

# ChildFund Nonghet Program (2010 - 2020)

## Operational and Impact Evaluation



Final Evaluation Report

December 2019

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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While hopefully this report presents an accurate picture of 10 years of ChildFund's support for Nonghet District and the sample villages which comprised this study, any errors contained in this report are solely the responsibility of the authors.

W. John Howe  
Phonexay Soukkaseum  
Asia-Oceania Development Network  
[www.asiaoceania.net](http://www.asiaoceania.net)  
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## List of Acronyms

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| CDWBC    | Community Development for the Well Being of Children                                    |
| CFA      | ChildFund Australia   |
| CFL      | ChildFund Laos  |
| CLTS     | Community-Led Total Sanitation  |
| CWD      | Children with Disabilities  |
| DESB     | District Education and Sports Bureau  |
| DLSW     | Department of Labour and Social Welfare   |
| DRR      | Disaster Risk Reduction   |
| EMIS     | Education Management Information System   |
| ESDP     | Education Sector Development Plan   |
| FGD      | Focus Group Discussion  |
| GFWS     | Gravity-Fed Water System  |
| IEC      | Information, Education, Communication   |
| IMC      | Implementation Management Committee   |
| INGO     | International Non Government Organisation   |
| KII      | Key Informant Interview   |
| MAG      | Mine Action Group   |
| MDG      | Millennium Development Goal   |
| MCH      | Mother and Child Health   |
| MEL      | Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning   |
| MoES     | Ministry of Education and Sports  |
| MOU      | Memorandum of Understanding   |
| NGPES    | National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy  |
| OECD/DAC | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee |
| NSEDP    | National Socio-Economic Development Plan  |
| PA       | Pedagogical Advisor   |
| PCC      | Project Construction Committee  |
| PESS     | Provincial Education and Sports Service   |
| TBA      | Traditional Birth Attendant   |
| TOR      | Terms of Reference  |
| ToT      | Training of Trainers  |
| UXO      | Unexploded Ordnance   |
| VEDC     | Village Education Development Committee   |

## Executive Summary

ChildFund Laos (CFL), with support from ChildFund Australia (CFA)<sup>1</sup>, has been working in Nonghet District, Xieng Khouang Province, since 2010 and the current Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Lao Government will end in September 2020. This report documents the findings of an operational and impact evaluation of their work in Nonghet District covering the past decade. This impact evaluation report covers all three phases of CFL's work in Nonghet District, from 2010 up to the end of 2019.

**Evaluation Purpose:** The overall purpose of the operational and impact evaluation was to collect, analyse and document key findings from ChildFund's work in Nonghet over 10 years, with a specific focus on achievements of the program, documenting changes, as well as identifying lessons learned and good practices that could inform future support for other districts.

**Methodology, Scope and Respondents:** The methodology used was largely qualitative, involving document review, key informant interviews (KIIs), 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 and Health Offices, as well as 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 ChildFund 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 (45), 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.

**Background - Nonghet District:** Nonghet District has undergone significant change over the past decade. While there are still villages which remain inaccessible in the wet season, the road network has been expanded and upgraded, access to basic education has been improved through the construction of complete schools (grades 1-5), and more villagers have access to electricity, health services, water supply and toilets. There has also been a shift over time from subsistence agriculture, primarily upland rice, to cash crops, especially corn. The majority of the population are of the Hmong ethnic group (63%), followed by Lao Tai (16%), with Phong and Khmu ethnic groups making up the remainder.

**Child Fund Projects:** There have been three phases of ChildFund's support over the past decade - the Nonghet Child-Friendly Education Promotion (NoCEP) Project from 2010 to 2012, the second phase, the Community Development for the Well-Being of Children Phase I (CDWBC-I) Project, involving further expansion in terms of sectors and the number of sub-projects, and the third (and current) phase - CDWBC-II - from 2014 to 2020. Over the past 10 years, the program has evolved in the following ways :

- From an sectoral education focus to a multi-sectoral focus;
- A significant increase in the number of sub projects ( totalling 45 during the 10 year period);
- An increase from five to 27 target villages (25% coverage of villages in the District);
- From a focus on 'hardware' (construction) to an increasing focus on 'software' (capacity development).

At the same time, evaluation reports over the past decade and discussions with former project staff and partners suggest a number of inter-related challenges, including:

- Expansion of projects across several sectors led to problems regarding internal coordination among staff from different projects and 'overloading' of target villages with activities;

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, the term 'ChildFund' is used when referring more generally to overall support that involves both organisations. Where reference is made to a specific organisation, the acronyms CFL and CFA are used.

- Low level of knowledge and skills on the part of some trainers limited project quality;
- Turnover of CFL staff and local Government counterparts had a negative impact on continuity;
- Lack of a centralised documentation system which made locating specific project documents difficult.

**Overall Findings:** The following overall findings have been developed from a range of data and sources, including from project documents, previous project and program evaluations, recent fieldwork conducted in Nonghet District for this evaluation, as well as other data provided by the District Government.

### **Education - 11 Projects**

#### *Access to Education:*

- Construction of ECE centers and primary schools with ChildFund support has had a very positive impact on increasing access to education in target villages, with almost 100% of school age children reportedly now attending compared to a much lower percentage previously.
- Enabling access for children to ECE centers and schools is valued by parents and communities, with most highlighting this as a lasting contribution from ChildFund in their communities.
- CFL's practice of involving the community in construction appears to have contributed to a sense of ownership.
- However, this sense of ownership was usually not reflected in the often poor maintenance of school facilities, particularly toilets and water supply;
- Poor maintenance can be attributed to weak leadership by the school principal as well as the teachers, limited links to the community, and the lack of longer term maintenance plans.

#### *Education - Quality of Teaching and Learning:*

- In-service training for teachers and principals was more effective in terms of change soon after training, but these changes have not been sustained in many schools once training stopped in 2017.
- However, in some schools, child-centred teaching and learning did appear to be the norm, with one of the critical factors being school leadership and management by the principal.
- Follow-up support after training also seems to have been an important factor in adoption of child-centered teaching and learning, with more remote schools not receiving this support.
- The District Education and Sports Bureau (DESB) was very dependent on ChildFund support to maintain a higher level of in-service training for teachers and principals, support which ceased in 2017.
- Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) in most sample schools visited were not active, perhaps in part due to limited training and support.

### **Empowering Children and Youth - 20 Projects<sup>2</sup>**

The main findings here included:

- Activities were dependent on ChildFund inputs and support and ended once the project period was over.
- However, it was reported that children and youth did acquire new knowledge and skills from these activities.
- Rugby and associated life skills under the ChildFund Pass It Back Project were found to be the most popular youth-focussed activities and relative to other child-youth centred activities, appear to have reached the largest number of children and young people. ChildFund Pass It Back, now banned in Nonghet District, may have continued had the Lao Rugby Union and CFL communicated and coordinated more effectively, both with the District Government as well as schools and communities.
- Child Clubs were no longer functioning in schools (having stopped when CFL support ended), but can be an effective way of building children's knowledge, skills and levels of participation. However, it seems that they were not always designed and implemented with the full involvement of principals, teachers and parents, as well as children's availability and capacity.

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<sup>2</sup> Including three monitoring and evaluation projects.



- While efforts to involve children and youth in monitoring and evaluation were laudable and would have helped develop new skills (e.g. writing), an evaluation in 2017 found that these activities need to be more effectively linked and feedback to local communities needed to be enhanced.
- The Outcome Indicator Surveys conducted in 2013 and 2016 do appear to show positive impact in most program areas included in the surveys.

### **Achieving Equitable Well-being - 14 Projects**

#### *Health:*

- Construction and renovation of health care facilities, provision of equipment, and training at all levels (including TBAs at village level), helped to ensure long term positive impact.
- These efforts were supported by a change in Government policy regarding free maternal-child health care.

#### *Water and Sanitation:*

- Making provision of clean water conditional on all households have toilets first was an effective way of ensuring village wide latrine coverage.
- Water management groups have usually not continued in their expected form and roles after project support ended, with their roles being managed by the Village Committee.

#### *Livelihoods:*

- Weaving seems to have had the greatest impact on family income and gender relations within the family though the number of families participating in each village has been minimal
- Livestock raising has had little success. Apart from disease, which killed many of the chickens and livestock provided, many villagers felt the breeds supplied by CFL were inappropriate for Nonghet conditions. This kind of support falls outside of CFL's focus on children, as well as technical expertise.
- School gardens stopped after CFL support ended. This activity needs to be better integrated into the curriculum and the life of the school, rather than being seen as an external activity implemented by CFL.

#### *Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR):*

- CFL DRR activities seem to have had more impact at District level in terms of strengthening the District Disaster Management Committee, particularly the Department of Labour and Social Welfare (DLSW).
- At village level, there was limited evidence of impact. Village Disaster Management Committees (VDMCs) no longer existed in most villages, and there was no evidence of any Disaster Risk Management (DRM) plans. Few schools continued to use the DRR resources provided previously.
- Loudspeaker systems were valued by Village Heads but not seen as directly related to DRR activities. Only half of these systems are still functioning, and Village Heads said they could not be repaired locally.

### ***Cross-cutting Program Areas***

**Gender Equity:** The gender assessment 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. Several 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.

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 - rather than gender transformative, and this evaluation generally confirmed this assessment and the overall conclusion. The exceptions to this in Nonghet 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. Overall, in terms of gender, it appears that the CFL's Nonghet District program had started to move from what was largely a gender accommodating approach - e.g. trying to ensure participation of girls and women in project activities, disaggregating data by gender, etc. - to a more transformative approach - actively trying to bring changes in gender relations through projects like Pass It Back and Ready for Life.



**Children with Disabilities:** While there have been some efforts to identify and involve children with disabilities in project activities, these were limited during the earlier years of CFL's engagement in Nonghet District. This has changed over the past two or three years, with more effort being made to identify and include children and young people with disabilities in project activities.

**Reaching the Poorest:** ChildFund activities targeted the poorest in target villages in the first phase (2010-2012) through providing uniforms and school materials to the poorest children, but no significant effort was made after that to map and target the poorest. For example, villagers who joined livelihood activities, such as weaving and livestock raising, were selected based on interest and motivation, rather than poverty level. The exception was latrine construction activities, where an effort was made to ensure the poorest were included through CFL providing additional materials (cement and sand) to the poorest families in each village.

**Child Rights and Child Protection:** These were topics included in much of the training provided at district and village levels. A Child Protection Committee was also established at District level, under the Department of Labour and Social Welfare (DLSW) and involving the Lao Women's Union and Lao Youth Union, but it was not clear how often they met. There were also attempts by CFL to establish Child Protection Committees at village level but there was no evidence of their existence at the time of the evaluation. Overall, it seems in terms of awareness raising on child protection, as well as setting up child protection mechanisms, that the main impact had been at District level.

**Other:** The only other two areas which could be considered cross-cutting relate to environment and the role of the village cluster ('Khoum Ban') administration in ChildFund activities. There was awareness raising on the importance of maintaining watershed areas around water sources for gravity-fed water systems, and ensuring a safe environment for children in schools. Although each village cluster reportedly has an administrator, it appears there was no effort to strengthen capacity at this level.

**Learning:** 10 years of support to development in Nonghet District has provided ChildFund with a number of lessons which can inform future programming. These are as follows:

- While a multi-sectoral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has some advantages over a single sector MoU regarding program scope and the number of projects, it also has a number of disadvantages.
- Working with local Government is challenging and requires sensitivity and skills to find a balance between meeting needs as perceived by local Government with organisational priorities, capacities and integrity.
- Setting up project specific committees in target villages risks overloading villagers and are unlikely to be sustainable once project support ends.
- It is essential that training for teachers and principals be followed by good quality support after training.
- Multiple projects increases the likelihood of poor internal coordination and communication.
- Setting up a well-organised e-filing system for project documentation is essential from the outset.
- When providing external resources, it is important to ensure that they are appropriate and sustainable.

**Good Practices:** The evaluation identified several examples of good practices, including:

- *A shift from a 'hardware' to a 'software' focus* - from construction more to training and other capacity building activities, which helped to ensure greater support from the District Government.
- *Provision of clean water conditional on latrine construction* - which helped to avoid the problem of low latrine coverage which often occurs elsewhere when water supply is constructed first.
- *Maternal Child Health - a good balance* - The MCH project provided a good combination of infrastructure, training and equipment provision, which, combined with the Government policy of providing free services, helped ensure that good quality health care services were available and utilised.
- *Ready for Life - Getting it right?* - While a relatively new project, 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 through peer training, with young people selected for their potential as trainers. 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.
- *Pass It Back - a good practice that went a little off-track* - ChildFund's partnership with the Lao Rugby Federation has had multiple benefits. By introducing a 'gender neutral' sport to the Lao PDR and

encouraging girls and women to take up rugby, this project has 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 on the part of youth involved. Unfortunately, in 2018/2019, the District Governor banned rugby, ostensibly because of the lack of coordination and communication with the local Government on the part of ChildFund and the Lao Rugby Federation.

- *Weaving - a positive impact on family income and gender equity:* While benefitting a relatively small number of families in each target village, promotion of weaving has created a sustainable income that has had positive impacts on education (mothers are able to afford school materials for their children) and gender relations within the family.

### **Recommendations<sup>3</sup>:**

#### Organisational

- *Reduce and streamline number of projects.*
- *Consider going back to sectoral MoUs.*
- *Develop an exit strategy at least one year before withdrawing from a target District.*
- *Ensure District Government authorities, especially the District governor, are fully informed of project activities.*
- *Improve internal and external coordination among projects.*
- *Ensure quality training at all levels.*
- *Include village cluster administrators.*
- *Avoid setting up new committees in target villages.*

#### Education

- *Give more attention to maintenance of school facilities longer term.*
- *Ensure quality post-training support for principals, teachers and VEDC members.*
- *Revisit the possibility of establishing and maintaining school gardens.*

#### Children and Youth Empowerment

- *Review how Pass It Back is being implemented vis-a-vis local Government in other target districts.*

#### Equitable Well-being

- *Focus on areas where CFL has knowledge, experience and expertise and a successful track record (rather than areas such as livestock where CFL has less technical capacity).*

#### Cross-Cutting

*Gender Equity: Incorporate gender related activities (with budget allocation) into project design and develop capacity of staff to effectively implement these.*

*Reaching the most disadvantaged: Incorporate strategies and specific activities to better include children with disabilities and the poorest (also with budget allocation) into project design and implementation.*

**Conclusion:** The impact evaluation documented in this report has been challenging, due to the large number of projects involved, the fact that it covers a 10 year period during which time ChildFund and Government staff have changed and gaps in documentation. The picture that has emerged is varied in terms of impact. The ChildFund program has had positive impacts in several areas, including MCH, water and sanitation, access to ECE and primary education, as well as children and youth empowerment. At the same time, not all projects have had positive outcomes. The quality of teaching and learning in many target schools remains low, and the facilities, particularly the toilets and water supply, are often not well maintained. Apart from weaving and, to a lesser extent, kitchen gardens, several livelihood activities, have not been successful in terms of achieving impact due to a range of factors.

However, learning is not only about looking at good practices and how they can be repeated - it is also about learning from practices that have not been successful. Hopefully this report examining ChildFund's experience in Nonghet District over the past 10 years, provides examples of both good practices as well as lessons which

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<sup>3</sup> Note: Several of these recommendations are already being acted on to some extent.

can be learnt from projects which did not go so well, and will thus contribute to ChildFund's work in other districts in the future.

## **1. Introduction**

ChildFund Laos (CFL), with support from ChildFund Australia (CFA), has been working in Nonghet District, Xieng Khouang Province, since 2010. From the beginning, the organisation made a commitment to provide support for development within the district for a ten year period, at that time classified as one of the 47 poorest

districts in the Lao PDR<sup>4</sup>. As this period is now coming to a close - the current Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Lao Government will end in September 2020 - the organisation commissioned an operational and impact evaluation of their work in Nonghet District over the past decade. 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<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, an evaluation was also conducted of the Community Development for the Well-being of Children Phase II (CDWBC-II) Project (2014 - 2020) which was a component of the overall ChildFund program in Nonghet District. Although that evaluation was conducted by the same evaluation team using a similar methodology, the findings are documented in a separate report.

