ENHANCED EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PLATFORM WITH MATCHING TOOL AND E-LEARNING MODULES (PHASE1) – LAO PDR

CONCEPT WORKSHOP REPORT
JANUARY 2021

ASEAN
AUSTRALIA
SMART CITIES
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ADB

RAMBØLL

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Description	**Concept Workshop Report**

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Figure 1: Scenery, Kaysone Phomvihane
Source: Cities Development Initiative for Asia

ABBREVIATIONS

AASCTF	ASEAN Australia Smart Cities Trust Fund
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASCN	ASEAN Smart Cities Network
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASUS	ASEAN Sustainable Urbanization Strategy
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade , Government of Australia
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
JC	Job Centre
LMIS	Labor Market Information System
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports, Laos PDR
PES	Public Employment Services
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
PLSW	Savannakhet Provincial Labour and Social Welfare
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SCDESS	Strengthening Capacity to Develop the Employment Service System Project
SHEP	Strengthening Higher Education Project
SKU	Savannakhet University
SSEZ	Savan-Seno Special Economic Zone
TO	Task Order
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

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1. BACKGROUND

This report is the first deliverable from Ramboll to ADB as per AASCTF Task Order – LAO: Enhanced Employment Service Platform with Matching Tool and E-Learning Modules (Phase 1). The report output includes identification of the main stakeholders of the project, lessons learnt from previous initiatives, initial demand assessment from stakeholders, concept of gamification and summary of meeting minutes from kick- off workshop with main stakeholders.

1.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

Lao PDR is currently experiencing one of the fastest rates of urbanization and industrialization in Asia. With a strategy of economic diversification, the government is promoting foreign investments to expand industries and the logistics sector. One of the requirements for these sectors to flourish is access to a skilled workforce. However, educational and vocational institutions have not be able to adequately provide the specific skills required by the labor market.

The Lao PDR government has collaborated with donors previously to assess and improve the labor market situation. Such recent labor market assessments have shown that while a large surplus of job seekers exist in certain sectors, other sectors face skill shortages. Employment focused training and guidance for students from universities and TVET institutions is a key factor to mitigate the skills gap within the labor market. The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare has introduced a Labor Market Information System (LMIS) which, while being a step forward, has limitations and as such, requires further development.

Kaysone Phomvihame is the most relevant urban center in Lao PDR. The fast growing Savan-Seno Special Economic Zone (SSEZ) is located in this strategic hub, promoted by the government. In Kaysone, there is both international companies increasing demand for a skilled workforce, as well as higher education and vocational institutions that can provide the needed skill training to students entering the job market. Hence,

Kaysone Phomvihame was proposed for pilot development of a labor market information system that includes digital matching tools for skills, together with the provision of high-demand skills training through e-learning modules.

To-date, E-learning has been used in limited capacity in Lao education sector but not to the full potential. The proposed project will therefore help government to enhance the existing labor market information system by introducing relevant e-learning approaches. The aim is to prepare the country to anticipate labor market challenges and prepare young people for formal employment through digitalization.

This Phase 1 project will be implemented, from October 2020 to January 2021, through Savannakhet University with the support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) under the umbrella of the ASEAN Australia Smart Cities Trust Fund (AASCTF).

The key outputs of this Phase 1 project are as follows:

- Needs assessment for employment service platform and e-learning programs;
- Sample e-learning modules on specific and generic skills building topics; and
- Viability and sustainability analysis of the proposed solutions.

These outputs will lead to a pre-feasibility study for an employment service platform with sample matching tools and e-learning modules developed for Kaysone Phomvihane. To achieve this, specific essential elements need to be clarified to have a fully-fledged project that is not only viable and sustainable, but also brings real added value to all stakeholders. This Phase 1 project therefore focuses on the need assessment of the current skill demand supply gap in the labor market and will suggest e-learning measures to mitigate this gap going forward.

1.2 MOBILIZATION

ADB commissioned the Task Order (TO) for the Ramboll consultant team to commence mid-October 2020. The consultant team, compromised of international and local experts, has since then mobilized to complete the tasks under the Phase 1 Task Order.

Since mobilization, the consultant team has engaged in multiple discussions with Dr. Sengthong Vangkeomany, Mayor of Kaysone Phomvihane City. Through the mayor, coordination with key stakeholders and the formation of a Project Steering Committee (PSC) and a Project Implementation Unit (PIU) has been initiated. To kick-off the project, a Conceptual Workshop was held on 18 November 2020.

