

UNDP COUNTRY PROGRAMME (2017-2021) EVALUATION – LAO PEOPLE’S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

FINAL REPORT

January 2021

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
BTOR	Back-to-Office-Report
CEGGA	Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and the Rule of Law
CO	Country Office
CPD	Country Programme Document
CTA	Chief Technical Adviser
DAFO	District Agriculture and Forestry Office
DDF	District Development Fund
DESA	Department of Economic & Social Affairs
DIC	Department of International Cooperation
DIM	Direct Implementation Modality
DMRS	Disaster Monitoring and Response System
EPPCR	Enhancing People’s Participation through Community Radio
EQ	Evaluation Question
ET	Evaluation Team
EU	European Union
EWS	Early Warning System
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographical Information System
GoL	Government of the People’s Democratic Republic of Lao
GPAP	National Governance and Public Administration Reform Programme
GS	Governance Specialist (Evaluation Team)
GSWG	Governance Sector Working Group
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
II	Individual Interview
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
IP	Implementing Partner
IREP	Institute of Renewable Energy Promotion
LDC	Least Developed Country
LNCCI	Lao National Chamber of Commerce & Industries
LSB	Lao Statistical Bureau
LSMP	Legal Sector Master Plan
LWU	Lao Women’s Union
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MICT	Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism
MLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
MOHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoNRE	Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NA	National Assembly

NDMO	National Disaster Management Organisation
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NIM	National Implementation Modality
NRA	National Regulatory Authority for the Mine Action/UXO Sector
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
ODS	One-Door-Service
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PAFO	Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
PEI	Poverty Environment Initiative (now called Poverty Environment Action, PEA)
PPA	Provincial People's Assemblies
PRF	Poverty Reduction Fund
Prodoc	Project document
RBAP	Regional Bureau for Asia-Pacific
RBM	Result-based Management
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
ROAR	Result-Oriented Annual Report
ROL	Rule of Law
RR	Resident Representative, UNDP
RRF	Results & Resources Framework
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SII	Structured individual Interview
SUFS	Service User Feedback Survey
SWG	Sector Working Group
TOC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNPF	United Nations Partnership Framework
US\$	United States Dollar
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance

Executive Summary

Introduction

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) works with the Government of the Lao PDR (GoL) in pursuit of the national development priorities defined in the country's Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED). UNDP's particular support is guided by its Country Programme Document (CPD) for 2017-2021 which is based on the UN Partnership Framework (UNPF) and agreed with the GoL. The UNDP commissioned an independent evaluation of the country programme to assess its contribution and performance in supporting the national development, *with a special focus on the Governance thematic area*. The evaluation was undertaken by a team of three consultants between September-November 2020. This report brings together the findings, conclusions and recommendations from the various processes of the evaluation.

The CPD focused on the following three outcome areas: i) inclusive growth and reduced inequality; ii) building resilience and environmental sustainability and natural resources; and iii) capable and more responsive governance. The country programme follows national execution modality whereby the GoL is the main implementing agency with support from UNDP. The inclusive growth outcome focused on poverty reduction and livelihoods and support to the government to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in implementation of the 8th national five-year plan, as well as strengthening government capacity for the clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) which is a serious impediment to all development efforts in the country. The environment and natural resources outcome concentrated on developing national development planning capacities to address links between environmental degradation and poverty, strengthening climate change response, and improving environmental governance and community-based natural resource management. The governance programme focused on public administration reform for improved access to social services, strengthening access to justice, and enhanced public participation in government decision-making. At the regional and local levels, UNDP support builds capacity for local service provision and the Provincial Assemblies.

Evaluation objectives, framework and methodology

The evaluation's key objectives were to examine how and the extent to which the UNDP country programme was able to support national priority needs and position UNDP as an effective partner of the GoL. The criteria used in the evaluation were: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, and two cross-cutting issues - human rights and gender equality. The primary users of the evaluation are the UNDP country office (CO), Regional Bureau for Asia & Pacific (RBAP), GoL, implementing partners (IP) of UNDP CO and key donor agencies supporting the CPD.

The evaluation team used mixed methods involving structured individual interviews (SII), desk review of key documents and visits and meetings with communities or users of the services provided through UNDP's support. The individual interviewees included GoL partner institutions, development partners, UNDP staff and other development agencies selected through purposive sampling. In total, the evaluation team conducted 104 structured individual interviews and visited 6 project sites where group interviews were conducted with communities.

A major limitation of the evaluation lay in the fact that due to Covid-19, the international consultants on the team carried out all interviews remotely, while the lone national consultant undertook limited field visits to projects supported by UNDP and met with local authorities and communities in provinces.

Findings of the evaluation

The major findings of the evaluation are summarised below.

Findings on ‘Decent livelihoods’ (outcome 1)

UNDP has supported two key Ministries (Ministry of Planning and Investment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in integrating SDG into the NSEDP and rolling out outcome/ results-based management (RBM). While SDGs may have been integrated, there is no results /monitoring framework in place for the NSEDP. UNDP plays a major role in supporting the Resident Coordinator and the government in hosting the Round Table Meetings (RTM) involving all development partners and stakeholders to review and prioritise development actions in the country. A Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) was developed by the Ministry of Finance, but lack of a results framework for NSEDP means that it is not yet integrated into the planning and budgeting process, undermining the utility of the budget as an instrument to achieve NSEDP objectives. Some of the sector working groups which contribute technical and programmatic inputs in various sectors and to the RTM process lack strong programmatic leadership and results frameworks based on the five-year plan.

The UXO programme remains the flagship of UNDP Lao. To mobilise resources for the UXO programme, UNDP has formulated multiple *modular and discrete series of* projects which made resource mobilisation easier. However, this is fraught with the danger of increasing ‘projectisation’ that might lose sight of the overarching strategic value added by UNDP. UNDP’s depth of engagement has tended to stagnate in recent years when a number of other organisations have begun to demonstrate strong expertise in the sector. While mine clearance has increased in its efficiency, success in terms of post-clearance poverty reduction and livelihoods development eludes the programme.

UNDP-supported actions have provided women space to participate in their local communities and promoted savings groups and livelihoods activities; however, limited market opportunities or disease outbreaks in animal stock have hamstrung meaningful economic empowerment.

UNDP has demonstrated the ability to identify strategic areas for support, though its institutional capacity to deliver – and deliver on time - does not match its ambitious goals. A number of initiatives have highly ambitious and complex project designs, often with multiple stakeholders and objectives, without a clear results pathway.

Findings on environment, climate change and disasters (outcome 2)

Substantial progress has been made with regard to developing policies and guidelines on land and forest resources management through UNDP projects, and their utilisation will be key to future results. UNDP assisted the GoL to engage in community-based protection of forests and ecosystem. The absence of a viable theory of change underpinning the programme meant that the linkages between different components and activities and how each of these interact with economic, social and livelihood factors that affect communities were not clear. There were a number of unrealistic assumptions made in the design of some of the livelihoods interventions which were meant to provide people alternative sources of livelihoods not entirely dependent on forest-resources.

Strengthening the disaster management capacity of the National Disaster Management Organisation (NDMO) has been prioritised through the development of Disaster Management Law and Recovery framework/guidance. Successful climate-resilient measures at the community level were implemented, but these did not feed into influencing policies at the central level. Links between the village-level pilot early warning system and national level

initiatives on early warning systems of the GoL remain unclear, and may have implication for sustainability of such localised systems.

Findings on governance (outcome 3)

The UNDP-supported actions have facilitated broader engagement between communities, local authorities and the central government and considerable effort has been put into linking the SDGs and parliament, especially at the local level, and public awareness of the SDGs has improved. UNDP's contribution to setting up the District Development Fund (DDF) which now operates in 12 districts ought to help consolidate the decentralisation process. The Community Radio project has created a cost-effective medium for disseminating information on a range of issues of interest to local communities and as an outreach programme. However, funding shortages have affected the development potential of the radio programme. The governance portfolio of UNDP has been relatively weak due to lack of sustained funding, compounded by limited progress towards decentralisation in the country. Like in all other projects in the governance portfolio, UNDP's actions on the rule of law have been peripheral and suffered from funds shortages.

Key findings on Relevance

There is a strong convergence between the national priorities and the support provided by UNDP. Several outputs within the country programme stand out as uniquely relevant on a national scale in terms of their breadth and scope: (a) support to the UXO sector; (b) integration of SDGs into national and provincial planning and orientation of Parliamentarians; (c) capacity building of NA/PPAs, (d) support to LWU and promoting livelihoods for women; (e) development of disaster management law, disaster recovery framework (ongoing) and capacity development of NDMO; (f) policies, guidelines and capacity building for land and forest resource management; and (g) community radio programme. UNDP has been very successful in raising resources for its environment portfolio (96 percent mobilisation) while struggling to raise any more than about 60 percent of funds required for the decent livelihoods and governance programme. In its work on capacity building of government institutions, the exchange visits through South-South cooperation were found by participants to be useful, but limited by their one-off exchange and these did not result in an ongoing cooperation following the exchanges.

While UNDP's close relationship with the government helps widen the scope of its programming support, it has not been able to leverage this relationship of trust to be constructively critical of some of the latter's policies, where necessary, and UNDP's deeper analysis of development issues has often shied away from sensitive, but critical, issues.

Key findings on Effectiveness

UNDP's actions have contributed to greater awareness and understanding of the SDGs at central and provincial levels and a greater sensitivity among key Ministries to the needs of the poor and women in particular in development programmes of the government. The DDF has demonstrated the potential of bottom-up planning and implementation and the community radio programme has been successful in enabling government's outreach to people. The UXO programme is reorienting itself to focus on linking UXO clearance with livelihoods and economic development targeting vulnerable communities. Various policies, frameworks and guidelines have been developed which provide institutional frameworks for different departments and Ministries, though their implementation may not have received adequate attention.

Capacity building has taken place through UNDP's actions, but it is difficult to attribute these to the current CPD as it is impossible to untangle the effect of recent interventions from the cumulative effect in the absence of clear baselines to compare against. Not having a results framework in place meant that operationalisation of SDGs, and their monitoring and reporting by various departments and provinces remain patchy. The evaluation findings point to the fact that UNDP interventions have been successful when: (a) it *enabled* others (NRA, UXO Lao, provincial departments in implementing the small-scale rural infrastructure project or DDF, MICT on community radio) and (b) the results were *specific and clearly defined*.

Key findings on Efficiency

The Results and Resources Framework (RRF) accompanying the CPD presents reasonably clear articulation of expected results and key indicators to track them. However, the biggest challenge UNDP has faced in use of this RRF lay in the wide gap between the CPD assumption/expectations on resources and the actual amount of resources UNDP was able to mobilise. As UNDP gets increasingly 'projectised' to raise project funds, it needs to get staff who can manage projects; yet the complexity of UNDP's role in a country like Lao PDR is that UNDP needs to demonstrate high level strategic thinking and analysis throughout its programme, and both these modes require a different set of competencies. Cost-effectiveness and economy with regard to several interventions have been sub-optimal and there have been delays in implementation of several projects.

Key finding on Sustainability

Capacity-building of local officials in different areas to provide services that address the priorities of the communities and citizen engagement through community radio provide good foundations for sustainability, though further financial support for a phase of consolidation may be necessary.

Key findings on cross-cutting issues

The governance sector working group serves as a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue on gender issues. In most of the programme, gender equality is manifested by participation of women as beneficiaries in particular projects, but there is no indication that women play a significant role in determining development policy or any other area of relevance to gender policies and programmes. The UNDP-supported community radio project has contributed to changing people's views on women's role. The evaluation did not find a strong focus on inclusion of persons with disabilities in the regular activities, except for the short-term victim assistance in the UXO programme.

Conclusions and recommendations

The evaluation concluded that the strategic priorities and areas of focus identified in the CPD have been perfect fit with the national needs and UNDP's position as a trusted partner of the GoL uniquely placed it to address the issues identified in the country programme. There have been mixed performance in different outcome areas, with the environment outcome having made relatively more progress than the others - the development of policies and tools, capacity building of provincial officials particularly on sustainable land and forest management and disaster management have made significant progress under outcome 2. Under outcome 1, work on UXO continues to make progress, albeit with limited resources and capacity UNDP is able to bring to this. The community radio and work on DDF have been significant achievements under the governance outcome, which otherwise has witnessed a gradual decline in UNDP's role in the country. The two most critical factors that contributed to success or failure in different areas of interventions have been: (i) UNDP's staff capacity in technical and programming areas, and (ii) availability of resources to implement activities at scale and for a consistent duration.

Results

Building on its decades-long close relationship as a trusted partner of the Government of the Lao PDR, the UNDP country programme continues to deliver its assistance through a people-centred approach, with its focus on three outcomes: decent livelihoods, environment and governance. The evaluation concluded that there is greater awareness and understanding of the SDGs at central and provincial levels which UNDP's sustained advocacy, training and practical support in integrating these into the NSEDP have contributed to. Focusing particularly on addressing the needs of vulnerable women, UNDP's support has been enabling women to participate in their local communities through savings groups and economic activities including small enterprises development, though these are in an early stage of development and exploring markets. Work on UXO continues to clear cluster munitions; however, progress with regard to linking post-clearance with poverty reduction and livelihoods development has been limited. UNDP's actions on Rule of Law and governance have been suffered from funding shortages and inadequate in-house expertise. The community radio programme has been successful in enabling

government's outreach to people, with relatively little resources. UNDP's new initiative on supporting digitisation in the GoL institutions is timely, but lacks a comprehensive strategy and resourcing plan.