## 1.1 Nonghet Program Background

ChildFund Laos began working in Nonghet District in 2010 and implemented an education project in five villages of Nonghet District beginning in January 2010 under an MoU with the (then) Ministry of Education. In January 2012, approval was given to ChildFund 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 maternal child health (MCH), water and sanitation, livelihoods and food security, in addition to capacity building, youth empowerment and child protection, under 11 sub-projects. Subsequently, a new MoU was signed with the Xieng Khouang Rural Development and Poverty Reduction Office (under the National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication) for the Community Development for the Well-being of Children (CDWBC-I) Project covering the period January 2012 - 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>6</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 26. This impact evaluation report covers all three phases of ChildFund's work in Nonghet District, from 2010 up to the end of 2019. More information on each of these phases is detailed in *Section 3.1* below.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Evaluation

The overall purpose of the operational and impact evaluation was to collect, analyse and document key findings to understand the impacts of ChildFund work in Nonghet over 10 years, with a specific focus on the following:

- Achievements of program interventions;
- Significant changes at community (including children and youth), village cluster and district levels through program interventions, including inclusion and empowerment of traditionally excluded groups, especially girls and women, people with disabilities and ethnic communities;
- Lessons learned and good practices over the program period to explain achievement and ways forward for communities (including girls and boys, youth, men and women, children with disabilities (CWD) and ethnic minorities), as well as village cluster authorities and district partners, in terms of their ownership and sustainable approaches to program interventions;
- Understanding post-project impact, or changes in communities that would not have happened without interventions, as well as reflecting on the links between ChildFund and its future engagement approaches with partners.

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<sup>4</sup> National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) 2004

<sup>5</sup> See Annex 4 for the final fieldwork schedule.

<sup>6</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

## 2. Methodology

As specified in the Terms of Reference (ToR), the methodology used was largely qualitative, although substantial quantitative data was also gathered from existing sources, mainly related to education and health within Nonghet District.

### 2.1 Scope

#### **Geographical Scope:**

In addition to gathering data at national, provincial and especially Nonghet District levels, 17 sample villages were selected for more in-depth community level assessments, both for the impact evaluation as well as the CDWBC-II evaluation. Criteria for selection of these sample villages included:

- Villages from the initial five target villages from the 2010-2012 phase;
- Villages that had been target villages for ChildFund 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 Village Groups ('Khoum Ban')
- Varied according to facilities and basic infrastructure (electricity, health center, schools, water supply, etc.) provided by ChildFund.

A total of 17 sample villages out of the total 27 ChildFund target villages (approximately 63%) were visited for more in-depth fieldwork<sup>7</sup>. In addition to these sample villages, 3 health centers and two secondary schools that had received support from ChildFund were also visited as part of the evaluations (see *Annex 2. 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; 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

**Table 1. Village Level Participants**

| Participants                             | Total | Male | Female | % of Females |
|--|-------|------|--------|--------------|
| 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) | 81    | 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                        | 46    | 35   | 11     | 24%          |

<sup>7</sup> Of these 17 villages, four (Houayzouang, Thampong, Namkonngua and Nongae) were only visited briefly due either to the unavailability of the village head, committee members, and other key informants, or limited project activities.

| Participants                            | Total      | Male       | Female     | % of Females |
|---|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Village Health Volunteers               | 12         | 2          | 10         | 83%          |
| Water Management Committee <sup>8</sup> | 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 operational and impact evaluation took into account a range of documents, including ChildFund Country Strategies (ChildFund Laos Country Strategy 2012 - 2015; ChildFund Laos Strategy Paper 2015 - 2020), the ChildFund Australia Organisational Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) document, several project evaluation reports, and more than 100 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.

As mentioned above, 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>9</sup>, a village observation checklist (primarily for water and sanitation), children's activity indicators and coloured cards, and case study question guides. In addition, quantitative data was also gathered related to education (from the Education Management Information System - EMIS - 2013-2019), health and district development.

## 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 – two local Government staff members, one Provincial Government and one ChildFund staff member, two AODN consultants, and two additional members hired specifically as interpreters for their Hmong language abilities - undertook data collection at community level. 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 workplan for the village visits was also reviewed and agreed on. Team members met after each village visit to consolidate and analyse data, a process which took up to three hours per village data set.

## 2.4 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 but rather contributed to the overall understanding of the realities of implementing a multi-sectoral program in a remote and severely disadvantaged district in the Lao PDR. Challenges included:

- *Availability of informants at village level due largely to corn harvesting:* 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. However, in some cases, key informants were not available in some locations.
- *Large number of projects involved:* The impact evaluation covered a ten year period (2010 - 2019) which included the implementation of at least 45 projects (see *Annex 5. ChildFund Projects in Nonghet*). While

<sup>8</sup> Water Management Committees did not exist in their previously established form, with usually only one or two male members now responsible, together with the Village Head and Village Committee, for overseeing maintenance and fee collection.

<sup>9</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.

documentation was available for many of these projects, it was often incomplete 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 ChildFund staff, which were not always available.

- *Changes in CFL and Government staff:* One of the challenges in undertaking a 10 year impact evaluation is finding people who were involved with the program in the earlier years. Most ChildFund staff who were involved in the Nonghet program between 2010 and 2014 have since left the organisation, and local Government staff from various departments assigned to coordinate with CFL had also changed. There had also been changes in village administration - Village Heads and Village Committee members - over this time in several target villages. However, it was possible to find a small number of people who had been with the CFL Nonghet program from the beginning and their insights and perspectives were valuable.
- *Closure of CFL Nonghet Operations:* Although the CFL Office was still available for use by the evaluation team, it was about to be closed down and was no longer used by staff<sup>10</sup>, most of whom had ended their contracts or moved elsewhere. This meant there were no longer CFL project staff available for interviews or to provide information or clarification.
- *Limited evaluation 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 and consolidation, they were able to manage the data consolidation and analysis process quite well.
- *Language issue - Hmong, Khmu and Lao:* Most of the villagers interviewed, including the children, were Hmong 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.

It does need to be acknowledged that several of the above challenges, particularly the reliance on a limited number of local informants familiar with earlier projects, gaps in documentation, lack of availability of CFL project staff and other constraints, may have limited the perspective and scope of the findings. However, at the same time, this perspective does help to provide insights into the impact and sustainability of 10 years of ChildFund involvement in Nonghet District, as well as how it is regarded and remembered at local level, long after projects have ended.<sup>11</sup>

## 3. Findings

### 3.1 Background

This section briefly outlines the overall context of Nonghet District both before and at the end of the period of ChildFund's involvement, as well as describing each of the three main phases of ChildFund's engagement within the District.

#### 3.1.1 Nonghet District - Then and Now

As the two summaries below indicate, Nonghet District has undergone significant change over the past decade, particularly in terms of infrastructure development. While there are still villages which remain inaccessible in the wet season, the road network has been expanded and upgraded, access to basic education has been improved through the construction of complete schools (grades 1-5), and more villagers have access to water supply and sanitation. However, in terms of SDG targets, access to water and sanitation have yet to

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<sup>10</sup> The exception was one local CFL staff member responsible for the Ready For Life Project in Nonghet District.

<sup>11</sup> Project evaluations are usually done while projects are still being implemented or have just been completed, and thus do not give a picture of what remains several years later. In this case, most CFL projects had ended by 2017/2018.



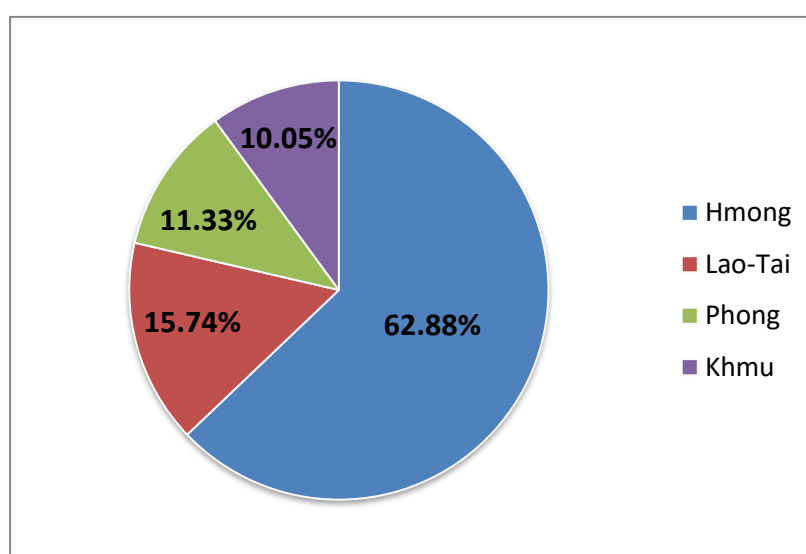
be fully achieved. There has also been a shift over time from subsistence agriculture, primarily upland rice (which remains important to food security), to cash crops, especially corn which is exported to markets in Vietnam.

**Figure 1. Nonghet District Snapshots 2010 and 2019**

| <u>Then (2010):</u>   | <u>Now (2019):</u>  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Population – 35,873 (19,370 f)</b></li> <li>• <b>110 villages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ 45% of villages had road access all year</li> <li>✚ 55% of households had access to clean water supply</li> <li>✚ 34 complete primary schools</li> <li>✚ 56% of households had and used toilets*</li> <li>✚ (Data on electricity coverage unavailable)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Livelihoods*</b> – Subsistence agriculture, including high-land farming, is the main activity. Cash crops also grown, including: corn, chilli, peaches, plums, asparagus and others.</li> <li>• <b>Poverty:</b> - Classified as 1 of 47 'poorest districts' (NGPES 2004)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Population – 40,719 (19,931 f)</b></li> <li>• <b>106 villages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ 99% of villages have road access (75% access during the dry and rainy seasons and 25% can only access during the dry season)</li> <li>✚ 80.6% of total households have access to clean water (SDG target 92.5%)</li> <li>✚ 84 complete primary schools</li> <li>✚ 67% of total households have and use toilets (SDG target 85.9%)</li> <li>✚ 82% have access to electricity</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Livelihoods</b> – Cash crops and raising livestock are the main livelihood activities; trading, services and handicraft activities are secondary.</li> <li>• <b>Poverty:</b> Declared as a 'non-poor district' in late 2015</li> </ul> |

However, the ethnic composition of the District has remained largely the same during this period. The overall majority of the population (62.88%) are of the Hmong ethnic group, followed by Lao Tai (15.74%) who reside primarily in the towns along the road, with Phong and Khmu ethnic groups making up the remaining proportion of the population.

**Figure 2. Ethnic Composition - Nonghet District (2018)**



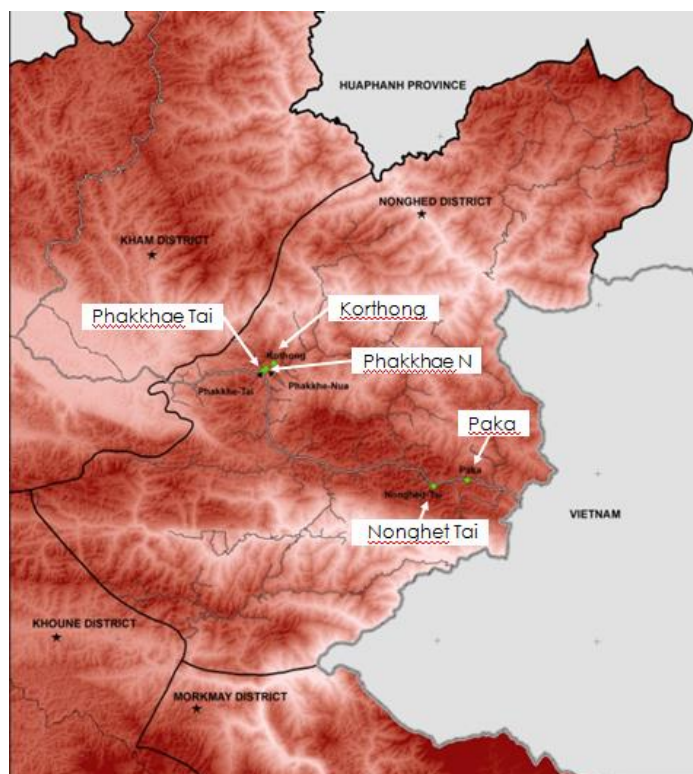
decade  
in

Changes over the past  
outlined above, particularly  
terms of access to schools,

water and sanitation, can be attributed in part to ChildFund's support, as can be seen in the following section, though of course other factors are also involved.

## 3.2 ChildFund's Programs in Nonghet District

This section briefly reviews each of the three phases of ChildFund's support over the past decade - the first phase from 2010 to 2012, the second phase, involving further expansion in terms of sectors and sub-projects, and the third (and current) phase from 2014 to 2020.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 3. NoCEP Target Villages (2010-2012)**

### 3.2.1 First Phase: 2010 – 2012 - Nonghet Child-Friendly Education Promotion (NoCEP) Project

Following the selection of Nonghet District as an initial target district for ChildFund, based on a range of factors including access, Ministry of Education priorities, existing education interventions, poverty levels and key education indicators, an MoU was signed with the (then) Ministry of Education. This involved working in five target villages<sup>13</sup> (See *Figure 3. NoCEP Target Villages 2010-2012*), mainly focused on primary education, but also undertaking research to inform future decisions on program expansion, especially multi-sectorally, as well as assessing the potential for using sponsorship as a tool for community development and fundraising.

Activities in support of education included construction of schools, toilets and water supply in schools in two villages (Khortong and Paka villages), provision of toilets and water supply and renovation of other schools, training for teachers in

student-centered learning, clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) from school grounds, provision of teaching and learning materials, and training for school committee members (VEDCs) in their roles and responsibilities. In addition, research was undertaken into expansion of ChildFund's program in Nonghet to include other sectors, and the feasibility of developing a child sponsorship program was explored<sup>14</sup>.

An evaluation of the NoCEP project was undertaken in 2011 and noted that while most of the project's outputs had been achieved to a large extent - school facilities had been improved (classrooms, water and toilets), the quality of teaching and learning was more child-centered than before, Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) had been established, the poorest students had been supported, unexploded ordnance (UXO) had been cleared from school grounds, and a proposal for multi-sectoral project expansion had been developed - more attention was needed on teacher training (especially teaching Lao language and inclusive education), reaching disabled children, and provision of pre-school education. More attention was also needed on the maintenance of the facilities provided and the school environment.

<sup>12</sup> Each of these phases corresponds to the periods of time specified in the three MoUs between ChildFund and representative Government Agencies.

<sup>13</sup> Paka Khorthong, Honghet Tai, Phakhae Neua and Phakhae Tai.

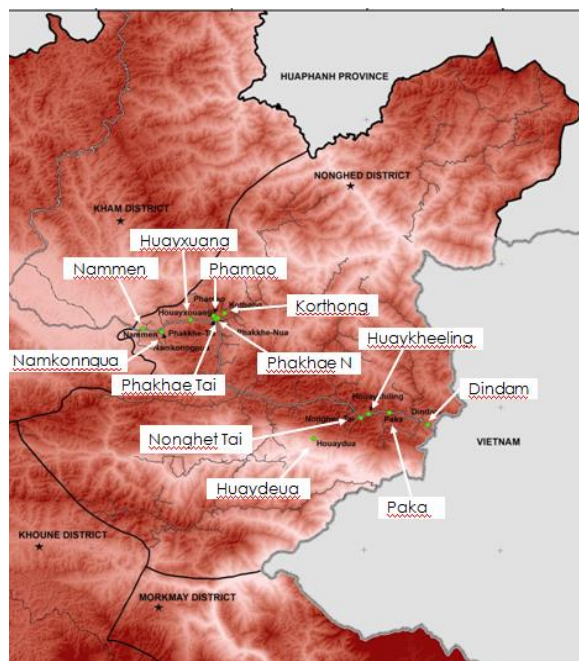
<sup>14</sup> A decision was made not to pursue this further due to sensitivities on the part of the Lao Government related to how Lao children would be portrayed internationally in such a program.

### **Relevant Learning from the NoCEP Evaluation (2011)**

- Teachers need more training in teaching Lao and inclusive education
- VEDCs need more capacity development
- More attention needed to maintenance of school facilities (classrooms, toilets and water supply)
- More effort needed to reach children with disabilities (CWD)
- Focus on research and preparation for next multi-sectoral phase was useful

### **3.2.2 Second Phase - 2012 - 2014 - CDWBC-I Project**

Following on from the initial focus on education in the first phase, the second phase of ChildFund's work in Nonghet District involved further development and implementation of the multi-sectoral project plan designed as part of the previous phase. This marked a move away from a single sector focus on education and in order to facilitate this, an MoU was signed with the Xiengkhouang Provincial Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office (representing the National Committee on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication under the Prime Minister's Office) and ChildFund Australia (represented in the Lao PDR by ChildFund Laos), covering the period January 2012 to June 2014. With the title of the Community Development for the Well-Being of Children (CDWBC-I) Project, this involved 11 sub-projects across several sectors, including education, health, water and sanitation, children and youth empowerment, livelihoods, and building capacity for service delivery (especially on the part of local government). The number of target villages was expanded from five to 12<sup>15</sup>, and the project<sup>16</sup> had three main objectives focussed on education (access and quality), capacity building for children, youth, communities and local government, and improving health services and livelihoods.



