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**SOME NOTES ON THE SEVENTH FIVE-YEAR PLAN,
THE FOUR BREAKTHROUGHS, AND THE THREE BUILDS, WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EDUCATION SECTOR DEVELOPMENT**

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Notes to the reader

1. The Three Builds and the Four Breakthroughs emerged from the 9th Party Congress (March 17-21, 2011). The National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2011-2015 (NSED7)¹ and the “Resolution of the 9th Congress of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party”² (referred to below as “the Resolution”) are available in PDF format and can be found easily on the Internet. The Four Breakthroughs are expressed relatively clearly (if simply) in the NSED7, Appendix 7: Definitions, p. 222-223. The Three Builds do not appear as clearly in the NSED7; instead they appear as numerous references throughout the document to human resource development and staff capacity building. They are clearly stated in the Resolution and promulgated in the Prime Minister’s “*Sam Sang Directive*” of October 2012.
2. The Three Builds and the Four Breakthroughs have been widely discussed in the Lao media, and English translations (of varying quality) of these public discussions have appeared. The original Party documents are not widely available, and I have not found any complete or authoritative translation. The most authoritative presentation of the Four Breakthroughs is in the English translation of NSED7, pp. 222-223. There they are referred to as the four objectives of the “Dynamic Plan”.
3. In the sections below I quote and summarize from the authoritative translation of NSED7. For understanding the Four Breakthroughs and the Three Builds I have had to rely on the public media, including mainly the Vientiane Times and the (*Khaosan Pathet Lao*) KPL News Agency.
4. The concepts used in NSED7 are clear enough to anyone familiar with development planning. The authoritative translation (but note that translations are almost never “authorized” or “official”) is of medium quality but easily understood. The translations of public statements concerning the Three Builds are usually of medium or lower quality, but the concepts involved appear to be relatively clear and are relatively easily grasped. The translations of public statements concerning the Four Breakthrough seem generally to be of still lower quality and the concepts are not easily grasped.
5. As a consequence, for the Three Builds and the Four Breakthroughs I am compelled to rely on my own interpretation of what I have read and understood from discussions with well-informed persons. In all cases, “sensitive” words that appear below concerning the Four Breakthroughs have appeared in *more than one translation* of authoritative sources (*e.g.*, a speech, usually exhortatory, by a minister or vice-minister).
6. Finally, the Lao word “*boukthalu*” means literally and concretely “breakthrough”, like when a tree falls and breaks through a roof. Sometimes it is translated “dynamic” or “priority area”, which I believe lowers the level of urgency the Party is trying to communicate. Nevertheless, although “dynamic” is not an accurate translation of the word “*boukthalu*”, it does express the spirit of the 9th Party Congress and the 7th NSED7: The plan is intended to be

¹ Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI). (2011). ‘The Seventh Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2011-2015)’. Vientiane Capital: MPI. October 7. Reference is made here to the authoritative English translation, PDF format, 228 pages.

² “Resolution of the 9th Congress of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party”. Presented by Head of the Congress Secretariat, Mr Somsavat Lengsavad. Undated. Reference is made here to the authoritative English translation, PDF format, 9 pages.

flexible and dynamic, based on the actual situation at the time, to ensure achievement of the planned objectives. Similarly, the Four Breakthroughs are clearly assigned high priority by the Party.

7. In a figurative sense, the word “*boukthalu*” has an honorable history in the political context, for example when it is used to describe Prime Minister Kayson’s decision on renovation and the introduction of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in 1986. In the present public discussion, this reference to Kayson’s “breakthrough approach” with the introduction of the NEM has appeared several times. It appears that today, as in 1986, the sense within the Party is of an *urgent need to break away from entrenched but ineffective ways of thinking and behaving*. It is more urgent than a simple priority, and it points to essential and significant changes in direction. The Four Breakthroughs point the direction, and the Three Builds allocate responsibility.

I. NSEDP7 – THE SEVENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (2011-2015)

8. NSEDP7 places a stronger focus on human resource development than previous Five Year Plans. Some excerpts Section 2.2.1 “Education and Human Resource Development” are given below.