Various policies, frameworks and guidelines have been developed which provide institutional frameworks for different departments and Ministries, though their implementation may not have received due attention. Strengthening the disaster management capacity of the National Disaster Management Organisation (NDMO) has been prioritised during this CPD period. The evaluation concluded that though capacity building of various departments goes on in the course of implementation of various interventions/projects supported by UNDP, absence of a results framework has meant that their operationalisation, monitoring and reporting by various departments and provinces remains patchy. UNDP's enabling role with a focus on clearly defined results has been a key factor in instances where the results can be considered a success. It has had less of a success where:

- a. the theory of change and assumptions behind the design of the project were not thought through clearly;
- b. the initiatives were planned and implemented in silos without linkages between different components; and
- c. inability to bring on board external partners who could have helped fill the gap in areas where there may have been weak in-house technical capacity.

UNDP internal capacity

UNDP plays a vital role in facilitating SWGs which feed into the RTM process; the SWGs are generally weak due to lack of strong leadership in some of the them and the absence of a results framework for NSEDP integrated with SDGs, which UNDP has been unable to develop. Historically UNDP's forte used to be the work on UXO sector in the country; of late, however, UNDP has been unable to bring in the kind of cutting-edge thinking and expertise in this sector which several INGOs are better able to provide.

The CPD provides a good framework for programme development on outcomes. However, the projects that are developed to translate the CPD objectives into reality are often weak on a clear articulation of the change pathway and an analysis of assumptions underpinning the actions proposed. This may sometimes be reflected in a lack of depth in UNDP's analysis and articulation of development issues in the country. The complexity of UNDP's role requires it to demonstrate high level strategic thinking and analysis throughout its programme which requires a complex set of staff competencies that UNDP may have struggled to ensure in the past; the evaluation noted that in the past one or two years, UNDP has been trying to fill this void.

Recommendations

Strategic positioning

- R1: Review the functioning of SWGs and redefine their role and results framework to ensure that these provide strategic inputs to the RTM process as well as to sector plans on an ongoing basis. This will need to be driven from the top with strong facilitation and leadership, working with relevant Ministries. The Government institutions provide the leadership for the SWGs, but UNDP can play a facilitating role in strengthening their capacity and this will need senior level engagement. This will be a demanding ask, so UNDP may, in consultation with GoL, prioritise a limited number of SWGs and work in phases.
- R2: Linking the above process of SWG development, facilitate development of clearly defined results frameworks, involving relevant Ministries and provincial departments, for each key sector, prioritising the most critical ones first.
- R3: Building on its Governance initiatives, UNDP should develop a comprehensive SDG support strategy to guide Lao PDR's attainment of the SDGs, linking it to the ninth NSEDP which is under development. It may

be that UNDP prioritises a limited number of SDGs which are most-critical and where UNDP has or can mobilise top-class expertise.

UNDP Internal capacity

- R4: Through advanced training, coaching, secondment from other UNDP offices and continuing professional development, as well as, where possible, fresh recruitment, develop high level staff skills in the following core areas:
- a. Developing theories of change and their use in programme design and results management
 - b. Strengthening internal monitoring and data collection system focusing on results
 - c. High-level technical expertise in the area of rural livelihoods and UXO, in particular
 - d. Development policy analysis and advocacy.
- R5: Senior managerial inputs need to go into exploring synergistic partnerships with UN organisations and other Agencies which may have technical capacity in specific areas of UNDP's programming interest, namely agriculture and biodiversity, rural livelihoods, digitisation.

Programme issues & resource mobilisation

- R6: The community radio programme which has proven to be effective with a relatively small investment should be continued, and if resources allow, expanded. In this regard, NDP may also consider using the Service User Feedback Survey (SUFSS); these surveys elicit people's views on public service delivery in order to measure the level of satisfaction and to identify where services could be improved.
- R7: The governance and public administration reforms undertaken by the GDP project, if they continue to be used by the government, will set the conditions for UNDP to end its broad support to the programme. However, ongoing support to the GSWG and the DDF could be valuable in maintaining UNDP's policy influence and participation in the governance reform process. The support to DDF should continue along with advocacy with the central government to gradually take over total funding of these in a phased manner. This will require new agreements to be drawn up with the government setting annual increase in government funding and corresponding decrease in UNDP allocations over the next three years.
- R8: UNDP should develop the digitisation initiative to cover e-governance and related areas of the GoL in a phased manner through developing partnership with agencies (DESA) specialised in complex process of government digitisation.
- R9: Ensure that when undertaking capacity building interventions, there is a clear baseline of the capacity gaps identified and a change pathway defined clearly before embarking on the process. One-off interventions, without clear links to the change pathway need to be avoided.
- R10: UNDP needs to develop a robust resource mobilisation strategy to strengthen its role in the country. In particular, UNDP needs to rebuild its relationships with key funding organisations, such as the EU. It should also explore funding opportunities for the GoL from the private sector.
- R11: Develop an inventory of all local EWS supported by UNDP and explore linking these up with the nationally-adapted Disaster Monitoring and Response System (DMRS) being currently developed in the country.

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They may not necessarily represent those of UNDP or of any of the individuals and organisations referred to in the report, unless cited from published reports and documents duly referenced.

Section 1: Introducing the evaluation

1. Evaluation purpose, scope and objectives

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) commissioned an independent evaluation of the country programme for the period 2017-2021. The evaluation was undertaken by a team of three consultants between September-November 2020. This report brings together the findings, conclusions and recommendations from the various processes of the evaluation.

The overall purpose of this evaluation was to assess the UNDP's contribution and performance in supporting the national development and priorities under the approved Country Programme Document for 2017-2021 (CPD), *with a special focus on the Governance thematic area*. The evaluation took stock of progress made with regard to the CPD outputs and outcomes, and lessons learned from implementation of the CPD. The CPD focused on the following three outcome areas: i) inclusive growth and reduced inequality; ii) building resilience and environmental sustainability and natural resources; and iii) capable and more responsive governance.

The scope of the evaluation included, besides different discrete projects funded during the current CPD cycle, various non-project activities and support provided by UNDP through Sector Working Groups (SWGs) which form core of the consultative engagement process leading up to the annual Round Table Implementation Meeting (RTiM) and the five-yearly High Level Round Table meeting (HLRTM) involving development partners, UN agencies, the Government of Lao PDR's (GoL) stakeholders, and limited participation of civil society and private sector. The SWGs also support the drafting and implementation of the National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) which is the GoL five-year plan. The thematic outcome areas of the country programme cover the following (Box 1) range of activities and outputs.

Box 1: An Overview of Key Actions Supported through UNDP CPD

Outcome 1 (Inclusive Growth): The programme focuses on strengthening government capacity for the clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) through the National Unexploded Ordnance Programme (UXO Lao) and the UXO sector through support to the National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR. UNDP also supports the government to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in implementation of the 8th NSED. UNDP interventions target poverty reduction and livelihoods, in order to achieve the country's graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status, and support government for this transition.

Outcome 2 (Environment and Natural resources): There are three priority areas in the environment portfolio: developing national development planning capacities which recognise and address links between environmental degradation and poverty, strengthening climate change response, and improving environmental governance and community-based natural resource management. Projects include a multi-year Global Environment Facility (GEF) project on sustainable forest and land management, as well as projects supporting disaster and climate risk management, flood response, and other related activities.

Outcome 3 (Governance): UNDP's work on Governance focuses on public administration reform for improved access to social services, strengthening access to justice, and enhanced public participation in government decision-making. The governance portfolio includes support to the national government and the legal sector (rule of law, domesticating and implementing international standards, and justice service delivery). UNDP also provides policy and capacity building support to the National Assembly. At the regional and local levels, UNDP support builds capacity for local service provision and the Provincial Assemblies. The programme also has a focus on supporting the GoL's initiative on decentralisation (Sam Sang Directive), working to narrow the gap in quality and access to services between rural and urban areas.

The evaluation's key objectives were to examine how and the extent to which the UNDP country programme was able to support national priority needs and position UNDP as an effective partner of the GoL, working to strengthen the United Nations Partnership Framework (UNPF), while meeting the objectives of the CPD in a cost-effective, efficient and sustainable manner. The evaluation sought to address these broad objectives through the lens of four key evaluation criteria namely relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, and two cross-cutting issues: human rights and gender equality, using the following specific evaluation questions (EQ) presented in Box 2. The Terms of Reference (ToR, attached as Annex 1) had outlined 24 questions which were revised, in agreement with UNDP country office (CO), to the following 18 questions.

Box 2: Evaluation criteria and evaluation questions

Relevance

1. To what extent has the current UNDP programme supported the GoL in achieving the national development goals, responding to unexpected events, implementing the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and delivering UNPF intended results?
2. To what extent has the UNDP programme responded to the priorities and the needs of target beneficiaries as defined in the programme document?
3. Is UNDP perceived by stakeholders as a strong advocate for improving Governance, Inclusive Growth and Environment and Natural Resource Management in Lao PDR?
4. Have the efforts made by UNDP and national partners to mobilise resources and knowledge been in line with the current development landscape?
5. To what extent did the UNDP programme promote South-South /Triangular cooperation?
6. Has UNDP been able to effectively adapt the programme to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Lao PDR?

Effectiveness

7. Is the UNDP programme on track to achieve intended results at the outcome and output levels? What are the key achievements and what factors contributed to the achievements or non-achievement of those results?
8. How have the small-size initiatives funded by UNDP regular sources fulfilled their objectives? What are the factors (positive and negative) that contribute to their success or shortcomings? Are there recommendations or lessons that can be drawn from this approach?
9. To what extent has the UNDP programme contributed towards an improvement in national government capacity, including institutional strengthening? How could UNDP enhance this element in the next UNDP programme?
10. Which programme areas are the most relevant and strategic for UNDP to scale up going forward?

Efficiency

11. To what extent has there been an economical use of resources (funds, human resources, time, expertise, etc.)? What are the main administrative constraints/strengths?
12. Is the results-based management system operating effectively and is monitoring data informing management decision making?
13. To what extent has UNDP been efficient in building synergies and leveraging with other programmes and stakeholders in Lao PDR?
14. To what extent have programme funds been delivered in a timely manner?

Sustainability

15. What outcomes and outputs have the most likelihood of sustainability and being adopted by partners and why?
16. Have the communities and the Government institutions who are the intended ultimate beneficiaries of activities acquired capacity to sustain the outputs and outcomes on their own in the absence of external assistance?

Cross-cutting issues

17. What barriers have been seen to the inclusion of vulnerable groups in UNDP's work and what can be done to improve inclusion of these groups?
18. To what extent have gender equality and the empowerment of women been addressed in the programme strategic design, implementation and reporting? In what way could UNDP enhance gender equality in the next country programme?

The primary users of the evaluation are the UNDP country office (CO), Regional Bureau for Asia & Pacific (RBAP), GoL, implementing partners (IP) of UNDP CO and key donor agencies supporting the CPD.

2. Evaluation framework and methodology

2.1 Approach and method

During the inception phase, the evaluation team (ET) developed a **three-pronged approach** combining (a) *theory-based* approach, (b) *data-driven* approach based on CPD performance measurement framework, and (c) *evaluation matrix* with a set of evaluation questions based on evaluation criteria to build a strong evidence-base (Figure 1). At the country programme level, the ET examined the Theory of Change (TOC) or interventions logic underpinning the CPD, as articulated in the Programme rationale of the CPD, and the underlying assumptions. As the intervention logic shows, UNDP country programme aims to deliver several complex outputs and outcomes, evaluation of which required methodologies that took into account the complexities of dealing with different type of data, quantitative and qualitative, often with little or no counterfactuals to compare against. The ET used mixed methods, with primary and secondary data gathered from a representative sample of projects supported through the CPD. To help gather evidence from UNDP interventions, the ET developed a series of judgement criteria for all the 18 evaluation questions; this was done to enable a granular analysis of UNDP-supported work in line with the strategy and results articulated in the CPD. The judgment criteria were based on various UNDP commitments made in the CPD, UNDP/UNEG evaluation guidelines, as well as an understanding of the context in the country, and these were used to develop appropriate methods for data collection and analysis and collated into an evaluation matrix (Annex 2).

