village development committees (VDCs) on construction and maintenance, and running hygiene promotion campaigns. Livelihood security support under this component included establishing Women's Livelihood Groups (WLG), providing technical support on livestock raising and farming management systems, developing kitchen gardens, and market linkages as well as gender-responsive agricultural planning and implementation. Maternal-child health (MCH) activities included awareness raising on the importance of good nutrition, and breastfeeding to mothers, training of trainers on basic knowledge of nutrition to Health Clinic and District Health Staff, and conducting nutrition promotion campaigns in schools. Disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities included training for district and village leaders, setting up of District and village level Disaster Management Committees, and provision of loudspeaker systems. Key findings under this component included:

- Provision of water supply continues to benefit target villages though shortages are apparent in some villages, especially along the road.
- Apart from weaving, and, to a lesser extent school gardens, livestock raising activities through women's groups appear to have had little if any positive impact. This has been due in part to provision of unsuitable breeds of livestock and possibly inadequate care.
- MCH services have been significantly improved as a result of project inputs and this, coupled with a Government policy of free MCH services, has contributed to a major increase in villagers using these services.
- DRR activities appear to have had only limited impact at village and District level, as this has not been seen as a priority at both levels. Disaster Management Committees were no longer functioning at village level. Loudspeaker systems were no longer fully functioning in half (7/14) of the sample villages visited.

### **Efficiency**

Overall, the planning system seems to have functioned reasonably well, though some project documents refer to the lack of internal CFL coordination across sectors, resulting in different project staff arriving in target villages on the same day to conduct activities, without being aware of each other's plans. Planning also was reported to have been affected to some extent by the turnover of both CFL and local Government staff assigned to specific projects. It was reported that there were no issues regarding disbursement of funds, once plans were approved. Previously, due to the lack of a bank in Nonghet District, there were delays in sending funds to cover activity costs, but over the past few years, this situation has improved significantly and since last year, ChildFund has been able to use the e-banking system. Unlike previous phases of ChildFund support for Nonghet District (i.e. NoCEP from 2010-2012 and then CDWBC-I from 2012-2014), there was less budget allocation for construction and more for training and other related activities. When comparing between the budget plan and actual expenditure of the CDWBC-II Project, it can be seen that the operational costs have remained stable over the past five fiscal years; however, program costs were much higher than expected in the first 3 years because it involved investments in 'hardware' such as construction of school and water facilities.

### **Sustainability**

School buildings and toilets will continue to be used, though with poor maintenance in most sample schools visited. Parents will also continue supporting their children to attend ECE and primary school, at least until completing primary level. The concept of child-centred teaching and learning, which was the core of the in-service training provided, has only been adopted in some schools.

The MCH and Health Centers are well maintained and will continue to provide good quality service into the foreseeable future. Health staff in all MCH and rural health centers continue to apply the skills and knowledge obtained through ChildFund Laos support activities, though the reduction in funding following the end of ChildFund support may limit their activities at village level. Good infant and child nutrition practices are now

embedded in everyday practice among those mothers trained. Water systems will continue to be used and maintained by the communities as they regard water as essential for their lives.

Although less tangible and difficult to measure, the knowledge and skills gained through youth empowerment activities are likely to continue to shape the lives of those young people who participated. Weaving will be continued in most villages and will continue to contribute to family incomes, but mainly for the few women who have participated.

### **Impact**

- **High Level:** Access to ECE and primary education; Access to village water supply and sanitation; Access to quality healthcare, especially maternal child health.
- **Medium Level:** Children and youth participation; Livelihoods - weaving; Livelihoods - kitchen gardens; Improving the quality of education through training; Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).
- **Low/No Impact:** Livelihoods - livestock raising; School gardens; Maintenance of school toilets; Child Rights/Child Protection.

### **Cross-Cutting:**

#### **Gender**

Gender equity and girls and women's empowerment were highlighted in most CDWBC-II project documents. Changes in gender relations within households were reported by several villagers. Women in Nonghet District have also become more involved in village administration in ChildFund target villages compared to villages without CFL support, which may be due partly to ChildFund gender related activities in target villages (other factors involved may include men becoming more engaged in economic activities in the town). However, a gender assessment of CFL conducted in August 2019 found that most CFL projects tended to be 'gender accommodating' - i.e. they take gender into account but mostly work around existing gender differences and inequalities. - with the exceptions identified in this evaluation being ChildFund Pass It Back and Ready For Life projects.

#### **Children with Disability (CWD)**

There was not much evidence found of any special outreach to CWD by CFL staff before 2018, when a decision was made to focus more on CWD. For example, the Media Capacity Strengthening Project in 2018 made a conscious effort to include youth with disabilities in the project, while the Wheelchairs for Kids Project provided training for relevant staff and community members and nine wheelchairs for CWDs in Nonghet District. In 2019, a disability situation and needs assessment was conducted with the aim of improving programming related to CWDs which will hopefully see CWDs more specifically targeted in project design in future.

### **Lessons Learned:**

- *Important to have a balance of 'hardware' and 'software'* - Provision of hardware together with software supports implementation and helps ensure partner 'buy-in'.
- *Quality of Training and follow-up post training is key to change* - Good quality training with subsequent follow-up is essential to bring about positive change.
- *Reaching CWDs requires an activity focus* - Project design needs activities specifically targeting CWDs and an associated budget.
- *Need to improve internal coordination and communication* - Greater focus on coordination and communication (internal and external) and relationship management needs to be a priority.
- *Too many committees are not sustainable* - Setting up several project specific committees in target villages risks overloading villagers and these are unlikely to be sustainable once project support ends.
- *Multi-sectoral versus sectoral approaches* - Both multi-sectoral and sectoral MoUs have their advantages and disadvantages but sectoral MoUs may be more efficient.
- *The need for a logical framework and/or theory of change* - A clear yet simple logical framework and/or Theory of Change understood by all staff will help ensure program cohesiveness.

**Good Practices:**

- *Infant and child nutrition - building on CDWBC-I* - The CDWBC-II Project has built on the earlier work on MCH under the CDWBC-I Project which provided a good combination of infrastructure, training and equipment provision to ensure a good quality MCH system was in place.
- *Ready For Life - Getting it Right?* - While a new youth empowerment project, the early indications are that it represents a significant improvement over previous youth empowerment activities.
- *ChildFund Pass it Back - A good practice that went a little 'off track'* - By introducing a 'gender neutral' sport to the Lao PDR and encouraging girls and women to take up the sport, and combining it with a life skills curriculum, this project has undoubtedly contributed to promoting gender equity and an increase in knowledge and skills, and enhanced self-confidence among youth, though it is essential to ensure the support from those in authority at all levels.

**Recommendations:****Component 1 - Education**

- Give more attention to school building, water supply and toilet maintenance.
- Make a more focused effort to reach more disadvantaged groups.
- Ensure principals and teachers in more remote schools are being effectively supported.
- Allocate budget for, and bring in qualified technical expertise to ensure quality training.

**Component 2 - Children and Youth Empowerment**

- Work more with the parents and teachers of children and young people when implementing youth empowerment activities to ensure an enabling environment.
- Ensure District Government is aware and engaged in ChildFund Pass it Back to avoid similar problems arising elsewhere.
- Combine youth empowerment activities into as few projects as possible<sup>5</sup>.

**Component 3 - Equitable Well-Being**

- Use the Nonghet MCH program as a model for other districts to visit and learn from.
- Ensure adequate preparatory research and planning for livelihood activities.

**Conclusion:** This evaluation of the CDWBC-II Project, which involved 26 projects over a five year period, has identified both examples of good practice, particularly in MCH, and also in some of the youth empowerment activities and provision of ECE facilities, as well as areas where the project has been less successful in achieving component objectives. Project evaluation is also about learning from what did not go so well and perhaps failed to meet project objectives. Hopefully this report examining the CDWBC-II project over the past five years will provide examples of both good practices as well as other lessons which can be used to inform future project design and practice in other districts in the future.

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<sup>5</sup> This recommendation can be applied to all sectors - i.e. reducing and streamlining the number of projects to be implemented.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The *Community Development for the Well-Being of Children Phase II Project (CDWBC-II)* has been implemented by ChildFund Laos (CFL), beginning in October 2014 in Nonghet District, Xieng Khouang Province in the Lao PDR, and is due to end in September 2020. This final CDWBC-II project evaluation was commissioned by CFL and ChildFund Australia in compliance with the terms of the project Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (NCRDPE) represented by the Xieng Khouang Provincial Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office (PRDPEO). The evaluation was undertaken by two consultants under the auspices of the Asia-Oceania Development Network (AODN) with fieldwork carried out during the last half of October/early November 2019. Findings from the fieldwork were used to inform both the CDWBC-II Project evaluation covering five years, as well as the overall Nonghet Program Operational and Impact evaluation, covering 10 years<sup>6</sup>.

This report begins by briefly outlining the background to the current phase of CDWBC-II, the purpose of the evaluation, and the methodology used. The findings of the evaluation are then examined, organised under the relevant OECD criteria - relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Findings related to the cross-cutting areas of gender, disability, poverty and ethnicity are then discussed, and examples of good practice and learning from the current phase are outlined. Although CFL will not be continuing to work in Nonghet District beyond the end of the current MoU, the report concludes with some recommendations arising from the findings that may have relevance for CFL's future development work in other districts.

### 1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

CFL implemented an education project in five villages of Nonghet District beginning in January 2010 under an MoU with the (then) Ministry of Education (MOE)<sup>7</sup>. In January 2012, approval was given to CFL not only to expand the number of target villages from five to 12, but also to expand the scope of the programme beyond education to include mother and child health, water and sanitation, livelihoods and food security, in addition to capacity building and child protection.

Subsequently, a new MoU was signed with the Xieng Khouang Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office (under the National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication) for Phase I of the Community Development for the Well-Being of Children (CDWBC-I) Project. This included 11 sub-projects and covered the period from January 2012 to June 2014. In 2014, the project was expanded further to cover 27 villages and a further MoU was signed with the Xieng Khouang Provincial Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office<sup>8</sup> covering the period October 2014 to September 2020. The CDWBC-II project continued to be multi-sectoral in design, though the number of sub-projects was increased to 27. This evaluation report covers this last phase of the CDWBC Project, Phase II, from 2014 up to the present.

### 1.2 PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

According to the Terms of Reference<sup>9</sup>, the aim of the evaluation is to assess the implementation of the CDWBC Phase II Project with an emphasis on:

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<sup>6</sup> The evaluation used the same methodology and similar tools, as well as the same evaluation team.

<sup>7</sup> In September 2011 the Ministry of Education (MOE) was reorganized and renamed Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES). See 'Historical Glossary of Education Development in Lao PDR (November 1, 2019 Edition)', R. Noonan (2019).

<sup>8</sup> The MoU was signed between ChildFund Australia and the National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, represented by ChildFund Laos and the Xieng Khouang Provincial Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office

<sup>9</sup> See Annex 1 for the complete Terms of Reference

- The achievement of the program objectives as outlined in the MOU and Outcome Indicator Survey Report<sup>10</sup>, with emphasis on program-level M&E data;
- The relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the MOU regarding project goals and objectives;
- Evidence of learning and good practices around project implementation;
- Significant changes in terms of gender, education, youth empowerment, health and community ownership) as a result of implementing program interventions during the last 5 years.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 SCOPE

#### **Geographical Scope:**

In addition to gathering data at national, provincial and particularly Nonghet District levels, a total of 17 sample villages out of the total 27 CFL target villages (approximately 63%) were selected for more in-depth community level assessments<sup>11</sup>, both for the impact evaluation as well as the CDWBC-II evaluation. Criteria for selection of these CDWBC-II Project sample villages included:

- Villages from the initial five target villages from the 2010-2012 phase
- Villages that had been target villages for CFL with both the CDWBC phases I and II (i.e. 2012 - 2019)
- Villages that had been target villages for CDWBC-II only - i.e. 2014-2019
- Varied, according to the number of projects per village (full set of projects versus only a few)
- A range of villages according to size, ethnic composition (Hmong, Khmu and mixed), and location (remote/semi-remote versus on the road)
- At least one village from each of all four target Village Groups ('Khoum Ban')
- Varied according to facilities and basic infrastructure (electricity, health center, schools, GFWS, etc.) provided by CFL.

