

MID-TERM EVALUATION

LAO/031

Support to Legal Teaching and Training and
to the Promotion of the Rule of Law Concept
in Lao PDR

PROJECT SUMMARY DATA

Country	Lao PDR
Long project title	Support to Legal Teaching and Training and to the Promotion of the Rule of Law Concept in Lao PDR
Short project title	Strengthening the rule of Law – Phase II
LuxDev Code	LAO/031
Version of the Report	October 2020

RATING OF THE PROJECT BY THE EVALUATION MISSION

Global rating (Effectiveness)	2 On a scale of 1 (excellent results, significantly better than expected) to 6 (the project was unsuccessful, or the situation has deteriorated on balance)
Rating using other evaluation criteria	Relevance: 1 Efficiency: 2 Sustainability: 2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Mid-Term Evaluation of “Project LAO/031 – Support to Legal Teaching and Training and to the Promotion of the Rule of Law Concept in Lao PDR” was carried out by Tana Copenhagen, by Team Leader Dr Lone Lindholt and Local Consultant Ms. Sommany Sihathep. The assignment was carried out during the period from February to October 2020. Due to COVID-19, the entire mission was conducted through remote consultation by the Team Leader from Europe with stakeholders in the form of Key Informant Interviews by Zoom, facilitated through the presence of the Local Consultant on the ground.

The scope of this Mid-Term Evaluation of LAO/031 project, as outlined in its Terms of Reference, includes the following elements of analysis:

- the Results and Specific Objectives reached at the time of evaluation against the project framework targets;
- results achieved in terms of capacity building;
- management and monitoring, especially in relation to alignment and monitoring and evaluation, and the implementation mechanism;
- evaluation criteria and cross-cutting aspects; and
- a number of specific questions including likelihood of the project’s contribution to a strengthened legal culture and access to justice, internal communication and coordination, and the response of the partners and beneficiaries to the project and its prospects.

On this basis the team has assessed and identified lessons learned as well as provided recommendations for the project continuation.

LAO/031 is governed by the Global Objective/Impact of “Rule of Law further promoted in Lao PDR”. This is achieved through two Specific Objectives/Outcomes:

- “1. Reinforce the enabling environment for access to justice”; and
- “2. Continue strengthening legal education and training”.

Specific Objective 1 is achieved through three Outputs:

- “1.1 Legal practitioners and civil servants in law are enhanced”; “
- “1.2 Formal/Informal legal awareness raising campaigns are supported”; and
- “1.3 Coordination between academia and practitioners is strengthened”.

Specific Objective 2 is achieved through three Outputs:

- “2.1 New curricula complying with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ standards and requirements are developed”;
- “2.2 Competences of targeted teachers¹ are enhanced”; and
- “3.3 Management and governance of Faculty of Law and Political Science of University of Laos and Faculty of Law of Champasak University are improved”.

The main partners, viewed across the two Specific Objectives include justice sector representatives (the Ministry of Justice, the People’s Supreme Court, the Office of the Supreme People’s Prosecutor, the State Inspection Authority and the Anti-Money-Laundering Office, as well as academia - Faculty of Law and Political Science of University of Laos and Faculty of Law of Champasak University). Other relevant institutions are included and benefit from project activity as well.

In addition to a number of activities implemented by the Project Management Unit, the Institute for Legal Support and Technical Assistance in Vientiane is responsible for a significant proportion of the project’s achieved Outputs.

¹ Originally, “practitioners” was included here, *ibid*.

The evaluation team concludes that the project appears highly **relevant (score 1)** in all aspects, especially by applying adaptive programming to further include and respond to relevant themes in accordance with the shifting needs of the context, e.g. by engaging in areas of legal aid and village mediation, and by contributing to support for strategic planning at the Ministry of Justice. The project implementation is found to be **effective (score 2)** in terms of Output, with good trajectories towards Outcomes achieved as well for both Specific Objective 1 and Specific Objective 2. In terms of strategic approaches to capacity strengthening the project would benefit from further enhancement to ensure the qualitative aspects of training activity and in terms of institutional anchoring. In terms of **efficiency (score 2)**, relative to the documented Outputs, the balance is acceptable, although the proportion of the costs going to administration could be improved, not least through an activity funding increase in the short terms and, in the longer term, a more coordinated implementation approach. Finally, **sustainability (score 2)** to at least some degree is likely, not least because of the awareness raising and knowledge transfer at the partner institution level which the project engagement has contributed towards. However, also in this respect would an increased focus on anchoring project results, e.g. from capacity strengthening, contribute greatly towards ensuring this.

The project is centred around **capacity strengthening** and has adapted to the COVID-19 situation by taking an **innovative** approach towards, in particular, e-based approaches and solutions to capacity strengthening and project coordination, to which the partners have responded well.

In terms of **monitoring and evaluation**, the framework is actively applied by the project management. The indicators at Specific Objective and Output levels are constructive and clear, although their focus is mainly on quantitative Outputs. At Global Objective level the indicators appear more abstract and with no elaborated Theory of Change to justify their legitimacy. Similarly, there are few baseline data to support and underpin the different elements. The approach to risk management appears relevant.

The project is well **aligned** and to some extent harmonised. **Governance for development** is well achieved throughout the project. However, the project has a low standard of performance in terms of addressing **gender** in all of its aspects, processual as well as material, although this was never envisaged as a core dimension of LAO/031.