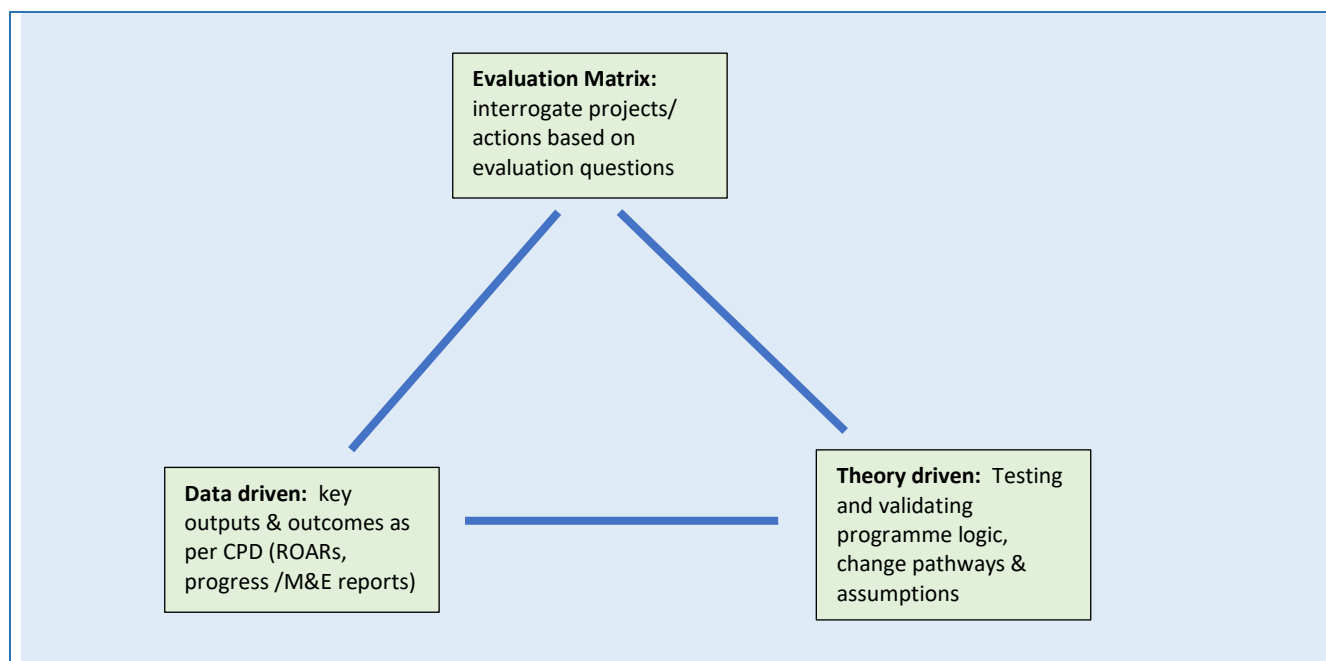


Figure 1: Three-pronged approach to evaluation

Secondary data available in various reports related to outputs and outcomes of the CPD were extracted from Annual progress reports, Result-Oriented Outcome Reports (ROAR), monitoring and evaluation (M&E) reports in UNDP's documents repository, and relevant evaluation reports of various programmes and projects that constitute the CPD. The list of key documents is annexed as Annex 3. These were supplemented with and validated against data obtained from key individual interviewees, site visits to a cross-section of projects and interviews with communities who benefitted from some of the project activities supported through UNDP. The selection of individual interviewees (GoL partner institutions, development partners, UNDP staff and, other development

agencies) was done in a way that ensured that the ET covered all major activities under the three outcome areas. For structured individual interviews (SII), purposive sampling was used for data collection on the basis of any or a combination of the following criteria:

- Actions/projects/interventions that flow directly from the national priorities as articulated in the Eighth National Socio-Economic Development Plan of the GoL and UNPF;
- Actions/projects/interventions that have absorbed the bulk of the available funding;
- Actions/projects/interventions that appear innovative;
- Actions/projects/interventions that are crucial for institutional capacity development of GoL partner agencies; and
- Actions that have been continued during the evaluation period 2017 through to the current period.

In total, 104 structured individual interviews were conducted by the ET – a breakdown of different stakeholder groups interviewed is presented in Table 1 below. A list of individual interviewees (II) is presented in Annex 4.

Table 1: Stakeholder groups interviewed during the evaluation

Stakeholder group	Total interviewed	Vientiane/HQ	Provinces
GoL & related agencies	61	35	26
Development partners	13	13	-
Others	4	4	-
UNDP	26	26	-
Community groups	6 groups	2	4
Total	104 II + 6 groups¹	78 + 2 groups	26 II + 4 groups

(Source: Compiled by ET from list of interviews conducted during the evaluation)

The ToR require the evaluation to give special focus on the governance programme (Outcome 3). It was clarified during inception that greater weightage was to be given on this component relative to other outcome areas as UNDP felt the need to develop a deeper understanding of how it positions itself on the governance issue in the country. While the evaluation matrix covered all the questions for the entire CPD evaluation, a few areas were given special attention with regard to the governance portfolio. These were:

- UNDP's support to decentralised governance and service delivery at national and subnational levels (Effectiveness)
- Cross-sectoral linkages – integration of governance work in other CO programme outcome areas (Efficiency)
- UNDP's cost-effectiveness and value for money especially with regard to governance activities (Efficiency).

2.2 Data mapping, triangulation and analysis

Throughout the evaluation, data collected from both primary and secondary sources were recorded systematically for evidence assessment based on the judgment criteria against each EQ defined in the evaluation matrix. The ET carried out an analysis of patterns in the data, clustering the data around emerging themes and sub-themes. A rigorous analysis of data was then undertaken, and findings on each EQ were compared for their congruence. Rigorous data triangulation was done mainly through comparing information gathered through multiple sources and methods. Where discrepancies occurred that could not be resolved, the ET did not use such data for drawing findings or conclusions. Rigorous data triangulation was undertaken to validate data gathered during the course of the evaluation. This will be done mainly through comparing information gathered through multiple sources and methods. This evaluation utilised four types of triangulation to highlight any inconsistencies between different data sources. These were:

¹ Groups varied in size in different locations, from 6 to 10.

- *Methods triangulation* - both qualitative and quantitative data was used to elucidate complementary aspects of the same subject;
- *Data source triangulation* – involved examining the consistency of different data sources within the same methods;
- *Theory triangulation* - which involved using multiple theories to interpret and examine the data obtained;
- *Evaluator triangulation* - the evaluation team compared notes and checked for consistencies and patterns, or otherwise, on a regular basis as interviews and data collection progressed.

All data from the desk review, individual interviewee interview notes and beneficiary interviews were examined by two members of the ET independently to check for their (i) representativeness – do the data/information represent the whole or a sizeable picture?; (ii) relevance – to the questions in the evaluation matrix; and (iii) attributability – if the data convey a ‘state’, is it attributable to the intervention/cause being described? The team then assessed the findings for **strength of evidence** using the following scoring system:

4. **Strong evidence.** The finding is fully supported by all evidence from a wide-range of data sources and methods.
3. **Good evidence.** The finding is supported by most evidence from a range of data sources.
2. **Some/limited evidence.** The finding is supported by some/most evidence from limited data sources.
1. **Weak evidence.** There is not enough triangulated evidence to support the finding.

3. Evaluation ethics and data protection

Protecting personal data is essential in any evaluation so as to respect dignity and ensure security of all stakeholders involved. The ET has ensured full confidentiality of data provided, accessed and produced during the course of their work, unless information was obtained from sources that are in the public domain. Besides maintaining independence and impartiality of the evaluation process, the ET ensured that, when interacting with communities, the evaluation avoided any situation that could have caused harm to the respondents, including vulnerable groups. For all community interviews, the ET discussed beforehand with the partner-agencies in locations to assess if there was sensitivity around the interview process. In coordination with local stakeholders, the ET ensured that the evaluation complies with all local data protection and privacy laws. **Any personal data collected has been minimal and anonymised in the report; for any community/beneficiary interviews, no name(s) or personal details were collected or recorded at all, except the gender (M/F) of the respondents.** For all other stakeholders (individual interviewees), although their names and title (function/role in an organisation) were collected by the ET for analysis of any trend with regard to information/data collected, their names or any details is not presented in the report in any way that information presented can be traced back to an individual interviewee or organisation, unless authorised by the latter in writing, or cited from published documents.

All ET members are contractually obliged not to publish or otherwise communicate to third parties, through any medium whatsoever, any information obtained during this evaluation, except those presented in this report. In its communication with communities and all stakeholders, the ET explained these commitments and procedures in a transparent way in order for participants to understand the data protection protocol.

The evaluators followed UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) ethical guidelines² throughout the evaluation process. In specific terms, the ET adhered to the following ethical principles at all stages:

- a) *Principle 1: independence and impartiality of the evaluators* - while a consultative process underpinned the team’s engagement with UNDP staff and other stakeholders, impartiality and independence of the ET was strictly maintained;

² UN Evaluation Group (2008). *UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation*

- b) *Principle 2: Avoiding harm* – evaluators ensured that the basic human rights of individuals and groups with whom they interacted as well as their health and safety (risks related to Covid-19, for example) were protected.
- c) *Principle 4: Voluntary participation* - participation in the evaluation process was voluntary and free from external pressure. All participants had a right to withdraw from the process and withdraw any data concerning them at any point without fear of penalty.
- d) *Principle 5: Informed consent* - evaluators informed participants how information and data obtained will be used, processed, shared, disposed of, prior to obtaining consent.
- e) *Principle 6: Ensuring confidentiality* – evaluators respected people’s right to provide information in confidence, and are committed to ensuring that information cannot be traced to its source.

4. Limitations of the evaluation

Most of the individual interviews by the international consultants were undertaken remotely as travel wasn’t possible due to fallouts from Covid-19. Language barriers, problems with translations during phone interviews and often-not-very-good connectivity challenged the evaluation process, though these shortcomings were overcome to a large extent by extensive interviews with UNDP staff (current and former) and development partners, supplemented with data collected by the national consultant of the ET who was able to visit some of the projects supported by UNDP and meet with local authorities and communities in provinces.

Secondary data on outputs and outcomes in M&E reports and progress reports were weak. This has been mitigated to a large extent by individual interviews at different levels (senior staff, provincial staff and those involved in frontline delivery in the implementing agencies; communities; development partners and UNDP staff).

Section 2: The country context and UNDP programme

5. Development challenges and opportunities

Although the national poverty rate declined steadily by 40 per cent over the last 15 years, nearly eighty per cent of the population still lives on US\$2.50 a day.³ The CPD document and various progress reports of different projects provide detailed descriptions of the development context in Lao PDR. The country witnessed consistently high annual economic growth rate of 7.8 percent over a decade up to 2016, distinguishing itself as the second fastest-growing economy in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region.⁴ Though economic growth in Lao PDR has slowed over the past four years, it still stood at 4.8 percent in 2019,⁵ despite natural disasters that affected the agricultural sector. In 2020, economic growth is projected to decline by 2.5 percent which is forecast to pick up by 2021 (forecast 4.5 percent).⁶ The COVID-19 outbreak is expected to further intensify the country's macroeconomic vulnerabilities, with limited fiscal and foreign currency buffers constraining the ability of the Government of Lao PDR to mitigate the economic impacts of the pandemic.⁷

Poverty is largely rural, concentrated especially in remote and mountainous areas adjacent to the north-eastern and eastern borders with Vietnam. More than three quarters of the Lao people live in rural areas and depend on agriculture and natural resources for survival. The GDP growth over the years did not lead to commensurate increase in employment and income for a significant proportion of the population. This is due to growth being driven by natural resources where job creation was limited, stagnant productivity in agriculture where most of the labour force continues to be engaged, and the creation of very few jobs out of agriculture.⁸ A small number of capital-intensive industries, such as mining and power generation, are fuelling economic growth. While capital-intensive resource sectors produce around 20 percent of total GDP and 50 percent of total exports, they create only 1 percent of total employment and provide few positive spill-overs to other economic sectors.⁹ Consequently, poverty reduction has been slower compared to peers.

While agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, farming is largely practiced at the subsistence level in a fragile ecosystem threatened by overexploitation and climate change on the one hand, and lack of access to improved technologies and markets on the other. Farmers, especially from large families, struggle to meet their household's food requirements and most of them use traditional farming methods and lack knowledge of new technologies and skills to improve yields. Also affecting productivity are declining soil fertility and lack of access to irrigation.¹⁰ Lao PDR is also vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters. Frequent floods and droughts adversely affect crop production and increase the risk of food insecurity and agriculture losses, besides damaging infrastructure. Resilience in communities is low due to the prevalence of monoculture, lack of diversity in livelihoods and limited infrastructure. The World Bank estimated¹¹ the cost of environment degradation to have exceeded 7 percent of GDP in 2013.