Educational development in this plan assumes high priority. Effort will be made to expand opportunities for accessing quality education continuously. Educational policies must be implemented with a clear vision to develop all levels of education, in close conjunction with national defense and social security (*sic*). It is important to build up human resources to serve the people, and bring about gradual modernization and industrialization in the country, closer to international standards. There is a need to continue with reforms in the national education system, uplifting its quality and widening access to opportunities for the people at large – in particular, ethnic groups, women and those deprived of opportunities by developing curricula, providing teaching and learning materials and providing training to teachers and other staff to increase children’s access to school and to promote gender equity in education (to achieve MDG goals no. 2 and 3) and also to ensure a balance in education between three areas: physical education, intellectual education, and behavioral education (for character building). (Pp. 110).

... Various skills must be developed among the people in accordance with actual demand in each field of work, to improve them as professional workers: technicians, engineers, management staff, supporting staff, etc. The purpose is to build Lao people’s skills at different levels so that they are qualified and skilled and have a healthy mind, so that they can contribute to national development process. (P. 139).

9. Targets include the achievement of the main education sector goals by 2015, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: NSEDP7 Education Targets by 2015

Enrolment of age group 3-5 in kindergarten and primary preparation classes	39 %
Kindergarten teachers' curriculum at diploma level to be offered at 3 more institutions (Vientiane Capital, Saravane, Luang Namtha).	
Childcare centers and kindergartens to accommodate 22% more children	
Primary-school level preparation class enrolment for 5-year old pupils	55%
Primary school enrolment rate	98%
Annual primary school repetition and dropout rate	2-3%
Lower secondary education enrolment rate	75%
Upper secondary education enrolment rate	43%
Literacy in populations of age 15 + years	87%
Technical students (50% women, 20% from remote and/or poor families)	50,000
Diploma and degree students per 100,000 population	1,640

10. Major education project activities envisaged in NSEDP7 include:

- National educational reform;
- Continuously enhancement capacity of teachers;
- Policies and operational plan on teacher development and management;
- Construction of 20 primary schools;
- Construction and improvement of Savannakhet University;
- Improvement and expansion vocational education in the southern provinces;
- Development of technology for quality of education improvement; and
- Expansion of access to schooling.

11. Other measures to be taken include:

- Building and/or renovating the education infrastructure, including laboratories and equipment therein;
- Developing new scientific branches in teaching;
- Developing curricula for enabling students to obtain knowledge in diverse fields, in both theory and practice, to equal quality of that in the region and up to international standards;
- Raising investment in the education sector to 18% of the budget;
- Increasing development cooperation and attract more assistance (including lesson learned and fund) development partners;
- Expanding education access into remote areas, and creating suitable conditions for disadvantaged children, especially the poor, females, non-Lao ethnic, and children with disabilities.

- Formulating a “support policy” for especially gifted students, to induce them to become scientists and highly skilled administrators.
- Continuing with the “tuition fee” and “no tuition fee” policy in the education sector at all levels and grades, and reduce fees at the kindergarten and primary school levels by increasing budgetary support;
- Upgrading skills of teachers, professors, and scientists to be in sufficient quantity and quality;
- Considering a fair remuneration to teachers and incentives to the scientific community;
- Encouraging society to widely participate in education, create encouraging conditions for the private sector, parents and people in general, to participate in educational development;
- Further expanding private schools, which are important components of the national education system;
- Introducing newer technologies, such as information and communication technology (ICT), to match global educational standards.
- Linking education with nutrition for establishing synergies between health, nutrition and education, especially for girl’s and women’s nutrition;
- Integrating disaster management into school curricula, and curricula of Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs);
- Considering natural disaster risks in new school construction;

12. In September 2011 the Ministry of Education was merged with the National Sports Committee and renamed Ministry of Education and sports (MOES). With the renaming and reorganization of the Ministry of include sports, a number of new targets have been introduced, listed in Table 2.

Table 2: NSEDP7 Sports Targets by 2015

Regular participation in sports and gymnastics out of the total population	75%
“Sports families” out of the total population	25%
Provinces participating in sports	90%
Districts participating in sports	75%
Infrastructure for sports and physical exercise developed at the provincial level and half developed at district level.	
Training of people aged 5-35 to be sportsmen and upgrade Lao sports to international level	15%
Organizing 9th National Sports Competition in Luang Prabang in 2011 to be completed successfully	
Organizing 10th National Sports to be held in Oudomxay in 2014	
Developing, upgrading, and selecting sports players across the country in order to prepare them for domestic and international competitions	

13. Major sports project activities envisaged in NSEDP7 include:
- Project on infrastructure construction for sports facilities;
 - Project on infrastructure construction for sports facilities in Luang Prabang Province;
 - Project on infrastructure construction for sports facilities in Oudomxay Province;
 - Project on capacity-building for sport administrators; and
 - Project on Lao sport players development.
14. Other measures to be taken include:
- Widening the catchment for seeking gifted sportsmen in various branches and improving their quality;
 - Providing some critical training equipment and materials for strengthening the sportsmen's capacity;
 - Intensifying coordination with concerned parties in sports development, and upgrading sports personnel for regional and international games;
 - Exploring the mass of hidden potential from the center down to the grassroots continuously for Lao sport development; and
 - Attracting more assistance from neighboring countries for sport development.