In addition to these sample villages, three health centers and two secondary schools that had received support from CFL were also visited as part of the evaluations (see *Annex 3. Sample Villages, Schools and Health Centers*).

#### **Respondents:**

A wide range of respondents were interviewed for the two evaluations, including the following:

- At village and school level, 370 people (56% female) including 146 children and youth
- At District Government level, interviews were conducted with the District Governor and Deputy Governor as well as relevant staff from five Departments (DESB, Lao Women's Union, Health Department, Agriculture and Forestry Department, Labour and Social Welfare Department)
- Xieng Khouang Provincial Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office staff
- Current and former ChildFund staff – Vientiane, Phonsavan and Nonghet offices

(For a full list of participants in the evaluation, refer to *Annex 4. Evaluation Participant List*)

<sup>10</sup> While reference is made to the findings from the *Midline 2016 Outcome Indicator Survey Report* in the appropriate sections under 3. *Findings*, this survey was quantitative in nature while the final evaluation was qualitative as specified in the ToR, and thus assessing change based on numerical indicators was not possible.

<sup>11</sup> Of these 16 villages, four (Houayzouang, Thampong, Namkonngua and Nongae) were only visited briefly due to the unavailability of the village head, committee members, and other key informants

**Table 1. : List of participants at village level**

Participants	Total	Male	Female	% Female
ChildFund Youth Monitoring Volunteers	2	0	2	100%
ChildFund Village Coordinators	3	1	2	67%
Children and Youth	146	74	72	49%
Community Members	18	0	18	100%
Fathers	27	27	0	0%
Mothers (with Children < 5 years of age)	80	0	80	100%
Mothers (with Children > 5 years of age)	8	0	8	100%
Primary School Principals and Teachers	20	14	6	30%
Village Committee Members	46	35	11	24%
Village Health Volunteers	12	2	10	83%
Water Management Committee Members	8	8	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>56%</b>

## 2.2 EVALUATION DESIGN

The design of the CDWBC-II Project evaluation took into account a range of documents, including the ChildFund Laos Strategy Paper (2015 - 2020), the Midline 2016 Outcome Indicator Survey Report, the ChildFund Australia Organisational Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) document, several individual project evaluation reports, and more than 60 other project documents. An evaluation matrix, outlining areas of focus, key and specific questions, and sources of information was developed first, and then expanded to provide the content for the various tools used in the evaluation.

**Methodology/Tools:** As indicated in the ToR, the methodology used was largely qualitative in nature, involving key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), an activity for children designed to get their perspective, as well as observation. The tools used for gathering qualitative data included interview guides, impact ranking cards<sup>12</sup>, an village observation checklist (primarily for water and sanitation), children's activity indicators and coloured cards, and a case study question guide. In addition, quantitative data was also gathered related to education (EMIS 2013-2019), health and District development. Team members met after each village visit to consolidate and analyse data, a process which took up to three hours per village data set.

## 2.3 EVALUATION TEAM

While the two AODN consultants conducted the interviews with District and Provincial Government staff and ChildFund staff at all levels, a team comprised of eight members conducted the data gathering in sample villages. This team was comprised of two local Government staff members, one Provincial Government and one CFL staff member, two consultants, and two additional members hired specifically as interpreters for their Hmong language abilities. A half day workshop was held with the evaluation team prior to going to the sample villages to familiarise them with the purpose and scope of the evaluation, the methodology and tools to be used, as well as interviewing and note-taking techniques. Roles and responsibilities were also assigned to each team member and the evaluation work plan for the village visits was also reviewed and agreed on.

<sup>12</sup> These outlined ChildFund's main activity areas over the past decade and were used in both KIIs and FGDs to facilitate prioritisation of impact as well as stimulate more detailed discussion regarding each main activity area.

## 2.4 CHALLENGES

There were a number of challenges to the implementation of the evaluation. Overall, these constraints did not seriously affect the results of the evaluation and included:

- *Availability of informants at village level:* As it was harvest time for the largest cash crop in the district, corn, many villagers left for their fields in the morning and did not return until evening. This was managed through making prior appointments with each village head and then reaching the village as early as possible in the morning, before villagers departed for their fields, or in one case, Pha-En, staying overnight in the village.
- *Large number of projects involved:* The CDWBC-II evaluation covered a five year period (2014 - 2019) which included the implementation of at least 26 projects (see *Annex 2. ChildFund Projects in Nonghet*). While documentation was available for many of these projects, it was incomplete for some projects and not fully organised, which meant that the consultants needed to work through a large number of documents to find information they were looking for, and often request additional documents from CFL staff which were not always available.
- *Changes in CFL and Government staff, including village authorities:* One of the challenges in undertaking the CDWBC-II evaluation was finding people who were involved with the program in the first two to three years of the phase (i.e. 2014-2017). The CFL office in Nonghet had essentially been closed and most CFL project implementation staff who were involved in the Nonghet program between 2014 and 2017 have since left the organisation, and local Government staff from various departments assigned to coordinate with CFL previously had also changed. However, it was possible to find a small number of people who had been with the CDWBC-II Project from the beginning, both current and former CFL and Government staff and village leaders, and their insights were valuable.
- *Limited experience of evaluation team members:* None of the evaluation team members other than the consultants, had any significant experience in conducting qualitative evaluations. They also found the daily data consolidation and analysis challenging, especially at first. However, through the preparation workshop and then gaining more experience in data collection, consolidation, and analysis, they learned to manage the process quite well.
- *Language issue - Hmong, Khmu and Lao:* Most of the villagers interviewed, including the children, were Hmong or, in two villages, Khmu speakers and some of them had only limited Lao language skills. Fortunately half of the evaluation team (four members) were native Hmong speakers and were able to interpret for the other team members. While some of the communication may have been 'lost in translation', generally this did not cause a major problem. For the two Khmu villages, the fact that one of the consultants is Khmu helped to minimise any language difficulties.

## 3. FINDINGS

The findings in this report are presented in relation to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability<sup>13</sup>. Some criteria were given more weight in accordance with the MOU and the TOR for this report. Due to a number of circumstances outlined earlier (see *footnote 11*), a full complement of evaluation activities was not carried out in all sample villages.

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<sup>13</sup> These terms are defined in more detail on the OECD website:

<http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

### 3.1 RELEVANCE<sup>14</sup>

#### 3.1.1 RELEVANCE TO NEEDS OF BENEFICIARIES

The 26 sub-projects that made up the CDWBC-II project were implemented in 27 villages of Nonghet District (comprising approximately 25% of the total number of villages - 106 - in the District), including 12 existing villages from the previous phase of the CDWBC-I Project<sup>15</sup>. To ensure that the second phase was relevant to the needs of project beneficiaries, CFL held consultations with Provincial and District authorities prior to the start of the project. Consultations with other NGOs working in Nonghet District (specifically Helvetas and World Renew) were also held in order to avoid project duplication in villages where CFL planned to work.

Community members, school principals and teachers in all sample villages visited reported that CFL support had a high degree of relevance to their needs, particularly the construction of early childhood education (ECE) facilities<sup>16</sup>, provision of training to teachers, and awareness raising on health and nutrition. As with primary school construction in earlier phases, CFL employed a Community-Based Development (CBD) approach in the construction of ECE facilities and toilets. The process began with consultations with District authorities and target communities to reach agreement on their priorities. After that, villages where facilities were to be constructed established Project Construction Committees (PCC) in order to help lead and monitor the construction process. Villagers contributed labour and locally available materials (e.g. wood and sand). Most sample communities visited reported that such an approach was appropriate to the local context and that it created a sense of ownership. This evaluation found no evidence of negative consequences as a result of asking communities to contribute labour and local materials for construction, suggesting that the contribution requirements were at an acceptable level and did not put too much pressure on communities.

Children and youth empowerment and participation had been a key area in ChildFund's long-term support in Nonghet District. Children and youth interviewed for this evaluation reported that activities related to this were very much relevant to their needs. Accordingly, many children and youth, especially girls and adolescent females, had participated in the activities, particularly rugby and, more recently, Ready for Life. However, while rugby was perceived by young people, especially girls, as a relevant activity, the District Governor and some principals and teachers interviewed, felt that rugby was not appropriate for their district, though this appeared to be more about the way in which it was implemented rather than its relevance (see Section 3.2.2 *Component 2* below).

ChildFund support related to maternal-child health (MCH) was seen by community members interviewed as particularly relevant to their needs. This included the upgrading of health services in the District MCH Center constructed and equipped with ChildFund support, and the four health centers<sup>17</sup>, as well as training provided to mothers in infant nutrition.

However, in terms of livelihood related activities, villagers interviewed only regarded weaving and to a lesser extent, kitchen gardens, as relevant to their needs. Due to problems related to the livestock and chickens provided by the Project, they did not regard these livelihood activities as particularly relevant or useful.

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<sup>14</sup> Relevance - *The extent to which the objectives of the development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners' and donor's policies.*

<sup>15</sup> These 12 target villages from CDWBC-I also included 5 target villages from the Nonghet Child-friendly Education Promotion Project (NoCEP), which was implemented from 2010–2012.

<sup>16</sup> Primary school construction had been an area of focus of earlier phases, whereas school construction in CDWBC-II was more focused on ECE.

<sup>17</sup> According to the MCH Project final evaluation report in 2017, these were located in Nammen, Phakkhæ, Phaven and Pha-En villages.



### 3.1.2 RELEVANCE TO LAO GOVERNMENT POLICIES

The evaluation found the CDWBC-II design to be relevant to Nonghet District development priorities in three main areas: rural development and poverty reduction; infrastructure improvement, including construction of clean water systems; and access to improved education and healthcare services. Also, prior to the start of the CDWBC-II phase in 2014, Nonghet was still classified as one of the poorest districts in the Lao PDR. For example, only 56% of total households had and used toilets<sup>18</sup>, and Government funding support to the education sector, especially for in-service training, was also very limited. A number of ECE facilities existed but were temporary and most health centers lacked a full range of appropriate equipment and resources, as well as few well-trained staff responsible for managing and providing services at the health centers.

Staff from the Provincial Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Division who were interviewed said that the design was largely consistent with Xieng Khouang Provincial development plans and priorities, especially in terms of support for maternal-child health care.

At the National level, the CDWBC-II MOU was also relevant to the five-year Education Sector Development Plan (2016–2020) in that “equitable access to quality education and sports” was a development priority of the Ministry of Education and Sports<sup>19</sup>. The MOU was also relevant to the eighth National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016–2020) in enabling ‘access to quality education and improved healthcare services’ with a focus on the poor<sup>20</sup>.

Apart from focusing on poverty reduction, the CDWBC-II project was also regarded as a way to support Nonghet District in the move towards achieving its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2020<sup>21</sup>. Though the project documents did not explicitly refer to these goals, analysis of the CDWBC-II project objectives suggest that they do cover five targets of MDGs (Goals 1 - 5) and five targets of SDGs (Goals 1 and 3 - 6) as presented in *Annex 6. Relevance to MDG and SDG Goals* attached.