**Figure 4. CDWBC-I Target Villages (2012-2014)**

Activities included:

**Education:** Renovation of toilets and new school construction in Namkonngua, Houayzhouang, Nammen, Nonghet Tai and Houay Deua villages; Training for teachers in child-centred teaching methodology and life skills curriculum; Training for VEDCs in roles and responsibilities.

**Capacity building - service delivery:** Training in planning and child rights for District Government staff and villagers.

**Child and youth empowerment:** setting up Child Clubs; Organising sports activities including rugby, football, volley ball and takraw; Training in how to create media messages through video (Connect project).

**Maternal-Child Health (MCH):** Construction of the District MCH Center and renovation of rural Health Centers; Provision of equipment; Training of Trainers (ToT) workshops for Health Department staff; Training for Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs);

**Water and Sanitation:** Construction of gravity-fed water systems (GFWS); Repair and upgrading of existing water systems; Construction of toilets (using a Community -Led Total Sanitation - CLTS - approach); Training for Water Management Committees (WMCs).

<sup>15</sup> Seven new target villages were added to the five target villages from the first phase.

<sup>16</sup> Though more a program rather than a project, as it comprised a number of sub-projects.



**Cross-cutting:** Identification of children with disabilities (CWD); Promoting the inclusion of women in all activities

- School infrastructural improvements have improved access
- Need to improve quality of teacher training and post-training support (teaching quality not child-centred)
- VEDCs need more capacity development and support
- MCH inputs have made a very positive contribution but health data system needs improvement
- Water and sanitation activities have achieved effective water supply and sanitation in target villages
- Livelihoods activities – livestock raising, school gardens, etc. – have had limited success
- More effort was needed to reach children with disabilities (CWD)
- Capacity building for Govt staff in child protection, child rights, monitoring, etc. has had limited impact
- More effort needed to Improve targeting of the poorest
- Coordination among project staff between various projects has been poor - need to streamline and improve coordination of activities

The third phase of ChildFund's support to Nonghet District saw a continuation of the multi-sectoral approach from the CDWBC-I design, but with an expansion of the number of target villages from 12 to 27, as well as an increase in the number of sub-projects to 26. This phase also saw a reduction in construction-related activities and an increase in training and other capacity development activities. As with the previous phase, the MoU was with the Xieng Khouang Provincial Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office and ChildFund Australia (represented in the Lao PDR by ChildFund Laos), and covered the period October 2014 to September 2020. The CDWBC-II project continued the three main areas of focus on (1) improving access to quality education (with a shift in focus to early childhood education); (2) Increasing village level participation in district planning and providing 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 community-wide well-being through increasing access to improved services. Perhaps because of the challenges in implementing livelihood activities in the previous phase, support for livelihoods was limited to gender equity strengthening through women's livestock raising groups, weaving and vegetable growing across 10 villages from 2014 - 2017.

**Education:** Construction of four early childhood education (ECE) centers (including toilets) in two village groups, covering a total of 11 villages; Training for teachers and communities in ECE.



**Child and youth empowerment:** With at least 10 sub-projects, activities included supporting child clubs in schools, sports (especially rugby combined with life skills), media training, linking children globally through social media, training peer educators in life skills<sup>17</sup> (ongoing to 2020), and training for children and youth in monitoring ChildFund supported activities.

**Maternal-Child Health:** Continuation of activities from CDWBC-I regarding Strengthening MCH Center and health centers; Infant growth assessments and supplementary feeding; Training in child nutrition for mothers and pregnant women; Developing kitchen gardens (with a focus on providing adequate child nutrition); Training for Village Health Volunteers and Health Department staff in child nutrition.

**Water and Sanitation:** Construction of GFWS (4 villages) and additional water tanks (4 villages); CLTS training.

**Livelihoods:** Establishment of women's livelihoods groups, training in livestock raising, weaving, sweet making and kitchen gardens; Training in gender equity.

**Disaster Risk Reduction:** Training for District and Village Disaster Management Committees (DDMCs and VDMCs); Provision of a disaster risk reduction (DRR) curriculum and teaching aids for schools; Training for teachers; Provision of village loudspeaker systems.

While the findings from the evaluation of the CDWBC-II Project are covered in a separate report, the main findings relevant to this overall impact evaluation are listed below.

#### **Relevant Learning from CDWBC Phase II (2014-2020)**

- High degree of relevance to community needs, Government policies and SDG targets
- Access to early childhood education (ECE) significantly expanded
- Quality of teaching and learning at primary level remains generally low (with some exceptions) though reduction in grade 1 repetition rates noted
- Youth empowerment activities contributed to increased self-confidence and a greater awareness of the outside world, but activities stop with the end of ChildFund support
- Rugby was very popular among youth, particularly girls, but was stopped by the District governor in late 2019/early 2020 possibly due to poor communication and coordination with local Government and schools
- MCH focus on improving child nutrition had impact, building on earlier support for MCH in CDWBC-I
- Livestock raising and school gardens had little if any impact
- Poor maintenance of schools and especially school toilets an ongoing problem
- DRR activities had limited impact at village level

### **3.2.4 Three Phases - Summary**

Examination of the nature of the three phases in ChildFund's support for Nonghet District over the past 10 years - NoCEP, CDWBC-I and CDWBC-II - indicate a shift in focus as the program evolved. The main shifts have included:

- **Sectoral to multi-sectoral focus:** ChildFund's programs in Nonghet District developed from an education sector focus (with a small number of primarily education sub-projects) to a much wider multi-sectoral focus, including sub-projects on maternal child health, child and youth empowerment, water and sanitation, and livelihoods.
- **Significant increase in the number of sub projects:** With a broadening of sectoral focus, the number of sub-projects also expanded, with a total of 45 or more sub-projects implemented during the 10 year period.

<sup>17</sup> Based on the project documents, this will be ongoing to 2021. However, the current MoU for Nonghet District will end in September 2020, so it is anticipated that this activity will end at that point..

- ***From a small number of target villages to approximately 25% coverage of villages in the District:*** Together with sectoral expansion, the number of target villages also increased during the 10 years of ChildFund's involvement in Nonghet District, from five to 12 and then to 27 villages.
- ***From a focus on 'hardware' to an increasing focus on 'software':*** Between 2010 and 2014, there was a greater focus on construction, initially of schools and school toilets, and then on GFWS and an MCH Center in Nonghet. While training for children, villagers, and district staff has always been a part of ChildFund programs, this increased significantly in the last CDWBC-II phase and became the main focus of the program.

At the same time, evaluation reports over the past decade and discussions with former project staff suggest a number of inter-related challenges affecting the ChildFund program overall, including:

- The expansion of projects across several sectors led to problems regarding internal coordination among staff from different projects and 'overloading' of target villages with activities, reflected in complaints from villagers and District Government staff at times.
- Low level of knowledge and skills on the part of some trainers impacted negatively on project quality.
- Turnover of both ChildFund staff and local Government counterparts, including village administrations, impacted negatively on the continuity of projects as well as on learning, as there was little 'institutional memory'.
- This turnover, combined with the large number of projects also meant that projects were not always clearly or well documented, which resulted in some evaluators not being able to access the documents related to the projects they were evaluating.

The next section on overall impact reflects these challenges as well as the achievements.

### 3.3 Findings - Overall Impact (NoCEP, CDWBC-I and II)

The following overall findings have been developed from a range of data and sources, including from project documents, previous project and program evaluations, recent fieldwork conducted in Nonghet District for this evaluation (involving interviews and FGDs with villagers, children, youth, local Government and ChildFund staff, as well as data provided by the District Government).

Given the large number and variety of sub-projects involved, it is obviously not possible to organise the findings by project and project objectives and indicators. However, the ChildFund Laos strategic plans, particularly ChildFund Laos Strategy Paper 2015 - 2020, does provide a consolidated overall framework within which the findings across different sectoral and sub-sectoral areas can be organised. The three most relevant program areas include *Enhancing Access to Quality Education* (which includes findings related to ECE and primary education), *Empowering Youth* (which includes findings related to a range of activities targeting children and youth) and *Achieving Equitable Well-Being* (which includes MCH, water and sanitation, livelihoods, and DRR). The fourth program area - *Enabling Protection* - is included as a programmatic cross-cutting area, together with, gender equity, reaching the disabled, and reaching the poorest. Findings under each of these broad program areas are also briefly analysed in terms of the four themes from ChildFund's Theory of Change - *Access to Assets, Voice, Agency and Power, Protection, and Formal Systems*.

### 3.3.1 Enhancing Access to Quality Education

#### EDUCATION – 11 Projects

1. LA01-001 Nonghet Child Friendly Education Promotion Project (NoCEP)
2. LA01-004 Access to Education
3. LA01-005 Quality of education
4. LA01-006 Pilot – Vulnerable Children
5. LA01-010 Early Childhood Care and Development
6. LA01-011 Reinforcing Physical and Arts Education for Children in Laos (RPAEC)
7. LA01-014 Teacher training
8. LA01-016 Early Child Education (ECE)
9. LA01-017 Quality education in Namkonngoua
10. LA01-022 Increasing Rates of Participation in Secondary Education
11. LA01-023 Learning Beyond Blackboard 2 (LBB2)

#### **Access to Education:**

*Construction and renovation:* The construction and renovation of education facilities, initially for primary level and then later for ECE, has had significant impact on improving access to education. In several of the sample of 17 villages visited for the evaluation, there had previously been only an incomplete school offering two or three grades, often without toilets or water supply, or no school at all. For example, in Ban Korthong, there was previously no school in the village at all and most children of primary school age did not attend school, as the nearest school was in another village, too far for smaller children to walk to each day. In Ban Kengled, Ban Nammen, and Ban Korkmu, the Lao Red Cross had built schools in 2001 and 2005 respectively, but the schools were in poor condition, and was thus did not attract regular attendance. In villages where schools already existed, CFL helped to renovate the schools and toilets, and also encouraged parents to ensure their children attended school. While accurate and complete records are not fully available, it appears that at least six complete schools were constructed and several more renovated, with at least three complete ECE Centers (each offering three grades) covering three to five year old children being constructed with ChildFund support. This has contributed to a significant increase in ECE enrolments across the District, from 522 students (51% female) in the 2012-2013 school year to 940 students in the 2015-2016 school year.<sup>18</sup>

While companies were contracted to construct and renovate education facilities, community involvement was also a requirement from ChildFund, with villagers providing some of the materials - particularly sand, stone and wood - as well as labour for construction. This would seem to have contributed to a degree of ownership of the schools by communities, who clearly valued having primary education facilities available within their villages. This was reflected in the responses by community members interviewed that (almost<sup>19</sup>) 100% of primary school aged children were attending school.

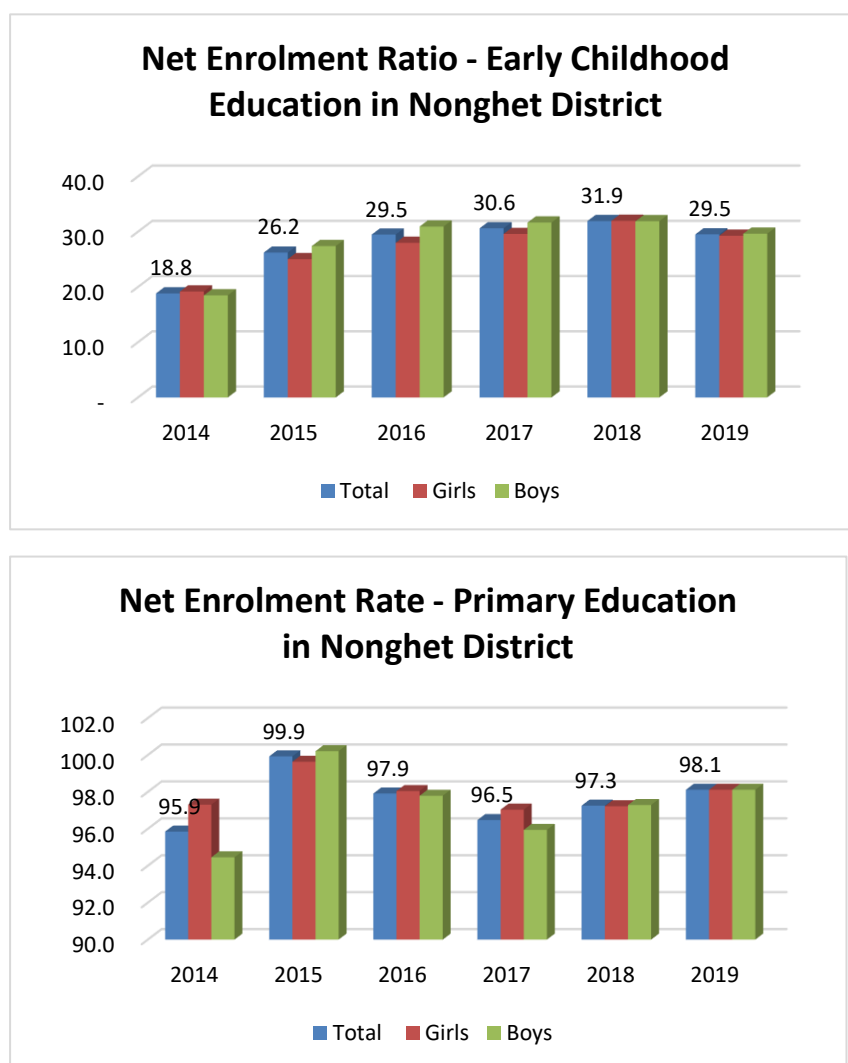
Data from the education EMIS system would seem to support this. While EMIS data is only available since 2013, and may not be totally reliable, it seems to show an overall increase (despite some annual fluctuations) for both ECE and primary education (see *Figure 6. Net Enrolment Rates* below).

<sup>18</sup> EMIS data, Nonghet DESB (2013 and 2016).

<sup>19</sup> The exception was those children who were disabled - usually a small number in each community. See Section 3.1.4 *Cross-cutting Areas* below.



**Figure 6. Net Enrolment Rates for ECE and Primary<sup>20</sup> - Nonghet District**



Though most children who completed primary school continued their studies at secondary school level, the dropout rate is often quite high, especially in grades 7-8, due to early marriage (particularly among girls), as well as leaving school to work to support their families. For example, in school year 2018/2019 alone in Phakkhæ Secondary School, there were 40 students, mostly female, who dropped out, and all from the Hmong ethnic group (where early marriage is often considered the norm). One of the teachers interviewed at this school said that parents often tell their daughters that, “girls don’t have to study much, better they stay home and help parents doing housework. Also, you look at those who have continued their studies, they could not find jobs”. This indicates that more needs to be done to address the issues related to drop outs due to parental attitudes and early marriage at secondary school level.

<sup>20</sup> The NER for Primary level in 2015 seems to be unrealistically high and may reflect an error in calculations by the DESB.

*Maintenance and repair:* However, toilets in schools in most of the sample villages visited were not being well maintained, with toilets often dirty or unused. In some cases this was due in part to lack of direct access to water supply (with previously constructed water supply systems no longer functioning), but more often it was due to lack of maintenance. For example, in the school in Ban



***Toilets at Houayzouang Primary School - constructed 2013***



***Twice daily  
handwashing at  
Korthong School***

Houayzouang, where the school and toilets were constructed in 2013, the toilets were clearly never cleaned or maintained, despite an adequate water supply (see photo above). Nearly 50% of sample schools<sup>21</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. When children wanted to use toilets, they went back to their home or used the bushes around the school. Approximately 20% of a sample of children<sup>22</sup> surveyed in 11 villages said that there was no water at school for them to use<sup>23</sup> and that they never used toilets at school. It is uncertain as to why this issue was not dealt with by the school or by CFL staff, but it could possibly be due, at least in part, to a 'project mindset' whereby addressing this was seen as outside of the scope of current projects. Where there were functioning toilets at the school and water available, under half of the children surveyed (40%) said they used them regularly and the other half (40%) used them only sometimes.

In schools where toilets were accessible and had water, soap for hand washing was usually not available. The exceptions were Korthong and Nammen schools, where water and soap was made available<sup>24</sup> 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). In Korthong School, built in 2011, the toilets were clean, with water and soap provided inside.

Clearly, more needs to be done to address this issue, including perhaps a positive deviance study regarding school toilet and water maintenance and usage. This would enable a clearer identification of the key factors involved and this information could then be used to inform the design of future interventions to address this issue.

<sup>21</sup> Including Namkonngua, Dindam, and Pha-En schools

<sup>22</sup> A result of children's evaluation activities conducted in 11 sample villages, including sample villages for 10 years impact evaluation.

<sup>23</sup> Though they may have meant at certain times of the year such as during the dry season.

<sup>24</sup> While who provided the soap was not clear, it is likely that it was purchased by the school using their block grant.