The complete consultant team is as follows:
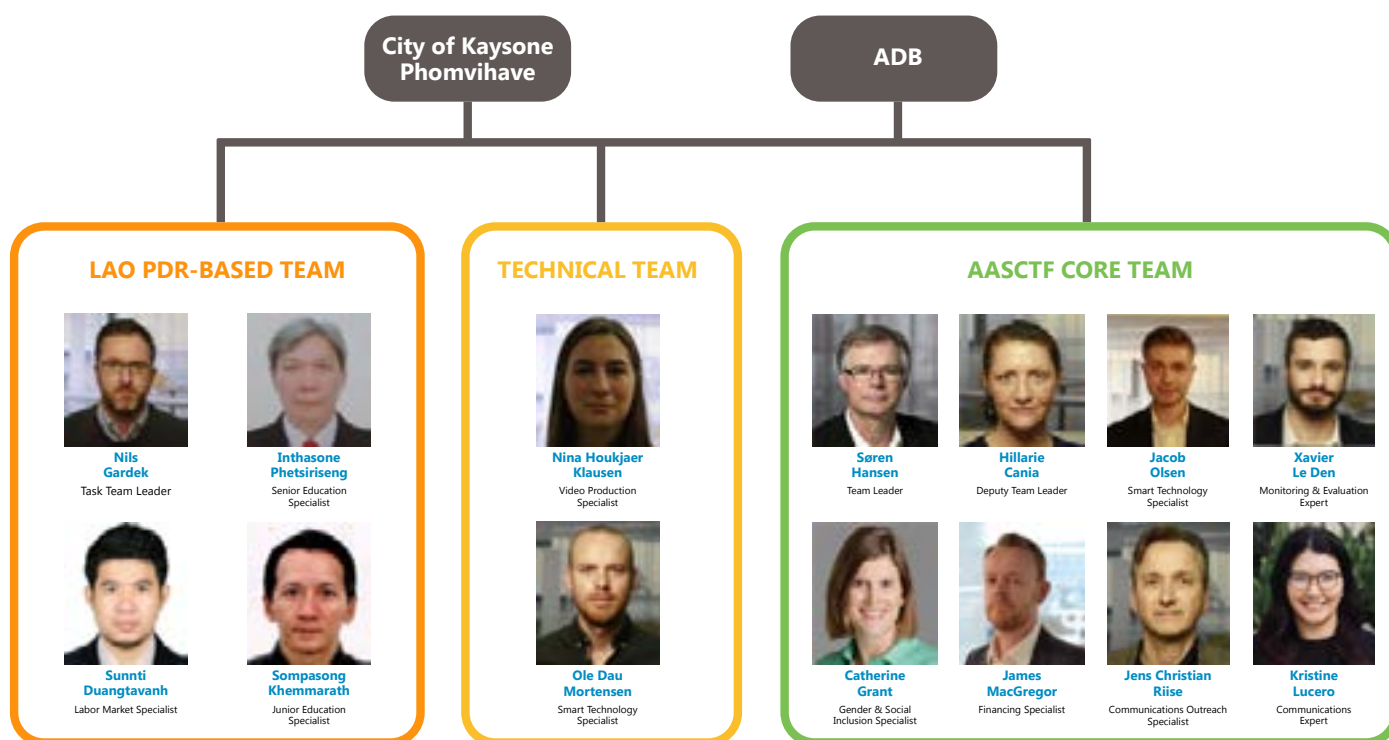
Figure 2: Consulting team organizational chart

Table 1 summarizes the activities performed by the consultant team as of 18 November 2020.

Table 1: Consultant activities performed (As of 18 November 2020)

No.	Activity
1	Stage 1 – Start-up, Knowledge Capture and Analysis
1.1	Mobilization
1.2	Define stakeholders from education and private/public sectors
1.3	Methodology refinement
1.4	Review and collation of data/reports from previous initiatives
1.5	Consultation and collection of information from stakeholders
1.6	Employer Survey (Quantitative)
1.7	Define demand from education institutions and employers
1.8	Concept definition for "e-learning/ gamification" sample development
1.9	Presentation workshop to local stakeholders

2. STAKEHOLDERS

2.1 MAJOR STAKEHOLDERS

The relevant project stakeholders are categorized into 4 segments (i.e. central, regional, local and other). This project needs commitment from stakeholders at the central, regional and local government/non-government institution level. Table 2 summarizes the key stakeholders across the 4 segments and their respective roles in this project.

2.2 FUNCTIONS OF STEERING AND IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEES

Functions of the Steering Committee:

- Provide guidance to the consultant for project preparation and coordinate with all the organizations concerned in horizontal and vertical lines of administration relevant to the project.
- Provide feedback to PIU on the overall project implementation plan.
- Review progress reports on project activities, provide guidance to PIU in resolving issues arising during project implementation, and agree in principle to further report to the upper level of authority on overall project implementation.
- Monitor and evaluate the activates implemented under the project to ensure it is in accordance with the government's guidelines of democratic centralism – acceptable to all relevant stakeholder within the government.

Functions of the Implementation Committee:

- Oversee all activities, and coordinate and assume the external relations activities.
- Coordinate with the consultant team in implementing the AASCTF Project activities to assure successful achievement.
- Report on progress of the project activities to the AASCFT Kaysone steering committee.
- Coordinate and work hand-in-hand with all stakeholders' organizations in implementing the project.

