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Laos, Education

Recommendations for Laos; Education and Food Insecurity

Health. We think of health as something without illness. The definition being in a state of being free of illness or injury. I like to take this and add an extension. Health. Being well-fed, a stable education, a fun and happy life. And when I think of the current situation in Laos, I can't see health for all. Laos is the only landlocked country in Southeast Asia ("Land and Climate") and is bordered by Vietnam, Myanmar, and China. The Mekong River runs along its western border ("Laos"), providing a critical water source for agriculture and daily life. Laos gained independence from France in October 1953 ("Laos") and has since been governed by a communist government, with Thongloun Sisoulith currently serving as president. The country is known as the most bombed nation in the world due to intense U.S. bombing during the Vietnam War. While its natural beauty, including stunning waterfalls, draws tourists, Laos remains a nation struggling with poverty, food insecurity, and inadequate educational infrastructure.

What is food insecurity? Food insecurity is the lack of a stable diet. Whether that be very unhealthy and very small amounts or nothing at all. As of the most recent data, 20% of people in Laos are food insecure. This is typically found in rural areas. Food insecurity went from a minor issue to severe in 2020. Many are facing malnutrition. Nearly 62% of Laotians live in rural areas where farming is the primary source of income, but families often rely on small-scale agriculture, growing rice, corn, and other staples. However, poor soil quality, limited irrigation, and the challenges posed by Laos' mountainous terrain contribute to low agricultural yields. Additionally, leftover unexploded ordnance (UXO) from the Vietnam War limits the use of arable land, making it dangerous for farmers to cultivate new areas. These factors contribute to high rates of undernutrition, particularly in children, where nearly 33% suffer from stunted growth due to inadequate food intake.

I find that these issues may be connected back to the young. Education could have an impact on the amount of available food and resources. We see kids often dropping out of school around primary school with a 5.2% rate. The general being 11.5%. Now, this number may seem small but with this many children dropping it out, it can and has caused an issue. In Laotian schools, most everything is taught in Lao. As previously mentioned, Lao isn't the only language spoken there. This is seen as an issue when it comes to children continuing with their education. I, myself, would not be able to learn anything if it was taught to me in an entirely different language. Among many issues in Laos, the language is also a major part. In Laos you'll find many different languages being spoken. The main 3 being Lao, Khmu, and Hmong. But even then, Thai and Chinese can be found. With so many different languages and even more dialects, communication can become tricky. In a school environment, even more so. If you were trying to teach a class, yet only 20 students spoke the language you teach in, you wouldn't be very successful. This is why I believe we should input mobile language schools, and include more language into everyday teaching for younger students. Mobile schools are seen throughout the U.S., mainly as libraries. We can use this same blueprint and turn these into fully working language schools. Working with UNICEF to

provide volunteer teachers. These mobile schools would teach Lao and English. English being something you can take many places, and Lao being the official language of Laos. Education plays a significant role in alleviating food insecurity, but Laos faces serious challenges in this area as well. Many rural schools lack resources, qualified teachers, and basic supplies needed for effective learning. Language barriers further complicate education, as many children from ethnic minorities do not speak Lao as their first language. Improving education can empower communities to adopt better farming techniques, improve income generation, and ultimately reduce food insecurity. Mobile schools and community learning centers could help bridge the gap by offering education in both Lao and English, ensuring that children in remote areas gain access to knowledge that can transform their lives. The impact of this solution could be very powerful. If more students can be educated, this will create more job opportunities. The more success they can have, the better it is for them and even their community.

To combat food insecurity in Laos, several strategies can be implemented. Increasing funding for education, developing mobile schools, and addressing language barriers can significantly improve literacy and empower future generations. Simultaneously, investing in agricultural innovation, expanding irrigation systems, and clearing unexploded ordnance can enhance food production and safety. Additionally, international partnerships and humanitarian efforts can provide much-needed resources.