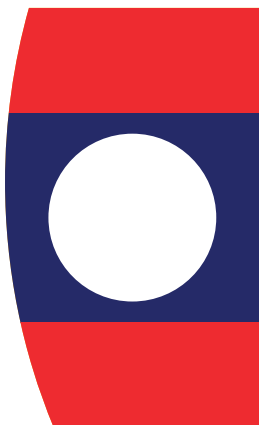


EVALUATION REPORT

MID-TERM EVALUATION •

2025 • — • LAOS



Rule of law, access to justice and good governance



LUXDEV
Luxembourg
Development Agency

PROGRAMME RATING BY THE ASSESSMENT MISSION

Evaluation criteria scoring	Scoring
Effectiveness	2
Relevance	2
Coherence	3
Efficiency	2
Sustainability	4
Impact:	3 (preliminary assessment)
Project code	LAO/037
Report version	24.08.2025

Note: Scale from 1 (excellent results, significantly exceeding expectations) to 6 (development action unsuccessful or situation rather worse).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Objectives

The Rule of Law, Access to Justice and Good Governance programme (ROLAG) is the flagship bilateral initiative between the government of Lao PDR and the Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, implemented through LuxDev, the Luxembourg Development Cooperation Agency. Launched in January 2023 with an initial budget of EUR 9 million, later increased to EUR 11,46 million, ROLAG is the smallest single programme under the Fifth Indicative Cooperation Programme (ICP V), and the only one focused explicitly on governance. The programme builds on two decades of Luxembourg's support to the justice sector, including project LAO/031, and is designed to strengthen legal institutions, expand access to justice, and embed rule of law principles within public administration.

The present Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE), commissioned in early 2025, assesses ROLAG's performance across OECD-DAC criteria, including relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. It also explores cross-cutting themes such as human rights, gender equality, digitalisation, and capacity development. The evaluation aims to provide practical recommendations to improve delivery during the remaining implementation period and inform any future extension or follow-on programming.

Methodology

The evaluation applied a mixed-methods approach, drawing on document reviews, financial data, field observations, and over 50 stakeholder interviews conducted at central and provincial levels. The team examined progress against the programme's Intermediate Changes (ICs), tested the Theory of Change (ToC) and Theory of Action (ToA), and applied contribution analysis to trace the programme's role in any developments observed. Particular attention was paid to institutional ownership, partner coordination, and evidence of systemic change.

Main Findings

Relevance

ROLAG's overall design aligns well with Lao PDR's legal development priorities, including the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED), the justice sector Strategy, and the 2023 Constitutional amendments. The programme directly responds to pressing needs in legal aid, treaty implementation, legislative scrutiny, and professional training. It also reflects the conclusions of the LAO/031 evaluation, incorporating a structured ToC and broader engagement across justice institutions.

All components remain relevant, although some could benefit from re-scoping to address emerging needs. For instance, increased demand for decentralised legal support may follow the creation of new sub-district (*kum-ban*) governance units, while some stakeholders now request more advanced legal training beyond the basic level.

Coherence

ROLAG demonstrates strong internal coherence, with its components working together toward a unified strategic vision. Collaboration between institutions such as the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Faculty of Law and Political Science (FLP), and the National Assembly (NA) has been facilitated through cross-cutting mechanisms, including the steering committee and joint planning meetings. The Institute of Legal Support and Technical Assistance (ILSTA-led) "All-Agency" approach ensures coordinated training across institutions, reducing duplication.

Externally, however, coherence with other development partners is less consistent. ROLAG participates in the legal sector working group and some thematic coordination platforms (for example on human rights); however routine engagement has waned since 2023. The evaluation finds some synergies with major donor efforts such as the European Union (EU-funded)-Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and Rule of Law (CEGGA) programme, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and The Asia Foundation initiatives. Given the shifting donor landscape, particularly USAID's 2025 exit from the sector, ROLAG has become a de facto anchor for justice and governance, thus warranting more sustained sector coordination.

Effectiveness

ROLAG has achieved measurable outputs across all five ICs, with particular progress in legal education reform (IC-A), professional training (IC-B), legal aid service delivery (IC-D), and legislative support (IC-E). Strong contributions include:

- over 4,000 officials trained by ILSTA across central and provincial agencies, with positive feedback on quality and relevance;
- revised law curricula introduced at FLP and the Faculty of Law and Administration (FLA) in Champasak, in partnership with University of Luxembourg (Uni.lu);
- standardised intake procedures adopted in 30+ legal aid offices, and referral mechanisms increasingly formalised;
- pilot data-sharing with provincial courts led to the NA requesting nationwide caseload statistics for budget scrutiny.

However, some areas lag behind expectations, with the penitentiary reform component (IC-C) still under development, with as yet unclear engagement from the Ministry of Public Security (MoPS). There is also no functioning Training-of-Trainers (ToT) model, despite genuine efforts to do so by ILSTA and other development partners, or systematised post-training coaching, which limits institutional capacity retention.