Gender inequality remains high especially in rural areas and among ethnic groups. Many women lack equal access to economic opportunities, resources, and decision-making institutions. Cultural stereotypes bind women typically to engage in low-paying jobs and perform most unpaid household work. Gender disparity in

³ United Nations (2019). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Human Rights Council Forty-first session, 24 June–12 July 2019*. Pp1

⁴ World Bank Group (2017). *Lao People's Democratic Republic Systematic Country Diagnostic*

⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lao/overview> (accessed 07 Sep 2020)

⁶ The source of data for forecast for 2020 and 2021 is Asian Development Bank Lao PDR webpage (accessed 11 Dec 2020)

⁷ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lao/overview> (accessed 07 Sep 2020)

⁸ World Bank Group (2017). *Ibid*

⁹ ADB. *Lao People's Democratic Republic: Country Partnership Strategy (2017-2020)*

¹⁰ <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/country/id/laos> (accessed 27 Nov, 2020)

¹¹ World Bank Group (2017). *Ibid*

education is high, with limited access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and maternal health is poor, with consequences on high maternal and infant mortality. The country faces low completion rates at all levels of education and a wide gender gap, especially at secondary and tertiary levels.¹²

The country's Eighth Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP), 2016–2020 localises United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and incorporates the Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Plan lays the foundation for graduating from least-developed country (LDC) status. Building on lessons from previous years, the NSEDP aims to improve and simplify the structure of government and administration at all levels and emphasise legislation on delegation of authority and responsibility in order to ensure ownership at the local level. In this regard, the Plan stresses the need for harmonising the NSEDP and *“sector and provincial development plans, taking into account the nature, characteristics and potential of each sector and province.”*¹³

The presence of unexploded ordnance (UXO) from the Indochina War (1964-1973) in the country continues to destroy lives and limits agricultural production and expansion. More than 2 million tons of bombs were dropped on all provinces between 1964 and 1973, with 30 percent of those failing to detonate. There is a strong correlation between UXO contamination and the prevalence of poverty, with 42 of the 46 poorest districts affected by UXO.¹⁴

Lao PDR also faces challenges in improving governance to ensure effective service delivery to its population; to develop sound fiscal/revenue collection systems; and to ensure a stable, transparent and predictable environment for national and international investment. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought renewed challenges to this agenda. The pandemic has severely affected economic growth, which will decline to an estimated -2.5 percent in 2020.¹⁵ The service sector, including travel and tourism has been hit hard by lockdown measures while remittances, a vital source of income for many families, have dried up. The unemployment rate rose to 25 percent in May 2020, from 16 percent at the end of 2019.

The NSEDP provided an important framework for engagement of the development partners. The World Bank's Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF)¹⁶ is the largest multi-sector community-driven development project in the country. PRF has focused on improved access to basic services for rural people through more than 5,000 community infrastructure projects in the poorest 55 districts of the country. The Asian Development Bank is supporting reforms to improve access to basic health care in the Lao PDR. ADB's program assistance underpins the government's reform programme. It also supports human resources and financial management system improvements. In the areas of governance, the Asia Foundation works with local partners and Lao government agencies to strengthen governance and improve access to justice¹⁷ for all Lao citizens, empower women leaders and advance women's rights. The Foundation also helped establish a parliamentary research unit at the National Assembly. There are several other development partners, such as Luxembourg that have a large portfolio in the country; the EU is also a key player. A key element to consider in the development context is the heavy reliance on China and to some degree Vietnam and Thailand for technical assistance, infrastructure and other financial support.

¹² World Bank Group (2017). *Lao People's Democratic Republic Systematic Country Diagnostic*

¹³ Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2016). 8th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan, 2016-2020. June 2016.

¹⁴ <https://www.la.undp.org/content/laopdr/en/home/countryinfo.html>

¹⁵ The source of data for forecast for 2020 and 2021 is Asian Development Bank Lao PDR webpage (accessed 11 Dec 2020)

¹⁶ The Poverty Reduction Fund has also established village institutions and numerous village volunteers and leaders trained by the project that are increasingly seen by the Government of Laos as an effective platform to implement rural development programmes. The World Bank's Scaling-UP Participatory Forest Management project and Lao Environment and Social Project support government efforts to build a foundation for sustainable forest management and strengthen environmental protection capacity and improve management of protected areas.

¹⁷ One of the key activities has been the establishment of the nation's first legal aid clinics that make justice more affordable. The Foundation also supports capacity building of Village Dispute Resolution Committees.

6. Key elements of UNDP country programme

UNDP has been a consistent partner of the GoL, providing technical expertise and policy advice to implement national strategies and plans, and to localise the Sustainable Development Goals. Through a partnership approach, it engages with development partners, civil society and the private sector in order to address the development challenges of the country. The country programme is nationally executed by the Government, through the coordination of the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) at the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI). The CPD has three outcomes which are based on the GoL priorities and the UN Partnership Framework (UNPF) 2017-2021.¹⁸ The country programme was formulated in consultation with the Government and other stakeholders to support achievement of the 8th NSEDP and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16 and 17, in addition to a local Goal 18 on UXO (SDG 18 – “Lives safe from unexploded ordnance (UXO)”). The three outcomes of the CPD and their constituent outputs are presented below (Table 2).

Table 2: UNDP Lao PDR Country Programme Document Outcomes & Outputs, 2017-2021

Country programme outcome & outputs
<p>Outcome 1: This is linked to Outcome 1 of NSEDP and UNFP and SDG1, SDG2, SDG 5, SDG8, SDG10 and SDG 18.¹⁹ All women and men have increased opportunities for decent livelihoods and jobs.</p> <p>Output 1.1: National and subnational systems and institutions enabled to develop productive capacities that are employment and livelihoods intensive.</p> <p>Output 1.2: Post-2015 agenda / SDG priorities localised and incorporated in 8th NSEDP.</p> <p>Output 1.3: Institutional capacities are strengthened to further improve the contribution of UXO sector to human development in contaminated communities.</p>
<p>Outcome 2: This is linked to Outcome 3 of the NSEDP and UNPF and SDG 7, SDG13, SDG 15 Forests and other ecosystems are protected and enhanced, and people are less vulnerable to climate-related events and disasters.</p> <p>Output 2.1: Increased climate resilience of communities through small-scale infrastructure initiatives.</p> <p>Output 2.2: Strengthened legal framework for climate change adaptation mitigation and disaster risk management.</p> <p>Output 2.3: Improved management of natural resources and ecosystem benefits through sustainable forestry and land management practices.</p> <p>Output 2.4: Ecosystem and agrobiodiversity management is contributing to food security and improved livelihoods in rural communities.</p> <p>Output 2.5: Improved monitoring and enforcement of investment compliance by State institutions and community groups.</p> <p>Output 2.6: Inclusive and sustainable solutions adopted to increase energy efficiency and rural energy access.</p>
<p>Outcome 3: This is linked to cross-cutting outcome of NSEDP, Outcome 7 of the UNPF and SDG 16 and SDG17.</p>

¹⁸ United Nations/Government of the Lao PDR. *LAO PDR - UNITED NATIONS PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK 2017-2021*

¹⁹ The GoL has added an additional goal on eradication of Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) in the country.

Institutions and policies at national and local levels support the delivery of quality services that better respond to people's needs.

Output 3.1: Local administrations able to develop and finance multi-sectoral plans based on community priorities

Output 3.2: Accountability framework introduced and/or expanded at district level to capture and use citizen feedback for provision of basic services.

Output 3.3: Multi-stakeholder governance processes promote dialogue and give feedback on implementation of policies related to delivery of basic services.

Output 3.4: People's institutions (NA/PPAs) better able to fulfil their legislative oversight and representation mandates.

Output 3.5: Legal and judicial institutional structure arrangement and capacity improved to promote rule of law.

Output 3.6: Increased public understanding of legal rights and information and increased public participation in the legal system for equal access to justice.

Output 3.7: Lao PDR better able to fulfil its international human rights obligations through treaty reporting and UPR process.²⁰

(Source: UNDP CPD, 2017-2021²¹ and UNPF 2017-2021)

The delivery of the country programme has been made through a number of discrete actions under different projects during the CPD period, with several major actions and projects being continuation of support to these actions from previous years. The major projects /programmes implemented during the period 2017 onwards are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Major projects implemented from 2017

Project title	Duration	Main donor	Executing agency/ Implementing partner
Outcome 1: Decent livelihoods - All women and men have increased opportunities for decent livelihoods and jobs.			
1. SDG 5 - Women's livelihood	July 2018-December 2021	UNDP	Lao Women's Union
2. Brand Lao for better livelihoods	January 2018-December 2021	UNDP	LNCCI
3. Accelerator Lab	July 2019-December 2021	UNDP	UNDP
4. Support for NSEDP & SDG	April 2017-December 2021	UNDP & Luxembourg	MOFA, MPI
5. UXO Lao	June 2017-Dec 2021	Multiple	UXO Lao
6. Support to National Regulatory Authority	June 2017-December 2021	Multiple	NRA
Outcome 2: Environment - Forests, ecosystems, climate change and disasters.			
7. Effective governance for small scale rural infrastructure	December 2012-December 2017	GEF	MoNRE
8. Building capacity for resilient recovery	September 2018-March 2021	Luxembourg	MLSW
9. Multiple projects on disaster management and recovery	Between 2018-2019	Multiple	UNDP

²⁰ This output was moved over to the Resident Coordinator's office through the UN Partnership Framework and dropped from UNDP CPD.

²¹ UNDP (2016). *Country programme document for the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2017-2021)* - Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services, 8 August 2016 DP/DCP/LAO/3/Rev.1

10. SAFE Ecosystems project – protected areas conservation	May 2016-May 2022	GEF & UNDP	MAF/Department of Forests
11. Poverty-Environment Action	January 2019-December 2021	UNDP	MPI
12. Nationally Determined Contributions support programme	October 2017-December 2020	EU, Germany	Ministry of Energy & Mines/IREP
Outcome 3: Governance - Institutions and policies at national and local levels support the delivery of quality services			
13. Enhancing People's Participation through Community Radio	August 2017-December 2021	UNDP	MICT
14. Governance & Inclusive Development	April 2017-September 2021	SDC & UNDP	MOHA
15. Strengthening National & Provincial Assemblies	August 2018-December 2021	SDC & UNDP	National Assembly
16. Strengthening Rule of Law	August 2017-December 2021	UNDP	Ministry of Justice

(Source: Project list provided by UNDP Lao PDR)

Resource mobilisation and spending data (Table 4) provided by the CO shows that of the 16 outputs, over the years, Output 1.3 (UXO sector) received the highest funding, followed by outputs 2.3 and 2.4 (management of natural resources and agrobiodiversity respectively) receiving the second highest resources. Output 3.1 (local administration's capacity) received the third highest amount of resources. Output 3.3 (multi-stakeholder dialogue), is supported by GIDP programme (SDC). Parallel funding was also provided by development partners for various projects under 3.3. Output 3.6 (access to justice) showed no spending up to 2019, though during the current year UNDP (3S-ROL) resources were mobilised for this; and for Output 3.7 (human rights obligations), after the initial phase when a small amount of funding was mobilised from 3S-ROL and other partners to undertake a lessons review of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Human Rights,²² this was subsequently transferred to the RCO/OHCHR which supported activities in this area.

Table 4: Resources mobilised, 2017-2021 (US\$)²³

Outputs under different outcomes	Resources required	Resources mobilised	% mobilised
Output 1.1. National and subnational systems and institutions enabled to develop productive capacities that are employment and livelihoods intensive	3,858,325	2,669,893	69.20
Output 1.2. Post-2015 agenda / SDG priorities localised and incorporated in 8th NSEDP	10,400,000	4,000,000	38.46
Output 1.3. Institutional capacities are strengthened to further improve the contribution of the UXO sector to human development in contaminated communities	24,259,296	17,858,111	73.61
Total Outcome 1	38,517,621	24,528,004	63.68
Output 2.1. Increased climate resilience of communities through small-scale infrastructure initiatives	1,392,899	1,392,899	100.00
Output 2.2. Strengthened legal framework for climate change adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk management	2,087,555	1,402,022	67.16

²² Globally this is a OHCHR-managed process - under this mechanism, the human rights situation of all UN Member States is reviewed every 5 years.

²³ The data provided by UNDP included some of the grants which straddle over two CPD periods starting with 2011-2016 CPD cycle. The ET has adjusted those data by averaging out the annual 'requirement' and 'available' on a pro-rata basis for every year. Hence the data presented in this Table may vary slightly from the UNDP Finance data which included in some cases years 2012-2016.

Output 2.3. Improved management of natural resources and ecosystem benefits through sustainable forestry and land management practices	6,398,722	6,398,722	100.00
Output 2.4. Ecosystem and agrobiodiversity management is contributing to food security and improved livelihoods in rural communities	6,514,129	6,514,129	100.00
Output 2.5. Improved monitoring and enforcement of investment compliance by State institutions and community groups	2,299,280	2,299,280	100.00
Output 2.6. Inclusive and sustainable solutions adopted to increase energy efficiency and rural energy access	802,500	802,500	100.00
Total Outcome 2	19,495,085	18,809,552	96.48
Output 3.1. Local administrations able to develop and finance multisectoral plans based on community priorities	4,961,295	4,961,295	100.00
Output 3.2. Accountability framework introduced and/or expanded at district level to capture and use citizen feedback for provision of basic services	4,379,773	1,828,773	41.75
Output 3.3. Multi-stakeholder governance processes promote dialogue and give feedback on implementation of policies related to the delivery of basic services	1,182,773	1,182,663	100.00.
Output 3.4. People's institutions (NA/PPAs) better able to fulfil their legislative, oversight and representation mandates	3,783,000	1,076,393	28.45
Output 3.5. Legal and judicial institutional structure, arrangement and capacity improved to promote rule of law	1,400,000	243,479	17.39
Output 3.6. Increased public understanding of legal rights and information, and increased public participation in the legal system for equal access to justice	1,607,463	1,607,463	100.00
Output 3.7. Lao People's Democratic Republic better able to fulfil its international human rights obligations through treaty reporting and UPR process	1,200,000	208,687	17.39
Total Outcome 3	18,514,304.00	11,108,753.00	60.00

(Source: UNDP Finance, Lao PDR country office, 20 November 2020)

Section 3: Findings of the evaluation

7. Outcome 1: Decent livelihoods

This outcome has been sought to be achieved through UNDP's active engagement on the GoL's NSEDP goals related to sustainable and inclusive growth as well as graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) status. UNDP has sought to support the GoL in strengthening institutional capacity in its sectoral coordination and planning by facilitating Round Table platforms for engagement of all stakeholders; assisted incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in the NSEDP and their dissemination and assimilation at provincial levels; supported the GoL in responding to women's development needs and promoting the status and role of women; addressed the long-standing issue of UXO which impedes all development efforts in the country; and promoted livelihood opportunities for the vulnerable and poor in the rural areas.