## 3.2 EFFECTIVENESS<sup>22</sup>

***The overall objective of CDWBC-II is to reduce poverty and strengthen sustainable development in Nonghet district through integrated community development that supports government development policies and contributes to Millennium Development Goals and post-Millennium Development Goal priorities, focusing on Least Developed Country graduation in 2020.***

In terms of the overall objective, the CDWBC-II project can be said to have made a contribution to poverty reduction in Nonghet District. Evidence can be seen in increased access to ECE and primary education and improved healthcare facilities in the district, strengthened capacity of district staff, teachers and healthcare personnel, and improved awareness among mothers on hygiene practices and nutrition (see the details by MOU component below). District-wide data also appears to support a decline in poverty, showing a steady decline in the percentage of families classified as poor, from just over 33% in 2010 to only just over 4% by 2015. However, a change in the criteria for assessing poverty levels used by the Lao Government - primarily a significant increase in the poverty threshold amount of family income below which families are classified as 'poor' (from US\$22.50 per month per person to US\$59) - saw a dramatic increase in 2019 to more than half

<sup>18</sup> District Socio-Economic Development Report (2010–2014) and District Socio-Economic Development Plan (2014–2019). District Governors Office, Nonghet District. 2014.

<sup>19</sup> ESDP (2016–2020). MOES, Lao PDR. p. 7–8.

<sup>20</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> NSEDP (2016–2020). MPI, Laos PDR. 2016. p. 130–133.

<sup>21</sup> The end target of SDGs is 2030 but the MOU ends in 2020 so it limits its target within the project life only.

<sup>22</sup> Effectiveness - *The extent to which the development intervention's objectives were achieved.*

the population of the District being classified as 'poor', so while these figures do give us a sense of the trend in poverty levels before 2019, they may not be totally reliable. (See *Figure 2* below). This will make it even more difficult for Nonghet District to achieve national poverty reduction targets, despite the national target for achieving graduation from least developed country status also being adjusted to 2025 from 2020.

**Figure 1. Percentage of Families Classified as 'Poor'<sup>23</sup>**

Years	Number of Families in the District	Number of Families Classified as 'Poor'	% of Families Classified as 'Poor'
2010	5365	1796	33.48
2012	5474	1328	24.26
2014	5657	277	4.90
2015	5749	240	4.17
2019	6381	3242	50.81

Again, at the overall District level, the CDWBC-II Project would appear to have been a factor contributing towards achieving MDG and then SDG targets, together with previous ChildFund support, as well as that of the District Government and other international organisations. In terms of achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), overall, Nonghet District has made good progress towards achieving the targets, some of which have already been exceeded. (see *Figure 2. SDG Targets and Progress Made – Education* and *Figure 3. SDG Targets and Progress Made - Health*).

**Figure 2. SDG Targets and Progress Made – Education**

Sustainable Development Indicators	Achievements (2019) <sup>24</sup>	SDG Targets	Progress
<b>Early Childhood Education</b>			
1. Enrolment Rate (3-5 years old children)	30.20	65.00	-34.80
2. Enrolment Rate (5 years old children)	57.70	79.00	-21.30
<b>Primary Education</b>			
1. Net Enrolment Rate	98.30	99.00	-0.70
2. Net Enrolment Rate - Grade 1	96.50	98.00	-1.50
3. Survival Rate	89.40	98.00	-8.60
4. Promotion Rate	92.48	98.80	-6.32
5. Dropout Rate	2.23	3.00	0.77
6. Repetition Rate	5.14	4.30	-0.84
<b>Lower Secondary Education</b>			
1. Gross Enrolment Rate	88.90	84.00	4.90
2. Promotion Rate	88.60	99.80	-11.20
3. Dropout Rate	9.20	9.00	-0.20
4. Repetition Rate	1.47	0.10	-1.37
<b>Upper Secondary Education</b>			
1. Gross Enrolment Rate	56.70	55.00	1.70
2. Promotion Rate	84.50	99.80	-15.30

<sup>23</sup> Provincial Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Division, Xieng Khuang Province.

<sup>24</sup> District Socio-Economic Development Report (2015–2019), Nonghet District Office.

Sustainable Development Indicators	Achievements (2019) <sup>24</sup>	SDG Targets	Progress
3. Dropout Rate	14.90	7.00	-7.90
4. Repetition Rate	0.24	0.10	-0.14

**Figure 3. SDG Targets and Progress Made – Health**

Sustainable Development Indicators	Achievements (2019) <sup>25</sup>	SDG Targets	Progress
1. Maternal mortality ratio live births (per 100,000)	90.00	190.00	100.00
2. Deaths of children under 1 year of age (per 1,000)	46.20	1.10	-45.10
3. Deaths of children under 5 years of age (per 1,000)	49.20	11.30	-37.90
4. Deliveries with assistance of SBA	43.00	81.80	-38.80
5. Underweight children	3.10	19.20	16.10
6. Children with stunting	13.00	37.20	24.20
8. Access to clean water	80.60	92.50	-11.90
9. Use toilets	67.00	85.90	-18.90
10. Vaccinations	97.00	88.20	8.80

**Key**

<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: red; border: 1px solid black;"></span>	Not yet achieved, off track
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: yellow; border: 1px solid black;"></span>	Not yet achieved, but slow progress
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: green; border: 1px solid black;"></span>	Achieved or exceeded the target

### 3.2.1 MOU COMPONENT ONE

**Objective - Component One:** to improve young children's development through improving access to quality education

Component One included seven sub-projects focused on (i) improving access to early childhood and primary education by utilising a community-based construction approach, and (ii) improving the quality of child-friendly education. Activities involved construction of ECE facilities, including toilets, provision of education supplies and furniture, and in-service training of teachers. For primary education, the focus was only on training of teachers and principals, with no further construction and renovation of primary schools and toilets.

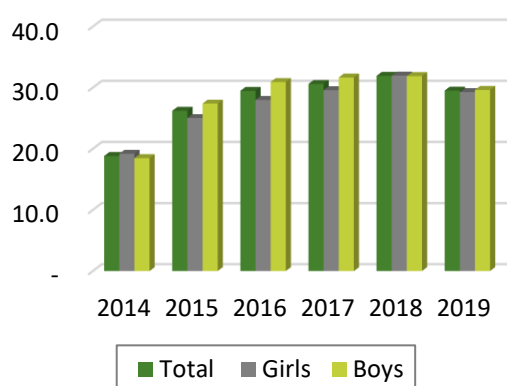
**Access to Education:** The project appears to have largely met its objective under this component. Children, parents and teachers in all sample villages visited for both the impact and CDWBC-II evaluations reported that all school-aged children were attending pre-primary and primary schools, apart from a few children who had severe disabilities. Increases in ECE and primary education enrolment in target villages over the past five years were reportedly due largely to improved school facilities and various education resources provided by the project. Children's attitudes and behaviour, especially among pre-primary school-aged children, was reported to have changed from 'not wanting' to 'more willing' to attend school in target villages. In addition to the facilities provided by ChildFund, other factors contributing to increased attendance reported by those

<sup>25</sup> District Socio-Economic Development Report (2015–2019), Nonghet District Office.

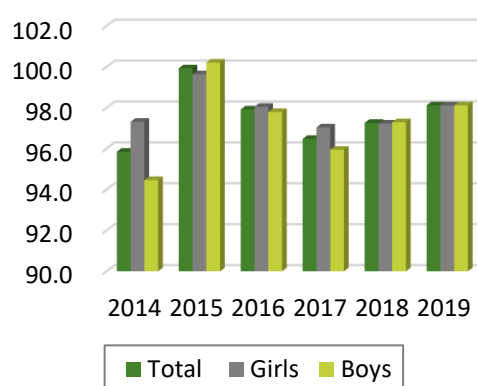
interviewed included increased awareness of the importance of education, as well as the influence of siblings and peers<sup>26</sup>, and These changes were not only as a result of the CDWBC-II project, but also a legacy of the CDWBC-I project.

Education statistics for ECE in Nonghet District as a whole support these qualitative findings, with a significant increase in the net enrolment ratio of children in ECE, from 18% in 2014 to 30% in 2016 (after which it remains stable until 2018/19 when it drops slightly, though the reasons for this are unclear - See *Figure 4* below). However, the figures for net enrolment rate at primary school level are less clear and unreliable, showing a decline from 99.9%<sup>27</sup> in 2015 to 98% in 2016, then dropping further in 2017 until rising again to 98% from 2018 to 2019 (See *Figure 5* below). In terms of enrolment numbers, data from interviews with school principals as well as from District EMIS showed a steady decline which appears to be largely due to decreasing family size due to family planning promotion, as well as temporary economic migration of parents who take their children with them when they go and work in towns elsewhere or to other provinces.

**Figure 4. Enrolment Ratio – Early Childhood Education<sup>28</sup>**



**Figure 5. Net Enrolment Rate – Primary Education**



Teachers and parents reported that, unlike before, most students went on secondary school after completing primary education, but some dropped out to get married and help parents on their farms<sup>29</sup>. However, statistics indicate that while the transition rate from primary to lower secondary level has increased, many students fail to complete lower secondary school level and only two thirds of lower secondary level students in Nonghet completed their studies at this level (See *Figure 6*. below). For example, in Phakkhæ Lower Secondary School, in school year 2018/19 alone, there were 40 students who dropped out from school due to early marriage, and all were from the Hmong ethnic group<sup>30</sup>. Though supporting secondary education was not an objective of the project, this issue could be explored more fully in order to ensure lifeskills training encourages particularly young women to continue staying in school, at least until they complete lower secondary level<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Specifically mentioned in interviews in Buamdao, Kengled and Pha-En villages.

<sup>27</sup> The figure of 99.9% NER for primary level for Nonghet District seems too high and is likely due to an error in the calculations. DESB staff explained that one of the reasons for this was because the figure includes students from other districts who migrated to Nonghet and the staff did not exclude that. This applies to all calculation methods used for the whole year brackets, from 2014/15 to 2018/19.

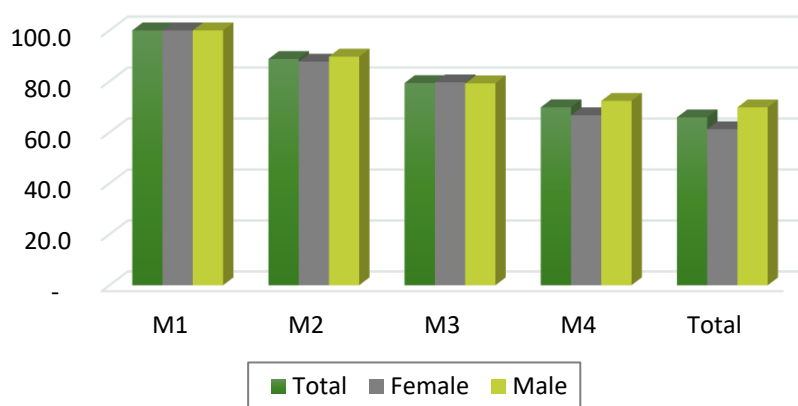
<sup>28</sup> 2014 = SY2013/14, 2015 = SY2014/15, and so on.

<sup>29</sup> See also similar findings from reports on 'Outcome Indicator Baseline Survey'. ChildFund Laos, 2016 and 'Social Factors Affecting Secondary School Completion among Adolescent Females'. P. Souvanxay, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> EMIS data shows no clear pattern in female dropouts from lower secondary school from 2014 to 2019. For example, it was lower in 2017/2018 (around 6% compared to 12% in 2018/2019) but higher the previous school year

<sup>31</sup> According to the Education Law (2015), lower secondary school education is compulsory.