II. *BOUKTHALU*: THE FOUR BREAKTHROUGHS

15. At the 9th Party Congress (March 17-21, 2011), it was noted that the Party would insist on continuing the policy of innovation to exit the status of Least Developed Countries (LDC) by 2020 and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.³ Laos needed to change from a natural resource-based economy to a more commodity-based economy. A major theme at the Congress was the need for *swift action* in order to halve poverty and provide universal primary education by 2015.

16. To achieve the NSEDP7 targets, Party and Government has introduced four “break-through” goals:

- (1) Breakthrough in *thinking*, to release and renew the unchanged, conservative mind, old stereotypes, recklessness, unfairness, dogmatism, and complacency;
- (2) Breakthrough in *human resource development* in all areas, especially in development and building capacity of civil servants in various areas, according to the real situation;
- (3) Breakthrough in solving the *governance and management* systems that are hindering commercial production and service delivery; and

³ The “2020 Goal” or “2020 Vision” was set by the 6th Party Congress in March 1996 and refined and reaffirmed by each succeeding Party Congress. The MDG Goals were established following the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration in September 2000 and subsequently “nationalized” to reflect the particular situation in Laos. Two goals are directly and specifically relevant to the education sector: (MDG 2) Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling; and (MDG3) MDG 3: Eliminate gender disparity at all levels by 2015.

- (4) Breakthrough in *poverty eradication* by seeking the source of funds and special promotion policy, and creating social and economic infrastructure by setting priority on holistic development.

17. These four breakthrough goals must be implemented together, not only one or two. To enhance the Four Breakthrough, the Party adopted several innovative policy guidelines, including the Three Builds. Taken together the Four Breakthroughs and the Three Builds serve as major policy guides for the coming years.

III. SAM SANG: THE THREE BUILDS

18. To achieve the aims of NSEDP7, closer coordination is needed between central and local administrative bodies. In important decision-making, consideration needs to be given to the roles and responsibilities of all levels. The Three Builds directive is part of the Politburo's policy of devolution of responsibility to local authorities. Under the *Sam Sang* policy, Government will: (a) Build the provinces as strategic units; (b) Strengthen the capacity of the districts in all regards; and (c) Build villages into development units, in some cases through merging villages into clusters (*khumban*). *Sam Sang* is "a revolution for the new era", to promote more active administration at the grassroots level, and to drive development into a positive new phase.

19. All line ministries will be involved in a pilot program of the directive, which began on October 1, 2012. In fiscal year 2012/13, 105 villages in 51 districts will take part. The first ministry to take part in the scheme will be the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), which will send its staff to help local administrations collect information. This will be followed by the Ministry of Finance (MOF), which will estimate the financial constraints.

20. Implementation focuses on management delivery and the handling of responsibility between the administrations at central, provincial, district, and village levels. Implementation requires officials at central and provincial levels to coordinate with one another more closely. They must acknowledge in what areas provincial administrations are lacking, and what responsibility each should undertake to rectify these shortcomings.

21. According to Party guidelines, ministries and government agencies at the central level must focus mainly on management at the macro level, while agencies at the local level should fulfil their duties in the implementation of projects relating to governance and socio-economic management in accordance with Lao law.

IV. THE FOUR BREAKTHROUGHS, THE THREE BUILDS, AND THE PARTY LINE

22. Following the decentralization that began in 1997/98, the Ministry of Education (MOE) (now Ministry of Education and Sports, MOES) had limited direct control over the education sector expenditure, because the provinces have had considerable discretion in budget planning and management. Although considerable progress has been made, in the education sector as in other sectors, realization of the ambitious aims of the 9th Party Congress and the 7th Plan require a thrust in capacity development at all levels. Taken together, the Four Breakthroughs and the Three Builds represent such a thrust. As such, they also represent a strengthening of the Party line from central level down to grassroots level, within the spirit of democratic centralism.