### **Summary Analysis and Learning - Access to Education**

- Construction of ECE centers and schools with ChildFund support has clearly had a very positive impact on increasing access to education in target villages, with almost 100% of primary school age children reportedly now attending. This was also reflected in increases in net enrolment rates for ECE in target village groups.
- Enabling access for children to ECE centers and schools is valued by parents and communities, with most highlighting this as a lasting contribution from ChildFund in their communities.
- ChildFund's practice of involving the community in construction appears to have contributed to a sense of ownership.

#### **BUT**

- This sense of ownership was usually not reflected in the maintenance of school facilities, particularly toilets, though also the school building themselves were in need of repair in several cases.
- Poor maintenance can be attributed to at least two factors - poor leadership by the school principal as well as the teachers, and weak links to the community primarily through VEDCs.
- A positive deviance study could help in identifying the key factors involved and could inform future project design.

### ***Quality of Teaching and Learning:***

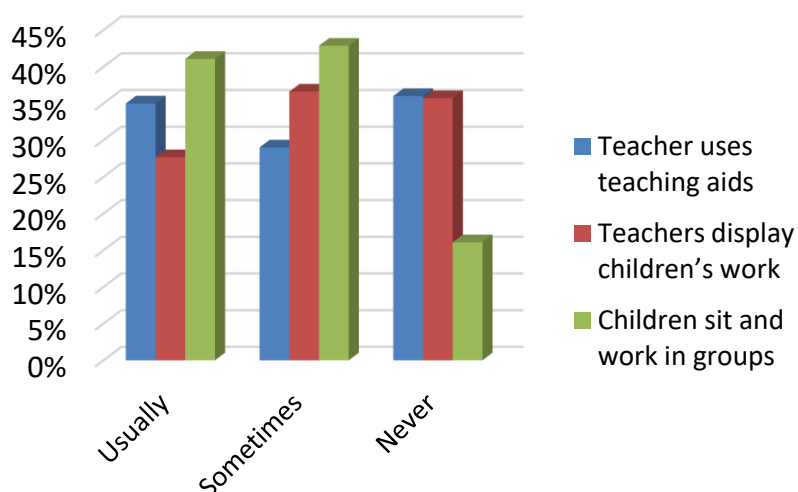
The quality of teaching and learning depends on multiple factors, particularly the relevance and quality of in-service training and follow-up support provided to teachers, the quality of school management, and the level of community involvement in, and support for, the school. Several ChildFund supported projects over the past decade have had a focus on in-service training for teachers, both for ECE and primary levels, training in school management for principals, as well as training for Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs).

While it was not possible, due to the wide scope of the evaluation and the limited time available, to conduct in-depth observations of teaching and learning in the classroom, it was possible to get a good sense of this quality component from several different sources - previous education project evaluation reports, interviews with teachers and principals, the perspective of children of the quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms, and from observation of classroom environments.

Evaluation reports from CDWBC-I and the recent findings from the CDWBC-II Project evaluation all mention concerns regarding the apparent limited impact of in-service training on the quality of teaching in most of the sample schools, assessed in terms of implementation of child-centered teaching and learning. This was also seen from the perspectives of children as well as from observation of classrooms during school visits for the impact evaluation. Classrooms in most sample schools visited (though not all) displayed few signs of a 'child friendly' learning environment - for example, posters, pictures and students' work on display, student desks in groups (rather than in rows), etc. This was confirmed by children's perspectives (primarily from grades four and five) from group activities in 11 sample villages visited (see *Figure 7. Children's Perspectives on Teaching and Learning* for three indicators below<sup>25</sup>).

### ***Figure 7. Children's Perspectives on Teaching and Learning***

<sup>25</sup> Note: This is a composite from the children's activity in 11 schools. In data from a small number of schools, such as Korthong school, where child-centred teaching was taking place, the 'usually' and 'sometimes' percentages were much higher.



The above data from the children's activity suggests that overall, only some teachers are applying child-centered teaching methodologies in the classroom. Differences can be seen in the responses from the children's activity in what could be considered 'good teaching practice' schools among the sample schools visited - Korthong, Houay Deua and Nammen . These responses show higher percentages under 'usually' and 'sometimes', as would be expected in a more child-friendly classroom, with 93% of students reporting that they work in groups, and that teachers display their work usually or sometimes.

How can these differences be explained? While the impact evaluation was not able to explore this in depth due to its broader scope, experience elsewhere indicates that there are several key factors that contribute to improved teaching - the quality of in-service training, the frequency and quality of follow-up support after training, school management, and community support.

While it was not possible to assess the quality of training provided for teachers and principals by CFL and the DESB, one CFL staff member directly involved previously reported that the quality of training provided was often poor. Interviews with teachers and principals from eight sample schools regarding in-service training, found that up until 2017, there had been frequent training workshops for teachers on a range of topics, but that this training ended two years ago. In terms of follow-up after training, teachers in schools with good road access reported that they were often visited by DESB and CFL staff after training, and that they observed classes and provided feedback. However, teachers in more difficult to access schools, like Korkmu, Houay Deua and Kengled, said that there were seldom if any follow up visits after training. The Deputy Head of the Nonghet DESB stated that they had depended heavily (70% - 80%) on ChildFund for the budget for in-service training of teachers, and that while they still hoped to be able to offer in-service training, this would be much more limited now that ChildFund was no longer providing support.

In terms of community support for education, the main mechanism for linking primary schools to their communities are the Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs). Most of ChildFund's education projects had an element of support for VEDC capacity development in their design, including training in roles and responsibilities, establishing child-friendly school environments and action planning (in support of teacher training and infrastructural improvements).<sup>26</sup> Project evaluations in 2012, 2013 and 2014 all implied that VEDCs were not functioning as effectively as they should have been, and that more attention was needed to training and support for these committees. The 2014 CDWBC-I evaluation also highlighted the problem of VEDC membership turnover and suggested that a handover system be developed.

<sup>26</sup> Under the CDWBC Project phases I and II

While it was intended that VEDC members would be interviewed as a group in the most recent evaluation fieldwork, only a few individual members were available in some villages. Those interviewed referred more to their practical roles in supporting the school - e.g. following up on students who were absent, repairing the school fence, etc. - but they did not seem to have a clear understanding of VEDC roles and responsibilities as defined by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). The overall impression was that VEDCs are not functioning as intended in most target communities. This could be due in part to turnover in membership since CFL supported training, as well as low motivation on the part of individual VEDC members, perhaps because of being appointed to the role though with no real interest or time available to be a VEDC member. As this is a common and ongoing issue with VEDCs elsewhere in the Lao PDR, it should be a focus for further action research designed to come up with ways to more effectively support VEDC functioning.

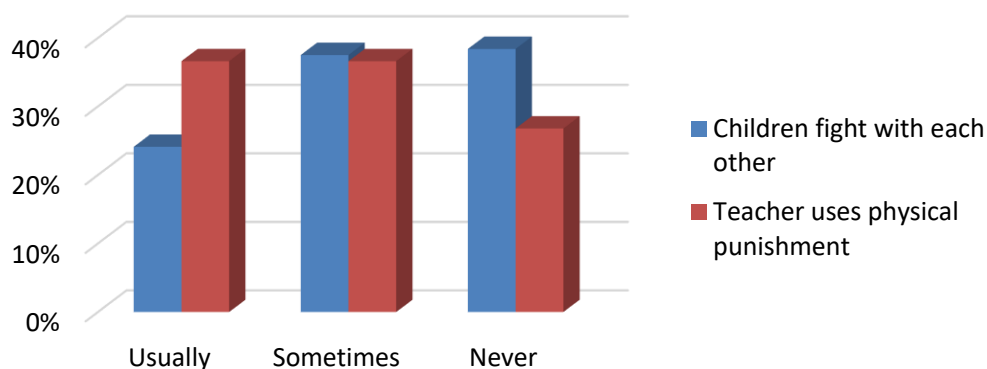
From the responses of children from Grade 5, it appears that physical punishment by teachers, as well as fighting among students, is an issue in some schools. 70% of children reported that teachers use physical punishment either usually or sometimes,

which, while it may not involve teachers hitting students, may involve, for example, forcing children to run around the school grounds carrying a chair, or stand on one leg in front of the class, or other forms of punishment.

of children said that

children fight with each other usually or sometimes. This suggests that little has been done to address this issue, for example, by including positive discipline as a topic in training for principals and teachers.

Although the quality of teaching and learning had not seemed to have improved significantly in eight of the 11 sample schools visited, analysis of the EMIS data from the Nonghet DESB indicates that there was some improvement in teaching District-wide, evident in reduced repetition rates in Grade 1<sup>27</sup> (see *Figure 9. Overall Repetition Rates in Grade 1* below), as well as increased completion rates. However, during evaluation activities with children from grades four and five in some sample schools (e.g. Khorkmu and Buamdao schools) it was observed that some children still struggled with understanding and expressing themselves in Lao language.

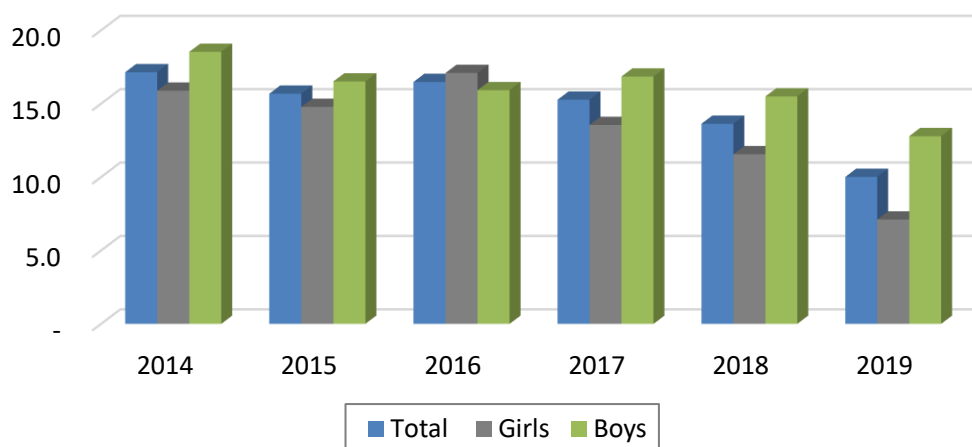


**Figure 8. Physical Punishment in Primary Schools**

55%

**Figure 9. Overall Repetition Rates in Grade 1**

<sup>27</sup> Which indicates that teachers were able to teach Lao language more effectively to Hmong children entering primary school level.



#### Summary Analysis and Learning - Education Quality

- In-service training for teachers and principals appears to have been more effective in terms of change soon after training, but for most teachers, these changes have not been continued once training stopped in 2017.
- However, in some schools, child-centred teaching and learning does appear to have been sustained. A critical factor would appear to be school leadership and management by the principal (as in Korthong School).
- Follow-up support after training by DESB and CFL also seems to have been an important factor in determining whether or not teachers continued to practice what they had learned through training. However, more remote schools did not appear to receive this follow up support from DESB and ChildFund.
- DESB was heavily dependent on ChildFund support to maintain what was quite a high level of in-service training. With only a limited budget to support future training, the quality of teaching and learning may slide.
- VEDCs in most sample schools visited did not seem to be particularly active, and given their other responsibilities, as well as limited training and support and turnover of membership, it is probably unrealistic to expect them to take on a more active role in future. As this is an issue elsewhere in the Lao PDR, further research into how to build stronger VEDCs would be worthwhile.

**Table 2. Contribution to Theory of Change Themes<sup>28</sup> (Education)**

| Theme         | Level                                 | Rationale   |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Assets</b> | Access: High<br>Quality: Low - Medium | ChildFund has significantly increased children's access to ECE and primary education in target villages, based on interviews with villagers <sup>29</sup> . Most if not all school age children are now attending school in target villages. However, quality of teaching and learning remains poor to average in many, perhaps most target schools. School facilities, especially toilets, are poorly maintained in several cases. |

<sup>28</sup> Themes and definitions taken from *ChildFund Laos Strategy Paper 2015 - 2020*. Page 7.

<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, EMIS data for individual target schools to show before and after CFL-supported construction enrolments was unavailable.



| Theme            | Level      | Rationale  |
|------------------|------------|--|
| Voice and Agency | Low        | Parental engagement in most schools remains low, in part due to weak functioning of VEDCs. (For Child Clubs in schools, see 3.1.2 below)   |
| Protection       | Medium     | School environments generally protective of children but children reported that physical punishment by teachers occurs often or sometimes in more than half of sample target schools.  |
| Power            | Low-Medium | While there were some efforts at different times over the past decade to identify and include the most marginalised children in target communities in education, this does not appear to have been followed up in a systematic or comprehensive way. |

### 3.1.2 Empowering Youth

#### YOUTH EMPOWERMENT – 20 Projects

1. FC01-LA1 ChildFund Connect Program
2. FC01-LA2 ChildFund Connect Program
3. FC01-LA3 ChildFund Connect
4. LA02-002 Child and Youth Participation (CYP)
5. LA02-003 Safeguarding Children through Participation in School Life (SPS)
6. LA02-004 Measuring Effectiveness
7. LA02-007 Participation for Action
8. LA02-009 Strengthening Participatory Planning and Local Governance in Nonghet
9. LA02-010 Creating Global Communities through Child-Led Development Education
10. LA02-012 Development Effectiveness & Learning
11. LA02-013 Regional Sport for Development
12. LA02-014 Child Participation for Resilience in Lao PDR (CPR)
13. LA04-001 Tune In
14. LA04-002 Local Empowerment through Community Accountability in Laos (LECA)
15. LA04-003 Strengthening Adolescent Resilience through Media (SARMeL)
16. LA04-004 Ready 4 Life
17. R01-003 ChildFund Pass It Back
18. LA01-007 Measuring Effectiveness
19. LA02-006 Project Learning and Quality
20. LA03-004 Project Learning and Quality

The impact of most of the projects related to empowering children and youth was difficult to evaluate during the fieldwork as most of the projects had been completed prior to 2018, project document was not always available, and very few of those who had implemented or participated in these activities were available for interviews. The exceptions were youth involved in a current youth empowerment project, Ready for Life, as well as some who had participated previously in the rugby and life-skills training related activities under ChildFund Pass it Back. Some adults who were aware of media-related training that had been implemented several years previously, but did not know the details. The fact that most of the children and youth groups that were formed around these activities no longer exist does not mean that the children and youth empowerment activities did not have any impact at the time they were implemented in terms of changing youth's thinking, building self-confidence, strengthening resilience, learning new skills, and other positive impacts - it is just that this is difficult to assess other than through the documentation that exists - i.e. proposals, reports and case studies related to these activities.



As a result, this section will focus on four types of projects that were implemented - (1) child clubs (implemented primarily with younger children in primary school); (2) youth activities designed to develop media skills and link youth with others outside of the Lao PDR; (3) sports related activities (especially rugby as in what came to be called ChildFund Pass It Back), and (4) activities designed to have children and youth monitor ChildFund supported activities. Findings related to each of these are as follows:

**(1) Child Clubs:** Establishing child clubs in primary schools was an aspect of ChildFund's support from the first phase in 2010 - 2012, and this reportedly continued on until 2017, through the *Participation for Action* Project. The CDWBC-I Mid-term Evaluation in 2013 explained that in child clubs, children learned about environmental, cultural, and child protection issues as well as developing leadership skills. The clubs were intended to link with other CFL supported activities, such as monitoring of sanitation/hygiene practices and video monitoring of school construction activities. By 2013, there were reportedly over 300 children participating (50% girls) in nine target villages. Support for Child Clubs apparently continued until 2017 through the *Participation for Action* Project (LA02-007) in five villages, but this was discontinued 12 months early due to problems related to levels of understanding of child participation by CFL project staff and poor coordination with schools and parents.

It appears that Child Clubs continued to function while CFL staff were providing support, and that children who participated gained new knowledge and skills. However, evaluation and project reports<sup>30</sup> refer to some of the inter-related challenges faced in implementing Child Club activities, including:

- Limited involvement of teachers in child club activities (which were often organised as an extra-curricular activity run by ChildFund staff);
- Lack of integration into school 'life' including into the curriculum;
- While roles for child club members had been envisaged in support of WASH and other activities, the degree of involvement was limited due to time constraints (i.e. children needed to attend school as well as help their families at home);
- Complaints from parents and teachers that involvement in Child Club activities was to the detriment of their studies as well as helping their families after school.

Respondents in interviews conducted as part of the final evaluation fieldwork conducted in October/November 2019, made almost no mention of child clubs, and it appears that Child Club activities stopped when CFL support ceased.

There are several potential lessons to be learned from this experience, including:

- The need to firmly 'embed' Child Club activities within the school, including, if possible, linking their activities to the curriculum and ensuring meaningful principal and teacher involvement, if they are to be sustained beyond the period of CFL support;
- Ensuring Child Clubs are not overloaded with activities to the possible detriment of their studies and support for families at home. As a practical mechanism for encouraging children's participation, in addition to their role within the school, Child Clubs have been regarded as a means for monitoring WASH activities, mapping children with disabilities, and other roles, but there are limits to the extent to which children are able to participate in these activities.