Table 2: Key project stakeholders

Stakeholders	Nature of Engagement
Central-level stakeholders	
Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR	Policy support, top most authority
Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Lao PDR	Policy support, top most authority
Ministry of Planning and Investment, Lao PDR	Policy support, top most authority
Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Policy support, top most authority
Regional-level stakeholders	
Mayor's office, Kaysone Pomvihane City	Steering Committee Member
Provincial Department of Education and Sport	Steering Committee Member
Provincial Department of Labor and Social Welfare	Steering Committee Member
Provincial Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Steering Committee Member, Implementation Committee Member
Local-level stakeholders	
University of Savannakhet (SKU)	Steering Committee Member, Implementation Committee Member
Xaysombath Technology College	Steering Committee Member, Implementation Committee Member
Savan-Seno Special Economic Zone (SSEZ)	Steering Committee Member, Implementation Committee Member
Office of Education and Sports, Kaysone Pomvihane City	Steering Committee Member, Implementation Committee Member
City Labor and Social Welfare Office, Kaysone Pomvihane City	Steering Committee Member, Implementation Committee Member
Other stakeholders	
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	Executing Agency
Ramboll	Project Consultant

3. PREVIOUS INITIATIVES

3.1 RELEVANT PROJECTS

The most notable initiative relevant to this project is the 'Strengthening Capacity to Develop the Employment Service System' (SCDESS) project. The project is financed by ADB and implemented by Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Lao PDR. The project ran from June 2016 to May 2019.

The project had 3 outputs:

1. Assessment of the then current employment service of Lao PDR to regional and international level concepts and standards;
2. Assessment of Labor Market Information System (LMIS), development of Employment Service System, capacity building of employment office and job centers and SMS to inform employment opportunities to rural job seekers; and
3. Assessment of capacity on employment services from central to provincial levels.

Another relevant project implemented previously is the 'Strengthening Higher Education Project' (SHEP). This project was financed by ADB and implemented by Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR. The project ran from October 2009 to August 2017.

The project had 4 outputs:

1. Strengthened management, financing, and governance of higher education system.
2. Enhanced relevance and capacity for quality improvement of higher education.
3. Increased equity and access in higher education.
4. Effective project management and implementation

3.2 LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned from the SCDESS project:

- Outreach activities such as job fairs increased both number of job seekers as well as number of vacancies.
- Continued training needs to be ensured for Job Centres' (JCs) staff to sustain service delivery.
- Understaffing and underfinancing impacts functioning of Public Employment Services (PES).
- Business model for JCs needs to be created and online service delivery mechanism needs to be developed.
- Mechanism for coordination between private companies, educational institutions and provincial chamber of commerce was suggested to be developed.
- Techniques of implementing labor market surveys have been transferred to JCs and should allow a better approach of the provincial/ local labor market.
- To improve labor market information, additional staff is required who would be dedicated for disseminating information and not work on migration issues.
- Users (jobseekers and employers) have high hopes and expectations from the JC and its website to provide them with quality and updated labor market information.

Lessons learned from the SHEP:

- Emphasis on e-learning and blended learning modalities showed improved learning experience.
- Providing work and soft skills for graduates is suggested as an inclusive learning approach.
- Universities to be considered as delivery points to provide skills development to youth.
- Lack of qualified technical staff to manage, maintain and consistently develop the E-learning platform.
- High investment costs to establish and maintain the network system including internet cost.
- Focus is better placed on the supply side rather than trying to integrate the supply and demand.

4. STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

4.1 INTERVIEW AND SURVEYS

Kaysone Phomvihane is located on the Mekong river and is connected to the East-West Economic Corridor, linking Vietnam and Thailand through the narrowest section of Lao PDR. SSEZ, set up in 2003, is located about 3km from the Lao-Thai Mekong bridge and contains 92 operational companies. The SSEZ tenants are local companies, joint ventures between companies from Laos and Thailand, Malaysia, Japan and fully-owned foreign companies from China, Japan, Australia, France, Italy, etc. SSEZ thus represents a valuable pool of international firms that are increasingly requiring highly skilled workers. SSEZ represents the private sector employer who drives the demand of what kind of skills are needed most by the university graduates to land a job.

Deputy Director of SSEZ mentioned that the employment opportunities are growing in SSEZ with increasing foreign and domestic investments.

Prior to this project initiation, there have been face-to-face interviews conducted with SSEZ authority who provided a consolidated feedback on behalf of the companies in SSEZ. As well as employer opinion surveys conducted by Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR. The reports is based on data gathered from 7 Provinces and 7 different types of employers. Both the interviews and reports are used as references to have an initial understanding of the demand from employers. Below are the main outcomes of the interviews and surveys performed.

Main comments from SSEZ:

- Employment opportunities exist and are growing in SSEZ.
- 90 percent SSEZ workers are local and mostly come from rural areas.
- Jobs are currently advertised by individual firms publicly and through social networks.
- COVID-19 has resulted in business setbacks and worker layoffs.
- No discrimination is practiced allowing candidates from all segments of society and rural areas to apply for jobs at SSEZ companies.
- SC Law is the only company in SSEZ collaborating with Saysomebath Vocational School to train potential workers to work at their factories.
- Collaboration agreement process between businesses and training institutes is slow, especially with the public vocational schools.

