SSUNS 2016: Position Paper

**Committee:** UNESCO

**Delegation:** Laos

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**Topic 1: Governance and its Effects on Education**

Many children and adolescents across the globe do not receive a good formal education, and are facing far reaching consequences as a result, including poverty caused by unemployment, decreased standards of living, and high mortality rates, which is very common in developing countries and countries afflicted by conflict (Ton-That, 2016). The root of the problem is governance, the establishment and implementation of policies conducted by members of a governing body (Ton-That, 2016).Poor governance hinders the quality of education in a nation drastically. If the resources are misused, the governing body is unable to spend its funding in a productive way and fails to serve its people with full capacity. Poor governance leads to lower levels of education, corruption, political instability and prevents governments from properly distributing funds to various aspects of the economy, especially progress in education (Ton-That, 2016). Nations in conflict are forced to deal with various situations that lead to a diminishing ability to improve their system of government and education.

With not enough financial support to build our education system, the Government of Laos has been working hard towards this goal. Reaching the goal of no pervasive corruption within low-level officials is a top priority. The Prime Minister of Laos is working to further strengthen measures to address undesirable practices within governing bodies and further improve the efficiency of anti-corruption law enforcement (Pike, 2013). The newly implemented law provides criminal penalties for official corruption and those caught giving or accepting bribes are punishable by fines and/or imprisonment (Pike, 2013)

One solution is following the UNCAC United Nations Convention Against Corruption. If wages of low-level officials are increased, they will be more reluctant to accept bribes in the future. The laws against bribery and corruption should be strictly enforced at all times and punish those who are caught with a jail sentence. International surveillance by UN officials in corrupted countries could be established and the country could be rewarded with more financial aid for educational purposes if the international body finds improvement in the control of corruption. Governments could also reward those who bring forward the people who are involved in corruption with a monetary incentive. These would be good solutions for low developed countries including Laos that are working to eliminate corruption, allowing them to receive the financial aid that is essential for investing and building their educational sector within the next few years.

**Topic 2: Preservation of World Heritage Sites**

Laos is home to two World Heritage sites, including the Town of Luang, described as the best preserved city in Southeast Asia, and attracting over 530,000 tourists annually (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). When it was added to the World Heritage list in 1995, the prices escalated drastically, causing the long-time residents to move out, leaving only the wealthiest to reside there (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). Dullan Timothy, an expert of cultural tourism, at Arizona State University believes the site has become a commodity of outsiders, “rather than remaining in control of the people whose cultural heritage it really is. It’s a matter of powerful versus the powerless (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.).” Many argue that this town has now lost its cultural heritage and character as a result of private interests of the rich and powerful.

The criteria needed to be met to be selected for the World Heritage list is too broad, as the nomination is required to only meet one of the ten selection criteria. There are already 1,052 sites that have been placed on the list, but as more are being added, it has become increasingly difficult to care for and protect these sites (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.).Therefore, the Operational Guidelines for the World Heritage Convention should be revised in such as way that, for the nomination to be designated, it must meet at least 3 of the 10 selection criteria. Furthermore, a restriction could be placed on the number of sites in each country – which will be determined by their acreage and population – in order to provide equal opportunities for other countries to have their sites designated. This will help to ensure that the sites chosen will be of outstanding universal value as well as decelerate the rapidly expanding list of World Heritage sites.

To help preserve the cultural integrity of World Heritage sites in conflict zones, it is imperative that international governments work together to gather UN peacekeepers that would go to unstable regions to help protect and preserve the sites. This is similar to the idea that was first introduced by Lester B. Pearson to send UN peacekeepers in 1956 during the Suez Canal Crisis and has been implemented again in Syria and Iraq, to protect World Heritage sites from ISIS attacks (Tattrie, n.d.).

Another factor that puts several sites at risk, including Laung Prabang in Laos, is climate change and private interests. Climate change has caused extensive damage to several World Heritage sites around the world. The Great Barrier Reef provides such an example, as it was to be included in the report that listed the “in-danger” World Heritage sites as it had been severely affected, but was ultimately omitted for fear of having a negative impact on the country’s tourism industry. Private interests in the tourism industry have led to the deterioration and endangerment of several World Heritage Sites as many people have not been informed of the ecological footprint that they are leaving when littering and polluting these sites. A monetary incentive can be offered to entice the private interests to co-operate with the preservation of these sites. The amount can be decided based on several factors including severity, location, and the efforts put forth in order to help preserve the site.

In this modern technological era, media has a great impact on society, and has the power to influence while informing people of the situation. If awareness is spread about this rising issue, more can be done as a country to create resolutions and set goals to combat it, similar to the Paris Agreement’s goal of limiting global temperature rise to less than 2 degrees Celsius. By observing these solutions, World Heritage sites across the globe will be preserved and protected for years to come.

**Topic 3: Supporting and Accomplishing Education 2030**

Among the various on-going problems faced by the world today, low standards of education and literacy rates, are among the extensive list of issues, experienced by several developing and newly developed nations from around the world. Laos is one of the many countries that has been deeply affected by this problem, with a literacy rate of only 73% (Hays, 2014). Though, the government has identified that the roots of the problem lie in insufficient funding, conflict, natural disasters, and gender and cultural equality (Ton-That, 2016).

The factors that have led underdeveloped countries into this downwards spiral of poverty from a lack of education, stems from the lack of sufficient funding. The government of Laos has recognized this, but is unable to invest a larger sum of money than 3.3% of its GDP into building and promoting schools (Atlas of Gender and Development, 2011). Since there is a limited amount of government revenue, many of our citizens are uneducated and unemployed. As a result, villages have either one, or no primary schools, or dilapidated structures, sometimes with no walls or a roof, that serve as schools (Atlas of Gender and Development, 2011). Very few teachers are employed, as the wages are low, and irregular.7

The government of Laos, has begun to take steps to resolving this on-going issue that has plagued our country for decades. Primary education has been made free and mandatory for children between the ages of 6 and 11 (Hays, 2014). However, many girls are still discouraged to continue to lower secondary education because of traditional beliefs, additional costs, and accessibility issues (Atlas of Gender and Development, 2011).The country has not reached the level of education that has been projected by the government. The system could be greatly enhanced if more funds could be allocated to this pressing and crucial issue.

In order, for the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 to succeed, it is imperative that more prosperous and developed member states of the United Nations provide financial aid to those countries who are struggling to pay for improvements in their education system. An agreement should be made between the lending country and the receiving country that 0.7 % of the developed country’s GDP will be lent to the developing country under the terms that the receiving country agrees to pay it back within a certain number of years, and will spend the money on the sole purpose of developing the education system. If the terms are not met, or broken, there will be a penalty to the receiving country, such as not being able to receive foreign aid for another 5 years, depending on the severity. Throughout the process, the developing country may work with several international organizations including UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, UNHCR, and the International Take Force on Teachers, in order to create equal opportunities for every student, whether male, or female, and teacher in the country. Member countries of the UN should work together to devise a plan that would set an international primary school standard level of education, as it is crucial to have an internationally shared education foundation. By following this procedure, students of developing countries will have equal educational opportunities to those in developed countries, and the objective of the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 could be attainable.

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