**Figure 6. Survival Rate - Lower Secondary Education 2018/19**



**Quality of Education:** Education quality improvement, particularly in terms of teaching and learning, was still low in most schools visited for the evaluation, despite the fact that more than 70% - 80% of the DESB budget spent on in-service training was reportedly from ChildFund Laos<sup>32</sup>. Most teachers and principals interviewed reported that in the past five years, there had been at least 10 in-service training workshops organised as part of the CDWBC-II Project. The main focus of these workshops had been on teaching methodology - multi-grade teaching, teaching of Lao language to speakers of other languages (for grade 1 teachers), developing lesson plans, creating supplementary teaching and learning materials and other related topics.



**'Child-friendly' classroom environment - Korthong School**

(see photo above).

However, when observing the classrooms and school environments, there was not much evidence of child-friendly practices, indicating that the quality of education had not changed significantly as a result of training. While the direct reasons for this were unclear, information from other sources indicated that it was most likely related to the poor quality of training as well as lack of follow-up, especially in semi- and remote schools. The exception was Korthong Primary School, where classroom environments appeared more 'child friendly', with student work and posters displayed and seating organised into groups (see

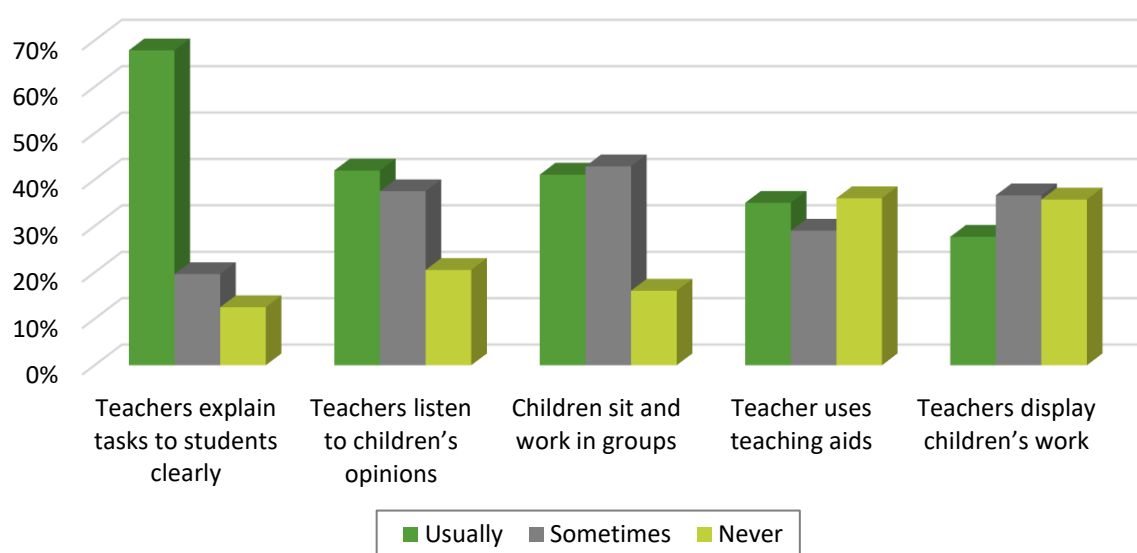
photo above).

Results from consultations with children from grades four and five in 11 primary schools visited supported the finding that teaching and learning still tends to follow a teacher-centered methodology. As Figure 7 below shows, while children reported that most of their teachers explained learning tasks clearly, only a minority of

<sup>32</sup> Source: Interview Deputy Director of Nonghet DESB, October 2019.

teachers regularly listened to children's opinions, used teaching aids, had students work in groups or displayed student's work.

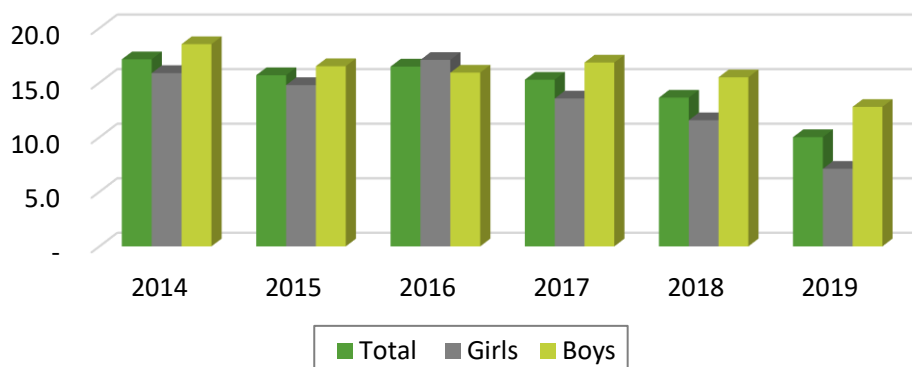
**Figure 7. Children's Perspectives on Quality Education**



Children in early grades, especially grade 1, experienced the most difficulty in learning, particularly as most of them were entering a Lao speaking school environment for the first time in schools where there was no pre-primary school. However, the focus on constructing ECE facilities in CDWBC-II as well as in-service training for teachers, does seem to be making some difference, with grade 1 repetition rates falling over the past four years, especially among girls (See *Figure 8.* below). With a drop in the grade 1 repetition rate from around 17% in 2014 to 10% in 2019, it seems that Nonghet District is well on the way to achieving the national target in reducing the repetition rate of grade 1 students to 5% by 2020<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) 2016 – 2020. MOES, Lao PDR. p.9.

**Figure 8. Grade 1 Repetition Rate - Primary Education in Nonghet District**



#### **Summary Analysis Learning - Component One: Access to and Quality Education**

- Construction of ECE facilities and schools with ChildFund support appears to have had a very positive impact on increasing access to education in target villages, with almost 100% of school age children reportedly now attending primary school and enrolment rates in ECE facilities increasing.
- In-service training for teachers and principals has been less effective, with only limited application of child-centred teaching methodologies in target schools (with some exceptions). Reasons for this may include limited follow-up and support after training, as well as poor school leadership.
- Improvement noted in reducing repetition rates in grade 1, which may be an indication that some of the in-service training has had a positive impact, particularly that related to teaching Lao to children from non-Lao Tai ethnic groups.

### **3.2.2 MOU COMPONENT TWO**

**Objective - Component Two:** *To increase village level participation in district planning and to provide opportunities for children and their communities to identify, manage and implement activities that result in positive changes in the lives of children.*

There were 12 sub-projects under this component. However, projects seemed to be more focused on empowering children and youth more than increasing village level participation in district planning. Key activities involved working with children and youth on a range of activities including sports, particularly rugby (ChildFund Pass It Back, which was also integrated with life skills with an emphasis on promoting gender equity), training on child protection and safeguarding, and safe social media use, story writing and photography, as well as life skills. At least two of the projects also linked young people in Nonghet District with young people in other countries, particularly Australia, through sharing of videos and stories (Connect and Global Community). Another activity involved training children and young people in developing writing skills and also monitoring of ChildFund initiated activities.

As several of these activities were facilitated directly by CFL staff and had been completed some time ago, respondents were not able to recall the details of these activities, other than the fact that children and young people had been involved in making videos and writing stories. The two exceptions were ChildFund Pass it Back and Ready for Life. Several respondents, especially those who had been directly involved, were able to recall activities related to ChildFund Pass it Back, as rugby had been very popular before it ended in late 2018/early 2019. Young people who were involved in Ready for Life were able to explain the activity clearly as it only recently started in high schools in Nonghet and was ongoing.



Rugby and the associated life skills training was very popular among children and youth, and activities were implemented by the Lao Rugby Federation (LRF) with funding and other support from CFL. In 2016, for example, there were 100 teams in Xieng Khouang Province who were part of rugby activities, 77 of which were from Nonghet District.<sup>34</sup> Rugby's popularity was reportedly due to several factors - It was a new sport which encouraged the involvement of girls (other more traditional sports being largely male dominated), taught positive values through the lifeskills curriculum, and potentially provided opportunities to travel outside of Nonghet District to Vientiane and even to other countries.

Youth who had participated in rugby activities reported that they learned new skills, not only how to play rugby but also they had gained interpersonal and networking skills. More importantly, they enjoyed playing the game and felt it kept them healthy. Parents also reported that they had observed changes in the development of their children after they joined the rugby activities - they were more self-confident and more mature in their behaviour.

However, the District Governor and some principals and teachers did not support the continuation of rugby activities, and it was stopped by the District Governor in early 2019. The District Governor said this was because CFL and the LRF sometimes did not follow government procedures during activity implementation and did not communicate or coordinate well with the relevant local authorities. For example, when taking rugby players to Vientiane or overseas, sometimes formal permission was not requested from local authorities in advance, only after they had returned. He also felt that ChildFund and the LRF should have worked more closely with the DESB in implementing the activity. Some school principals claimed that rugby had created a negative impact on children's learning, distracting them from study due to spending too much time playing the game. Thus while rugby was very popular among children and youth, especially girls, it was much less so among adults in authority. This raises the question as to whether or not the District Governor's 'ban' on rugby could have been avoided had the LRF and ChildFund made more effort to communicate and coordinate effectively with local authorities and schools.

Through Connect and Global Community activities, as well as the SARMeL sub-project (Strengthening Adolescent Resilience through Media Literacy in Laos), youth interviewed reported that they had learned new skills as a result of joining the activities, including having a better understanding of how to use 'safe' social media, take photos and make videos, and how to write stories - that is to say, their media literacy and

### **Case Study 1: Rugby and its implications for children and youth in Nonghet**

Lao Khang, from Namkonngua village in Nonghet District who had joined firstly as a player, then become a coach and now National Rugby Team Coordinator for Xiengkhuang Province, told us that Rugby has provided opportunities to help many children in Nonghet. A number of Hmong children had become more self-confident (rather than being shy) to ask what they didn't know or didn't understand in the classroom as well as outside of the classroom. They felt that their views were listened to more, and their participation in family decision making had been increased. Most children were also more aware of hygiene practices and also showed more respect to their friends and others in their communities after joining Rugby activities.

Lao Khang regarded Rugby as an "opportunity" for individual development for her. She could not imagine herself being at this stage of life without having this opportunity provided by ChildFund and the Lao Rugby Federation.



*Lao Khang, LRF Office, Vientiane Lao PDR, 2019*

<sup>34</sup> End of Project Report (Pass It Back: LA02-013). Lao Rugby Federation. 2017. Also interview with Ms Lao Khang, Pass It Back Coach from Nonghet District, November 2019.



engagement skills had been improved<sup>35</sup>. They also said that they were more open-minded, accepting differences, were more adaptive, having a wider perspective and improved social skills, and that they felt more connected to the wider world.

