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## UNDP IN LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Lao People's Democratic Republic has been striving for progress against arduous conditions. It has an ethnically diverse population in a mountainous terrain, the majority relying on subsistence agriculture. The experience and institutional infrastructure necessary for dealing with the challenges of market-led development have been lacking, although in recent years, the Government has engaged in administrative and legal reforms. Development policies

have been guided by a succession of five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plans.

UNDP has focused on poverty and democratic governance, with work on social sectors conducted primarily by other UN agencies, although the organization assisted on HIV/AIDS. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2007 to 2011.

### TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2007-2011: \$70.6 MILLION

#### FUNDING SOURCES, 2007-2011



#### PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY THEMATIC AREA, 2007-2009 (\$ MILLIONS)



## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNDP aligned its activities very closely with national ambitions for long-term development. The highest priority is to graduate from least developed country status by 2020. To this end, the Government has devised strategies to ensure rapid and pro-poor growth, to develop a legal and governance structure commensurate with a modern globalized economy, and to pursue economic growth in an environmentally sustainable manner. In all these areas, UNDP played major roles.

As a trusted and valuable development partner, UNDP had a leading part in aid coordination process. This provided great leverage but also compelled the organization to at times stretch its resources beyond its capacity and competence. In aid coordination, the organization performed assiduously and effectively, making an impact on the formulation and evolution of successive national plans. Meeting the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets by 2015 was the primary focus of the seventh national development plan, where UNDP policy advocacy had a major impact. Assistance in costing the MDGs provided the foundation for formulating sectoral policies in the plan.

While the country has made much progress in recent years towards ratifying core international human rights treaties and multilateral environment treaties, in large part due to UNDP support, much remains to be done to ensure full respect for human rights within the country.

This entails overcoming capacity constraints in implementing policies, and providing effective access to justice to all people, particularly in remote areas.

Notable progress on gender equality included increasing the representation of women in the legislature and executive branch. UNDP's gender mainstreaming efforts had mixed results at best, however. A notable exception was a small but pioneering local radio programme that achieved remarkable success in raising awareness about gender-related issues within the target community.

Largely due to UNDP's efforts, national strategies became increasingly pro-poor. 'Growth with equity' was placed firmly on the agenda. Pro-poor policies included targeting development programmes to the poorest districts, and vocational training programmes run by some ministries. Overall resources devoted to these initiatives were too modest to make a significant impact, however. Despite the high rate of economic growth in the last two decades, poverty has declined far too slowly.

Even within UNDP's programmes, activities were often not specifically pro-poor. For example, trade-related projects may have contributed to trade expansion in general, but did not promote policies to direct the gains from trade to the poor or stimulate pro-poor economic sectors.

Support to governance reforms at the subnational level achieved some good results. Experimentation with

alternative financing mechanisms highlighted the potential of the District Development Fund (DDF), which gives discretionary power to local authorities and involves communities in decision-making. Follow-up actions are needed to assure effective development outcomes and sustain results.

A range of activities sought to strengthen people's voice and participation in decision-making. National Assembly members are better able to absorb and reflect the grievances of the public, thanks to a live hotline during parliamentary sessions and a streamlined system for complaints management. A new legal framework allows civil society organizations to emerge and function more effectively.

Until recently, UNDP's environment programme was focused on strengthening national capacity to better understand and implement global environmental concerns and conventions, especially those related to climate change. These efforts have increased capacities to develop necessary policy frameworks and programmes, but scaling up implementation is imperative. Greater

attention needs to be paid to links between economic activities and environmental resources.

UNDP could improve efficiency through synergies across its own portfolio and with other development partners. One obvious example was the range of activities involving local communities in participatory planning for local development. Further, there was a persistent mismatch between the scope of programmes and resources. When collaborating with other development partners, the organization should avoid multiple procedures.

As a whole, UNDP support was so well aligned with national priorities that there was little question about ownership. But national capacity to sustain results was still very weak without support from donors. With a few exceptions, as in the case of support to the planning process, projects have yet to create national capacity for independent functioning. Where capacity has been created, as with the Community Radio Project and the DDF, sustainability required supplementing capacity with additional resources.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- As the Government's lead development partner in aid coordination, UNDP should continue to take initiatives to ensure the system functions effectively. UNDP could also support the capacity development of the Government and the National Assembly on monitoring and evaluation of policy impact and development assistance.
- UNDP should help the Government build consensus among development partners on priority actions for achieving national strategy goals, and should involve partners from the conceptualization of its own projects and activities, rather trying to mobilize funds for existing proposals.
- UNDP should focus on projects and activities more closely linked to its human development mandate and comparative strengths, reorienting existing activities where necessary.
- UNDP could pursue gender equality more vigorously, based on a coherent strategy, in collaboration with other development partners. It should also strive for better mainstreaming of gender in its own programmes as well as in various government departments and agencies.
- Based on the national strategy that features growth with equity, UNDP should make greater efforts to support the Government in mobilizing resources towards implementing policies and programmes that would stimulate pro-poor economic sectors, direct gains from economic growth to the poor and remove key constraints they face.
- The DDF mechanism for strengthening the capacity of subnational administrations should be scaled up, replicated throughout the country and supported with greater resources for its sustainability. UNDP should also attempt to spread the use of such mechanisms as the Citizen Report Card and One Door Service.
- Stronger efforts should be made to involve an emerging civil society in the development process.
- The environment programme should continue its reorientation towards policy implementation and local-level interventions that aim to achieve both sustainable environment and sustainable livelihoods.
- The model of the Community Radio Project should be scaled up and replicated across the country.
- For greater effectiveness and efficiency, UNDP should exploit potential synergies among its various activities.

## ABOUT THE ICPEs

Independent country programme evaluations (ICPEs) are the backbone of the work of the Independent Evaluation Office. They capture evidence of UNDP's contributions to development results and the effectiveness of strategies supporting national development. They enable continued improvement in UNDP programmes, contribute to strengthened national ownership and evaluation capacity, and underpin accountability to national stakeholders and UNDP's Executive Board. To date, over 100 ICPEs have been conducted worldwide.

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