Main demands from SSEZ:

- Skills gap exists in construction and engineering. Construction industries employ foreign workers due to an inadequate skill level, and need for further training, of local workers.
- There is a need to train job seekers on appropriate attitudes towards generic working culture, time management, safety issues, industrial processes.
- There is a need to train job seekers on the latest technical and technological skills required specifically in the industries located in SSEZ.
- Vocational schools need to be equipped with proper methods to deliver training on generic and specific subjects.
- Existing online employment service platform (pes.molsw.gov.la) needs to be user-friendly and have functionality in aggregation, monitoring, and reporting.
- Need to consider use of technology-based tools to build skills of potential job seekers.

Main points from Employer Opinion Survey and Employer Status Survey 2020 conducted by Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR:

- The top skills demanded by employers from university graduates coming into job market are:

  1. Analytical skills
  2. ICT skills
  3. Foreign language(s) skill
  4. Social competency/behavioral skills,
  5. Communication skills
  6. Problem-solving skills

- Relevant job experience or knowledge on industry specific jobs are also demanded.
- Universities should offer courses that teach about working environment.
- Network by universities with companies/employers to be strengthened.

5. GAMIFICATION CONCEPTS

5.1 THREE DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Learning through the "game"' approach is increasingly being used by private companies to train new and existing employees. The overall purpose of using gamification formats and interaction design for online teaching is primarily for creating a motivating and engaging app tool, for different learning processes. McDonalds Crew Challenge[1] is one of the many examples on how e-learning and gamification can train employees to be onboarded digitally.

As per Edgar Dale's Cone of Experience[2], simulating a real practice is an evidence-based effective learning method. The cone of experience illustrates different learning and training methods and the associated effects. The most passive and least effective methods are stated at the top in the cone. Moving towards the bottom of the cone, the methods gets more active and more effective in terms of learning outcome.

There are various ways E-learning/gamification apps provide employers training tools during the hiring and orientation process of new employees. Employers can use E-learning to onboard new employees by giving them a virtual exploration of the new office environment before joining. Short e-learning courses can teach new recruits office etiquettes for meetings, time management, deadlines, etc. Such courses can also teach new employees on collaboration techniques needed in an office environment such team building and knowledge sharing. While e-learning equips prospective job seekers to be more confident and quicker to adapt to new working conditions, it also saves employer's time and resources to train new employees.

There can be various gamification methods that can be followed to motivate the learner. The most commonly used e-learning methods are illustrated in Figure 4.

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[1] https://www.kineo.com/case-stu https://www.queensu.ca/teachingandlearning/modules/active/documents/Dales_Cone_of_Experience_summary.pdf dies/mcdonalds-till-training-game