**(2) Youth Activities<sup>31</sup> - Connect, Global Communities, Ready for Life:** From 2014 onwards, there were several innovative activities targeting children and youth and providing them with training in media skills, including video making and story writing, and linking them with other youth elsewhere in the world. While the evaluators did not meet any of the participants in these activities, reports and case studies available gave the impression that the youth involved found them to be innovative and fun, introducing them to a world beyond their village, as well as providing training in new skills. These different projects ended in 2016/2017, but elements have now been incorporated into the relatively new Ready for Life curriculum, together with sexual

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<sup>30</sup> e.g. CDWBC-I Project Mid-Term Evaluation, WASH Project Evaluation, Improving Nutritional Status Project Evaluation

<sup>31</sup> Note: Training for Young Authors and Young Monitors was part of *Local Empowerment through Community Accountability* (LECA - LA04-002), and is covered in more detail under (4) *Youth Monitoring Activities* below.

and reproductive health and other topics. While some of those interviewed remembered the fact that youth had been trained, none of those interviewed had participated in the activities themselves.

The exception was a relatively new project, Ready for Life, which involves peer training among high school students. Ready for Life reportedly started in 2018 but appears to have started more intensive implementation in 2019 with the finalisation and introduction of the new curriculum. 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<sup>32</sup>). The Ready for Life Project is proving popular among secondary school students. For example, in Touya Secondary School, 33 students have joined the Ready for Life after school 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 student trainers interviewed felt that the topics in the curriculum were all relevant for their lives, and that they and the other participants were all motivated to learn more.

The design and implementation of Ready for Life appears to reflect lessons learned from previous activities - for example, through the consolidation into a single project of what were several smaller projects focused on youth empowerment, the inclusion and training of teachers in target secondary schools as project coordinators, the capacity development and use of peer trainers (rather than CFL staff), and development of a curriculum that participants see as relevant to their lives. However, with the ChildFund MoU due to end in September 2020, it is uncertain whether Ready for Life will be able to continue beyond that date. There appears to be no documented exit strategy as yet nor any agreement regarding continuation in Nonghet District.

**(3) Sports Related Activities:** While ChildFund had provided sports equipment for schools as early back as in the 2010-2012 phase, it was rugby (and associated training in life skills and development of female leaders) that predominated for these activities, eventually emerging as the ChildFund Pass It Back Project, a ChildFund Australia flagship regional project, which ran from 2015 to 2018 in Nonghet District. ChildFund Pass It Back was designed to introduce a new sport that both girls and boys would be encouraged to play (rather than traditional sports which were male-dominated) with one of the key aims to empower girls, as well as teaching a range of life skills through a 16 module curriculum, to both male and female players.

This evaluation did not attempt to evaluate the overall ChildFund Pass It Back program - that has been done elsewhere in other more in-depth and comprehensive project-specific evaluations<sup>33</sup>, as well as through regular surveys, which indicated significant changes in attitudes and beliefs, particularly around gender equity. The focus of this evaluation was more on implementation of the program in Nonghet District, with sources limited to interviews with a small group of former players, a current female coach from Nonghet, the District Governor, some school principals and parents, as well as a review of relevant documents. The focus of this evaluation was more on understanding the events that led to this activity being 'banned' in Nonghet District and what could be learned from that experience to inform future implementation in other districts.

Since its introduction in 2012, rugby and the associated life skills training were very popular among children and youth in Nonghet District, Activities were implemented by the Lao Rugby Federation (LRF) with funding and other support from ChildFund Laos. In 2016, for example, there were 77 teams in Nonghet District alone.<sup>34</sup> Rugby's popularity was reportedly due to several factors - It was a new sport which encouraged the involvement of girls (other sports being largely male dominated and excluding girls), the life skills curriculum

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<sup>32</sup> *Strengthening Adolescent Resilience through Media Literacy in Laos*

<sup>33</sup> Including Bates, K. *Pass It Back External Evaluation* (2017), Brook Sport Consulting, *ChildFund Australia Safeguarding and Gender Inclusion Evaluation* (2019).

<sup>34</sup> *End of Project Report* (Pass It Back: LA02-013). Lao Rugby Federation. 2017.

was new to youth and taught positive values, and joining a rugby team potentially provided opportunities to travel outside of Nonghet District to Vientiane and perhaps even to other countries<sup>35</sup>.

Young people interviewed who had participated in rugby activities reported that they learned new skills, not only how to play rugby, but also new interpersonal and networking skills, and they had made friends outside of their school. More importantly, they enjoyed playing it and they said that the exercise kept them healthy. Parents also reported that they had observed changes in the development of their children after they joined the rugby and lifeskills activities, particularly in terms of self-confidence. But, based on project reports, some parents in Thamxay and Namkuang villages expressed concerns regarding injuries from rugby and the lack of follow-up by coaches.

However, the District Governor and some school principals and teachers did not support the continuation of rugby activities, and ChildFund Pass It Back was stopped by the District Governor in 2018. The District Governor said this was because ChildFund Laos and the Lao Rugby Federation (LRF) sometimes did not follow government procedures during activity implementation and did not always inform or coordinate well with the relevant local authorities. For example, when taking rugby players to play elsewhere in the Province, to Vientiane or overseas, the District Governor said that 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. School principals and teachers interviewed in Dindam and Pha-En schools also claimed that rugby had sometimes resulted in 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 seemed to be 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 communicated and coordinated more effectively with local authorities and schools. While there may have been other unstated reasons behind the decision to stop this activity, it is worth examining objectively (without 'blaming' one side or the other) in order to see if there could be learning here that might be applied to strengthen the implementation of ChildFund Pass it Back in other districts.

**(4) Monitoring Activities:** Several activities were conducted since 2014 that involved children and youth in monitoring as well as in developing reading and writing skills. There appear to have been two projects involving children and youth in monitoring ChildFund's work in Nonghet - *Development Effectiveness and Learning* (LA02-012) from 2014 - 2017, and *Local Empowerment through Community Accountability* (LECA - LA04-002) from 2017 - 2020, which built on the previous project. These were related to CFL and CFA ensuring accountability as an organisation, particularly in terms of their Development Effectiveness Framework (DEF)<sup>36</sup>. In addition, CFA undertook Outcome Indicator Surveys in 2012/2013 and again in 2016, and though while this was not a focus of youth empowerment activities, it is covered at the end of this section below.

The overall purpose of both of the abovementioned projects was to establish and develop a community-based monitoring system, both to monitor CFL supported activities, as well as build the capacity of community members to monitor changes and share learning within their communities. Activities undertaken as part of youth empowerment included training in photography and videography, interviewing skills, short story writing tips, as well as training for a network of community monitors<sup>37</sup>. For example, as part of the *Development Effectiveness and Learning*, training was provided for 'young writers' in primary and secondary schools, helping them to write short stories about their lives and the issues that most affect them which helped improve their

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<sup>35</sup> Four former players interviewed said their main motivation for joining was to have the chance to travel to Vientiane or even to other countries and experience new things. However, none of them were able to achieve that and had only played against other teams in Nonghet.

<sup>36</sup> However, objectives changed in 2018 when CFA phased out the DEF and adopted a new Monitoring and Learning approach.

<sup>37</sup> It was planned to train 121 Community Monitors (supported by 242 Community Researchers) to monitor, evaluate and report on development activities and issues across three districts. However, it was not clear from the annual reports provided how many had been trained by the end of fiscal year 2018/2019.

reading and writing skills. A book *A Life of Never Giving Up*, containing short stories by nine young Nonghet writers was published, launched in Nonghet, and circulated. In addition, the activity also provided opportunities for capacity building around photography, videography, interview techniques, and creative thinking, as well as providing a platform for children and youth to express their views. 12 young videographers were also trained to monitor the CFL supported Nutrition project. Participatory Action Research (PAR) was also undertaken through training young researchers and then conducting surveys on various topics, including needs and barriers faced by children with disabilities.

Evaluating the impact of these activities was difficult for the reasons mentioned earlier, particularly as none of the CFL staff who had been involved were remaining in Nonghet (with the office about to be closed), none of the youth participants were able to be interviewed, and full documentation was unavailable. Nonetheless, an evaluation of the *Development Effectiveness and Learning Project* conducted in 2017 found that the project had largely met its objectives in implementing the Development Effectiveness Framework, successfully involving children, youth and communities in CFL's monitoring and evaluation processes, and contributing to learning regarding strengths and weaknesses and making recommendations for program improvement. However, the evaluation also found that data collected from the DEF process, video and stories produced by young people, and community consultations were not fully contributing to new project design and project reviews. The lack of an exit strategy for this project was also noted which is also applicable to other projects in Nonghet District - see Section 5.1 *Organisational Recommendations* below).

**Outcome Indicator Surveys:** These quantitative surveys, involving random sampling in target villages, were conducted twice in Nonghet District, the first time in 2013 and again in 2016, though only the 2016 survey results were available for review in this evaluation. The 2016 Outcome Indicator Survey (OIS) was included as an output under Objective 1 of the LECA Project, but was implemented largely externally<sup>38</sup> with target community members as respondents. The OIS was a major part of ChildFund Australia's Development Effectiveness Framework and was undertaken to provide a snapshot of the program area and see the changes on a set of high level indicators over a three year period. It was reportedly not intended to inform local project design or implementation. It was undertaken in the four target village groups ('Koum Ban') - Thamxay, Nonghet Tai, Phakkae Tai and Pha En - using the Lot Quality Assurance Sampling (LQAS) methodology and random sampling. As *Figure 10*. below indicates, the findings from the OIS in 2016 indicate positive changes in all areas where comparison with the OIS in 2013 was possible, though most remain a medium (yellow) or high (red) priority for ChildFund to address in program areas (PA). The findings indicate that projects implemented for education, MCH, water and sanitation and empowering children and youth under each of the thematic areas from ChildFund's Theory of Change covered by the OIS did achieve positive impact over a three year period.

**Figure 10 . Comparison of Outcome Indicator Changes - 2013 to 2016<sup>39</sup>**

| Outcome Indicator                      | 2013 Coverage | 2016 Coverage (CI) |
|--|---------------|--------------------|
| <b>Access to Assets</b>                |               |                    |
| CR1: Skilled birth assistance (narrow) | 34.2%         | 36.9% (±9.4)       |
| CMP1: Skilled birth assistance (broad) | 35.8%         | 48.7% (±10.1)      |
| CR2: Primary school completion (12-16) | 88.6%         | 99.0% (±1.5)       |
| CR3: Reading level                     | 45.4%         | 50.8% (±5.2)       |
| CMP3: Reading comprehension            | N/A           | 42.5% (±5.2)       |
| CR4: Wasting                           | 18.4%         | 3.5% (±2.9)        |
| CMP4: Stunting                         | N/A           | 43.1% (±10.4)      |
| CR5: Improved, affordable water source | 49.3%         | 62.8% (±10.2)      |
| CMP5: ICT use                          | N/A           | 67.0% (±7.1)       |
| CR6: Basic sanitation                  | 58.6%         | 81.6% (±8.1)       |

<sup>38</sup> With a team made up of 27 members, including CFA and CFL staff, externally hired data collectors and local Government staff.

<sup>39</sup> The number of outcome indicators as well as some of the criteria for assessing them changed between 2013 and 2016 which is why comparison is not available for each indicator.

| Outcome Indicator                           | 2013 Coverage | 2016 Coverage (CI) |
|---|---------------|--------------------|
| CR7: Increased income spent on family needs | N/A           | 65.0% (±10.2)      |
| <b>Voice and Agency</b>                     |               |                    |
| CR9: Birth registration certificate         | 17.1%         | 18.7% (±8.1)       |
| CR10: Opportunities for voice               | 20.1%         | 45.8% (±5.2)       |
| CR11: Participation                         | 27.8%         | 30.1% (±4.8)       |
| CR12: Resilience                            | N/A           | 75.3% (±4.5)       |
| CR13: Positive outlook                      | N/A           | 20.8% (±6.9)       |
| <b>Protection</b>                           |               |                    |
| CR14: Knowledge of preventing HIV           | N/A           | 7.8% (±3.4)        |
| CR15: Knowledge of disaster response        | N/A           | 8.2% (±3.4)        |
| CR16: Child abuse                           | N/A           | 22.7% (±4.0)       |
| CR17: Sense of safety                       | N/A           | 68.7% (±4.4)       |
| <b>Power</b>                                |               |                    |
| CR18: Advocacy/lobbying                     | N/A           | 17.6% (±4.7)       |

|  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
|  | PA Coverage = High Priority   |
|  | PA Coverage = Medium Priority |
|  | PA Coverage = Low Priority    |

#### **Summary Analysis and Learning - Child and Youth Empowerment**

- Activities were dependent on ChildFund inputs and support and ended once the project period was over.
- However, project reports and an evaluation reported that children and young people did acquire new knowledge and skills which will hopefully benefit them and their communities following CFL's departure from the District.
- Rugby and associated life skills under ChildFund Pass It Back proved to be the most popular youth-focussed set of activities and relative to other child-youth centred activities, appears to have reached the largest number of children and youth within the District. ChildFund Pass It Back may have continued in Nonghet, had the Lao Rugby Union and ChildFund communicated and coordinated more effectively, both with District Government as well as with schools and communities.
- Child Clubs in schools can be an effective way of building children's knowledge, skills and levels of participation, but need to be designed and implemented with the full involvement of principals, teachers and parents if they are to be effective. Consideration also has to be given to children's availability and capacity.
- While efforts to involve children and youth in monitoring and evaluation were laudable, an evaluation in 2017 found that these activities need to be more effectively linked and that feedback mechanisms back to local communities needed to be enhanced.
- The Outcome Indicator Surveys conducted in 2013 and 2016 do appear to show positive impact in most program areas included in the surveys.

**Table 3. Contribution to Theory of Change Themes (Children and Youth Empowerment)**

| Theme | Level | Rationale |
|-------|-------|-----------|
|-------|-------|-----------|

|                         |   |   |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Assets</b>           | Low-Medium  | While youth's voices were strengthened in some villages (e.g. invited to express their views in village meetings in some target villages as in Namkuang and Nammen), more needed to be done to ensure adult support and a more enabling environment at village and District levels. |
| <b>Voice and Agency</b> | High  | These activities appear to have contributed significantly to building self-confidence and resilience among youth, particularly ChildFund Pass It Back and Ready for Life.   |
| <b>Protection</b>       | Medium - High (Children and youth)<br>Low (Parents and communities) | Awareness of child rights and child protection raised among children and youth who participated in activities. However, with the exception of Nammen Village, the evaluation found that awareness was low among parents and adult community members.                                |
| <b>Power</b>            | Low-Medium  | While some effort was made to reach the most disadvantaged, this was not always the case. A more systematic approach is needed to achieve this.   |

### 3.1.3 Achieve equitable well-being

#### **WELL-BEING – 8 Projects**

1. LA03-001 Healthy communities for Children and mothers (MCH)
2. LA03-002 Safe Water and Sanitation (WASH)
3. LA03-005 Strengthening Mother and Child Health in Nonghet
4. LA03-009 Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS)
5. LA03-011 Improving Nutrition of Children in Nonghet (INCN)
6. LA06-001 Children Improved Nutrition through Integrated Approach in Nonghet and Khou Districts (CINIA) (Phase 2)

#### **LIVELIHOODS – 2 Projects**

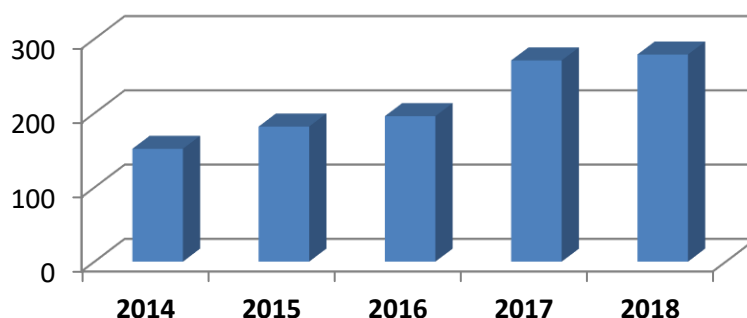
1. LA03-003 Livelihood and Food Security Enhancement
2. LA03-010 Improving Gender Equality and Livelihood Security in Nonghet (IGELS)

#### **DISASTER RISK REDUCTION – 2 Projects**

1. LA03-006 Strengthening Disaster Risk Management Systems and Capacities in Lao PDR
2. LA03-014 Strengthening Community based DRR Intervention in Nonghet (SCoDIN), Laos

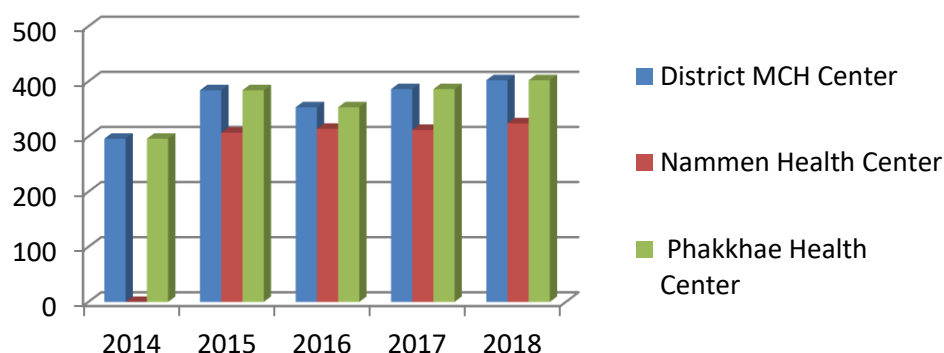
**Health:** ChildFund began supporting the health sector in 2012 under the CDWBC-I project and this involved renovating and equipping three health centers (in Pha En, Phakhae and Nammen villages), as well as the construction and equipping of a separate Maternal Child Health (MCH) center at the Nonghet District Hospital. The MCH centre includes a birthing suite, labour rooms, family planning counselling room, and a small pharmacy. ChildFund Laos also provided up-to-date equipment including an incubator, warming table, oxygen, autoclave, ultra sound, and other equipment. Staff from these centers were initially trained in the use of this equipment as well as basic first aid, family planning, patient referral, communication and training skills. Training was also provided to traditional birth attendants (TBAs) in target villages in pre- and post- natal care as well as family planning.