The Ready for Life Project is relatively new to Nonghet, with peer training among high school students only starting in Touya Secondary School with the availability of the new curriculum in 2019. It represents an effort by ChildFund to consolidate different projects into one - namely, knowledge and skills related to resilience and participation (Child Participation for Resilience), sexual and reproductive health (Tune In) and on-line safety (SARMeL). The Project is proving popular among secondary school students. For example, in Touya Secondary School, 33 students have joined the Ready for Life activity with eight of them being trained as trainers, under the guidance of one of their teachers. Two hour sessions are run after school one day per week, and students interviewed felt that the topics in the curriculum were all relevant for their lives. In Nankongua Secondary School, 33 students have joined, 27 of whom were females. According to five youth interviewed, they have joined the activities since the 2017/2018 school year and two<sup>36</sup> of them have been to Vientiane for the first time to participate in youth activities and training supported by CFL. The two have also organized a few trainings for their peers in school on early marriage, education awareness raising (encouraging them not to

#### **Summary Analysis and Learning - Component Two: Child and Youth Empowerment**

- Young people in Nonghet District have responded positively to projects promoting gender equity, building self-confidence and leadership skills, developing media skills and linking them more to the world beyond.
- However, some adults in authority, including the District Governor, were unhappy with the way in which it was implemented which suggests that more attention needs to be given by CFL and LRF to ensuring those in authority are fully informed and involved as appropriate.
- Because some adults in authority appear to have difficulty with these youth empowerment activities, ChildFund needs to consider developing better strategies to manage these.
- Nonetheless, some parents interviewed could see the positive changes in their children as a result of participation in their activities.
- With Ready for Life, ChildFund seems to have learned from past experience and is 'anchoring' this activity within the secondary education system, through making sure the school principal is on board and having a teacher assigned to support and oversee the peer education process.

drop out from school), and life skills. These students have reported some changes in their lives: increased self-confidence and self-value, more positive thinking, calmer, more mature, and with improved communication skills.

### **3.2.3 MOU COMPONENT THREE**

**Objective - Component Three:** *To improve community-wide well-being through increasing access to improved services through (i) improving access to safe sanitation through community-led total sanitation approaches, (ii) improving gender equity through improving livelihood security, and (iii) improving maternal and child health and nutrition.*

There were six projects under this component. Key activities included construction of toilets and water facilities, training for village development committees (VDCs) on construction and maintenance, and running hygiene promotion campaigns. Livelihood security support under this component included establishing

<sup>35</sup> Specific evaluation of Global Communities project can be found in 'Final Evaluation Report: Creating Global Communities through Child-Led Development Education Project'. C. Vanaspong. 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Male and female around 14 - 15 years old.

Women's Livelihood Groups (WLG) and training on how to manage the groups, providing technical support on livestock raising and farming management systems, developing kitchen gardens, and market linkages as well as gender-responsive agricultural planning and implementation. Other activities were awareness raising on the importance of good nutrition, and breastfeeding to mothers, training of trainers on basic knowledge of nutrition to Health Clinic and District Health Staff, and conducting nutrition promotion campaigns in schools.

**Water and sanitation:** Construction of gravity-fed water systems (GFWS) and toilets was implemented in close consultation with communities, using a community-led total sanitation (CLTS) approach<sup>37</sup>. In all cases, CFL provided construction materials and communities contributed labour and some locally available materials, such as wood and sand. In some cases, where community latrine coverage was low, villagers had to build their own toilets first, then ChildFund Laos provided support for GFWS construction. This was seen as the most effective approach in ensuring latrine coverage<sup>38</sup>, community involvement, ownership, and accountability.

More than 80% of households in the sample villages visited had access to water and toilets for use at home. Surprisingly, villages located on the road experienced more difficulty in getting access to water compared to those living in more rural villages. This was due to limited water sources available, particularly during the dry season, despite having water facilities in place. In Namkongua Village (see photo above), one third of households had no regular access to water, and in Phakkhæ Village, people had to buy water from others in the village or the villages nearby. In addition, poor water management systems and maintenance led to people having irregular



***Children washing hands with soap before starting class - Korthong School***



access to water. Water management was often done by the Village Committee rather than an assigned water management group (WMG), although these had initially been set up by ChildFund at the time of construction. Poor toilet maintenance also seemed to be a problem. In Dindam Village, for example, when septic tanks were full, new tanks were not being built and toilet usage had declined.

Access to water and use of toilets were more limited in schools than that of at home. Nearly 50% of sample villages<sup>39</sup> visited did not have water for children to use at school and toilets were locked or unusable. The school water system in some of these villages had been broken for almost four years and had not been repaired (see photo on the previous page from Dindam Primary School). When children wanted to use toilets, they go back to their house or go to the bushes around the school. As reported by

***A broken tapstand - four years without repair – Dindam School***

<sup>37</sup> See: <https://www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/page/clts-approach>

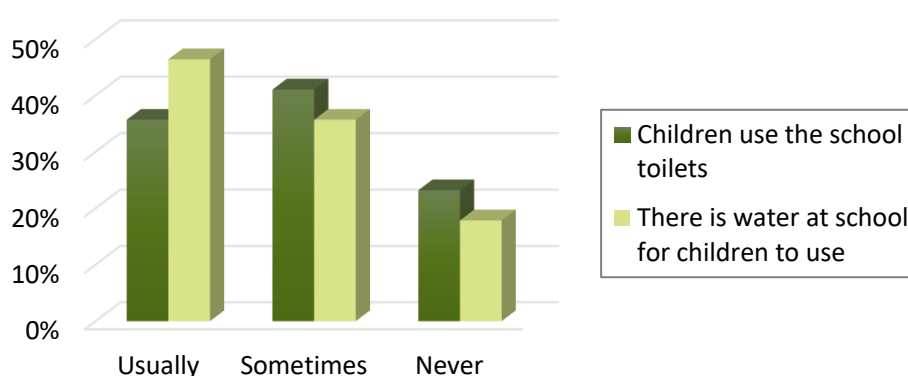
<sup>38</sup> Usually, village communities in the Lao PDR are more enthusiastic about improved water access, but less so when it comes to building toilets, but by making improved water supply conditional on ensuring village latrine coverage first, this resistance could be overcome.

<sup>39</sup> These were Nammen, Namkonngua and Dindam, and Pha-En

children<sup>40</sup>, approximately 20% reported that there was no water at school for them to use and that they never used toilets at school. Where there was water and toilet at school, only half of them (40%) used them regularly and the other half (40%) used them only sometimes (See *Figure 9.* below).

In schools where toilets were accessible and had water, soap for hand washing was usually not available. The exception was Korthong School, where water and soap was made available and students were required to wash their hands before entering the classroom at the start of the day and after break time (see photo above).

**Figure 9. Access to water and toilets at schools – Children’s perspective**



**Livelihood Security and Gender Equity:** Weaving seemed to have the greatest impact on family income and gender relations with the family. In Dindam Village, for example, 10 families were initially trained (based on their interest and motivation rather than other selection criteria) and the group of weavers has now expanded to 24, with others interested in participating, not only in Dindam Village but in some other villages as well. In Paka Village, five out of seven women trained have continued to do weaving, selling their products at the local market. All villages visited reported that livestock raising was not successful due partly to disease and the fact that breeds provided by CFL were not suitable to the local context. Some have suggested that it would have been better to give them cash so they could find more appropriate breeds available locally. Project documents also suggest that undertaking market analysis and linking women up with potential markets for their products as outlined in the proposals did not happen, though in the case of weaving, it appears that the trainers may have provided some contacts in the town for them to sell their products.

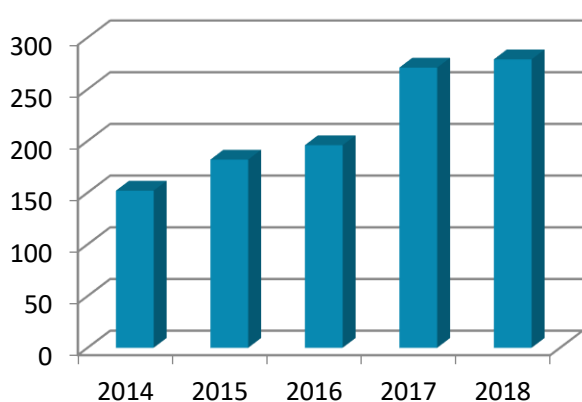
Training on kitchen gardens had provided them some new techniques in addition to the local knowledge and practices that they already had (kitchen gardens existed before ChildFund support for this activity). Many households, especially where there was enough water, continued growing vegetables but for consumption rather than for sale. School gardens, on the other hand, stopped after ChildFund support ended and school principals interviewed gave a number of reasons why this was the case - for example, not having enough water at school, gardens not being taken care of regularly, primary school children being too young to do gardening, etc. While project proposals had referred to school gardens being integrated into the existing curriculum (i.e. Lao language, mathematics, World Around Us), this appears to have never happened. Overall, it seemed school principals regarded this as a CFL activity and did not see the value of having school gardens.

Change in gender relations in the family as a result of livelihood security support was found only in a few villages. Some who were interviewed said that husbands listen to their wives more due to their increased income earning capacity and that, as a result, domestic violence was also reduced. Some students who dropped out from secondary school also helped their mothers with weaving and selling the products.

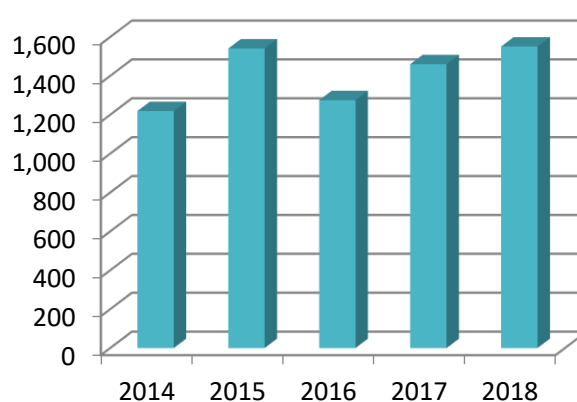
<sup>40</sup> A result of children's evaluation activities conducted in 11 sample villages, including sample villages for 10 years impact evaluation.

**Health and Nutrition:** Key inputs from CFL included training of health staff, provision of health-related equipment, and community awareness raising on health and nutrition. Staff from the three health centers visited reported that they had received annual training from Provincial trainers supported by CFL over the past five years to improve their skills in antenatal care and delivering babies, as well as Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI). After training, apart from applying what they have learned into their daily work, they also visited communities and provided training to villagers, especially village women, in child nutrition and cooking, as well as encouraging pregnant women and new mothers to utilise MCH services. Changes observed by health staff were the increase in number of villagers using MCH health center services, particularly pregnant women and mothers with children under five years of age. In Nammen Health Center, for example, there were around 200-300 people accessing services each month. Services utilised included family planning, ANC services, vaccinations, deliveries, etc. (see *Figure 10* and *Figure 11* below). However, it is important to note that the increase of users was not only a result of CFL support, as it was also due to Government policy interventions (especially abolishing fees for poor families with children under 5 years).

**Figure 10. Births at MCH Center**



**Figure 11. Use of ANC Services - MCH Center**



Mothers interviewed were now more aware of the importance of going to the health center for assistance. Those interviewed in most villages visited reported that most mothers now give birth at the rural health center near their home or, if there are complications, they go to the District Hospital or to Phonsavan, the capital of Xieng Khouang Province. However, mothers who can give birth easily (and often when it is not their first child), or if the village is more remote and they do not have time to get to the health center, give birth at home sometimes with or without the help of traditional birth attendants (TBAs). All villages visited had at least one TBA and/or Village Health Volunteer (VHV), and all of them received at least 3 trainings in MCH related topics supported by CFL. They helped mothers with delivery, encouraged them to use health centers/hospitals, and gave advice on nutrition related issues, as well as encouraging vaccinations of mothers and children.

**Disaster Risk Reduction:** Most villages visited received loudspeakers provided by CFL and project data shows that 14 villages received these systems. At least one village committee member was trained on how to use the loudspeakers and in disaster risk reduction (DRR) preparedness (e.g. fire prevention) and response (e.g. what to do when experiencing landslides or flooding). However, very few of them understood that the loudspeaker system was part of DRR. Village heads in several sample villages visited reported that the loudspeaker systems were either partly or fully broken, but there was no one who knew how to repair them even though the village could pay for the repairs. Project data shows that of the 14 sets provided by the project, only half were fully functioning by 2019.