7.1 Strengthening institutional capacity for NSEDP and SDG

A key area of intervention has been to strengthen the capacity of Ministry of Planning (MPI) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) for integrating SDG into the M&E framework of the NSEDP and rolling out outcome/results-based management (RBM) in NSEDP implementation at both central and provincial levels. The project involving the two ministries had a number of complex outputs, with a complicated arrangement for delivery. Output 1 is led by Department of Planning (DoP) in MPI; Output 2 led by Department of International Cooperation

The programme has 4 outputs:

Output 1: The Government, at central and provincial level, has fully adopted results-based five-year/annual planning and has taken steps to link planning with budgeting.

Output 2: The Government has stronger and diversified platform for effective development partnerships in line with Vientiane Partnership Declaration.

Output 3: The Government has accelerated progress towards SDG achievement.

Output 4: The Government has improved quality of national statistics and research.

(DIC), MPI; Output 3 by Department for International Organisations, MOFA; and Output 4 by DIC and DOP. Too many output indicators which are activity-oriented, dispersed in different departments and lack of a theory of change make it difficult to assess the results achieved, as is evident from the Result-Oriented Annual Reports (ROAR) which focus mostly on activities. Structured individual interviews indicate that while a broad M&E framework²⁴ for the NSEDP exists, its use in different Ministries and provinces for monitoring and reporting

remains limited, especially in the provinces. A study of the M&E framework document shows that while it explains the context and defines various measurements and indicators, it does not render itself for RBM, and KIIs suggest that UNDP may not have had the resources and capacity to provide adequate support to the process of development of RBM. A Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) was developed by the Ministry of Finance; however, the Framework is not yet integrated into the budgeting process, undermining the credibility of budget as an instrument to achieve NSEDP objectives, according to the World Bank.²⁵ A World Bank assessment (2019) found weak links between development partners' funding for sectoral plans and annual resource allocations for long-term development goals. The linking of the MTEF with planning and budgeting was to be facilitated by the DoP with UNDP's support on developing the results-based M&E framework for NSEDP. Lack of systems to track resources available at the service delivery level in provinces affect budget monitoring. *"Externally funded projects are monitored separately and there are no systems to track allocations received by service delivery units."*²⁶

²⁴ Ministry of Planning and Investment (2016). Annex 2. *Handbook on the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Eighth National Socio-Economic Development Plan Lao People's Democratic Republic Ministry of Planning and Investment Vientiane*, August 2016

²⁵ The World Bank (2019). *Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Assessment 2018*, March 2019

²⁶ The World Bank (2019). *Ibid*

UNDP continues to play a key role assisting the government in coordination through the Round Table Meetings (RTM), and in supporting the GoL's efforts towards graduation from LDC status. Co-chaired by the Government and Resident Coordinator (RC) with support from UNDP,²⁷ the RTM facilitates dialogue on key development agendas between the government and its development partners focusing on NSEDP and SDG. Feeding into the Annual Round Table process are 10 Sector Working Groups (SWG) which are technical groups that provide informed advice to the Round Table process. The support provided by UNDP country office and regional office in preparation for the first triennial review in 2018 for LDC graduation is acknowledged by the government; so was UNDP's support in drafting the first interim report on SDG implementation. Along with other development agencies, UNDP is supporting advocacy on SDGs and the preparation for the 2021 Voluntary Nation Review (VNR) of SDG. In recent months it has provided crucial inputs into the 9th NSEDP development. While UNDP's support has been useful and acknowledged by government, the limited donor engagement and institutional steer has affected overall achievement of results. UNDP co-chairs two SWGs, namely governance and UXO. The functioning and contribution of most of the SWGs have been uneven in the absence of strategic steer and technical input on operationalising NSEDP and SDG indicators, according to individual interviewees. While UNDP provides good support in organising the event itself, UNDP has been unable to provide strategic support to ongoing preparatory work across various Ministries and sectors to enable them to socialise SDG in the lead up to the RTM. The strategic value of the SWGs is undermined by non-participation of a number of key donors which fund major projects in several sectors – projects funded by China and Vietnam, for instance.

Monitoring the outcome of RTM or SWGs, or regular engagement on progress made on plans, remains a gap, according to donor interviewees. In this regard, lack of a systematic approach to communicating, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness²⁸ was averred as an example by five individual interviewees who observed that while the annual RTM does provide information on NSEDP and SDGs, it falls short on what may be called a 'dialogue'. The Vientiane Declaration provides for a joint taskforce of the Government and partners for preparation of the Country Action Plan, and its subsequent monitoring and review. While the development partners do receive a fully-developed draft to review, there is no opportunity for dialogue and once they send their feedback, there is no knowing if these were taken into consideration. In this regard, UNDP's communication and dialogue with external stakeholders was noted to be weak and sporadic, though this has improved to an extent following the separation of the role of RC who now plays a bridging role between development partners and the GoL.

Building capacity of the Lao Statistical Bureau (LSB) has not made much progress due to lack of resources and LSB's low capacity to absorb. Most of the technical ministries (health, agriculture and forest, planning, etc) have their own internal statistical capacity which MPI is able to draw on for its planning purposes. According to individual interviewees, there was no substantive input from UNDP on LSB's capacity building, except some ad hoc training and workshops. There was no systematic needs assessment and intervention. There is a big data gap - or where data exists, a lack of capacity to analyse these - in the country in terms of development partners' ability to track progress on the NSEDP or SDG which contributes to the former's tendency to continue projectised funding that are easier to track performance of. Individual interviewees attribute this to a lack of an effective monitoring framework mentioned before.

Various other major initiatives were supported towards strengthening the operationalisation of SDGs. UNDP, in partnership with UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), supported 12 districts with training and seed financing to upgrade District Development Funds (DDF) to finance multi-sectoral plans based on community priorities. These funds are being utilised to make small grants to communities for specific activities at community level. UNDP has advocated for government funding of these, and now the government is contributing 15 percent of the cost of each project under the DDF, but KIIs indicated that continuation of these funds without external

²⁷ With the separation of RC role from UNDP, while the former chairs the Annual meeting, UNDP continues to play its lead facilitating role.

²⁸ Government of Lao PDR (2016). *Vientiane Declaration On Partnership For Effective Development Cooperation (2016-2025)*

assistance in future is doubtful as the districts do not have any additional resources allocated for this. The central budgeting process does not include any DDF funding. On SDGs, the GoL has added one additional goal on UXO (SDG18) which ensures that UXO continues to receive priority in development planning. The GoL has developed institutional capacity over the past three decades of its work on UXOs. Another area which has directly benefitted from UNDP's support in SDG-5, implemented through Lao Women's Union (LWU), the nationwide quasi-Government agency focusing on women's empowerment. Apart from these two major programmes, it is unclear from interviews with different Ministries and departments as to how the SDGs are being taken forward in their planning. All Government individual interviews confirmed that they have attended training and orientation on SDGs, but response to the question as to how they report on SDGs lacked specifics from relevant Government and UNDP individual interviewees. Several individual interviewees noted that UNDP's support on this project lacked consistency; with a Programme Analyst (PA) acting as a focal point, the discussion is more at a grant administration level. Further, there has been a lack of continuity as PAs changed frequently in the last four years.

The women's economic empowerment project (SDG-5) to promote women's livelihoods opportunities through training, skills development and promoting small and medium enterprises (SME) is implemented in three provinces. The project aimed at enhancing the business practices and improved entrepreneurs' skills and marketing network directly benefiting women, among others. Progress reports, individual interviews and beneficiary interviews showed that the project has been providing a number of skills training in multiple trades (tailoring, weaving, handicrafts, chicken rearing, cattle and pig farming and mushroom cultivation). LWU set up gender

With UNDP support, LWU set up One District One Product (ODOP) group with 22 women in Ta Oy district. The group was provided training in various tailoring, embroidery, accounting skills etc., and women produce shoulder bags, table covers, women's skirts and other items which they sell locally, but the local market is limited as they are unable to produce to the design and quality a wider market will accept.

resource information centre to provide information on gender, women's rights, nutrition education and awareness on gender issues. These are however not well resourced and are not functioning everywhere. While the livelihoods activities have provided women space to participate in their local communities and promoted savings groups, limited market opportunities or disease outbreaks in animal stock have hamstrung any meaningful economic empowerment. Some of these challenges could have been foreseen if a thorough feasibility analysis of these enterprises had been done. For instance,

interviews with women's groups in a province indicated that what they produce does not sell in the market as consumer preferences and tastes for tailoring products are vastly different, a fact also confirmed by KIIs with other stakeholders. Animal rearing, for instance, is a challenging activity for anyone without previous experience in the activity, made worse when free or low-cost good quality veterinary services are not available locally. Women interviewed referred to 'marketing' being the main challenge and currently they can sell their products only when LWU organises market festivals, and women expect UNDP to support similar market fairs at national and international levels. LWU has also from time to time linked up the women's groups with GoL agencies which place orders for items such as conference bags, masks.

Besides the economic empowerment activities, LWU is the lead agency of the government for monitoring and responding to Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Working with UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), it operates centres throughout the country to track and monitor trafficking and GBV, and provide counselling services. LWU drafted for the Government a law on violence against women, and a national action plan to address GBV is now being developed. LWU is the focal point of the GoL for reporting on SDG 5 and SDG 16 which it does in coordination with different line ministries, with UNDP support in the process.

7.2 Institutional capacity for UXO sector (SDG-18)

Support to the UXO sector in the country has been the major flagship programme of UNDP for over two decades. Addressing the UXO issue remains central to the country's overall development, a fact recognised by the government through a dedicated goal, SDG18, in its national plan. UNDP's contribution in building the two key

institutions, National Regulatory Authority for the Mine Action/UXO sector (NRA) and UXO Lao has been significant; the former spearhead the UXO sector policy making and standard setting, while the latter focuses on operationalising the UXO response. The NRA has lead responsibility for the regulation, coordination, and oversight of all work in the UXO sector, and ensure that Lao PDR fulfils its legal obligations as a State Party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM). UNDP provides technical support to NRA through deployment of a Chief Technical Adviser (CTA), Finance Adviser and a Programme & Partnership Support Officer. The UXO Lao is the only not-for-profit national operator which currently undertakes more than half of all UXO survey, clearance, and risk education work throughout the country.²⁹ The CPD emphasised integration of SDG 18 into the NSEDP which has taken place. Looking at UXO clearance performance alone, the programme has been highly successful through introduction of evidence-based task prioritisation system during the current CPD. Over the years, the number of casualties nationwide has declined steadily from 302 in 2008³⁰ to a low 41 in 2017, 24 in 2018, 25 in 2019, 27 in 2020, according to UNDP, citing official sources. This is partly attributed to a switch from general clearance to targeted clearance (areas with highest contamination targeted) which has increased the rate of clearance of UXO from 4 per ha to 20 per ha. This methodology gave the UXO sector a measure of assessing performance of their operations in each area. Another new element has been added to the programme through the introduction of the concept of 'Humanitarian Army' which prioritises areas that may not have other clearance agencies but still have pockets of cluster munitions that prevent communities from going about their daily lives and economic activities. To support these communities, the GoL set up seven units of Humanitarian Army which can be deployed in these neglected areas.

To date, UNDP's support for UXO action in Lao PDR has focused mainly on building capacity for technical actions like survey, clearance and Mine Risk Education (MRE), and less on post-clearance poverty reduction and livelihoods development. The CPD emphasises UNDP's support to align the UXO sector with the country's poverty reduction goals, in line with national goal, SDG 18. One of the criticisms often made about UNDP's approach to the UXO sector has been that while it has been effective in reducing UXO-related casualties which have fallen from hundreds in the 1990s to 25 in 2019, its links to socioeconomic development has been weak.³¹ This was also raised in a 2016 evaluation of the previous phase of support.³² Since 2016-2017, there has been an increasing emphasis on prioritising land for clearance based on its intended use – lands that are to be put directly to productive use (farming, local market development) are prioritised first. Most of the clearances are made on land meant for agricultural use. However, according to individual interviewees this does not sometimes work as local authorities have the discretion to change the land use when they see other needs. Several small-scale livelihood activities at individual household level have been supported as part of victim assistance. A mid-term evaluation in late 2019 found that these had no clear criteria for family selection and could potentially create tensions and discord in the community.³³ Besides the inappropriate choice of activities (livestock rearing, without adequate training and veterinary care support, for example), UNDP's capacity to monitor these activities was assessed as weak in the said evaluation. UNDP has now hired a Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist who is based in the NRA to provide M&E capacity-strengthening support. These will be based on results-based management (RBM) framework which will allow for monitoring the outputs, outcomes, impact and the need for sustainable benefits.³⁴ On gender issues, the project design stresses women's participation in UXO sector planning and implementation and ensure gender issues are taken into consideration in victim assistance activities. It is unclear from the progress reports how these objectives were being achieved. The mid-term evaluation noted that the Programme does not seem to have an operational plan or activities to achieve the gender indicators.