Efficiency

After a slow start due to log-frame finalisation and partner negotiations, implementation has accelerated. By mid-2025, approximately 58% of the programme budget had been spent. The Operational Partnership Agreements (OPAs) used in some components have improved ownership but introduced procedural bottlenecks. Delegated budget management by MoJ and FLP has produced mixed results, with some strong outcomes but also difficulties in reporting.

The cost-per-beneficiary ratio for training and legal aid is in line with regional benchmarks. However, reporting remains heavily activity-based, with insufficient outcome-level data to guide adaptive management.

Sustainability

Institutional sustainability is somewhat uneven. Legal education reforms are taking root, with revised curricula, trained lecturers, and support structures in place. Legal aid service delivery is increasingly institutionalised, though still dependent on external funding and fragile in the face of donor withdrawal (e.g. USAID, the Asia Foundation). Most training, however, remains externally driven, and no formalised CPD system or ToT framework is in place across justice agencies.

The recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between ILSTA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) is a noteworthy achievement, establishing long-term cooperation on treaty implementation, human rights training, and international law. This partnership represents a key platform for institutionalising cross-cutting legal capacity in government.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Human Rights and gender

Human rights and gender considerations appear intermittently across components. Treaty-reporting support and human rights training have been provided through ILSTA and FLP, and gender-disaggregated data is collected for most training activities. However, there is no unified Human Rights-Based and Gender-Responsive (HRBA-G) framework guiding the programme. Rights and gender content is strongest where embedded in practical tools (e.g. case studies, reporting templates).

Digitalisation

Digital-for-development is an emerging but underutilised theme. The programme has supported basic IT upgrades in legal aid offices and ILSTA has provided extensive online information-sharing. However, digital justice systems, legal information platforms, and data dashboards remain nascent. There is considerable potential to expand the use of mobile-based outreach tools, and to improve internal data systems.

Capacity development

ROLAG has made substantial contributions to individual and organisational capacity. ILSTA's training is widely praised, and progress is evident in intake protocols, curriculum reforms, and cross-agency collaboration. However, sustainability remains limited in the absence of institutionalised ToT and CPD frameworks. FLP is emerging as a stronger academic actor; however, legal aid and training units within MoJ need stronger budgetary support.

Key Lessons

- **ToC must be a living tool:** while the ToC aligned partners during design, it was not used regularly during implementation. Future programmes should revisit it annually to test assumptions and adjust activities.
- **Sustainability requires early capacity-transfer planning:** a phased ToT and mentoring strategy must be embedded from the outset, with defined handover timelines.
- **Legal aid depends on budget-line anchoring:** the closure of donor-funded legal aid programmes reveals the fragility of services without domestic financing. Advocacy with the Ministry of Finance must begin early.
- **Provincial pilots can drive national change:** the successful use of pilot court statistics helped unlock nationwide legislative interest and can be used as a model for future policy engagement.
- **Integrated governance forums build capital:** the inclusive steering committee-built trust, which subsequently enabled smoother negotiations and stronger institutional buy-in. Such structures should be formalised and resourced.
- **CPD is critical to skill retention:** basic training without deeper follow-up has limited long-term impact. Sequenced learning and institutional frameworks are essential.
- **Technology must align with process reform:** hardware upgrades in legal aid offices only improved services once their intake protocols were standardised and understood.
- **HRBA-G integration is most effective when task-based:** practical application (e.g. in treaty reporting or casework) leads to better uptake than stand-alone sessions.

Recommendations

- **Adopt a training sustainability strategy:** establish a unified handover plan combining ToT, mentoring, and CPD, reducing reliance on external trainers.
- **Initiate a rights-centred prison pilot:** focus on a Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)-based model with MoPS to commence the penitentiary component.
- **Support MoJ in developing a legal aid transition roadmap:** ensure sustainability through policy, budgeting, and institutional reform.
- **Mainstream human rights-based approach and gender:** recruit a short-term expert to develop a unified approach, with embedded standards and tools.
- **Reinforce external coordination:** re-engage with DP platforms and share data-driven insights to align with broader sector strategies.
- **Update the ToC and log-frame:** reflect emerging themes (e.g. digitalisation, localisation, human rights/gender) and streamline indicators.
- **Commission a tracer study:** track graduate outcomes and legal aid client experiences to inform ROLAG's final evaluation, and sector policy dialogue.

Overall Conclusion

ROLAG is a strategically relevant and broadly effective programme with strong delivery across most components. It has built on lessons from LAO/031 and established new platforms for legal and institutional reform. However, progress is uneven, and sustainability remains challenging in key areas. With strategic adjustments, particularly in capacity transfer, coordination, and institutional ownership, the programme can consolidate its gains and contribute to a more resilient rule of law infrastructure.



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