The institutional implementation mechanism is complex, with two main entry points (the Project Management Unit and Institute for Legal Support and Technical Assistance) as described above and could in the longer term be further streamlined. This would have a further positive effect on e.g. **internal communication and coordination** as well as **knowledge management and sharing**.

In terms of **partnership and local contributions**, the engagement of all the partners appears clear, and all of them make substantial in-kind contributions. The project receives a **positive response by government partners to activities, with confidence in project results**, and by **immediate beneficiaries** from project activity. The project thus appears to be on a trajectory which will, ultimately and even significantly, contribute positively towards the enhancement of **legal culture**, and has increasingly adopted the focus on **increased access to quality legal advice by poor/vulnerable groups** especially through strengthening of the aspects addressed above and in the recommendations.

In terms of **scaling up** and **extension** to other justice sector stakeholders, the project at this stage would depend on a budget increase to continue activities at the same level as now. A scaling up of project activity even without **inclusion of new partners** is highly realistic, especially as the current partner landscape indicates their interest in this.

Recommendations

The recommendations² of the evaluation team are as follows:

Recommendation 1 - Partners and themes

1.1 Continue with the current partners, in both the justice and academic sectors. When relevant, the project should seek to expand current engagements to address expressed needs by the partners for more in-depth technical capacity strengthening of staff as well as institutional anchoring of this within the partner institutions (*short- and long-term*).

1.2 Assess each partnership in a close dialogue with each institutional stakeholder, based on lessons learned from engagement so far, and identify current and emerging needs (*short- and long-term*).

1.3 In terms of additional thematic and institutional focus, maintain the increased focus on legal aid and Village Mediation Committee as new emerging areas in close alignment with project Outcome and desired Impact of reaching the vulnerable in society (*short- and long-term*).

1.4 Increase gender focus and awareness in order to, as a minimum, ensure that the project does not have a negative effect, particularly when engaging in the areas of legal aid and Village Mediation Committee (*short- and long-term*); and consider the engagement of a qualified gender specialist to ensure this (*long-term*).

Recommendation 2 - Project implementation

2.1 Explore, for the next phase, how a more integrated institutional approach to project implementation can be ensured (*long-term*).

Recommendation 3 - Capacity strengthening

3.1 On the basis of lessons learned from the current project phase, design, adopt and implement a capacity strengthening strategy in accordance with recognised international standards. This approach should include a way that captures and documents how project activity beneficiaries, e.g. training participants, apply and retain their learning for changed practice, and how this is anchored within the partner institutions for sustainability and Impact. At the same time, the project should continue to enable diversified approaches to capacity strengthening, with relevant distinctions between different forms and modalities applicable to the justice and academic sectors respectively, and enable assessment of each of them on their own parameters for the purpose of identifying qualitative Outcome and Impact value (*long-term*).

3.2 Strengthen the capacity enhancement modalities and processes for training activities throughout the project activity portfolio in line with an overall strategy as addressed in Recommendation 3.1 (*long-term*).

3.3 Increase the focus on strategies for anchoring project Outcomes and the capacity developed through staff participation in project activity within each respective partner institution and in dialogue with these (*short- and long-term*).

3.4 Systematically harvest the lessons learned from the shift to relevant e-based modalities for capacity strengthening applied in response to the COVID-19 crisis from 2020, as well as for other project activity in dialogue with partners; and, when relevant and appropriate, include these modalities in future design of relevant activity (*short- and long-term*).

² In the following "short term" indicates within the duration of LAO/031, i.e. until 2022, while "long-term" extends to aspects to be reflected also for a subsequent phase from the end 2022.

Recommendation 4 – Alignment and harmonisation

4.1 When relevant and as a further means to ensuring relevance in response to partner needs, continue to apply an adaptive project implementation approach; and, when relevant, seek to anchor further engagement with partner institutions on the basis of their strategic frameworks (harmonization) and direct assistance towards enabling the effective implementation of these (*short- and long-term*).

4.2 In dialogue with partners and other international partners supporting the Lao justice and academic sectors, continue to articulate clearly the need for alignment and coordinated engagement with a focus of ensuring the best possible assistance to partner institutions, particularly the Ministry of Justice (*short- and long-term*).

Recommendation 5 – Monitoring and evaluation

5.1 Review and, when relevant, adjust current project Output targets both downwards to ensure realistic Outcomes especially in light of risks identified, and upwards in terms of areas where achievements so far surpass original targets (*short-term*).

5.2 Design and implement a monitoring and evaluation system for the next phase, which, taking outset in a Theory of Change, reflects better Outcomes and e.g. captures qualitative milestones in line with a capacity strengthening strategy (Recommendation 3.1). This in return should focus on e.g. documenting how training participants apply their training for change of practice, and for measuring how partner institutions absorb and anchor their staff's strengthened capacity in relevant areas (*long-term*).

5.3 By continuing to apply an adaptive approach to project implementation, continuously address risks identified through mitigation measures, if necessary, considering especially those aspects, which are beyond direct project control (*short- and long-term*).

Recommendation 6 - Funding

6.1 Based on the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this evaluation, a significant increase in budget both for the current and for the next phase should be considered, for the purpose of keeping the project momentum in progress, as well as extending and deepening the engagement with the current project partners (*short- and long-term*).