²⁹ Jo Durham (2016). *Evaluation of UNDP Support to Mine Action in Lao PDR, 2013-2016*

³⁰ UNDP (2017). *Final Project Report 2013-2017 – Support to the Institutional Strengthening of the National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector (NRA) and the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme (UXO Lao)*.

³¹ Raaymakers, S. & Phakdisoth, L. (2019). *UNDP - Lao UXO Program 2017-2021: Mid Term Evaluation, End Evaluation of EU Contribution & Forward-looking Opportunities* - Dec 2019. Report to the United Nations Development Programme and the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Project IDs: 00101607 & 00105819

³² Jo Durham (2016). *Ibid*

³³ Raaymakers, S. & Phakdisoth, L. (2019). *UNDP - Lao UXO Program 2017-2021, Ibid*

³⁴ UNDP Lao PDR (2020). *Internal note - Management Response - UXO Mid-Term Evaluation*

UNDP 's distinctive edge in UXO programming may be losing ground, through it still remains the only organisation focusing on sustainability of the NRA, besides playing a co-chair (with the government and USA) role in the UXO sector. In the past, funding for the UXO programme was either through a multi-donor trust fund operated by UNDP, or funds directly provided to UNDP by development partners. For the past several years, all donor funds are now made through bi-lateral agreement between UNDP and donors as the latter find that this arrangement gives them greater assurance in terms of accountability and transparency than the previous Trust Fund provided. Donor interviews suggest they also like UNDP's approach of presenting a formulation 'programme' comprising multiple *modular and discrete series of* projects within it, so that donors can pick and choose what they want to fund, depending on their preference and funds availability. However, this seemingly successful 'projectised' approach may have costs in the medium to long run. A few donors are now beginning to support UXO Lao directly as well which is an indication of the latter's capacity that probably owes a good deal to UNDP's long and sustained support. The share of UNDP's funding for UXO Lao has dropped, and it now supports work in one province only. Though UNDP's support to the UXO sector has had a history of a programmatic approach with clear goals across the sector, interviews indicate that its positioning as the leading organisation is now challenged by two major factors: (a) UNDP is not able to bring in cutting-edge thinking and expertise in the sector; (b) a number of specialised INGOs which have been operating in the country for decades are able to step up to the plate and attract substantial donor funding.³⁵ Additionally, in the absence of a good baseline for capacity assessment of NRA or UXO Lao, UNDP's inability to track and demonstrate the value of its capacity building support puts it in an untenable position. To address this gap, UNDP is now in the process of recruiting a consultant to undertake a systematic capacity assessment.

Capacity building inputs to NRA needs greater focus. Interviews with donors indicate that while funding in general for Lao has been reducing, they still continue to fund the UXO sector for its criticality to the country's development. However, funds are now beginning to move towards other crises like those in Yemen, Syria and Somalia, which will put further pressure on the donor community operating in Asia to demonstrate for their constituents back home outstanding value. UNDP's main contribution now has been in supporting the NRA in its work on policy and standards nationally. At least four individual donor-interviewees cited the example of NRA as a matter of concern because of its relatively weak capacity even after nearly 15 years of capacity building support, a view shared by a number of others as well. While UNDP may provide technical support, a genuine process of institutional development for the next stage must be internally-driven. All support to most of the GoL institutions are predicated on a National Implementation Modality (NIM); however, UNDP could still facilitate a better analysis of institutional weaknesses and help develop a comprehensive plan based on a clear pathway to change.

7.3 Other initiatives to promote decent livelihoods and institutional capacity

As part of efforts to promote decent livelihoods, UNDP supported (Brand Lao project) Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) to develop a value chain strategy for branding, promotion, market identification and positioning, and quality assurance for local products namely, tea, coffee and rice in national, regional and international markets. A major part of the project was led by an international consultant who undertook research into various aspects of this project and made recommendations to LNCCI. The project has so far organised a few meetings and workshops with coffee growers and exporters; a number LNCCI officials and exporters participated in a trade exhibition in Shanghai; and now LNCCI is exploring different packaging standards. A study of the project document shows that it was good concept, but poor design without a theory of change (TOC) to identify **forward and backward linkages** of such an initiative. A number of factors determine such a complex value chain process: it is not enough to identify market and products that can be sold, it is also important to identify why the buyer would buy from country X and not Y; how linkages will be established with the producers (farmers) and are they prepared enough to participate in the value chain process (trained adequately to produce

³⁵ It is understood that the US has increased its funding on UXO in Lao PDR, but it does not fund through UNDP.

and ensure quality); who are these producers (poor farmers, or big companies out to grab the farmers' lands); if the producers are poor farmers, do/would they have enough land to generate marketable surplus after meeting their consumption needs); how will the products be aggregated from producers and finally linked to the market. Without this integrated analysis, any good concept remains like a wish-list, and this project, according to several individual interviewees, is one such.

Through a global learning project, Accelerator Lab, UNDP Lao country office has launched in 2019 an initiative to explore innovative solutions to local issues (waste management, for example). It is still at a formative stage and premature to assess the initiative. In response to Covid-19, UNDP is supporting MPI to develop its capacity to adapt to a pandemic environment by providing it with modern communication and conferencing equipment so that it can coordinate all its offices and provinces. As of October 2020, this initiative was at its final planning stage, and it is unclear when this equipment will be installed, staff trained and the system made operational. UNDP is also assisting the Ministry of Posts & Telecommunication with telecom equipment as part of its digitisation initiative throughout the country, to enable the Government departments to function in a socially-distanced way during the current pandemic. This is part of a digitisation project linking provinces with Vientiane to promote e-governance.

Summary of findings on Outcome 1:³⁶

1. UNDP plays a supporting role to the RC in assisting the government host the Round Table Meetings (RTM). Lack of strong programmatic leadership and a results framework for NSEDP affects the qualitative contribution of SWGs. The strategic value of the SWGs is also undermined by non-participation of a number of key donors which fund major projects in several sectors. (3)
2. Development partners valued the role played by UNDP in organizing the RTM, though the RTM by itself did not provide the space for ongoing dialogue with the GoL. UNDP's role in facilitating dialogue with external stakeholders was weak and sporadic; this has improved to an extent following the separation of role of the RC who now plays a bridging role between development partners and the GoL. (2)
3. Support to MPI and MOFA for integrating SDG into the M&E framework of the NSEDP and rolling out outcome/ results-based management (RBM) in NSEDP implementation have had mixed success. While SDGs may have been integrated, there is no results /M&E framework in place for the NSEDP. A Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) was developed by the Ministry of Finance; however, the Framework is not yet integrated into the budgeting process, undermining the credibility of budget as an instrument to achieve NSEDP objectives. (3)
4. The MPI-MOFA project design is complex, with multiple stakeholders and objectives, without a clear results pathway. Given the highly ambitious nature of its objectives, it lacked depth of engagement by UNDP; with a Programme Analyst acting as a focal point, the discussion has been more at a grant administration level. (3)
5. The UXO programme remains the flagship of UNDP Lao, though going forward the programme needs to be repositioned in the current operating context which has seen a number of other organisations bringing in strong expertise in the sector. (4)
6. The formulation of the UXO programme comprising multiple *modular and discrete series of* projects within it is liked by development partners as this allows them to pick and choose what they want to fund, depending on their preference and funds availability. This however is fraught with the danger of increasing 'projectisation'. (4)
7. Building capacity of the Lao Statistical Bureau (LSB) has not made much progress due to lack of resources within UNDP and LSB's low capacity to absorb. (3)

³⁶ The number within parenthesis at the end of each finding denotes the 'Strength of evidence', as described in methodology section of the report.

8. When measured on the basis of UXO clearance alone, the switch from general clearance to targeted clearance has increased the rate of clearance of UXO from 4 per ha to 20 per ha. However, success in terms of post-clearance poverty reduction and livelihoods development continues to be limited. (4)
9. The introduction of the concept of 'Humanitarian Army' which prioritises areas that may not be heavily contaminated but still have significant cluster munitions has been an important new initiative. (3)
10. Continuing concern over the relatively weak capacity of NRA even after nearly 15 years of capacity building support. (2)
11. While the SDG-5 project has provided women space to participate in their local communities and promoted savings groups, limited market opportunities or disease outbreaks in animal stock have hamstrung meaningful economic empowerment. Some of these challenges could have been foreseen if a thorough feasibility analysis of various enterprises had been done. (4)
12. UNDP has demonstrated ability to identify strategic areas for support. However, its institutional capacity to deliver – and deliver on time - does not match its ambitious goals (delayed procurement for Covid adaptation projects,³⁷ poor analyses underpinning livelihood interventions, lack of an integrated analysis of Brand Lao, etc). (4)

8. Outcome 2 – Environment, climate change and disasters

UNDP's programming on this outcome has sought to explore the links between poverty, livelihoods, environment and climate change through a number of initiatives on forest and land management through people's participation, climate change adaptation measures in rural small scale infrastructures and farming, biodiversity conservation, rural energy, and disaster management and recovery. A number of projects were initiated and implemented in this regard. Some of the major outputs and outcomes achieved are discussed below.

8.1 Sustainable management of forests and land resources

Working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF),³⁸ UNDP developed an ambitious project with three key components: (a) developing policy for sustainable land and forest management; (b) a model for protected areas management in one province (Savannakhet), incorporating demarcation and patrolling, community involvement in management of protected areas through conservation agreements, development of alternative livelihoods for local communities, reforestation in protected areas, livelihoods activities targeting the vulnerable households; and (c) a financing model for conservation through promotion of ecotourism in the protected areas. A mid-term review noted that the project has made good progress in developing draft plans and guidelines and getting some of these adopted by provincial authorities, though fell short in ensuring their utilisation. The project was fundamentally predicated on weaning people away from overuse of forest resources by providing them alternative livelihoods. However, the livelihoods component was very small and implemented on a pilot scale covering a small number of households in 16 villages.³⁹ Activities such as handicrafts and tailoring were supported, but these did not offer any viable opportunity due to lack of market. For the reforestation programme, nurseries were developed, but selecting land for planting became a challenge at the time due to lack of clarity regarding the type of land to be selected; since 2018, the situation has improved with the use of Geographical Information System (GIS) mapping by provincial staff. The project promoted community involvement in development of village forest management plans and created an awareness about conservation issues.

³⁷ Delays in procurement was also due to external factors to do with suppliers.

³⁸ UNDP originally developed the project with MoNRE. In 2017, the National Assembly of Lao PDR moved all responsibility of forest management to MAF. UNDP now provides support to the Department of Forestry as the Implementing Partner.

³⁹ The various project activities were implemented in 43 villages while conservation contract was implemented in 16 villages as a pilot. As of April 2020 (Eugenia Katsigris, Latsany Phakdisoth (2020). Mid-Term Review – Laos SAFE Ecosystems Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, UNDP, GEF), April 7, 2020

The project document did not have a TOC showing the linkages between different components and activities and how each of these interact with economic, social and livelihood factors that affect communities. Subsequently a TOC was developed based on the existing project design which fell short on clear articulation of assumptions⁴⁰ about how the *changes* might happen, as a check on whether the activities and outputs are appropriate for influencing change in the desired direction in this context. As a result, implementation of the project became one of delivering a long menu of activities, often without strong linkage to the overall output or outcome, particularly on livelihoods. Combined with the fact that the project was implemented under the National Implementation Modality (NIM) operating procedure, a weak design meant that corrective measures in the course of implementation had been difficult to undertake. Following a mid-term review of the project⁴¹ which noted several other weaknesses (generous and unsustainable conservation agreements with communities, payment for patrolling, inappropriate choice of livelihood activities), the country office has now been working with the implementing partner (MAF) to address these gaps.

The project design was not informed by solid technical understanding contextualised with a granular understanding of local livelihood systems. The weaknesses in choice of livelihoods activities and their implementation have been recognised in internal discussions⁴² held by the team in recent months. Livestock (goats, pigs) were being distributed in the areas where reforestation was being undertaken, with the result that the survival rate of planted seedlings fell below 60 percent due to several factors, including animal grazing. The discussion within the project management team currently has been focusing on corrective measures to develop an appropriate strategy for livestock management in the area so that animals do not stray into protected areas for grazing. Various options like growing fodder and stall feeding of animals are being explored, in addition to improving animal healthcare. In a TOC approach to planning, these options and solutions will need to be tested for validity of the theories underpinning them. Stall feeding of animals is a challenging concept in areas with concentration of farmers with small stocks of animals and in areas with good supply of pastures. For afforestation programme, plans are afoot now to move towards agro-forestry model encouraging farmers to plant trees on their own lands as these are more likely to be protected from grazing by animals. Private agro-forestry and alternative strategies to ensure better protection and survival of planted seedlings in protected areas are being considered. The project has developed strategies to improve protection of seedlings in reforestation areas which includes allowing ownership, caging trees and increased community responsibilities in management of reforestation areas.