From 2014 onwards, the focus shifted to improving child nutrition to address problems with malnourishment and stunting. Training of trainers workshops were conducted for health staff, followed by training for village health volunteers, equipment was provided for child growth assessments, IEC materials were produced and training was provided for mothers in nutrition and food preparation for children in 15 villages. This was also linked to support for kitchen gardens and the provision of tools and seeds.



**Figure 11. Births at MCH Center**

Feedback in interviews at all levels - District Health Department, rural health centers, and target villages - were all very positive in terms of the benefits that ChildFund support has provided. As a result of the above activities, more women are seeking pre- and post-natal care at the health centers and MCH Center, and more women are opting to give birth either at a rural health center near their village at the MCH Center (see *Figure 11. Births at MCH Center* above). As well as support from ChildFund, access to MCH services has also benefitted from a change in Government policy in 2012 which provides free deliveries and only a minimal charge for use of other MCH services.<sup>40</sup> The use of family planning services is also increasing (see *Figure 12. Users - Family Planning Services* below), and this is starting to be reflected in a decline in enrolment numbers at primary school level.



**Figure 12. Users - Family Planning Services**

Overall, this component of the ChildFund program appeared to be the most successful in terms of observable longer term impact. This was due to the fact that the project involved both provision of 'hardware' - i.e. constructed or renovated, well-equipped facilities - with 'software' in the form of training for

health staff from District to village levels. It also benefitted from a change in Government policy which enabled pregnant women and mothers to access these services largely free of charge.

**Water and Sanitation:** ChildFund has also been supporting the provision of water supply and toilets in target villages through several projects, starting initially in schools during the first phase (2010-2012) and then expanding into the community in 12 target villages in 2012, and then extending further into an additional 10 target villages from 2014 to 2017. In working with communities, the overall approach was characterised by a significant level of community involvement, and, at least in some communities, by making the provision of improved water supply contingent on construction of household toilets first. This was seen as the most

<sup>40</sup> Prior to this policy change, villagers were charged for services and health centers charged an extra 15% for medicine, but now they receive a budget of approximately eight million kip per year from the Government.



effective approach in ensuring latrine coverage<sup>41</sup>, community involvement, ownership, and accountability. In terms of construction, ChildFund provided the hardware - i.e. cement, pipes, etc. - while villagers provided sand, wood and labour. Where target villages lacked access to clean water, gravity fed water systems (GFWS) were constructed while in other villages that already had such a system but lacked adequate water, additional storage tanks were constructed (though several of these are no longer functioning due either to the lack of water or pipe maintenance). The projects also set up water management groups (WMGs) with responsibility for maintenance of the water systems and collection of fees for repair from villagers.

Requiring villagers to construct toilets before receiving support for water supply has helped ensure a relatively high rate of latrine coverage - close to or above the threshold of approximately 90% required to be reasonably certain to have a positive impact on community health<sup>42</sup>. The evaluation also found that more than 80% of households in the sample villages visited had ready access to water. Surprisingly, villages located on the road experienced more difficulty in getting access to water compared to those living in more rural villages off the road. This was due to limited water sources available, particularly during the dry season, despite having water facilities in place. In Namkongua Village, 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. Water management was often done by the village committee rather than an assigned WMG, although these had initially been set up by CFL at the time of construction<sup>43</sup>. In some communities, fees for repair were collected annually, while in others they were only collected when repairs were needed. Poor latrine maintenance seemed to be a problem in some communities. In Dindam Village, for example, when septic tanks became full, new tanks were not being built and toilet usage had declined.

**Livelihoods:** Activities supporting livelihoods were implemented from 2012 to 2017. These included training for women in weaving, establishment of women's livestock groups and provision of livestock, support for kitchen gardens, as well as gardens in schools. Although it is not clear from the documentation how many women were trained and then took up weaving, and in which villages, it appears that there were a relatively small group in each target village. Women were invited to join weaving training based on their own interest (rather than being selected based on a set of criteria). Women were required to construct their own looms with CFL providing the materials needed for the actual weaving (thread, etc.).

From the fieldwork in sample villages, weaving seemed to have had the greatest impact on family income and gender relations within the family. In Dindam Village, for example, 10 families were initially trained and now the group of weavers has now expanded to 24 and there were more people who were interested in weaving, not only in Dindam Village but 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 diseases and the fact that breeds provided by ChildFund Laos were not suitable to the Nonghet environment. In 2014, several thousand chickens and ducks died from disease after infected chickens were introduced to target villages by the project. Some villagers suggested that it would have been better to give the villagers cash so that they could find more appropriate breeds available locally.

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<sup>41</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>42</sup> Ikin, Derrick Owen, *Demand creation and affordable sanitation and water*. WEDC, Switzerland (1994)

<sup>43</sup> While it was not clear why these WMGs had largely ceased to exist, it seems likely that village administrations found it easier to manage water supplies under the control of the Village Head and Village Committee. There may also have been more difficult to retain membership after project support ended, as there was no further incentives such as training provided.

Training on kitchen gardens had provided villagers with 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, while actively maintained while CFL was providing support, stopped after ChildFund support ended. School principals interviewed gave a number of reasons why school gardens were no longer being maintained - 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 not to have happened. Overall, it seemed school principals did not see the value of having school gardens.

Change in gender relations in the family as a result of livelihood security support was reported only in a few villages, and mainly from those involved in weaving. 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.

Of all the livelihood related activities, weaving appears to have been the most sustainable and successful in terms of earning additional income for participating families. However, as participation in this activity was based on motivation and required construction of a loom, it is likely that this activity did not include the poorest families in target villages.

**Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR):** There were two DRR projects implemented in Nonghet District, the first, Strengthening Disaster Risk Management Systems and Capacities in the Lao PDR, had a focus on DRR in schools as well as in communities and was implemented from 2012-2013. Activities included introduction of a DRR curriculum and teaching resources as well as involving children in disaster risk mapping of their communities. Training was also provided for newly established Village Disaster Management Committees (VDMCs). The

### Case Study - Weaving in Paka Village



Seng is a 28 year old mother of three primary school age children. She and her husband are farmers, growing rice for their family and corn for sale. While they are not poor, they are not financially well off either, and as their children were about to start school, they needed extra income.

In 2016, Seng heard that ChildFund had invited those women who were interested in learning how to weave using traditional looms to join a training that was to be organised in the village. Altogether, seven women joined the training which was held in the village meeting room. Her husband helped her to make a loom and they set it up at the training site. The training ran for one week and all seven participants completed the course, which also linked them up with a buyer in the District Town.

Of the seven women who went through the training three years ago, five are still weaving. They make traditional Lao skirts or 'sinh' which they can sell for around 60,000 Kip (about US \$7-\$8), or more for a piece decorated with flower motifs. Each piece takes two to four days to produce.

*" Now I can earn money to help the family, especially to buy*

second project, Strengthening Community-based DRR Intervention in Nonghet (SCoDIN), was a six month project implemented in 2015, with a focus on training for VDMCs, provision of loudspeaker systems, involvement of children in videoing DRR activities, and a review of the District DRR plan which had been developed previously. It was also reported by the Head of the Department of Labour and Social Welfare (DLSW) that an emergency response fund was set up by the project with contributions from villagers (10,000 kip per family) and that this was being maintained by DLSW. It was also reported that in 2018, ChildFund contributed \$30,000 for food and construction materials when a flood struck Hat Bo Village, destroying 30 houses. The evaluation found that at least one school, Korthong, was still using the DRR curriculum and teaching aids provided earlier, in conjunction with the core curriculum *World Around Us* topic in the curriculum.

Village Heads also remembered the training provided and were able to describe some of the risks faced by their village. However, with the possible exception of Kengled Village, there was no evidence that VDMCs had continued to function after the project ended, and several of the loudspeaker systems were starting to break down by 2019 and were unable to be repaired (as they had been purchased outside of the District and there was no-one available locally to repair them). Of 14 sample villages visited that had received loudspeaker systems, these were only fully functioning in seven.

Overall, it appears that DRR focused activities did have some impact in terms of raising awareness among relevant District Government authorities and establishing a District Disaster Management Committee as well as an emergency response fund. At village level, the main impact seems to have been raised awareness of disaster risk management by those who participated in the training, primarily Village Heads and CFL Village Coordinators, and loudspeaker systems which functioned for a limited period of time. The establishment of Village Disaster Management Committees and development of disaster management plans does not appear to have been sustainable. This suggests that the viability of establishing new committees related to DRR needs to be reviewed, and consideration given to focusing more on strengthening capacity related to DRR of existing village administration committees rather than establishing new committees with a specific focus on DRR.

#### **Summary Analysis and Learning - Equitable Well-Being:**

##### ***Maternal-Child Health:***

- Construction and renovation of health care facilities, provision of equipment, and training at all levels (including TBAs at village level), helped to ensure long term positive impact in terms of access to and quality of MCH health services.
- This impact was also due to a change in Government policy regarding free maternal-child health care.

##### ***Water and Sanitation:***

- Making provision of clean water conditional on all households have toilets is an effective way of ensuring village wide latrine coverage.
- Water management groups have usually not continued in their expected form and role for long after the project has finished, with their roles being managed by the Village Committee. It may be better to focus on the Village Committee for water system maintenance and fee collection from the outset.

***Livelihoods:***

- Weaving seems to have had the greatest impact on family income and gender relations within the family though the number of families in each village has been minimal (e.g. Paka – 5 families out of 7 trained, Dindam 10 families trained and now expanded to 24), and does not appear to have reached the poorest families.
- Livestock raising has had little success. Apart from disease, many villagers felt the breeds supplied by CF were inappropriate for Nonghet conditions. Accordingly, it may be better for ChildFund to avoid this kind of support in future as it falls outside of their focus on children and youth, and areas of technical expertise.
- School gardens stopped after ChildFund support ended – various reasons were given (but none very convincing – it seems school principals just don't see the added value of school gardens). While they do have the potential to make a significant contribution to learning and to nutrition, if this activity is to be supported in future, it needs to be better integrated into the curriculum, management, and life of the school, rather than being seen as an external activity by ChildFund.

***Disaster Risk Reduction:***

- ChildFund activities seem to have had more impact at District level in terms of strengthening the District Disaster Management Committee, particularly the DLSW.
- At village level, there was limited evidence of impact. While Village Heads could explain some of what they learned through training, the VDMCs appeared to no longer exist in most villages, and there was no evidence of any DRM plans. Only a limited number of schools (possibly only Korthong) continued to use the DRR resources provided previously. For future DRR projects at village level, it would seem to make more sense to focus on strengthening DRR capacities among existing village committees rather than establishing new committees with a DRR focus.
- Loudspeaker systems were valued by Village Heads but not seen as directly related to DRR activities. Now mostly broken, Village Heads said they would be willing to cover the cost of repair, but that there was no one available in the District who could repair them. This aspect needs more attention in future if these systems are to be provided.

**Table 4. Contribution to Theory of Change Themes (Well-being)**

| Theme                   | Level   | Rationale  |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Assets</b>           | Maternal-Child Health: High                                       | Health projects have helped put in place a strong MCH system - a well equipped MCH Center and three health centers - to ensure mothers and children can access quality health care.  |
|                         | Water and sanitation in communities <sup>44</sup> : Medium - high | Water and sanitation systems within villages support children's good health and hygiene. Maintenance could be improved in some cases.  |
|                         | Livelihoods: Weaving and gardens: Medium<br><br>Livestock: Low    | Weaving has helped some less poor families with additional income, including for children's education though only included a few women. Kitchen gardens have contributed to improved nutrition.<br>School gardens may have had impact during implementation but were not sustained after CFL support ended.<br>Livestock raising has had little if any positive impact on target communities due to disease and limited technical support. |
|                         | DRR - Low   | DRR activities had very little impact at village level, other than raised awareness.   |
| <b>Voice and Agency</b> | Uncertain   | While children were reportedly involved in DRR project training, and had input into school DRR planning, the level and quality of their input is not clear from the limited documentation available.   |
| <b>Protection</b>       | High  | Children's health better protected through improved MCH services and provision of village water and sanitation.  |
| <b>Power</b>            | MCH and Watsan: High  | Poorest also able to access health care and water supply and sanitation.   |
|                         | Livelihoods: Low  | Access of the poorest to livelihoods activities limited or non-existent  |

### 3.1.4 Cross-Cutting Program Areas

While the multiple projects that have been implemented over the past decade in Nonghet District have generally had a specific sectoral or sub-sectoral focus, there are several areas that are cross-cutting, and these include gender equity, reaching children with disabilities, reaching the poorest, child rights and child protection. Each of these is examined in more detail below, both in terms of what was done as well as the level of impact assessed as part of this evaluation.

**Gender Equity:** Assessing the impact of CFL activities over the past decade in terms of promoting gender equity and enhancing the roles of women, was limited during the fieldwork for this evaluation, particularly given the lack of access to CFL staff who had implemented these activities, as well as limited recollection of those in the

<sup>44</sup> Water supply and sanitation in schools is included under education above and ranks low-medium.

community who had participated in project supported activities<sup>45</sup>. As a result, this aspect of the assessment has relied heavily on project documents, particularly those related to ChildFund Pass It Back as well as a gender assessments conducted in 2015 and 2019<sup>46</sup>.

The gender assessment in 2015 found that while there had been changes towards increased gender equity, the traditional view of the role of girls and women, both in Hmong and Khmu target villages, was still strong. This included a low value put on education for girls (who were expected to either not attend school or to leave early in order to marry) and a view that the role of women in the community was to be homemakers and mothers, and not be involved in decision-making either within the family or the village as a whole, as this was traditionally the role of men. This could be seen in the EMIS data, for example, in the 2012/2013 school year, the transition rate from primary to lower secondary school was 91% for boys but only 84% for girls. In the same year, the dropout rate in upper secondary level was 0.2% for boys but 4.7% for girls.<sup>47</sup> Several of ChildFund's projects directly challenged this view, 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, for example through the formation of women's groups for livelihood related activities. Child and youth empowerment activities in particular placed a strong emphasis on empowering girls, particularly through the ChildFund Pass It Back project which actively promoted the role of women through establishing women's teams, promoting women coaches as positive role models, as well as promoting gender equity through the associated life skills curriculum.

While it is difficult to accurately assess the extent to which these gender related initiatives have contributed to change regarding the roles and status of girls and women in target communities, a gender assessment of CFL conducted in August 2019 does give some indication from a CFL field staff perspective as to the extent to which programs were gender transformative, even though it was not specifically focussed on assessing projects in Nonghet District. Using a scale that goes from gender exploitative to gender accommodating to gender transformative, the survey and FGDs with staff found that most projects tended to be accommodating - i.e. they take gender into account but mostly work around existing gender differences and inequalities. Even the set of MCH projects, which had the most apparent positive impact, could not be seen as transformative. The gender assessment found that even though project goals were gender-focused, they did not have a transformative impact, *"... instead treating maternal health mostly as a means to the end of achieving improved infant and child health outcomes."*<sup>48</sup> Although the gender assessment was not specific to Nonghet District, a review of the Nonghet project documents available as part of this evaluation generally confirmed these perceptions and the overall conclusion regarding Nonghet District project design and implementation as being more gender accommodating rather than gender transformative.