[2] https://www.queensu.ca/teachingandlearning/modules/active/documents/Dales_Cone_of_Experience_summary.pdf
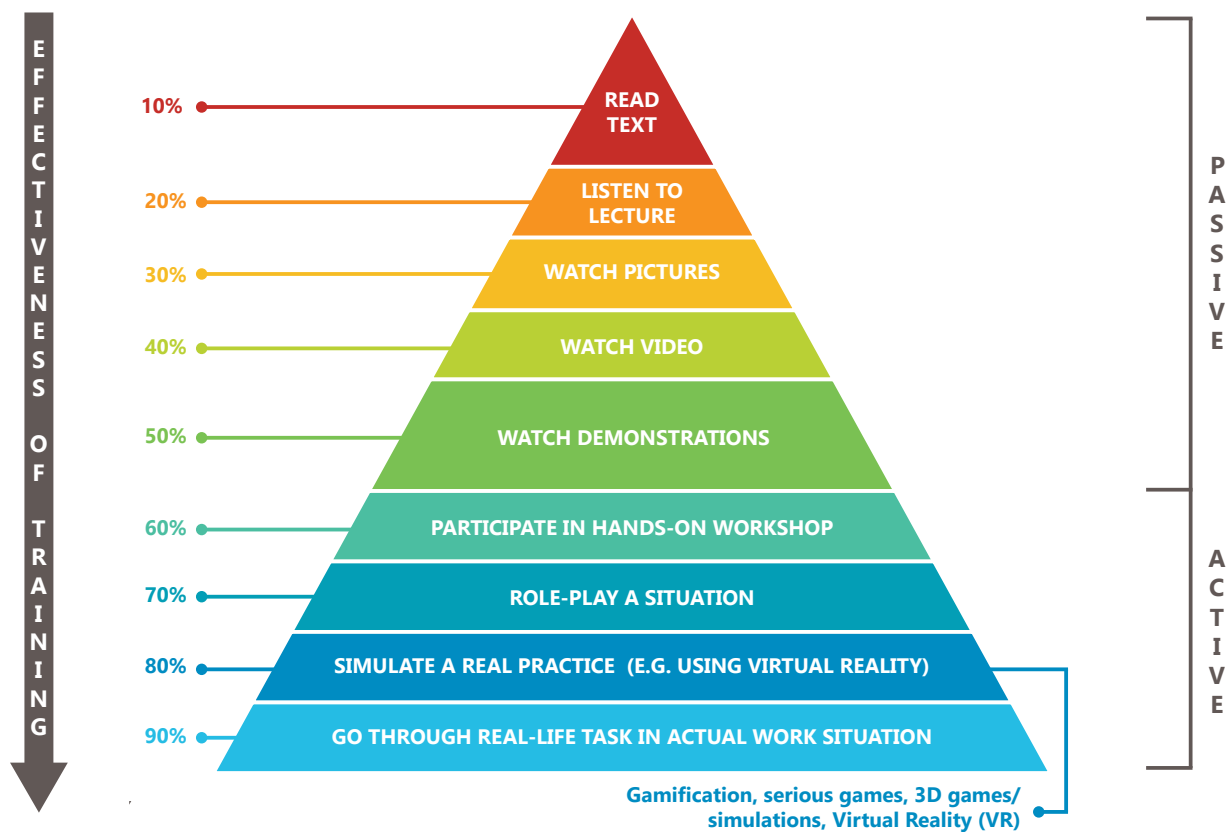
Figure 3: Dale's Cone of Experience
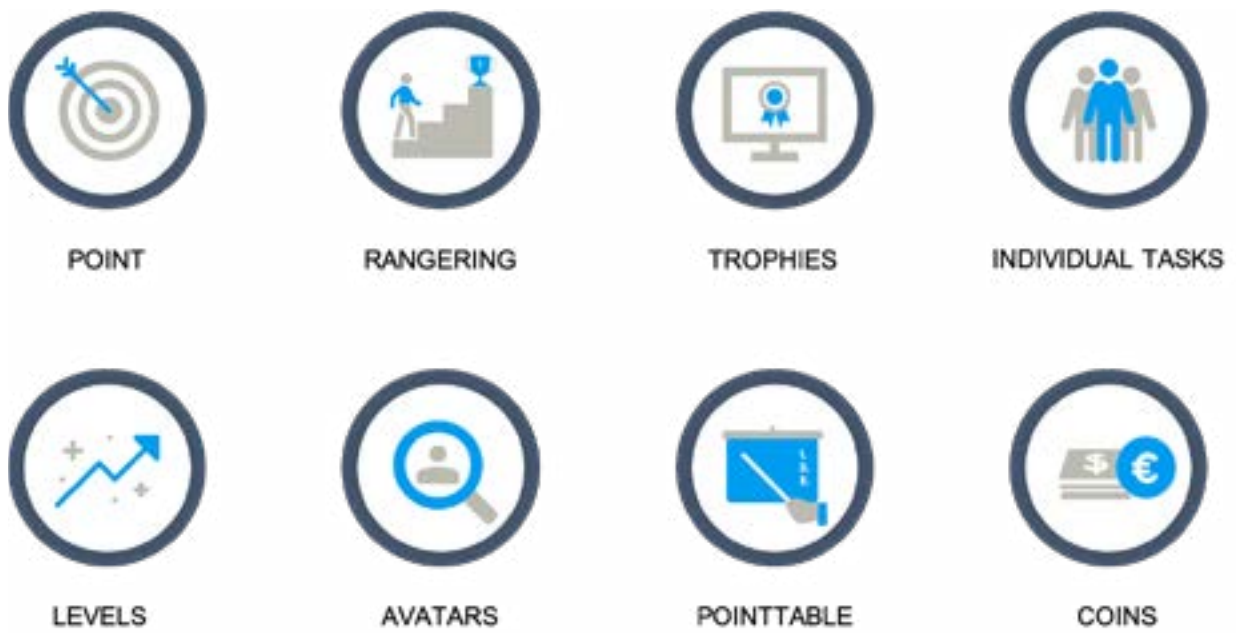
Figure 4: Common e-Learning Methods

The three main methods of delivering e-learning are as follows:

1D: One-dimensional e-learning

This type of delivery method is static and asks the user to answer targeted questions. A score system is maintained rewarding users on each correct answer. Such method can be used to train users on both generic and specialized topics.

Kahoot! is a game-based learning platform that makes it easy to create, share and play learning games or trivia quizzes in minutes.

Figure 5: Kahoot! quiz example

2D: Two-dimensional e-learning

This type of delivery method follows pre-recorded short videos. Such formats can be used as an introduction to a company, department, or specific tasks for users. Customized videos can be created for each employer. General content on time management, knowledge sharing can be used by multiple employers. Such formats can be integrated with social media for easier access by users.