The Head of the Department of Labour and Social Welfare Office (DoLSW) in Nonghet felt strongly that ChildFund support for DRR preparedness and response should be continued. He claimed that ChildFund Laos had provided a significant contribution to DRR in Nonghet in the past five years. Staff from the DoLSW had been trained as trainers and then organized trainings in target villages. ChildFund Korea support (US\$5,000) for a fund to be used for emergencies in 11 target villages was still functioning. At the time of the evaluation, he reported that there was around US\$6,000 (approximately 50 million kip) in the fund which is kept in the



bank. He said that every year each family contributes 10,000 Kip and these contributions are systematically recorded.

This positive response was counter-balanced to some extent by the views of a former staff of ChildFund who said that DRR was not successfully implemented in the District as it was not a priority for the District authorities, nor for many of the target communities. Despite the fact that disaster risk reduction management mechanisms were established – District Disaster Management Committee (DDMC), Village Disaster Management Committee (VDMC) and School-Based DRR Plans for Action - there was little evidence that these continued to function or even exist (particularly at village level) after the project ended<sup>41</sup>.

#### **Summary Analysis and Learning - Component Three: Community Well-being**

- Provision of water supply continues to benefit target villages though shortages are apparent in some villages, especially along the road.
- Water supply systems and toilets have not been well maintained in several schools. Maintenance of water supply systems and toilets need to be given more attention in education projects.
- Apart from weaving, and, to a lesser extent school gardens, other activities, particularly livestock raising through women's groups, appear to have had little if any positive impact. This has been due in part to provision of unsuitable breeds of livestock and possibly limited follow-up technical support.
- MCH services have been significantly improved as a result of project inputs and this, coupled with a Government policy of free MCH care, has contributed to a major increase in villagers using these services.
- DRR activities appear to have had only limited impact at village and District level, as this has not been seen as a priority at both levels.

### **3.3 EFFICIENCY<sup>42</sup>**

Assessment of efficiency typically reviews planning, reporting and financial management processes, as well as budget allocations for various activities. In the case of CFL's involvement in Nonghet District, this was more difficult to assess, as apart from two projects (Ready for Life and LECA<sup>43</sup>), ChildFund has ceased operations in this District. Nonetheless, through discussions with ChildFund and District Government staff, as well as review of relevant documentation, it was possible to get a picture of some of these processes in the past.

**Planning Processes:** Overall, internal planning processes appear to have been adequate, though the level of internal cross-sectoral communication and coordination, especially at local level, was not clear. Internally, there were monthly Senior Management Team (SMT) meetings in Vientiane focused on program operations and the implementation of activities, although there were reportedly no direct links between the SMT meetings and PWT meetings within Nonghet District other than what was filtered through the Project manager responsible for implementation in Nonghet District. Although the Provincial Area Manager was not included in these meetings, minutes were circulated to all relevant staff. Sectoral meetings were also held in the Vientiane office following the SMT meetings but minutes were not kept, other than by individual participants, though points discussed at these meetings were incorporated into monthly reports. At provincial level, there were also regular meetings (monthly or every two months) to discuss program implementation, finance and administration issues, and problem solving.

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<sup>41</sup> The DDMC continues to exist, at least on paper, and a DRR Plan was seen on the wall at Dindam Primary School, though no evidence was found of VDMCs in sample villages visited.

<sup>42</sup> A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results.

<sup>43</sup> Local Empowerment through Community Accountability (LECA, 2017 – 2021).

Within Nonghet District, monthly planning was done by Project Working Teams (PWTs) together with relevant District partners sectorally and then agreed on plans were submitted to ChildFund for approval before being submitted to the District Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office (after 2016, to the District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO) after the Office was placed under that Department), who would then send the plans to each relevant department who would, in turn, send notification letters to target villages. While this process was time-consuming and unwieldy, ChildFund probably had little choice given that their MoU<sup>44</sup> was with the Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office (RDPEO).

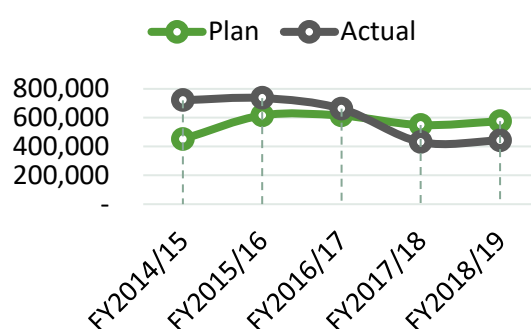
While the PWTs prepared the sector reports and plans, the formal mechanism for reporting was the Implementation Management Committee (IMC) meeting which occurred six monthly in Nonghet District, bringing together National, Provincial and District representatives for a one day meeting where each sector would report on activities for the previous six months and present their plans for the next six months.

Overall, the planning system seems to have functioned reasonably well, though some project documents refer to the lack of coordination across sectors, resulting in different project staff arriving in target villages on the same day to conduct activities, without being aware of each other's plans. Planning also was reported to have been affected to some extent by the turnover of both ChildFund and local Government staff assigned to specific projects. It was also reported that staff from the main partner at District level, the Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office, did not always fully participate in planning or activities due to a lack of funding support for their staff.

**Financial Management:** It was reported that disbursement of funds, once plans were approved, was not an issue. Previously, due to there being no bank in Nonghet, there were delays in sending funds to cover activity costs, but over the past few years, this situation has improved significantly and since last year, ChildFund was able to use the e-banking system.

When comparing between the budget plan and actual expenditure of the CDWBC-II Project, it can be seen that the operational costs have remained stable and consistent over the past five fiscal years; however, program costs were much higher than expected in the first 3 years because it involved investments on the 'hardware' such as construction of school and water facilities. Interestingly, expenditure on 'software' (i.e., youth participation and protection for action) was also high due to a large proportion of it being assigned to ChildFund Pass It Back (2015–2017) and the budget had to be spent before the Project ended in 2017. Thus, expenditure was reduced in the final 2 years.

**Figure 12. Budget Plan vs. Actual Expenditure**



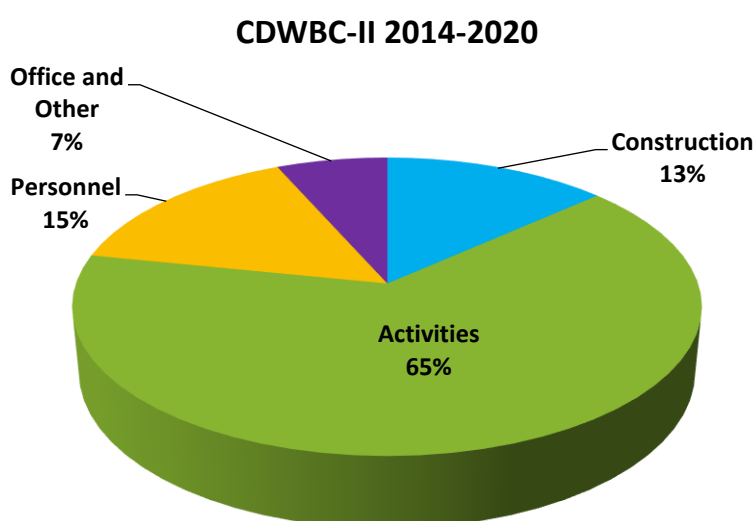
Source: CDWBC-II Expenditure tracking sheet. ChildFund Laos, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that the MOU between ChildFund and the RDPEO was for six years, an unusually long period, which allowed for greater flexibility and was indicative of ChildFund's commitment to Nonghet District. Most MoUs are for a three year period.

In terms of managing budgets within the District, this was fully managed by ChildFund staff, with payments to Government partners for specific activity costs only - mainly transport and per diem expenses. While some organisations try to increasingly pass responsibility for budgeting and expenditures for activities to local Government partners over time (with associated capacity building), ChildFund did not take this approach in Nonghet District due to the potential complications and risks involved. Interviews with local Government staff on this point found different points of view. While the District Governor said he would have preferred regular transfer of budgets to partner District Departments, the Deputy Head of the DESB preferred the system used by ChildFund, acknowledging perhaps the limited financial management capacity within his Department.

**Budget Allocations:** Unlike previous phases of ChildFund support for Nonghet District (i.e. NoCEP from 2010-2012 and then CDWBC-I from 2012-2014), for the CDWBC-II Project there was less budget allocation for construction and more for training and other 'soft' activities (see *Figure 13*. below). Allocations for personnel and office costs appear to have been kept to a reasonable minimum. The only major changes that occurred in this phase were reportedly related to specific project activity costs - for example, with the cancellation of the Strengthening Participatory Planning and Local Governance in Nonghet (LA02-009)<sup>45</sup>, this budget was reallocated to ChildFund Pass it Back, the youth empowerment activity under Component Two.

**Figure 13. CDWBC-II Budget Allocation (based on the MoU)**



### 3.4

#### SUSTAINABILITY<sup>46</sup>

This section briefly outlines the positive changes that, based on the findings, are expected to continue beyond the end of ChildFund support.

**Education:** School buildings and facilities will continue to be used (where functioning), though with poor maintenance in most sample villages. Parents will also continue supporting their children to attend ECE and primary school, at least until completing primary level. The concept of child-centred teaching and learning,

<sup>45</sup> Apparently because this project was designed to support local Government input into the District Socio-Economic Development Plan (DESDP) which would then inform National Government planning processes, but because the timeline was moved forward, this was no longer feasible, and then the budget of AUD\$210,038 was reallocated.

<sup>46</sup> The continuation of benefits from a development intervention after major development assistance has been completed; the probability of continued long-term benefits.

which was the core of the in-service training provided, has only been adopted in some schools. Specifically, the majority of teachers are not using teaching aids or providing supplementary materials, not having students work in groups, displaying students' work, establishing more child-friendly school environments (including playgrounds and a system for disposing of rubbish), and applying child rights and child protection. On the positive side, there were three out of ten primary schools visited that have made positive changes as a result of CFL support, and hopefully these changes will continue and the schools can become models in future.

**Health and sanitation:** The MCH and Health Centers are well maintained and will continue to provide good quality service into the foreseeable future. Health staff in all MCH and rural health centers continue to apply the skills and knowledge obtained through CFL support activities, though the reduction in funding following the end of ChildFund support may limit their activities at village level.

Village water systems will continue to be used and maintained by the communities as they regard water as essential for their lives – not only for survival but also for good hygiene. Toilets will continue to be used by most villagers as their use becomes increasingly routine. A TBA in Dindam Village, for example, reported that the village already had a plan to ensure every household has a latrine for use. However, regular use of toilets may decline in villages where there is not enough water, such as in Phakkhæ, Namkonngua and Nammen villages.

**Children and youth participation and empowerment:** Although less tangible and difficult to measure, the knowledge and skills gained through youth empowerment activities are likely to continue to shape the lives of the youth who participated. In some villages, such as Namkuang, Nakonngua and Nammen, where communities appreciate the contribution of youth and the importance of youth participation in community life, they will likely continue to join village meetings and share their views. In Namkuang, for example, a former village head stated that *"We invited youth to join the meetings as we want to hear their views and sometimes what they think and contribute is beyond what we could think of"*. In Nammen, the Village Committee ranked youth empowerment as the second 'most impactful set of activities' in their communities.

**Livelihood security and gender equality:** Good infant and child nutrition practices are now embedded in everyday practice among mothers who have been trained. Weaving will be continued in most villages and will continue to contribute to family incomes, but mainly for the few women who have participated.