The exceptions to this assessment are 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 and peer trainers. Although ChildFund Pass It Back is no longer implemented in Nonghet District, an interview with one of the female coaches from Nonghet<sup>49</sup> as well as a review of project documents, illustrated how the project provided opportunities for young women to learn new skills, improve self-confidence and become positive role models for other girls and young women in their communities. Also, the Ready for Life Project, while more focused on sexual and reproductive health and online safety, also actively promotes young women as peer trainers as well as gender equity through the life skills curriculum.

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<sup>45</sup> The exceptions to this were an interview with a Pass It Back coach from Nonghet who was able to explain the challenges she faced in terms of community beliefs and expectations around gender and how Pass It Back had helped to challenge some of these traditional beliefs, and youth peer trainers from Ready for Life.

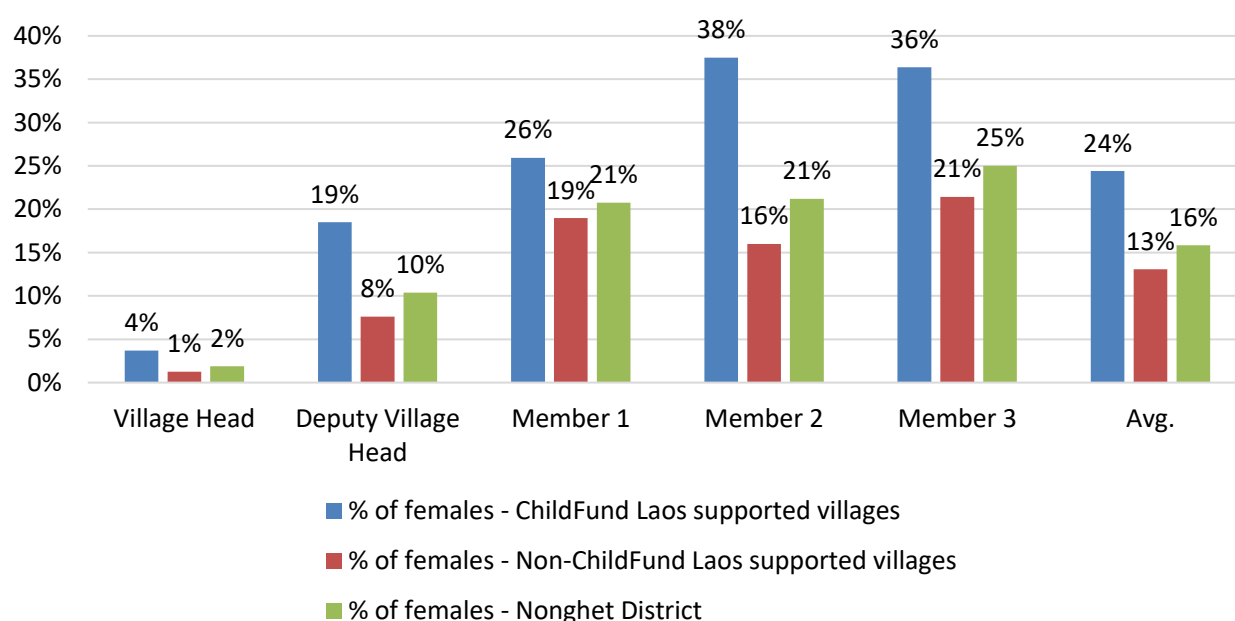
<sup>46</sup> Malam, L. *Improving Gender Equity and Livelihood Security in Nonghet* (2015); (Author unknown) *ChildFund Laos Gender Assessment Final Report* (2019). The former was focussed on one specific livelihoods project while the latter involved surveys and FGDs with CFL staff, as well as a document review.

<sup>47</sup> EMIS data 2012/2013, DESB Nonghet District..

<sup>48</sup> *ChildFund Laos Gender Assessment Final Report*, 2019, Page 12.

<sup>49</sup> See CDWBC-II Project Final Evaluation Report (2019) for a case study.

Other evidence related to changes in gender equity was found in district level data, particularly from EMIS and District Governance, but the extent to which these changes can be directly linked to ChildFund inputs cannot be clearly defined. This is because there are also other external influences, such as social media and television, which have become more widespread, especially with the expansion of electricity and telecommunications networks within Nonghet District, which may also have an influence on gender related changes. For example, in terms of village leadership, there is evidence that shows that women are more likely to be in leadership positions in ChildFund target villages than in other non-target villages (see *Figure 13. Women's Involvement - Village Leadership* below). This may be due, at least in part, to gender-related awareness raising through various activities within these villages though other factors, such as those mentioned above, may also be involved.



**Figure 13. Women's Involvement - Village Leadership**

Overall, in terms of gender, it appears that the Nonghet District program had started to move from what was largely a gender accommodating approach - e.g. trying to ensure participation of girls and women in project activities, disaggregating data by gender, etc. - to a more transformative approach - actively bringing change in gender relations, primarily through the Pass It Back and Ready for Life projects.

**Children with Disabilities (CWD):** While there had been some efforts earlier to identify and involve children with disabilities in project activities, these appear to have been limited prior to 2018. For example, in 2013, Child Club members in 11 villages were trained and undertook a survey of children with disabilities in their communities. Out of 12 villages, about 33 children with disabilities were identified, with about one third being school-aged and going to school. However, with the exception of two children, it appeared that the children identified as having disabilities did not receive rehabilitation or medical assessments or benefit from appropriate physical therapy, wheelchairs or other assistive devices. However, this appears to have changed over the past two or three years of the program, with more effort being made to include children and youth with disabilities in project activities. For example, the Media Capacity 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 to focus more on reaching CWDs. 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.

**Reaching the Poorest:** ChildFund activities targeted the poorest in target villages in the first phase (2010-2012) through providing uniforms and materials (pens, notebooks, etc.) to the poorest children, but it appears no significant effort was made to map and specifically target the poorest after that. For example, villagers who joined livelihood activities, such as weaving and livestock raising, were selected based on interest and motivation. As these activities also required an investment of time and sometimes money, this worked against the poorest becoming involved. The exception was latrine construction activities, where an effort was made to ensure the poorest were included through ChildFund providing additional materials (cement and sand) to the poorest families in each village. For example, in Nammen Village, ChildFund provided these additional materials for six families while the other 58 families had to provide this themselves.

From the experience in Nonghet District, it appears that more could be done to specifically target the poorest in the communities in other districts where CFL is working. Accordingly, this aspect has been included in the project assessment checklist in *Annex 4. Project Assessment Checklist* at the end of this report.

**Child Rights and Child Protection:** These were topics included in most of the training provided at district and village level. A Child Protection Committee was also established at District level, under the Department of Labour and Social Welfare (DLSW) and involving the Lao Women's Union and Lao Youth Union, but it was not clear how often they met. There were also apparently attempts by ChildFund to establish Child Protection Committees at village level but there was no evidence of their existence at the time of the evaluation. Those interviewed were able to explain some of what they had learned regarding child rights and child protection, but they were adamant that there were no cases of child abuse in their village, with the greatest risk facing children being road accidents. However, the Head of DLSW said there were cases of youth suicide, one or two cases per year, due to family problems, as well as some cases of labour migration and trafficking.

Overall, it seems in terms of awareness raising on child protection, as well as setting up child protection mechanisms, that the main effect had been at District level, through raising awareness of child rights and child protection issues. Expending effort to establish child protection committees at village level seemed to have little if any benefit, as these no longer functioned after the relevant project ended. It would probably be more effective in terms of awareness raising around child rights and child protection to focus more on existing village committees and other community leaders.

**Other:** The only other two areas which could be considered cross-cutting relate to environment and the role of the village cluster ('Khoum Ban') administration in ChildFund activities.

**Environment:** Other than awareness raising on the importance of maintaining watershed areas around water sources for gravity-fed water systems, ensuring a safe environment for children in schools (for example, building a fence in Houayzhouang School to prevent children falling down a steep bank, and an obligatory mention in project proposals when required by donors, environmental issues do not seem to have featured in CFL supported projects in Nonghet District.

**Village Clusters:** The ChildFund program eventually came to focus on 27 villages in four village clusters - Nonghet Tai, Pha-En, Thamxay Municipality, and Phak-Khae. Although each village cluster has an administrator, it appears there was no effort to strengthen capacity at this level - project documents refer only to village and District levels.

## 4. Learning and Good Practices

As the above findings indicate, a decade of involvement in development in Nonghet District has provided a wealth of experience and learning, both positive and some less positive. At the same time, while not all projects and activities have achieved the desired results, there have been examples of good practice. Both the learning and good practices are inter-related and have the potential to inform future development work elsewhere in the Lao PDR. This section both identifies some of the main lessons to be learned from ChildFund's

experience in Nonghet District, as well as documenting some of the good practices that have contributed to the successful outcomes identified in the findings described above.

## 4.1 Learning

While the learning points discussed below may not be a fully comprehensive listing of all that can be taken from ChildFund's ten years of experience in Nonghet District, it hopefully covers some of the main points which can be considered when undertaking similar work in other districts in the Lao PDR. A checklist that incorporates these and other points for use in applying the learning from Nonghet District in other districts can be found in *Annex 4. Project Assessment Checklist*.

### 4.1.1 Multi-Sectoral MoU

***While a multi-sectoral MoU has some advantages over a single sector MoU regarding program scope and the number of projects, it also has a number of disadvantages.*** When ChildFund signed an MoU with the National Committee for Development and Poverty Eradication Office in 2012, which was then under the Prime Minister's Office, it was regarded as somewhat innovative among Development Partners working in the Lao PDR. Most international organisations at that time had sectoral MoUs with whichever line Ministry or Mass Organisation was their main partner based on single large projects - for example, with the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Lao Women's Union, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, etc. - with organisations often having multiple MoUs covering different sectoral projects. While ChildFund Laos had started out in Nonghet with a single sector MoU with the (then) Ministry of Education, the intention was to research and then design a multi-sectoral program (which became the CDWBC-I Project and then expanded into CDWBC-II) and this was then implemented from 2012 up to the present time. This MoU model is typically used in other countries for multiple sector community development programs/projects and theoretically enables a 'level playing field' in terms of sectoral dominance. It also enables greater program flexibility in terms of the addition of new components to the program even after the MoU has been signed, as all sectors are covered in some way. The main challenge of this approach in the Lao PDR related to the staff capacity of the Committee for Development and Poverty Eradication, particularly at district level, both in terms of numbers of staff, as well as previous experience and skills in coordinating, planning and reporting on larger multi-sectoral programs.

While this MoU did in fact enable implementation of a multi-sectoral program, with the addition of a range of new projects along the way, it did present some challenges. These included:

- ***Delays in seeking official approval and in engaging with relevant District Departments:*** Because approvals and formal notification of planned activities within the District had to pass through the District Office for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, this sometimes caused delays and miscommunication, as the Office had to prepare documents for each Department and then forward these on. This somewhat unwieldy process was further complicated in 2016 when the Office for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication was moved out of the District Governor's Office into the Department of Agriculture and Forestry.
- ***Large number of projects:*** Because the MoU allowed for the incorporation of multiple projects, the number of projects grew over time, from 11 projects under CDWBC-I to more than 26 under CDWBC-II. These projects included both projects with relatively large budgets (e.g. the three year Safe Water and Sanitation Project and the Strengthening Mother and Child Health in Nonghet Project), to smaller, shorter term projects (e.g. the six month Strengthening Community-Based DRR in Nonghet). This large number of projects then had implications for coordination, communication and documentation (see below). It is understood that ChildFund has already learned from this experience and has started consolidating projects on a sectoral basis - e.g. Ready for Life, which has brought together in one youth empowerment project, participation and resilience, sexual and reproductive health and on-line safety.

### 4.1.2 Working with Local Government

**Working with local Government requires sensitivity and skills in order to find a balance between meeting needs as perceived by local Government with organisational priorities, capacities and integrity.** International development organisations in the Lao PDR are required to work with and through Government agencies and finding the balance between meeting the wishes of local Government and maintaining organisational integrity can be challenging - for example, when requested to work in newly resettled or consolidated villages where there may be human rights issues. Local Government, as in Nonghet District, tends to prioritise infrastructure, and coordination and communication among Departments is often slow or non-existent. For ChildFund, on the other hand, a priority was given to capacity building and awareness raising, particularly around empowering women, children and youth as well as child rights and child protection. Whether by accident or design, ChildFund appears to have managed this relationship reasonably well, though as the experience with rugby and ChildFund Pass It Back appears to indicate, more could have been done at times to engage with local Government and communities in a more timely and appropriate manner.

### 4.1.3 Establishment of Village Committees

**Setting up 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 (see 7. Recommendations below).

### 4.1.4 Importance of Quality Follow-up After Training

**It is essential that training for teachers and principals be followed by good quality support after training.** Up until 2017, teachers and principals had received significant in-service training in a range of topics, including teaching Lao, child-centred teaching and learning, school management, and other topics. From interviews with principals, teachers, and students, as well as observations of classroom environments, there appeared to be a difference in terms of those schools which had received frequent follow-up support from DESB trainers and ChildFund staff after training (e.g. Korthong and Phakkae primary schools), and those which hadn't (e.g. Houay Deua, Kengled, Dindam and Buamdao primary schools). One of the main factors determining whether or not follow-up support was received appears to have been accessibility, with more remote schools receiving fewer or no follow-up support visits after in-service training for teachers and principals. Without support focused on ensuring those trained are able to implement what they have learned effectively, much of the effort and funding provided is less likely to bring positive change in schools.

### 4.1.5 Internal Cross-Project Planning and Coordination

**Multiple projects increases the likelihood of poor internal coordination and communication.** Poor coordination and communication was often mentioned in project evaluation and progress reports as well as by target village and district level respondents during the fieldwork for this evaluation. For example, evaluation reports gave examples of different ChildFund staff from different projects arriving in a target village on the same day to work with villagers, each unaware of the other's plans, or ChildFund staff arriving in villages much later than had been agreed earlier, thus keeping villagers waiting around for several hours. District Government staff also mentioned that coordination between CFL staff and District Government Departments was not always 'smooth' (though sometimes that may have been a result of the coordination mechanism mentioned in Section 4.1.1 above). Poor internal communication and coordination also works against a 'whole

village' development approach as it reduces the likelihood of linkages among projects in the same communities. Internal cross-project planning and coordination is an area for ChildFund to check and if necessary, address if it is an issue in other districts (See *Annex 4. Project Assessment Checklist*).

#### 4.1.6 Documentation

***Setting up a well-organised e-filing system for project documentation is essential from the outset.*** While more than 100 documents were reviewed for this evaluation, there were still gaps. Some projects had proposals only, while others had two or three quarterly reports. Evaluation reports from 2013 onwards for specific projects listed lack of documentation as one of the major challenges that was faced by the evaluators. While there had been efforts to consolidate project numbers and names in terms of overall program (i.e. CDWBC), gaps remained. This appears to have been caused by several factors - the large number of projects and thus project documents, turnover of ChildFund staff, and the lack of a clear and complete electronic filing system. The importance of maintaining such a documentation system has hopefully been learned for new projects in other districts in Xieng Khouang and Huaphan provinces.

#### 4.1.7 Provision of External Resources

***When providing external resources, it is important to ensure that they are appropriate and sustainable.*** As the experience with provision of livestock, including chickens, under the livelihoods projects, and loudspeakers under DRR, has shown, what was provided was not always appropriate for the local context. In the case of selection of chickens, the result was that not only the diseased chickens provided by CFL died, but that so did all the other chickens and ducks already in the target villages, thus undermining food security as well as the credibility of the villagers in the project. With the loudspeakers provided by the DRR Project, now that they are beginning to break down, Village Heads find that they cannot be repaired locally, even though the village administration is willing to pay for repairs. This would suggest that more care could be taken in bringing in resources for use in project activities, especially when this involves quite high expenditures.

### 4.2 Good Practices

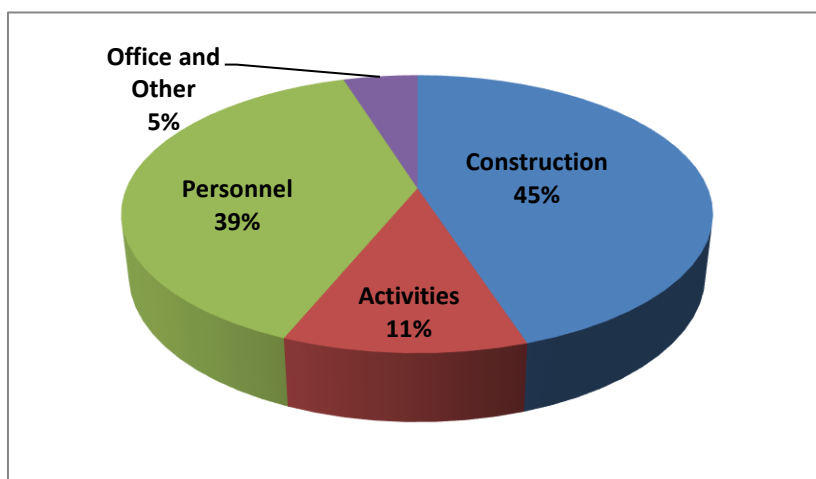
In addition to identifying several lessons learned, the evaluation has also identified several good practices which may have relevance for ChildFund's future project design in other districts.

