Quality of literacy instruction - Stakeholders reported a significant gap in literacy instruction quality and capacity. This was confirmed through classroom observations where it was observed that teaching approaches such as reading to the class, playing games, engaging in reading activities, and using a variety of teaching materials are not used consistently.

Literacy - Reading skills of Grade 2 students were relatively low both in terms of reading comprehension and listening comprehension. In general, students whose primary language is Lao performed better than non-Lao speakers. Low literacy outcomes are likely due to several factors, the most important of which is reduced instruction time and reduced curriculum due to COVID-19.

Health and hygiene practices - In general students are practicing good handwashing behavior while at school, which stakeholders noted is likely due to reinforcement from teachers and parents due to the onset of COVID-19. Latrine use at school is low which stakeholders attributed to the fact that many households lack latrines. Students who do not have the habit of using latrines at home are unaccustomed to using them at school.

Safe food preparation and storage knowledge and practices - Quantitative findings suggest that students are satisfied with the school meals. However, qualitative feedback suggested that cooks could benefit from additional training on how to make the meals more nutritious, varied, and tasty.
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: IMPROVED LITERACY OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

- Improved Quality of Literacy Instruction
  - Teaching approaches such as reading to the class, playing games, engaging in reading activities, and using a variety of teaching materials are not used consistently.
  - Only 9.3% of students were classified as readers. Of those, 55% percent can read with comprehension.
- Improved Attentiveness
  - Student attentiveness was measured at 87% based on classroom observations.
  - Almost half of the students (45%) demonstrated proficiency in identifying symbols.
  - 94% of students indicated they had eaten breakfast and 92% reported they ate lunch at school, with only 7% of children surveyed during the afternoon saying they were hungry.
- Improved Student Attendance
  - Student attendance rates are high across all grade levels, ranging from 91% to 93%, and evenly split between boys and girls.
  - 92% of students reported they wash their hands at school and 80% indicated they use soap.
  - School meals was noted as an incentive for student attendance, while the agricultural calendar and childcare assistance were noted as barriers.
  - Less than one-third (28%) of students reported missing school in the past week due to illness.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: INCREASED USE OF HEALTH AND DIETARY PRACTICES

- Improved Knowledge of Health and Hygiene Practices
  - 92% of students reported they wash their hands at school and 80% indicated they use soap.
  - Only 43% of students reported using a latrine, with girls more frequently reporting use than boys.
- Improved Knowledge of Safe Food Prep and Storage Practices
  - Cooks noted needing additional training on how to prepare tasty and nutritious meals as well as access to new equipment and repairs to storage rooms.
- Increased Access to Clean Water and Sanitation Services
  - Stakeholders noted challenges around maintenance of water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities and lack of access to water.
  - Greater coordination among government institutions, simplified monitoring procedures, and additional training and capacity building is essential for handover and sustainability.
- Increased Capacity of Government Institutions
  - The government has demonstrated commitment to the project, but faces significant resource, time, and capacity constraints.
- Increased Government Support
  - Parents, community members, and Village Education Development Councils (VEDCs) are motivated to support sustainability but must overcome resource and capacity constraints.

FOUNDATIONAL RESULTS
Build teacher capacity and improve mechanisms to support quality instruction.

Teachers continue to face challenges implementing positive pedagogy approaches, managing multi-grade classrooms, instructing non-Lao language students, and dealing with student learning loss due to school closures. LEAPS III should provide additional training and capacity building to teachers on teaching approaches and classroom management techniques. LEAPS III should also consider working with teachers and schools to improve access to at home learning as well as using community-based models to support group learning during times of school closure.

Strengthen the management and advocacy capacity of VEDCs.

VEDCs could serve as a strong community advocate and sustainable resource for LEAPS initiatives. Previous phases on LEAPS have been successful in building the capacity of VEDC members, however, members lack specific management and advocacy skills needed to support the transition and handover of the school meals program. LEAPS III should provide VEDC members with targeted project management, financial management, and advocacy training so the VEDCs can better support and manage school-based initiatives.

Promote sustainability through targeted support to the GOL.

Given LEAPS III focus on handover and sustainability, there is a need to provide targeted capacity building support to the GOL to overcome potential barriers to sustainability. Specifically, LEAPS III should work with the GOL to improve coordination among district-level government officials to ensure that school-based initiatives are properly planned and resourced. LEAPS III should also co-create a simple, user-friendly monitoring and evaluation system that accommodates the GOL’s time and resource constraints while providing relevant and timely information. Lastly, LEAPS III should support the GOL in developing guidelines and policies for dealing with national level challenges such as managing multi-grade classrooms, addressing the needs of non-Lao language speakers, and promoting at home learning.

We think that the school meals program has a good impact on the students’ attendance and performance. The students have more understanding of their learning. They are healthy and clever.

- Mother, Phine