### 3.5 IMPACT<sup>47</sup>

The outcomes and longer term impacts of the CDWBC-II Project have already been documented under Effectiveness (Section 3.2). This section highlights and summarises these in terms of high, medium or no/low impact.<sup>48</sup>

#### 3.5.1 LEVEL OF IMPACT OF CDWBC-II ACTIVITIES

The tables below classify the main CDWBC-II activity areas in terms of a high level of impact (i.e. reaching a larger number of people and likely to last longer term), medium impact (i.e. reaching a smaller number of people but still likely to have longer term positive impact) and low or no impact (i.e. bringing little if any change).

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<sup>47</sup> Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

<sup>48</sup> For a comparison of qualitative findings against the quantitative results of surveys conducted in 2013 and 2016 in terms of ChildFund outcome indicators under the four thematic areas of Access to Assets, Voice and Agency Protection and Power, see the *Operational and Impact Evaluation Report, 2019*.



**High Level of Impact:**

Activities	Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to Education</li> </ul>	Through construction of ECE centers and primary schools, and renovation of existing classrooms and involving villagers in construction/renovation, together with awareness raising within communities of the importance of education, the CDWBC-II project has increased enrolment rates in target villages. ECE and primary education are now regarded as 'the norm' in most of the target communities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to water and sanitation</li> </ul>	Through requiring villagers to construct toilets before receiving water supply has helped ensure a high rate of latrine coverage - close to or above the threshold of approximately 90% required to be certain to have a positive impact on community health <sup>49</sup> .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to quality healthcare, especially maternal child health</li> </ul>	Construction of the MCH Center at the District Hospital during CDWBC-I and equipping of this Center as well as three village health centers, together with training for staff, has contributed to an increase in villagers accessing these services, particularly mothers/pregnant women. Government policy - i.e. offering free MCH services - has also complemented this improvement in availability of quality services.

**Medium Level Impact:**

Activities	Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children and youth participation</li> </ul>	Despite these activities being dependent on ChildFund support (and thus finishing when that support ended), there was evidence that they did have a positive impact on children and young people in terms of confidence building, gender equity, resilience, levels of participation, and other areas. For example, rugby helped to increase the level of participation of girls in sports, creating role models and positive examples for their communities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Livelihoods - weaving</li> </ul>	While not involving large numbers of women, this activity helped women who were motivated to participate to generate increased income as well as contribute to greater gender equity through enhancing women's roles within the family.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Livelihoods - kitchen gardens</li> </ul>	Although these gardens existed prior to ChildFund's involvement, this activity did help to improve kitchen gardens through introducing new techniques and thus contributed to family nutrition.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving the quality of Education through training</li> </ul>	This includes the quality of teaching and learning, school management and community involvement, particularly through VEDCs. Training provided by the CDWBC-II project did have some impact on some target schools in bringing positive changes in the three above areas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)</li> </ul>	This was only a short term project, and it did raise awareness of DRR among village heads and in some schools, as well as providing village loudspeaker systems (though 50% are semi- or non functioning). It

<sup>49</sup> Ikin, Derrick Owen, *Demand creation and affordable sanitation and water*. WEDC, Switzerland (1994)

Activities	Details
	was also reportedly instrumental in setting up a Disaster Response Fund in the DLSW (but the existence of this fund was not able to be verified).

#### Low/No Impact:

Activities	Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Livelihoods - livestock raising</li> </ul>	This activity largely failed to achieve any impact, due to a number of reasons, including poor selection of livestock breeds, disease, and lack of adequate technical support.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School Gardens</li> </ul>	This activity only functioned when supported by ChildFund. Reasons may include a failure to integrate the gardens into teaching and learning, and a lack of support from school principals and , longer term, by DESB/ChildFund staff.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintenance of school toilets</li> </ul>	While there were some exceptions, most schools that were provided with toilets and water supply have failed to maintain these. This may be due partly to a lack of longer term maintenance planning by the Project.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child Rights/Child Protection (CR/CP)</li> </ul>	Though most teachers and principals reported they received training on child rights and child protection, they could recall little or nothing of these topics. None of the schools visited appeared to have incorporated child rights or child protection into their teaching or learning practices. <sup>50</sup>

## 4. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

The issues of gender, disability, and ethnicity/language are cross-cutting in terms of the CDWBC-II project.

### 4.1 GENDER

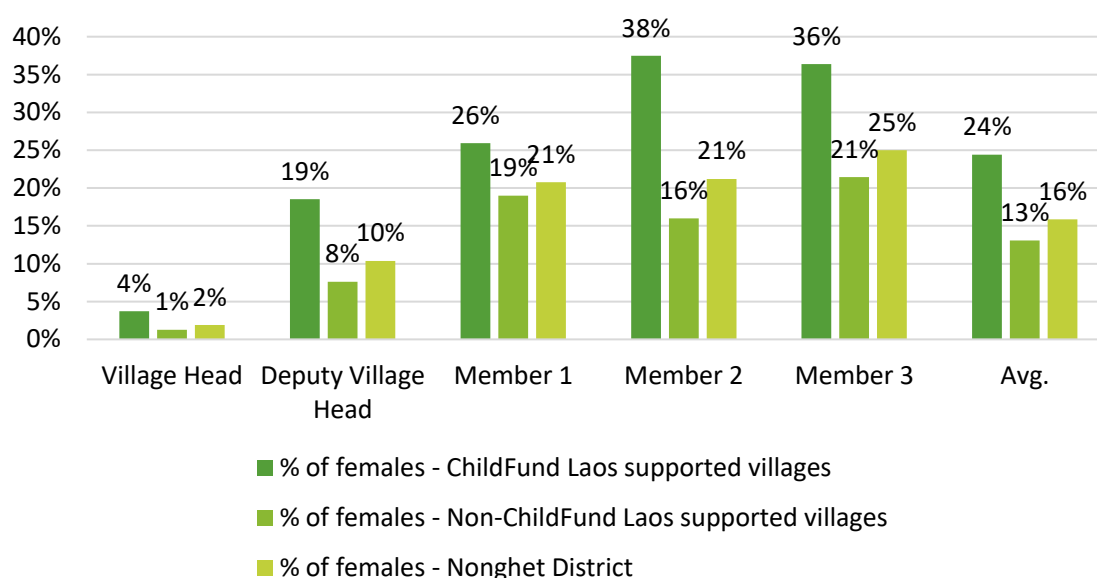
Gender equality and girls and women's empowerment were two key aspects highlighted in the CDWBC-II project. A gender assessment conducted in Nonghet District in 2015 found that while there had been changes towards increased gender equity, the traditional view of the roles of girls and women as homemakers and mothers, both in Hmong and Khmu target villages, was still strong. Some of ChildFund's projects challenged this view to some extent, encouraging girls to continue their education and become more involved in school activities, and women to become more economically and 'politically' active within their communities. In terms of equality, particularly in education, both girls and boys have equal access to education both at early and primary levels in the District as a whole. A positive change in gender disparity in education was a decline in primary grade repetition rates, which was greater among girls, suggesting that they are overcoming language

<sup>50</sup> The overall CFL investment in child protection was also reportedly very low, and there was a lack of child protection mechanisms within the District.

difficulties in early grades faster or more than boys. While not possible to prove, this may be attributable in part to in-service teacher training supported by ChildFund.

Changes in gender relations within households were reported by several villagers. This was due partly to economic empowerment (e.g., weaving) as well as interventions by the government through the District Lao Women's Union Office (DLWU). According to the head of DLWU, husbands now help their wives to do housework and consult more with their wives, not only on matters related to earnings but also family planning and supporting children's education. Villagers also reported that men listen to women's opinions, showing respect and are more aware of gender equality. Women in Nonghet District have also become more involved in village administration, possibly supported by the percentage of women's involvement in village administration, which was higher in ChildFund target villages compared to villages without ChildFund Laos support (see Figure 14. below), suggesting that CFL activities may have had some influence, though there are possibly other factors involved (including men becoming more engaged in economic activities in the town).

**Figure 14. Percentage of women's involvement in village leadership - ChildFund Laos vs. non-ChildFund Laos supported villages<sup>51</sup>**



A gender assessment of CFL conducted in August 2019 found that most projects tended to be 'gender accommodating' - i.e. they take gender into account but mostly work around existing gender differences and inequalities. The exceptions to this in Nonghet District were ChildFund Pass It Back and Ready for Life which can both be considered transformative through their focus on gender equity and promoting young women as coaches, peer trainers and role models.

## 4.2 DISABILITY

Inclusiveness was also a core element of the CDWBC-II project. Several project documents referred to the inclusion of children with disabilities (CWD) in project activities. Yet, most sample communities had at least one disabled child not attending school though there was no system for recording CWDs at health centers, or in village or school data. There was not much evidence of any special outreach to CWD by ChildFund Laos staff before 2018, when a decision was made to focus more on CWD. For example, the Media Capacity

<sup>51</sup> District Governor Office. 2019.

Strengthening Project made a conscious effort to include youth with disabilities in the project, following a decision made within ChildFund at the Australia Program Summit in 2017/2018. The Wheelchairs for Kids Project also provided training for relevant staff and community members and nine wheelchairs for CWDs in Nonghet. In 2019, a disability situation and needs assessment was conducted with the aim of improving programming related to CWDs. While CFL has largely withdrawn from Nonghet District, hopefully this effort to more effectively target children and youth with disabilities will continue in ChildFund Laos' programs in other districts in future.

### **Case study 2: Ya Yer – ‘Dare to dream’, 15 year old boy with vision impairment**

Ya Yer, a 15 year old boy, was born with vision impairment. He could not read at a distance of more than 20 centimetres. He could write but with only with 50% understanding of his handwriting. However, Ya has experienced this difficulty for at least 8 years in schools – from primary to secondary school where he now studies. Ya told us that he receives support from teachers when studying. His teacher also told us that school allows him to take a longer time when sitting for exams and when asking students to copy lessons from the blackboard. However, teachers can only support him while studying in class, and he gets very limited or almost no support for his study when he is at home. Ya told us that *"I want to wear glasses, I may see clearer, but I don't know where to buy them and I may not be able afford them, if they are too expensive. Do they have glasses in Vientiane?"* He told us that he wants to be a scientist as he is good at natural Sciences, Maths and Chemistry.



**Ya, Pha-En Lower Secondary School. Nov. 2019**

## **5. LEARNING AND GOOD PRACTICES**

### **5.1 LEARNING**

The CDWBC-II project has several learning points which can be used to inform their future work in other districts. Several of these points are self-evident, but it is useful to reinforce these for future reference. These include:

#### **5.1.1 BALANCING 'HARDWARE' AND 'SOFTWARE'**

**Provision of hardware together with software supports implementation.** The CDWBC-II Project followed community development good practice through a holistic approach to development issues in the partner villages which combined 'hardware' and 'software'. The 'hardware' aspects of the project (school buildings, toilets, water tanks, the MCH Centre, equipment, materials, etc.) are much easier to achieve and can be seen. This helps to get local authorities onside as it is more consistent with their development perspective. At the

same time, the 'software' aspect (capacity building, training, quality of teaching and learning, behaviour change, etc.) is also important, though the results may be less visible and thus more difficult to assess. ChildFund appears to be moving more towards a sectoral approach, but nonetheless, this combination of 'hardware' and 'software' remains important, even within a specific sector.