#### 4.2.1 Initial 'Hardware' Focus

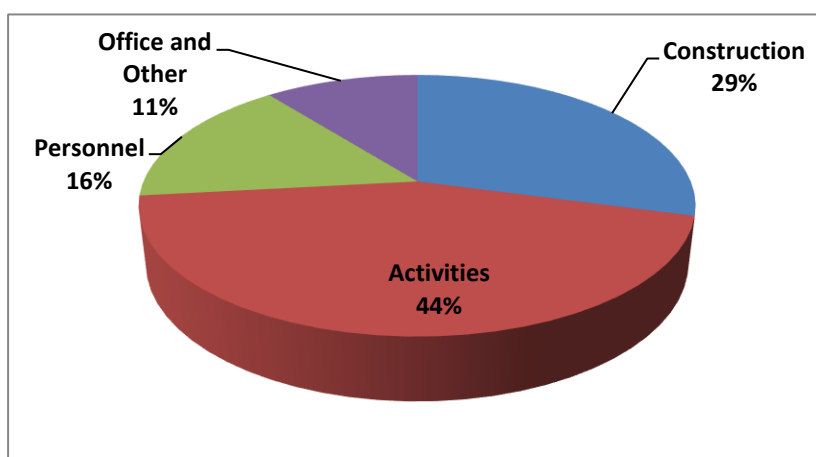
While it may not have been a conscious strategy, ChildFund's emphasis during the first five years was more on construction - schools, water supply, toilets, District MCH Center, etc. This is reflected in the budget allocations specified in the MoUs (See *Figure 14. Nonghet Program Budget Allocations below*). While this was reportedly not a planned strategy, but rather a response to immediate needs, it undoubtedly helped to get the support of District Government who tend to assess development in terms of infrastructure.

***Figure 14. Nonghet Program Budget Allocations (from MoUs)***

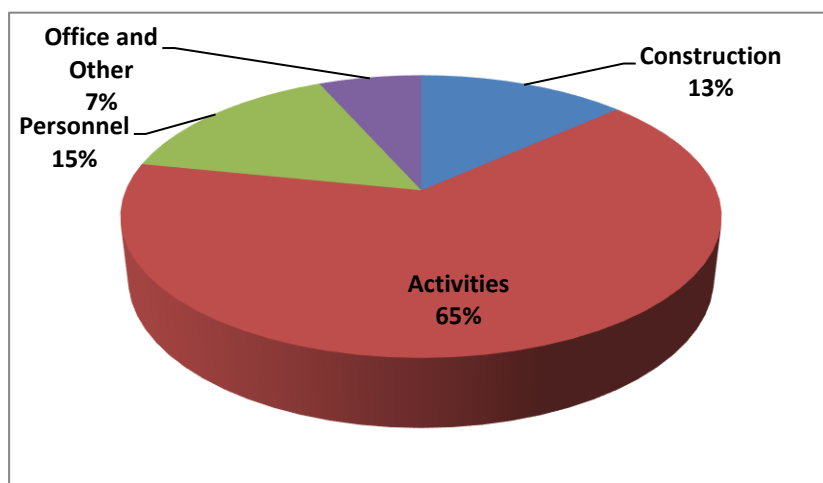
**NoCEP (2010-20120)**



CDWBC-I (2020 - 2014)<sup>50</sup>



CDWBC-II (2014-2020)



**Figure 15.**  
**Program Phase)**

*Budget (per*

<sup>50</sup> The percentage for construction is actually higher as MCH Center construction is under Health Activities rather than Construction, and it was not possible to separate it out from the documentation provided.

| Period                        | Budget (US\$) <sup>51</sup> | Average per year (US\$) |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| December 2009 - November 2011 | \$249,783                   | \$124,892               |
| January 2012 - June 2014      | \$1,869,817                 | \$747,927               |
| October 2014 - September 2020 | \$3,340,512                 | \$556,752               |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>\$5,460,112</b>          |                         |

As Figure 15 above shows, the average per year budget was highest between 2012 and 2014 which also reflects the period when construction was a major component of the program.

#### 4.2.2 Water supply conditional on sanitation

As was mentioned above, at least in Khorkmu Village, provision of a GFWS was made conditional on all households building toilets first. As villagers in the Lao PDR tend to initially value access to clean water over construction of toilets, this helped to avoid the problem of low latrine coverage which often occurs elsewhere when water supply is constructed before toilets.

#### 4.2.3 Maternal Child Health - a good balance of 'hardware' and 'software'

The projects addressing maternal-child health needs provided a good combination of infrastructure, training and equipment provision. ChildFund helped ensure that there were clean, well-equipped facilities available (the MCH Center at the District Hospital, as well as the three target 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. They also supported training for TBAs at village level to support these services. This, combined with the Government policy of providing free MCH services, helped ensure that good quality health care services were available and utilised, especially by women from target villages.

#### 4.2.4 Ready For Life - Getting it Right?

While it is probably too early to say that the Ready for Life Project can be classified as 'good practice', as the curriculum was only completed in 2019 and the implementation of peer education has only recently begun, at least in Touya Secondary School, 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, youth selected for their potential as trainers. 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.

#### 4.2.5 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, has had 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 on the part of those participating. Rugby was very popular among youth 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 ChildFund and the Lao Rugby Federation. While some players, like Lao Khang, went on to become coaches

<sup>51</sup> Based on amounts stated in MoUs which appear to be based on direct costs in Nonghet District. Actual total expenditures likely to have been higher.



and support rugby at national level, this meant the end of rugby in Nonghet District, with no teams continuing to play in 2019.

#### 4.2.6 Promoting Weaving - A positive impact on family income and gender equity

While most livelihood activities had little, if any, positive impact, weaving seems to have been the exception, even though it benefitted a relatively small number of families in each target village. However, through providing training for those women who were interested and helping them to become aware of the local market, weaving has created a sustainable income that has had positive impacts on education (e.g. mothers are able to afford school materials for their children) and gender relations within the family, with husbands more willing to help out around the home so that their wives can weave.

## 5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are not starting from zero. ChildFund Laos has already started to make changes in their ways of working as a result of their learning from 10 years of multi-sectoral project implementation in Nonghet District, and some of these recommendations may have already been acted on. Nonetheless, all recommendations arising out of the experience of 10 years in Nonghet District are included here, as well as being reflected in the *Implementation Checklist (Annex 4)* which can be used to assess these aspects in CFL programs in other districts. Recommendations are organised according to the main categories used in the Findings section - i.e. Education, Children and Youth Empowerment, Well-Being, and Cross-cutting (including gender and disability).

### 5.1. Organisational

#### ***Reduce/streamline number of projects.***

ChildFund has already started to do this in children and youth empowerment with the Ready for Life project, and hopefully the same can be done in education as well as MCH. Ideally, there would be one or two projects per sector, which will make documenting, monitoring and evaluation, as well as reporting, much easier.

#### ***Consider going back to sectoral MoUs.***

While there were advantages to having a multi-sectoral MoU with the Office for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication in the past, it may be more efficient to have a set of MoUs with relevant sectoral partners at this stage, even at Ministry level. This will enable more direct and efficient communication and coordination with the relevant departments at both provincial and district levels.

#### ***Develop an exit strategy at least one year before withdrawing from a target District.***

Although CFL had been clear early on that their commitment to working in Nonghet District was for a ten year period, it appears that no overall or project specific exit strategy was ever developed. Given the significant ChildFund investment in the District, development of an exit strategy would have helped implement project close-out and exit planning - which projects are to be phased out and when, and what kind of support, if any, might be available beyond the phase-out date to help ensure the sustainability of ChildFund investments<sup>52</sup>.

#### ***Ensure District Government authorities, especially the District governor, are fully informed of project activities.***

While the main focus may be on working sectorally, it cannot be assumed that staff in each sector will keep the District Governor informed of project implementation within their sector. An effective means could be used - such as sending a monthly summary of key activities by sector - to ensure that she or he has a good overview of what is being supported by CFL within their target district.

#### ***Improve internal and external coordination among projects***

With streamlining of projects, this may not be so much of an issue as it was in Nonghet where there were many projects being implemented around the same time. However, it is particularly important if ChildFund is

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<sup>52</sup> These might include, for example, study visits to/from other target districts, activities to bring together children and young people from different districts, etc.



going to implement several projects in the same target villages. It is recommended that ChildFund and local Government counterparts from different projects and sectors/sub-sectors have a regular meeting where they share their plans and identify areas of potential cooperation. This could be done three monthly following sectoral planning meetings where draft activity plans could be made beforehand. These agreed on joint plans could then be presented at the more formal six monthly IMC (or equivalent) meetings.

### ***Ensure quality training at all levels.***

It was reported that the quality of the training supported by CFL in Nonghet District was not always of good quality, with some trainers not suitably knowledgeable or skilled in training delivery. CFL needs to ensure that all training provided targets the appropriate people, that training content is based on prior assessments of needs and levels of the participants, that trainers are suitably skilled in training delivery, and that there is follow-up after the training to ensure that the participants can apply what they have learned.

### ***Include village cluster administrators***

While it may be that some village cluster administrators were included in ChildFund supported activities<sup>53</sup>, the impression gained from interviews and project documents and some interviews was that CFL staff worked with the District authorities and at village level, not the village cluster level. Given their support role for villages in their clusters, it would seem to make good sense to include capacity building for these administrators where they exist.

### ***Avoid setting up new committees in target villages.***

As was mentioned earlier, there was a tendency to set up new village committees for specific projects which were not sustainable. It is recommended that the focus should be on building the capacity of existing committees, particularly the village administration committee, and, when appropriate, the VEDC, rather than setting up new committees which will not be sustained.

## **5.2 Education - Access and Quality**

### ***Give more attention to maintenance of school facilities longer term.***

Develop a training and support training module focused on longer term maintenance of school facilities, with a high level of children's involvement in monitoring, reporting and maintaining these. Even if these facilities have not been provided by ChildFund, schools and children would benefit from a practical and realistic maintenance plan that had the support and commitment from the school principal and teachers. A positive deviance study of schools where there is effective maintenance of school facilities could help to identify key factors and better understand the underlying reasons.

### ***Ensure quality post-training support for principals, teachers and VEDC members.***

In Nonghet, principals and teachers in some schools reported limited or no follow-up support following training, whereas all of those trained should have received follow-up support equally. It is suggested that if not being done already, a detailed and funded follow-up plan be developed for implementation following each in-service training workshop for principals, teachers and VEDCs. These plans should specify what needs to be done on each follow-up visit, by whom and when, as well as how it will be reported.

### ***Revisit the possibility of school gardens.***

While most who are involved in education in the Lao PDR feel that school gardens are a 'good idea' with many potential benefits for children, especially when they are integrated into the curriculum and everyday life of the school, they often do not succeed and clearly did not work in target schools in Nonghet District. It is suggested that an example of a successful primary school garden be located and that a study visit be organised with a view to identifying the underlying factors that have contributed to its success. This visit could involve CFL and DESB staff, as well as one or two motivated principals from target districts who are interested in piloting this activity.

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<sup>53</sup> This was not mentioned in project documentation nor in interviews.

### 5.3 Children and Youth Empowerment

#### ***Review how ChildFund Pass It Back is being implemented vis-a-vis local Government.***

While the problems that occurred with this activity may have been unique to Nonghet, it would be worth conducting an internal review of coordination and communication with local Government regarding Pass It Back activities. If a similar situation is found to exist regarding poor communication and coordination, ChildFund may want to consider making changes to prevent the possibility of similar problems arising in other districts.

### 5.4 Equitable Well-Being

#### ***Focus on areas where CFL has knowledge, experience and expertise and a successful track record.***

Projects focussed on improving well-being covered areas which included MCH, water and sanitation, income generation through livestock and chicken raising and weaving, kitchen and school gardens to improve nutrition. Of these, MCH, water and sanitation and, to a lesser extent, income generation through weaving had the most impact. In the future, it would seem to make the most sense for CFL to focus on these areas where they were able to achieve impact, and avoid technical areas where they have less expertise and where risks are higher, namely involvement in livestock and chicken raising.

### 5.5 Cross-Cutting

#### 5.5.1 Gender

##### ***Incorporate gender related activities (with budget allocation) into project design and develop capacity of staff to effectively implement these.***

The gender assessment conducted in 2019 found that most of CFL's projects were 'gender accommodating' rather than 'transformative', and this was confirmed by this evaluation, with the exceptions being the ChildFund Pass It Back and Ready For Life projects. The gender assessment also recommended that gender implementation guidelines should be developed that can be integrated as part of project activities, and that CFL staff should be trained regularly in the use of these guidelines, as well as developing their capacity around gender, perhaps through the inclusion of gender related topics in other training for staff. The gender assessment also recommended adding at least one budgeted gender-focused activity into all new project proposals where possible.

#### 5.5.2 Targeting the most disadvantaged - Disability and Poverty

##### ***Incorporate strategies and specific activities to better include children with disabilities and the poorest (also with budget allocation) into project design and implementation***

While there were some efforts to reach the most disadvantaged children and youth - particularly the poorest and CWD - in some of the projects implemented in Nonghet District over the past decade, this was often not included in project design or carried out in a systematic way. By incorporating specific activities, each with a budget, in project design to reach these disadvantaged children and youth, this is more likely to happen.

## 6. Conclusion

The impact evaluation documented in this report has been particularly challenging, largely due to the large number of projects involved, as well as the fact that it covers a 10 year period during which time ChildFund and Government staff have changed and memories, particularly of the earlier years, are not so vivid. Nonetheless, through reviewing a range of available documents, talking with people who do remember what was done in the past, and having the opportunity to visit a sample of target villages and seeing the impact or lack of impact first hand, has enabled a picture to emerge of ChildFund's impact on Nonghet District over the past 10 years.

The picture that has emerged is varied in terms of changes and impact, as would be expected. The ChildFund program has had positive impacts in several areas, including MCH, water and sanitation, access to ECE and primary education, and children and youth empowerment. The impact that is most visible and most often referred to by those whose lives have been changed in some way involves a combination of 'hardware' and

'software' . For example, maternal child health care has significantly improved the lives of mothers and young children, with facilities that are clean and well equipped and with trained and efficient personnel at all levels. A Government policy that ensures almost free health care for mothers and babies has helped ensure maximum use of these facilities. Target villages now have access to clean water near their homes, and most households in each village have toilets that are being used. Almost 100% of primary school age children in target villages are now attending school, and enrolment in ECE is expanding. While the level of self-confidence and participation of children and youth, particularly girls, is more abstract and thus more difficult to measure, the range of youth empowerment activities introduced by ChildFund have clearly made a positive difference in their lives. This was apparent in interviews with children and youth as well as their parents, and is exemplified in role models like Lao Khang, a young woman from Namkonngoua Village, who, because of her involvement in ChildFund Pass It Back, went on to become a positive role model and coach training other young women and also participated in several international events.

Not all of these projects that did have positive impact were sustained after CFL support ended. This is particularly the case with children and youth activities, which were dependent on CFL staff support and which ended when project support ended. This included Child Clubs in primary schools, video and writing activities for youth, as well as rugby. However, the fact that these activities were not sustained does not necessarily mean that they did not have positive impact - not all activities have to be sustainable in order to bring about positive changes. It is just that these changes are more difficult to assess, though they can be seen, for example, in the positive role models for girls that coaches like Lao Khang exemplify.

At the same time, not all projects have had positive outcomes. While access to ECE and primary education has expanded considerably due to the construction of school facilities, the quality of teaching and learning in many target schools remains low or average, and the facilities, particularly the toilets and water supply in those schools, are not often well maintained. Apart from weaving and, to a lesser extent, kitchen gardens, livelihood activities, including animal and chicken raising, as well as school gardens, have not been successful in terms of achieving longer term impact due to a range of factors - the quality of training and support provided, failure to embed activities like school gardens into everyday school life, lack of longer term maintenance planning and monitoring, and other factors.

However, learning is not only about looking at good practices and how they can be repeated - it is also about learning from failure. Hopefully this report examining ChildFund's experience in Nonghet District over the past 10 years will provide examples of both good practices as well as lessons which can be learnt from projects which did not go well, and will thus contribute to ChildFund's work and positive changes in the lives of children, youth and their communities, in other districts in the future.

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