3D: Three-dimensional e-learning

This type of delivery method uses virtual 3D videos to deliver trainings on visualization of office and production spaces. Interactive videos create a deeper learning experience for the user. Customized 3D models can be created for each employer. This format can also be integrated with social media for easier access by users.
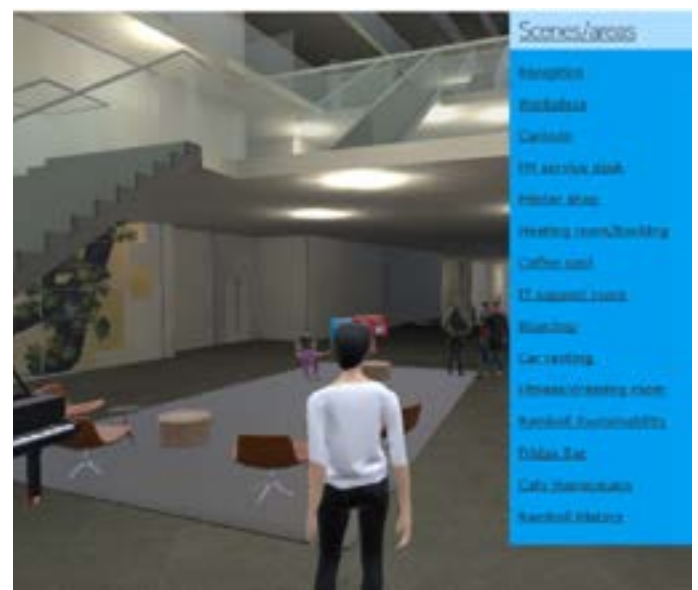

Figure 6: Short animated video example

Figure 7: 3D training environment example

6. STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

The kick-off meeting of the Enhanced Employment Service Platform with Matching Tools and E-learning Modules (Phase 1) was held on 18 November 2020 at the Mayor's Office of Kaysone Phomvihane City, Savannakhet Province. The objective of the meeting was to introduce the pilot project and planned Phase 1 activities in order to obtain opinions and feedback from the participating stakeholders.

The half-day meeting was co-chaired by the City Mayor, and Head of PIU with participation of 21 local government representatives from 11 provincial- and city-level organizations, 2 senior personnel from the ADB Lao PDR Resident Mission and ADB HQ (attending online), and 4 Ramboll consultants.

Key points of the meeting are summarized as follows:

- The Kaysone Phomevihane City has been selected to focus on the AASCTF theme: service delivery with three broad cross-cutting areas in gender, social inclusion, and private sector. More specifically, the Kaysone City Pilot Project will enhance employment service platform with matching digital tools and e-learning modules. The AASCTF is implemented in line with the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanization Strategy.

- The participants agreed with the preliminary findings (presented by the consultants) on lessons learned and demands by employers while acknowledging the importance of the digital or electronic tools at work. The SSEZ factories were reportedly labor-intensive while there was trend towards a knowledge-based labor market and economy which would rely more and more on electronics equipment and tools – allowing people to work from home. Digital tools thus are increasingly viewed as important, considering the Fourth Industrial Revolution or Industry 4.0.

- Collaboration between educational institutions had not been well established. The public TVET college in the city for instance began to work with companies only in 2020 to find suitable ways in educating and training students with skills and quality matched with employers' demand. It was acknowledged that employers required workers with patience, proper skills, and communication with English proficiency in addition to working attitudes and knowledge about occupational safety.

- With support from the ADB on strengthening TVET, the participating college(s) witnessed improvements of some programmes (particularly in construction) to meet a standard set of ILO International Standard Classification of Occupations. Development of teaching staff was a fundamental component – especially pedagogical methods. [A majority of] Vocational trainers/ teaching staff had no working experiences in factories or with industries, but were giving lessons to students all the same. The recently developed legal instrument states that eligible vocational trainers are required to have practical experiences with industries. It is just a beginning for public TVET college by implementing a dual competency training approach (e.g. theories at schools and practices in factories) with Daehan Car Assembly Factory.

- The vocational education and training programme at the beginner's level for e.g. Certificate Level 1 (3-6 months) and Level 2 (1 academic year) required that students spent 85-90 percent of the time on practical learning and 10-15 percent on theoretical learning. The schools however were facing shortage of visual tools and materials and equipment used in practice. In other words, the practical education part needed training materials, hand-on training equipment and systems, and other educational products to offer a fast and easy solution to conducting and providing the required hands-on job skills training. Having materials and equipment available was also associated with costs.

- SKU Students Affairs emphasized the importance of soft skills of students and foreign languages. Improving degree programmes to have the expected learning outcomes required approval from MOES – normally being a length in time. It was expected that improved programmes would help produce workforce required by the labor market was not an easy job and it required industries to invest in training and developing their own workers based on their specific needs. The digital tools/ e-learning would be a supplementary tool for students from SKU for instance to upgrade their skills and knowledge about work life before entering the labor market.

7. WAY FORWARD

Feedback from discussions with local stakeholders and the participants of the Concept Workshop acknowledged the role of digital tools when developed based on location-specific needs, and that they could potentially benefit and enhance the service delivery in improving the matching and responsiveness between employment and education sectors. Outcomes would then feed into employment information strategically linked with education.

The established AASCTF Kaysone project steering committee would discuss who else should be included in the committee considering the scope of the project.

During the stage 2 of the assignment the consultant team would present the sample of gamification by the third week of December 2020 in Kaysone Phomvihane City as the next meeting. While the ICT experts on the team would prepare the samples, the Lao-based team would continue the data collection to get a better understanding of the needs and potential with relevant provincial and city offices and SSEZ for further data collection.

In addition to the preparation of the gamification samples, a sample survey will be carried out in Kaysone Phomvihane on smart phone use among students at the three main institutions: SKU, the Savannakhet Vocational School and the Xaysombath Technical College.