The concept of protected area in Lao is generally top-down, with limited degree of participation of communities without any real sense of ownership and decision making.⁴³ Under the project, communities are paid to perform certain tasks related to guarding and patrolling of the protected areas. Globally, community-based management of protected areas is premised on communities living in and around protected areas playing a primary role in conservation activities. Through shared governance, or co-management approaches, communities play an active role in making decisions concerning the management of protected areas, in coordination with other actors, such as government and conservation organisations. Local customs, rules and regulations are often developed by communities themselves which enable responsible management of such forests, while at the same time obtain non-timber forest produce (NTPF) and certain usufruct rights for their own needs. The project supported the creation of Village Development Committees to promote people's participation. It is understood that the extent of illegal logging by outsiders and commercial loggers is the major cause of destruction of forest in Lao PDR, particularly to satisfy the voracious demand for wood from China and Vietnam. State enforcement agencies are not known to conduct inspections of logging operations linked to forest conservation projects. One research study

⁴⁰ In particular, the emphasis on making assumptions explicit and getting depth and critical thinking on assumptions is the crux of a theory of change process.

⁴¹ Eugenia Katsigris, Latsany Phakdisoth (2020). *Mid-Term Review – Laos SAFE Ecosystems Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR* (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, UNDP, GEF), April 7, 2020

⁴² Recommended Guidelines and Strategy for 2020-2021 SAFE Ecosystems Project Animal Husbandry, Village Vet and Feed Activities

⁴³ Kenney-Lazar, Miles. 2016. *Protected Area Governance and Equitable Access in the Lao PDR*. Ed. Darren J. Daley. Pakse, Laos: Global Association for People and the Environment (GAPE).

in Laos noted that Government protection agencies focus solely on small-scale loggers rather than the powerful companies behind the overwhelming majority of illegal logging operations in the country.⁴⁴ To its credit, the project was successful in working with the Provincial Authorities to have all large saw mills in the project area shut down. It is however unclear to the evaluation team as to how the project is addressing the issue of illegal logging by other commercial loggers.

Promoting the ecotourism initiative as a potential revenue-generating avenue for financing the protected areas in a sustainable way or to generate livelihoods for people was another ambitious idea, with a number of unrealistic assumptions, namely: (a) the district/provincial agriculture office has the ability to run such a project profitably; (b) there are sufficient number of tourists who are interested in visiting the area; and (c) create the facilities and the project will promote itself to attract potential tourists. It is understood that attempt is now being made to bring in private ecotourism operators⁴⁵ who know the business and may be interested, something that should have been done right at the start of the project. While this may be a step in the right direction, how much of a revenue this may generate for the protected areas maintenance, as opposed to revenue for the operator, and its potential to create livelihood opportunities remain to be seen.

Capacity building of MAF officials has been attempted in several areas, namely environmental assessments, development of GIS for environment management, biodiversity survey, etc. The evaluation team has been unable to evaluate the extent to which these capacity building inputs are being utilised by the officials.

8.2 Climate resilience, disaster risk reduction and disaster management

Lao PDR was one of the first ASEAN countries to ratify the Paris Agreement on Climate Change which brought about a significant interest in the GoL to push forward on climate change and disaster risk reduction. UNDP assisted the Government to outline its commitment through the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) in 2017, following which a NDC implementation handbook was developed to guide officials in delivery of the commitments made. KIIs suggest that the implementation or use of the handbook has not yet started, and in the provinces there is little awareness about its existence or implications.

Successful climate-resilient measures at community level were implemented, but these did not feed into influencing policies at the central level. A GEF-funded rural infrastructure project was implemented, starting with the previous CPD cycle and ending in 2017, to promote community management of small-scale infrastructure to reduce disaster risks and enhance the capacity of local administrative institutions to integrate climate risks in planning and financing local small-scale infrastructure. Its implementation was split between two Ministries – Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment (MoNRE)⁴⁶ and Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) at provincial level. Like the current Ecosystem project, the design of this project was also complicated and did not provide a clear pathway to results combining multiple priorities: addressing adaption-related priorities, implementation of small-scale infrastructure projects, implementation of ecosystem management and action plans, developing the planning capacity of local administrations, etc. Despite the challenges in design and its management split between two Ministries which caused severe delays in implementation, the project succeeded in developing provincial level policies and guidance on climate resilience measures in rural infrastructures, building capacity at district level for climate-resilient planning, upgraded a number of rural infrastructure with community participation and introduced soil and land conservation measures.⁴⁷ However, the terminal evaluation found that the project failed to generate

⁴⁴ <https://eia-international.org/news/leaked-report-reveals-huge-scale-of-illegal-logging-in-laos/>

⁴⁵ In this regard, a comprehensive concept note has been developed in recent months (UNDP Lao PDR, 20200. *Wildlife Tourism Experience Concept*, June 2020)

⁴⁶ Since 2015, this shifted to Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MAF)

⁴⁷ Vincent Lefebvre, Singh Ounniyom (2018). *Terminal evaluation of GEF project Effective Governance for small-scale rural infrastructure and disaster preparedness in a changing climate in Lao PDR*, Project ID 00084024

substantial interest at the central level to influence policy-making on climate resilience and related construction codes or improve sustainability models based on community maintenance and repairs by the Government.

Strengthening the disaster management capacity of the National Disaster Management Organisation (NDMO) has been prioritised. UNDP has been providing technical assistance to the NDMO by providing the services of a full-time Disaster Risk Reduction Specialist operating from the former's office. With support from UNDP and the International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the GoL adopted a Disaster Management Law in 2019 which provides the institutional framework and structure for disaster preparedness, response and recovery. This is currently being disseminated in provinces by NDMO through regular meetings and workshops held in the provinces. Following the Attepeu floods in 2018, UNDP facilitated training of government officials in post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA) and some of these staff were deployed for undertaking the post-floods PDNA. KIIs with Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare suggested that while they found the PDNA training useful, there is need for refresher courses as people either move from their jobs or tend to forget what they learnt in 2018.

As part of post-flood recovery, working through the Ministry of Labour & Social Welfare, UNDP provided support for repair of local infrastructure (roads) through cash for work, helped six villages in setting up a community-based early warning system through village-level disaster management committees. UNDP is now developing a post-disaster recovery framework which will include guidance for each key sector. At the national level, support was provided to the Posts & Telecommunications Ministry to work with the Department of Meteorology & Hydrology in the Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment to disseminate weather related information and early warning messages through SMS. It was noted in the documents that in the previous CPD cycle as well, UNDP supported village level early warning plans in a few districts,⁴⁸ which as micro-projects may have had success at that point in time in those villages in addressing the immediate emergency. It is unclear what these isolated early warning activities have contributed to and how these connected to major nation-wide early warning and disaster management systems being developed in the country. Funded by the USAID, the MLSW is already working on a region-wide hazard monitoring and early warning platform, DisasterAWARE, which is part of a larger Regional and National Capacity Development Programme implemented through the Pacific Disaster Centre of the US. This will develop a nationally-adapted Disaster Monitoring and Response System (DMRS). Extensive staff training and development of Concept of Operations (CONOPS) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) are now being undertaken.

A rural energy project utilising solar energy has been supported by UNDP through a project which ends in December. The project involves installing the solar electricity system to provide electricity to two remote villages (147 households) which are not connected to the existing power grid. According to individual interviewees, the choice of technology, equipment and supplier was made without adequate consultation with Government authorities, with the consequence that equipment which has been supplied has been imported from Europe and there are no service centres for this in the country. In the entire ASEAN region, solar power systems are mostly from China, Malaysia, Japan or Korea. In Lao, there are several suppliers who work with these regional suppliers, but are not familiar with either installation or maintenance of the equipment provided, raising questions about sustainability of the entire system. The villagers will be trained after the completion of installation in its operation and maintenance. With the project coming to an end in December 2020, project stakeholders are worried if villagers can be at all trained and given adequate orientation in the short period of the few remaining days before the project ends. Even with training, given the highly sophisticated technology and equipment used without any consideration of the feasibility of its maintenance by local providers, the project implemented at a cost of about US\$374,000 is neither a viable nor a sustainable option, something that ought to have been obvious to people who were involved in designing the project.

⁴⁸ UNDP (undated). *Integrated Disaster and Climate Risk Management Project In Lao PDR (IDCRM)* Project ID: 00086007

Over the years the CO has supported several other small initiatives which at first glance appear reasonable, though their results are uncertain. Distribution of cattle and chicken for flood recovery in 2018 met the same fate as the livestock activities in the protected areas programme, with inadequate veterinary care and high mortality among animals and grazing problems.⁴⁹ It is understood that the CO is now getting involved in helping the Ministry of Health (MoH) in implementing a post-Covid medical waste management project. With the assistance of China, a personal protective equipment (PPE) supply/manufacturing project is also being explored. UNDP considers this as part of South-South cooperation on Covid response. While these are interesting initiatives, it is unclear how central these are to the environment and UNDP's climate change portfolio or to Covid response strategy in the country.

8.3 Interactions between poverty, environment and investment

As part of UNDP's global initiative to promote understanding and best practices in links between poverty and environment, and to ensure that investments coming into the country comply with the best practices and standards, UNDP supported the Ministry of Planning & Investment (MPI) in developing various tools and investment promotion videos which were disseminated to provinces through the poverty-environment action (PEA)⁵⁰ project. The Investment Promotion Department of MPI is currently being supported in developing a handbook on project assessment /environmental assessment. A Ministerial Instruction making environmental impact assessment mandatory before investment projects can begin was issued but its compliance is doubtful. Technical guidance notes and criteria for assessments of these projects have also been established to assist officers to examine impacts more efficiently. Foreign investment in Lao PDR is prominent in electricity generation and mining representing over half of the total FDI stock and contributing strongly to the rapid economic growth over the past decade. The mining sector in Lao PDR mostly comprises companies from Australia, China and Canada.⁵¹ As is well known, the mining sector all over the world, and particularly in the LDCs, leaves its debilitating effect on the environment and local communities. Structured individual interviews pointed to a lack of dialogue with major investors in the country. According the individual interviewees, while MPI has disseminated the tools and provided information sessions, there is no system that can monitor if these are being used and to what effect. MPI is now working with other central Ministries to develop an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism to track and monitor use of these guidance.

Summary of findings on Outcome 2:⁵²

1. Substantial progress has been made with regard to developing policies and guidelines (i) on land and forest resources management, and (ii) disaster management through UNDP projects; their utilisation will be key to future results. (3)
2. The ecosystem project on sustainable land and forest management, with three key components (policy on protected areas and conservation, sustainable forest management, and the financing model for conservation) initially suffered from lack of a clear TOC showing the linkages between different components and activities and how each of these interact with economic, social and livelihood factors that affect communities; this is now being addressed. (4)
3. Promoting ecotourism initiative as a potential revenue-generating avenue for financing the protected areas in a sustainable way or to generate livelihoods for people was an ambitious idea, with a number of unrealistic assumptions. (4)
4. The project designs were not informed by solid technical understanding, nor contextualised with a granular understanding of local livelihood systems. (4)

⁴⁹ UNDP (undated). *Report on the use of CERF funds – Lao PDR Rapid Response to Floods*, 2018.

⁵⁰ Previously called Poverty-Environment Initiative (PEI).

⁵¹ OECD INVESTMENT POLICY REVIEWS: LAO PDR © OECD 2017 Chapter 1: Trends in foreign investment and trade in Lao PDR

⁵² The number within parenthesis at the end of each finding denotes the 'Strength of evidence', as described in the methodology section of the report.

5. Successful climate-resilient measures at community level were implemented; however evidences from these were not utilised to feed into influencing policies at the central level. (3)
6. Strengthening the disaster management capacity of the National Disaster Management Organisation (NDMO) has been prioritised through the development of Disaster Management Law and Recovery framework/guidance. (2)
7. Links between the village-level pilot early warning system and national level initiatives on EWS of the GoL remain unclear, and may have implications for sustainability of these localised systems. (2)

9. Outcome 3: Governance

UNDP's support to the GoL on governance has been mainly through four key projects: (a) public administration reform for improved delivery of social services; (b) the rule of law and access to justice project; (c) enhanced public participation in government decision-making; and, (d) information sharing through community-based media. The GoL priorities on governance are outlined in its "Strategic Plan: Governance of the Lao PDR to 2020"⁵³ which provides the overarching framework for governance reform in Lao PDR and aims to strengthen governance through four thematic areas, namely: Development of the People's Representation and Participation; Public Administration Improvement; Rule of Law; Public Financial Management. The country's aim of graduating from LDC status by 2024 and its goals as set out in the 8th NSEDP and the SDGs, including the Agenda 2030 key objective of "*leaving no one behind*" are all dependent on strengthening governance and delineating functions and tasks between the centre and local administrative levels (provincial, district and village).