### 5.1.2 QUALITY OF TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP POST TRAINING IS KEY TO CHANGE

**Good quality training with subsequent follow-up is essential if positive changes are to be sustained.** This is a rather obvious point but one that was not always followed in some of the capacity building by the project. It was claimed that some of the trainers recruited by ChildFund were not suitably qualified to deliver the training for which they were responsible. This impacted negatively on what those attending training were able to learn. Also, there was not always follow-up support provided by the trainers after the workshops. For example, teachers in more semi-remote schools who had received training reportedly did not receive any follow-up support after training. It is important that ToR's for trainers include not only training delivery, but also a set of tasks related to follow up support for trainees, to help ensure that they can apply what they have learned. A follow-up support plan can also be included as a topic in the workshop itself.

### 5.1.3 REACHING CWDs REQUIRES AN ACTIVITY FOCUS

**Project design needs activities specifically targeting CWDs with a budget allocation.** Although inclusiveness is a core value of ChildFund and although efforts were made to reach at least some children with disabilities (CWD), this is an aspect of ChildFund's work that has not been particularly effective. The evaluation found that there were a few CWD in all sample villages visited, but that most of them were not in school and were not receiving special support. Building identification of and support for CWD's into project design increases the likelihood of the project reaching these disadvantaged children. While CFL and local government staff may not have the expertise to assist these children, there are others who do and they can be brought in as resources when needed.

### 5.1.4 IMPROVING INTERNAL COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION

**Greater focus on coordination and communication (internal and external) and relationship management should be a priority.** Although the CDWBC-II Project was multi-sectoral, there was an impression that project staff within it tended to work 'sectorally', in that they worked on planning activities under their area of responsibility with not much horizontal communication and coordination. The same could also be said of the various local Government Departments. Poor coordination and communication was mentioned in project documents as well as by village and District level respondents during the fieldwork for this evaluation. District Government staff also mentioned that coordination between ChildFund and District Government Departments was not always 'smooth' (though sometimes that may have been a result, at least in part, of the coordination mechanism required through communicating with sectors through the Rural Development Poverty Eradication Office). Internal cross-project planning and coordination, as well as with local Government counterparts may be an area for ChildFund to check and if needs be, address, if an issue in other districts.

### 5.1.5 TOO MANY COMMITTEES ARE NOT SUSTAINABLE

**Setting up several project specific committees in target villages risks overloading villagers and are unlikely to be sustainable once project support ends.** With a large number of projects being implemented in target villages, several of these projects established their own committees - e.g. water management committees, child protection committees, disaster management committees, village health committees, school construction committees, etc. However, the evaluation found that most of these committees were no longer functioning two or three years after their establishment, and may have only existed for the duration of each of the projects. Given the often limited number of people available within target villages to work on committees, as well as the time they need to ensure their own livelihoods, it is probably unrealistic to expect these committees to continue functioning after training and funding support ends. It may be more effective

to focus on working with the existing officially mandated Village Committee and build their capacity in the various project areas, as well as with the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) which has also been mandated by the Government.

#### 5.1.6 MULTI-SECTORAL VERSUS SECTORAL APPROACHES

**Both multi-sectoral and sectoral MoUs have their advantages and disadvantages.** In having an MoU for the CDWBC-II Project which was not sector specific, ChildFund had more flexibility in that they could include a range of projects of different sizes without having to develop a specific MoU for each one. However, this also made coordination and communication between ChildFund and sectoral Government partners more difficult at times, as formal communications had to pass through the District Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office. ChildFund is planning to move away from this model towards a more sector-based approach which seems to be practical given that staff in each sector report to their sector only, keeping the District Governor informed. This will also reduce the delay of informing target villages of upcoming activities, and save time and effort for ChildFund staff so that they concentrate more on their technical work and less on administrative tasks.

#### 5.1.7 THE NEED FOR A LOGICAL FRAMEWORK OR THEORY OF CHANGE

**A clear yet simple logical framework and/or Theory of Change understood by all staff will help ensure program cohesiveness.** The CDWBC-II Project did not have a logical framework or theory of change that provided a comprehensive overview as well as measurable indicators that could be used to assess progress and change. The MoU only grouped 26 projects under three components, each with a higher level objective. This has made monitoring and evaluation of the CDWBC-II Project particularly challenging, and reliant on a large number of differing logical frameworks. It is suggested that this model be avoided in future program and project design.

### 5.2 GOOD PRACTICES

#### 5.2.1 INFANT AND CHILD NUTRITION - BUILDING ON THE CDWBC-I PROJECT

In terms of healthcare, the CDWBC-II Project has built on the earlier work on MCH under the CDWBC-I Project which provided a good combination of infrastructure, training and equipment provision to ensure a good quality MCH system was in place. Under both projects, ChildFund helped ensure that there were clean, well-equipped facilities available (the MCH Center as well as the three target rural health centers), and provided training for the staff in these facilities to equip them to provide appropriate services as well as provide training for village women in pre- and post-natal care, infant nutrition and family planning. This has provided the foundation for ChildFund supported health work to start addressing the issues related to poor nutrition among infants and small children at village level. This has been done through providing training in nutritious food preparation for mothers, provision of IEC materials, and promoting kitchen gardens so that mothers can grow the vegetables needed for good nutrition for their children.

#### 5.2.2 READY FOR LIFE - GETTING IT RIGHT?

While it is probably too early to say that Ready for Life can be classified as 'good practice', as the curriculum was only completed in 2019 and the implementation of peer education using this curriculum has only recently begun, the early indications are that it represents a significant improvement over previous youth empowerment activities. The curriculum consolidates previous topics which were spread across three projects and is being implemented by peer trainers, young people selected for their potential as trainers, rather than by adults. It also is integrated into the education system at high school level, with a teacher assigned to help coordinate and support the young peer trainers. A quick review of the curriculum with young peer trainers in Touya Secondary School found that they regarded all the topics as having relevance for their lives, and were confident that their peers would benefit from the training.



### 5.2.3 CHILDFUND PASS IT BACK - A GOOD PRACTICE THAT WENT A LITTLE 'OFF TRACK'

ChildFund's partnership with the Lao Rugby Federation, as well as with the sport internationally, undoubtedly has multiple benefits. By introducing a 'gender neutral' sport to the Lao PDR and encouraging girls and women to take up the sport, this project has undoubtedly contributed to promoting gender equity. Including life skills training in the project design has also contributed to an increase in knowledge and skills, as well as enhanced self-confidence. Rugby was very popular among young people in Nonghet District - for example, at Touya Secondary School, more than 200 young people initially joined the activity, and by 2016, there were 77 teams in Nonghet District alone. However, in 2018, the District Governor banned rugby, ostensibly because of the lack of coordination and communication with the local Government on the part of CFL and the LRF. While some, like Lao Khang, went on to support rugby at national level and become a good role model, this meant the end of this project for most young people in Nonghet District and no further involvement in competitions in other districts.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

As ChildFund will soon be phasing out of Nonghet District, these recommendations are designed to inform ChildFund's work in other areas.

### 6.1 MOU COMPONENT ONE

- ***Give more attention to school and toilets maintenance.*** There needs to be a clear and practical monitoring and maintenance plan developed that also includes students, teachers and VEDC members. This should be done at the time of construction and could be in the form of a longer term maintenance training module. ChildFund can also support "Keep our school clean" campaigns, for example and also allocate a budget for this. This might include having a contest each year with a gift or certificate for the best maintained school.
- ***Make a more focused effort to reach more disadvantaged groups.*** The CDWBC-II Project did not have a strong focus on reaching more disadvantaged groups, including the poor and disabled children. More effort needs to be made in this regard, for example, by ensuring a set of activities are included in project design and funding is allocated for this purpose. Other organisations who have a focus on working with CWDs and inclusion, such as Humanity and Inclusion (formerly Handicap International), can be brought in to provide technical expertise and input as well as build the knowledge and skills of relevant CFL staff in working with CWDs. Before implementing activities targeting CWDs, a system of identifying or mapping in each community should also be developed, involving children's participation (as was done in the early stages of ChildFund's work in Nonghet District). This will enable a system that tracks/records CWDs in the target villages CFL is working with to be established as an integral part of program monitoring.
- ***Ensure principals and teachers in more remote schools are being effectively supported.*** Given past experience of the limitations around building the capacity of DESB Pedagogical Advisors (PAs) to more effectively support teachers and principals, especially in more remote schools, the education program needs to explore supplementary ways of ensuring teachers get the support they need after training. This could involve strengthening teacher peer support through school clusters, plan with them and join their regular monthly meetings, and use that opportunity to discuss and provide support on technical aspects related to teaching and school management. When designing projects and allocating budgets, more attention can be given to follow-up support for semi-remote and remote schools, rather than those that are more accessible.
- ***Allocate budget for and bring in technical expertise to ensure quality training.*** While project documentation was not clear on the quality of each training provided under the education component,

it was reported by former CFL staff that not all training was of good quality. Efforts need to be made to ensure that qualified trainers are hired, either from PESS or MoES or privately, and all teacher and principal training design involves a follow-up plan, involving trainers from the workshops.

## 7.2 MOU COMPONENT TWO

- **Work more with the parents and teachers of children and young people.** While it is important to continue supporting youth and empower them through activities like Ready for Life and ChildFund Pass It Back, it is also necessary to work more with parents and teachers to ensure that they understand the activities and are supportive. Some communities and schools where the CDWBC-II Project youth empowerment activities took place did not understand the purpose and nature of the activities clearly and thus discouraged their children from participating.
- **Ensure District Government is aware and engaged in ChildFund Pass it Back.** While the 'banning' of rugby by the District Governor in Nonghet may have been an isolated case, it is important that the project follows District procedures in a timely manner and involves the DESB as much as possible so that any future potential difficulties can be avoided.
- **Combine youth empowerment activities into as few projects as possible<sup>52</sup>.** This has already been done to a certain extent with Ready for Life, which combines training content from three different projects. This should be done in future project design so that the total number of youth empowerment projects is no more than two or three.

## 7.3 MOU COMPONENT THREE

- **Use the Nonghet MCH program as a model for other districts.** ChildFund can rightly be proud of what they and the District Health Office in Nonghet have achieved in terms of establishing an effective MCH system from District to village levels. If ChildFund is intending to continue with this kind of project in other districts, Nonghet could be a focus for study visits and possibly internships for project partners from other districts.
- **Livelihood-related activities need more prior research and planning.** Livelihood improvement, particularly linked to gender equity through establishing and strengthening women's groups, has the potential to make a difference in terms of family income and changes in gender relationships and should be continued, but would benefit from adjustments in the design and implementation. Activities for a particular village should be based on an initial analysis of needs, risks and potential markets. Then the project can work with women and their communities more strategically on what kinds of activities would be most appropriate for that specific village, and whether or not it would be realistic for the project to move beyond self-sufficiency to a more market-oriented approach. There should also be regular monitoring and provision of technical support on the activities.

## 7.4 OTHER

(See the Organisational and Impact Evaluation Report for overall recommendations that may have relevance for ChildFund's work in other districts).

## 8. CONCLUSION

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<sup>52</sup> This recommendation can be applied to all sectors - i.e. reducing and streamlining the number of projects to be implemented.



This evaluation of the CDWBC-II Project, which involved 26 projects over a five year period, has identified both examples of good practice, particularly in MCH as well as in some of the youth empowerment activities and provision of ECE facilities, as well as areas where the project has been less successful in achieving component objectives. As in the Report on the Operational and Impact Evaluation of the Nonghet Program over 10 years, of which the CDWBC-II Project evaluation is a part, learning is not only about looking at good practices and how they can be repeated - it is also about learning from what did not go so well and perhaps failed to meet project objectives. Hopefully this report examining the CDWBC-II project over the past five years will provide examples of both good practices as well as other lessons which can be used to inform future project design and practice, and will thus contribute to ChildFund's work in other districts in the future.

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