APPENDIX A: KICK-OFF MEETING AGENDA (18 NOV 2020)

Title: AASCTF -Pilot Project in Kaysone Phomvihane City: Enhanced
                    Employment Service Platform with Matching Tool and E-learning
                    Modules (Phase 1)
Date and Time: 18 November 2020, 8:30-12:15
Venue: City Mayor Office's Meeting Room, Kaysone Phomvihane City,
                    Savannakhet

Table 3: Kick-Off meeting agenda

Time	Content	Person responsible
8:30-9:00	Registration	Project secretary
8:30-9:00	Background of Pilot Project Objective of Meeting Introduction of participants	Assoc. Prof. Dr Sitha Khemmarath, AASCTF-PIU Director
9:10-9:20	Welcome and Opening remarks	Dr Sengthong Vangkeomany, Mayor of Kaysone Phomvihane City
9:20-9:30	AASCTF Presentation on AASCTF Trust Fund	ADB - Antonio Ressano
9:30-9:40	Presentation on Pilot Project Phase 1	Nils Gardek
9:40-10:00	Q&A	Participants
10:00-10:15	Coffee Break	Secretary
10:30-10:45	Lessons Learned/Good practices	Inthasone Phetsiriseng
10:45-11:00	Demand/needs of stakeholders (schools, government, employers)	Sunnti Duangtavanh
11:00-11:30	Q&A	Participants
11:30-11:45	Concept for E-learning/Gamification	Inthasone Phetsiriseng
11:45-12:00	Q&A	Participants
12:00-12:10	Closing remarks	Dr Sengthong Vangkeomany, Mayor of Kaysone Phomvihane City
12:10-12:15	Closing	Secretary

APPENDIX B: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Table 4: Kick-off meeting, list of participants

No	Name	Organization	Position	Telephone
1	Dr. Senghong Vangkeomany	Kaysone City Office	Mayor	59358789
2	Asso. Prof. Dr. Sitha Khammarath	SKU	Vice President & AASCTF PIU Head	98961999
3	Ms. Paphan Bouttakhan	SKU	Dept. deputy head	55441832
4	Ms. Pasaykhone Saykosy	SKU	Office deputy Head	56788658
5	Mr. Khamphuey Akkhavong	SKU	Office Head	55668809
6	Mr. Phanoumkone Dalatsamy	SKU	Deputy Head	55953556
7	Mr. Sayyaphone Phimmala	SKU	Head	22405557
8	Ms. Phonsay Sanavongsay	Edu and Sports office	Head	29946535
9	Mr. Thavone Mounsomleuth	SKU Youth Union	Secretary	58000110
10	Mr. Lamkeo Keomany	SEZ	Division deputy head	55641614
11	Mr. Bounkeuy Khotsombath	TVET college	Director	55441130
12	Ms. Latmany Thammavong	Labour Office	Unit Head	0309487190
13	Dr. Keophoukong Boubphavanh	Saysombath College	Deputy Director	55959088
14	Mr. Sinnomath Sayathilath	Saysombath College	Technical staff	99687061
15	Mr. Phet Yonthala	?	Unit head	97058549
16	Mr. Phouvanh Chanthasone	Kaysone City Office	Office head	91782222
17	Mr. Khamsiphet Sayyavong	Commerce and industry office	Office head	23235393

No	Name	Organization	Position	Telephone
18	Mr. Khonsavanh Bounsengsanavong	Labour office	Unit head	91703955
19	Mr. Soulideth Hiepbouathong	PLSW	Div. deputy head	54818811
20	Ms. Jit Sommaphon?	SKU	Support staff	55204455
21	Ms. Jaisavanh Somphon?	SKU	Support staff	
22	Mr. Antonio Ressano	ADB HQ		
23	Ms. Khamtanh Chanhty	ADB Lao PDR Resident Mission	Sr. Program Officer	
24	Nils Gardek	Consultant Team	Task Team Leader	
25	Inthasone Phetsiriseng	Consultant Team	Sr. education specialist	
26	Sompasong Khammarath	Consultant Team	Jr. education specialist	
27	Sunnti Duangtavanh	Consultant Team	Sr. labour specialist	

APPENDIX C: MEETING PHOTOS

Figure 8: Top and bottom photos: Kaysone City officials, led by Kaysone City Mayor Dr. Senghong Vangkeomany and other key stakeholders during the kick-off meeting of the at the City Mayor Office in Kaysone Phomvihane City, Savannakhet.
Source: Nils Gardek

APPENDIX D: MINUTES OF THE CONCEPT WORKSHOP MEETING

MINUTES
Kick-off and Conceptual Workshop
18th November 2020

ASEAN-Australia Smart City Trust Fund (AASCTF) Pilot Project in Kaysone Phomvihane City: Enhanced Employment Service Platform with Matching Tools and E-learning Modules (Phase 1)

Introduction

1.   The kick-off meeting of the AASCTF Pilot Project in Kaysone Phomvihane City – Enhanced Employment Service Platform with Matching Tools and E-learning Modules (Phase 1) was organized on November 18, 2020 at the Mayor's Office of Kaysone Phomvihane City, Savannakhet Province. The objective of the meeting was to introduce the pilot project and planned phase 1 activities and obtain opinions and feedback from the participation regarding the pilot project implementation.

