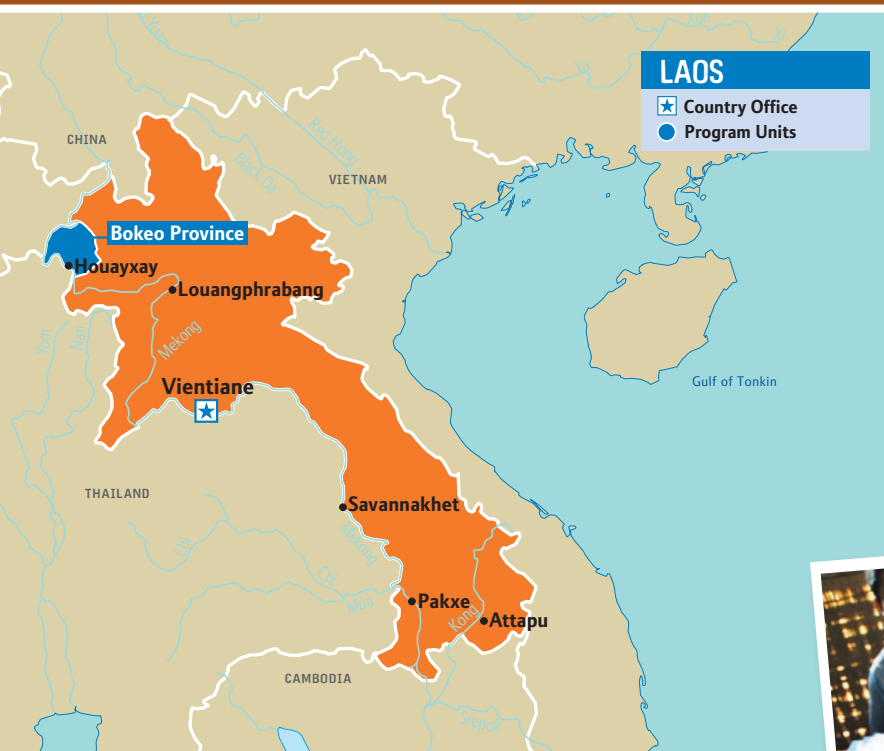


# A YEAR IN LAOS

## SUMMARY REPORT 2011

Plan is helping communities set up  
nursery schools and playgrounds



### About Laos

Plan began work in Laos in 2007. Our main focus is on the poorest communities situated in Bokeo Province.

With 49 ethnic groups and languages, Laos is proud of its rich cultural diversity. Despite some economic progress, poverty levels remain very high.

### Problems affecting the children of Laos

- Many children in poor districts lack access to primary school education
- Education standards are low
- Most villages lack any type of sanitation
- Over 40% of children nationwide are malnourished
- Children in Laos risk neglect, violence, abuse and exploitation
- Low awareness of children's rights



Primary school teachers receive Library book management training.

## PLAN'S PRIORITIES IN LAOS

### 1 Education

- Helping communities set up nursery schools and playgroups
- Supporting teacher training
- Providing equipment, materials and scholarships

### 2 Sanitation, hygiene and drinking water

- Working with communities to improve sanitation and set up or expand drinking water supply systems
- Supporting school committees to build school toilets and water systems

### 3 Improving early nutrition

- Investigating approaches to the improvement of early nutrition, including maternal nutrition and child nutrition in the first two years of life

### 4 Child protection

- Training school and village committees on their responsibilities for the protection of children from violence, neglect and abuse
- Promoting anti-bullying and discrimination campaigns in schools
- Assisting government organisations to strengthen child protection services
- Raising awareness of children's rights.

By being a child sponsor, you have directly supported projects like the ones below. Your ongoing support sustains our long-term development work which impacts the lives of children, their families and communities for generations to come.

Together we are making an invaluable difference to the lives of people in Laos.

To learn more about Plan's work in Laos visit:

[www.plan.org.au/ourwork/asia/laos](http://www.plan.org.au/ourwork/asia/laos)



Boys learning in primary school.

## CASE STUDY: PROJECT PUPPET THEATRE

One of the hardest things about working in the Bokeo region of Laos is its massive ethnic diversity.

There are 15 ethnic groups, and a staggering 44 sub groups, and each group has its own distinct language. What's more, many women and children don't speak the official language (Lao) and levels of adult literacy are very low.

For Plan, this is a problem because it makes it difficult to communicate vital messages that will improve people's lives: messages about the importance of education, for example, or clean water and child protection. But one way we've found of getting round the language barrier couldn't be simpler: we encourage local young volunteers to perform puppet shows with skits and stories that highlight these messages. And the shows have proved extremely popular with children in 22 remote villages.

The shows usually start at seven in the evening, because most children and their families are busy in the daytime. To kick the performance off, the children are encouraged to sing songs together as a warm up. Then comes the main event: puppet theatre lasting for around two hours, with usually more than 100 people taking part.

**“This puppet show is a great way of raising awareness because people can understand the message”**

### Serious messages

The main topics covered in the shows are water and sanitation, education, child protection and Plan sponsorship. The children learn, for example, how important it is to use a safe water source, how they should wash their hands before eating, and how important a good education could prove in providing them opportunities for the future. And because the topics are covered in an enjoyable, engaging way, the message really gets through.

Vongdeung Ounke is a government official who works in Paktha district. “Before Plan started working in this district,” she says, “we used presentations without any pictures to raise awareness among the village people. This was not effective. I think this puppet show is a great way of raising awareness because the people can understand the message easily and remember it well.”

She is also a performer in the puppet shows. “I have played different characters, including the grandmother of a small child whose parents do not allow her to go to school. I am very happy to see the children joining in the activities and enjoying the performance.”

Most of the performers in the puppet shows are members of local government, women's groups and youth organisations. Plan trains these volunteers for 10 days to make sure they understand the issues and can communicate them effectively to children.

### Opening up

Young volunteers also have an important role to play. Volunteers were recruited from the villages we work with, and they were shy at the beginning – some so much so that they were not even able to reply to our questions. But after a couple of months, they gradually gained in confidence and were able to perform in front of large crowds of people. Nineteen-year-old Pa Lee is one of the volunteers, and she found the experience really widened her horizons.

“If I did not get this opportunity to be part of Plan, I would have remained as a farm girl, doing farm work for a living and staying at home according to the customs of the Hmong women,” she says. “Now I have had this opportunity with Plan, I would like to work with children. I want them to have a better education than I had when they grow up.”

After the puppet shows, the performers do a question-and-answer session with the audience to check their understanding and also get feedback on the show. This means that with each performance, the puppet show is improving, better meeting the needs of the villagers of remote Bokeo.

## HIGHLIGHTS IN 2010

- Increased the number of sponsored children from 550 to 3,304
- Supported the building of nursery schools in 12 villages
- Distributed stationery, toys and art materials to almost 1,200 nursery school children
- Supported Children's Day celebrations in the districts of Pha Oudom and Paktha. More than 500 people took part



Girl learning how to wash hands.