2.   The half-day meeting was co-chaired by the City Mayor, Dr. Sengthong Vangkeomany and Head of AASCTF PIU Associate Professor Dr. Sitha Khemmarath, with participation of 21 local government representatives from 11 provincial-and city-level organizations, 2 senior personnel of the ADB LRM and ADB HQ (attending online), and 4 consultants (See Annex – List of Participants). The participants heard the presentations on (i) the ASEAN-Australia Smart Cities Trust Fund, (ii) Pilot Project Phase 1, (iii) Lessons Learned/Good Practices, (iv) Demands/Needs of Stakeholders (Schools, Governments, and Employers), (v) Concept for E-learning/Gamification. Discussions/Q&A followed the presentations.

3.   Key points of the meeting are summarized as follows:

3.1   Established in 2019 with a total budget of $13.95M, the AASCTF is funded by the Australian Government and managed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). It is a regional project that runs from 2019 until 2024 covering some cities selected from the ASEAN Smart Cities Network member cities. The Kaysone Phomevihane City has been selected to focus on the AASCTF theme: service deliver with three broad cross-cutting areas in gender, social inclusion, and private sector. More specifically, the Kaysone City Pilot Project will enhance employment service platform with matching digital tools and e-learning modules.

The AASCTF is implemented in line with the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanization Strategy.

3.2.   The participants agreed with the preliminary findings (presented by the consultants) on lessons learned and demands by employers while acknowledging the importance of the digital or electronic tools at work. The SEZ factories were reportedly labour-intensive while there was trend towards a knowledge-based labour market and economy which would rely more and more on electronics equipment and tools – allowing people to work from home. Digital tools thus were increasingly important, considering the Fourth Industrial Revolution or Industry 4.0.

3.3.   Collaboration between educational institutions had not been well established. The public TVET college in the city for instance began to work with companies only in 2020 to find suitable ways in educating and training students with skills and quality matched with employers' demand. It was acknowledged that employers required workers with patience, proper skills, and communication with English proficiency in addition to working attitudes and knowledge about occupational safety.

3.4.   With support from the ADB on strengthening TVET, the participating college(s) witnessed improvements of some programmes (particularly in construction) to meet a standard set of ILO International Standard Classification of Occupations. Development of teaching staff was a fundamental component – especially pedagogical methods. (A majority of) vocational trainers/teaching staff had no working experiences in factories or working with industries before but giving lessons to students. The recently developed legal instrument states that eligible vocational trainers are required to have practical experiences with industries. It is just a beginning for public TVET college by implementing a dual competency training approach (e.g. theories at schools and practices in factories) with Daehan Car Assembly Factory.

3.5.   The vocational education and training programme at the beginner's level required that students spent 80 percent of the learning time to practices and 20 percent for theories. The schools however were facing shortage of visual tools and materials and equipment used for practices. In other words, the practices needed training materials, hand-on training equipment and systems, and other educational products to offer a fast and easy solution to conducting and providing the required hands-on job skills training. Having materials and equipment available was also associated with costs.

3.6.   SKU Students Affairs emphasized the importance of soft skills of students and foreign languages. Improving degree programmes to have its expected learning outcomes required approval from MOES

– normally being a length in time. It was expected that improved programmes would help produce workforce required by the labour market was not an easy job and it required industries to invest in training and developing their own workers based on their specific needs. The digital tools/e-learning would be a supplementary tool for students from SKU for instance to upgrade their skills and knowledge about work life before entering the labour market.

3.7.   The participants acknowledged the role of digital tools if developed based on location-specific needs would benefit and enhance the service delivery in employment and education whose outcomes would feed into employment information strategically linked with education.

3.8.   The established AASCTF PIU committee would discuss who else should be included in the committee considering the scope of the project.

3.9.   The consultant team would present the sample of gamification by the 2nd week of December 2020 in Kaysone Phomvihane City as the next meeting. The team would approach each of the relevant provincial and city offices and SEZ for further data collection.

4.   In closing, the co-chairs emphasized that the AASCTF Kaysone Project was aligning well with the socioeconomic development direction of Savannakhet Province to transform the province as a hub for industry, commerce, logistics, and education by having Kaysone Phomvihane City as a model. On behalf of the City we were committed to supporting and implementing the AASCTF project successfully and encouraged all city offices concerned to support and facilitate.

5.   The meeting ended at 12:15.

ABOUT THE ASEAN AUSTRALIA SMART CITIES TRUST FUND

The ASEAN Australia Smart Cities Trust Fund (AASCTF) assists ASEAN cities in enhancing their planning systems, service delivery, and financial management by developing and testing appropriate digital urban solutions and systems. By working with cities, AASCTF facilitates their transformation to become more livable, resilient, and inclusive, while in the process identifying scalable best and next practices to be replicated across cities in Asia and the Pacific.

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