Governance programming, as it is understood in the international development context, is a challenging construct in a country like Lao PDR with its unique features. UNDP needs to work within the "Democratic Centralism" of the political system in the country⁵⁴ in order to encourage decentralisation and the development of local capacity and greater autonomy at the provincial and district level. This is particularly telling with respect to the role - or lack thereof - of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in development framework of the country. Normally, CSOs would be important actors in ensuring development effectiveness by improving transparency, good governance and holding government to account. Although the government is slowly coming to accept a greater role for CSOs, and related Non-Profit Associations (NPAs), they remain tightly controlled in Lao PDR. There is a clear connection between how confident the state feels that it is in control and the ability of UNDP (and other development partners) to move reform forward. This emphasises the need for an extended period of political stability, as well as a durable commitment by the leadership, to ensure the success of reform.

UNDP has failed to leverage its position of trust with the GoL to play a significant role in governance areas. Some development partners have pursued their own governance programming to the detriment of UNDP. UNDP has considerable advantages in programming in the Governance area in Lao PDR. It is held in high regard and trusted by the government; it is perceived to be a neutral partner. UNDP's global experience in areas such as capacity building, decentralisation, policy development, participatory development and women's empowerment is a "good fit" with the governance priorities of the country. Moreover, UNDP's long-standing presence in Lao PDR, its deep understanding of the historical and cultural context of the society, and its good working relationship with the government should make it the leading actor in the governance sector. However, UNDP has lost its edge and others have filled the void. A case in point is the Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and the Rule of Law (CEGGA) project (launched in 2017), funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (GIZ), the EU and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). CEGGA, which

⁵³ Government of the Lao PDR. "Strategic Plan: Governance of the Lao PDR to 2020," National Assembly, October 2011, p.5 (Unofficial translation)

⁵⁴ Article 3 of the amended constitution of 2015 defines the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) as the "leading nucleus" of the political system, whilst Article 5 "subordinates all state organisations to the principle of 'democratic centralism.'" Simon Creak & Keith Barney (2018) Conceptualizing Party-State Governance and Rule in Laos, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 48:5, 693-716, DOI: [10.1080/00472336.2018.1494849](https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2018.1494849)

essentially mirrors UNDP's governance programme and has the same target groups stemmed from general dissatisfaction with the latter's management and performance, a sense that programme impacts were negligible and that its reporting lacked substance. Several interviewees voiced the opinion that the reason why the CEGGA project was initiated reflects donors' general frustration with UNDP as an implementing partner. This may have cost UNDP the space to lead the governance agenda in the country, an issue UNDP is aiming to address in the next CPD cycle. These opinions reflect how things were viewed in recent times and it is recognised that there is now a new Governance team in place at UNDP. Whether this will result in changes in perspectives and results remains to be seen but the dynamic has changed and it appears to be a positive development.

In conjunction with the funding challenges, UNDP's role as a credible development partner has also been questioned. A perception, widely voiced in the course of this evaluation by development partners, is that UNDP lacks strategic vision, is not focused on the substance of its work and has often been absent from the discussions surrounding the design and planning of the development policy agenda. In addition, **complaints about poor communications, high staff turnover and an overly bureaucratic system have all contributed to some donors looking for other options for their support on governance issues.**

9.1 National Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAP) Programme - Governance for Inclusive Development Programme (GIDP)

The GPAP/GIDP project has enhanced broader engagement between communities, local authorities and the central government. Implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), in close collaboration with the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and the Provincial and District administrations), GPAP/GIDP has effectively been in existence since the 1990s and therefore has a strong history of governance reform to build on.⁵⁵ As shown in Table 4, it is the best funded of the governance projects reviewed. It was always the intention that external support would be phased out as MOHA staff gained the skills to run the programme. The project is due to end in March 2021 and it remains to be seen if the Government will carry it forward with its own resources, but for now GPAP/GIDP's work in enhancing local governance through systemic change is highly relevant and is aligned with the cross-cutting governance goals of the 8th NSEDP. In combination with support for the government's Sam Sang decentralisation and local development process, and the establishment of the Provincial People's Assemblies (PPAs), the GPAP/GIDP project has undoubtedly enhanced broader engagement between communities, local authorities and the centre. For example, the District Development Fund, supported by the project, builds the capacity of local authorities, especially at the provincial, district and village levels, to coordinate and promote participatory planning and thereby gives the people better access to basic services and a greater role in deciding which priorities affect their lives. Nevertheless, the major donor, SDC will not be continuing support for it in its present form when the current phase ends. Given the uncertainty of ongoing funding, it would be more apposite for UNDP to consider elements of it that are worth preserving - what stands out as being the most consequential is support to the Governance Sector Working Group (GSWG).

The support of the GIDP to the secretariat of the GSWG is probably one of the most relevant activities of the project, these activities are largely outside the project's main objectives. The GSWG, co-chaired by MOHA, the Ministry of Justice, UNDP and SDC is designed to promote dialogue and feedback on governance issues, advocate and influence governance-related policies and service delivery, while also encouraging the participation of Non-Profit Associations (NPAs). The GSWG is an important platform for discussion between all governance stakeholders and, as one of the co-chairs, UNDP has a high profile role in it. The work of the GSWG feeds directly

⁵⁵ In 1990, the GOL began to develop the rudiments of Good Governance and Participatory Development, including: the Constitution, legal codes, the National Assembly, the judicial branch, tax collection and enforcement bodies. In 2001, the Prime Minister issued Decree 01 to decentralise to the sub-national levels the functions of development planning, budgeting, tax collection and implementation. (Source: "Governance and Participation in Laos" SIDA, Asia Division, June 2003).

into the annual Round Table Implementation Meeting as well as the High Level Round Table Meeting, which occurs every five years. As an information exchange, the GSWG presents the opportunity to engage directly with the government on governance issues and sensitive matters in general; it can also provide coordination support to the development agenda. An important aspect of its work is the role the GSWG has played in encouraging the participation of NPAs in its deliberations. NPAs are primarily engaged in community development activities rather than advocacy and they are treading carefully to establish their role in Lao PDR's development framework. They wish to engage in meaningful policy dialogue at the sub-national and national levels and the GSWG presents them with the opportunity. The participation of NPAs in the GSWG and Round Table Meetings is seen as movement in a positive direction vis-à-vis government acceptance of a greater role for civil society.

In addition, continuing support to the District Development Fund (DDF) would help consolidate the decentralisation process and strengthen management capacities at the local level, especially on public financial and expenditure management. Significantly, as a NIM, the government has functional ownership of the DDF and has a committed budget allocation to co-finance projects. As a funding mechanism for small-scale local projects to deliver more effective public services, the DDF is incentive-driven and performance-based. It complements the devolution objectives for national inclusive and sustainable development initiatives under Sam Sang. By spreading management functions to the local level and giving people access to a source of funding tied to their needs, it promotes good governance and capacity development. The DDF initiative, piloted in Saravan (and subsequently in four other provinces), for example, introduced public expenditure management systems that have significantly improved the capacity of the districts to manage expenditure and plan for small scale investments that have a direct impact on improved service delivery. The DDF represents a cost-effective bottom-up development initiative and, as an innovative approach, it targets those most in need and, through citizens' participation at the district level, helps ensure that nobody is left behind. The DDF could also be seen as complementing the Global Environment Facility (GEF) programme, focusing on Climate Change Adaptation (Outcome 2).

9.2 Enhancing People's Participation through Community Radio

The Community Radio project has disseminated information on a range of issues such as elections, climate change, food and nutrition, maternal health, people trafficking, etc., and has increased people's understanding of gender equality.⁵⁶ The Enhancing People's Participation through Community Radio (EPPCR) project addresses the limited access to information which restricts people in remote ethnic communities from participating in the development process and being aware of important issues that affect their lives. UNDP and the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICT) established the first community radio station in Khoun District, Xieng Khouang province in 2007. The radio project has since been extended to eight priority districts in rural and remote areas, reaching out to around 300,000 people in their own ethnic languages. It is a key means by which to reach the many illiterate populations of the country. Community Radio has also provided a forum for policy-makers, such as the Provincial People's Assembly (PPA) representatives, to exchange views with their constituents. As an outreach programme, it has been cost-effective and shows great potential to support inclusive development and community awareness.

Funding shortages have stymied the development potential of the radio programme. The number of stations and their outreach expanded over the four-year duration of the project. The aim is for the radio stations to be independently run by the community with sufficient income generated to fund operations. However, at every level, interviewees have cited the lack of funding as being a major impediment to achieving the project's objectives. Disbursements have fallen far short of the \$3 million originally budgeted for the project. Overall, radio stations need to be supported in financial planning and resource mobilisation. The ET understands that this is being done. This is an important initiative which will directly contribute to the Leave No One Behind priority

⁵⁶ Some women radio volunteers are active members of the Lao Women's Union (LWU) and have served as radio hosts of programmes dedicated to women and girls.

of the 2030 Agenda. Aspirations that sufficient funds to sustain operations may be available from the private sector should be dismissed; this is unlikely to happen.

This draws into question the further expansion and sustainability of the project. This is unfortunate because Community Radio has had a big impact and it would not require a huge investment to expand its footprint and deliver quality broadcasts across a wider area. UNDP has provided a lot of assistance in building up the stations by providing transmitting equipment and training, as well as helping to pay the salaries and expenses of radio programmers and volunteers. It would be a shame if this investment was lost. Furthermore, Community Radio provides a number of opportunities to widely share information about UNDP's other governance projects - 3S-RoL, GIDP, National Assembly/PPAs - and to focus on relevant elements of these at the local level. It is evident that radio is the key information sharing mechanism able to reach the largest number of people in the most distant parts of the country. As such, community radio could also be made use of for the disaster early warning system discussed under outcome 2 earlier. This highlights the powerful effect Community Radio could have in strengthening civil society if it were to be properly funded and supported by UNDP.

Another important area worth investing in is the Service User Feedback Survey (SUFS); these surveys, as part of the accountability framework listed under Outcome 2 of the GIDP Prodoc, which elicit people's views on public service delivery in order to measure the level of satisfaction and to identify where services could be improved. SUFS⁵⁷ present the opportunity to generate wider consultation and feedback on public service issues by giving people a voice in the governance matters that directly affect their lives and ensures governments' accountability to the public. SUFS are also particularly valuable at the local level in order to identify gaps that might impact on the attainment of the SDGs.

9.3 Strategic Support to Enhancing the Role of the National Assembly and the Provincial People's Assemblies

Through an earlier project, *"National Assembly Strategic Support Project" (NASSP)*, UNDP had supported the legislative branch in its efforts towards an accountable institution through the promotion of good governance and rule of law. The 2016 National Assembly (NA) elections saw a significant number of new parliamentarians and members of Provincial People's Assemblies (PPAs) elected for the first time. Both institutions require on-going capacity-building to oversee implementation of the NSEDP, and to help attain the SDGs. The NA and PPAs work together closely but the PPAs are semi-independent.⁵⁸ Strengthening close collaboration between the NA and the PPAs is essential if inclusive sustainable development is to be achieved nationally. UNDP's focus in this regard has been on high outcome activities, such as capacity building for the NA, PPA and technical staff in areas such as drafting of regulations and oversight to monitor implementation of the Constitution and laws at the local level. The ultimate objective is to strengthen people's participation and representation in decision-making on national and local development issues. In part, meeting this objective requires the promotion of better service delivery and good governance. One of the mechanisms for enhancing service delivery and promoting transparency and effectiveness in the provision of local government services is the One-Door Service centre model (ODS). An effective ODS system will reinforce decentralisation and improve the delivery of public services. It is a method that has been used successfully in Vietnam (and elsewhere) and the approach to ODS in Lao PDR builds on the Vietnamese experience.

⁵⁷ SUFS have been successfully utilised in Vietnam and Lao PDR could look to this example for guidance.

⁵⁸ The National Assembly is the highest state authority and has the right to make decisions on fundamental issues affecting the country. The Law on People Assembly of 2015 defines the rights and duties of the PPAs as responsible for supervising the management within its local vicinity and to implement the Constitution, law, decree, resolution, order, instruction, decision of the higher authorities, socio-economic development plan and State Budget Plan. Therefore, although the PPAs have considerable autonomy within their own districts, their actions ultimately depend on the approval of the NA. For an in-depth discussion of the roles of the N.A and PPAs, and their relationship within the legal framework of the Lao PDR, see: "Legal System of the Lao People's Democratic Republic," Aristotle T. David & Novah Rose S. De Leon-David, NYU Hauser Global Law School Program, July/August 2019. <https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/Laos1.html>

Typically, ODS' provide a number of one-stop services, e.g. land use and building permits, immigration documents and business registration. In Lao PDR, the development of ODS centres has been funded through the GIDP/GPAR project but, in order to augment people-centred service delivery at the district level, the capacity of local administrations (PPAs) needs to be enhanced. This unfortunately has not materialised yet as UNDP's capacity-building of the NA and PPAs has not led to developing the necessary capacity in these institutions because of funding shortfalls. In the context of the NA/PPA project, the lack of funds has made it difficult to disseminate information and to build awareness in rural society about laws and regulations as well as to procure essential equipment, for example, to provide internet service to the PPAs. In fact, the project has a shortfall of \$2.7 million out of its \$3 million budget. As a result, the benefits of governance reform have not been demonstrated to the people, especially to the ethnic groups in remote areas.

Nevertheless, there have been some successes in the NA/PPA project. A lot of effort has been put into linking the SDGs and parliament, especially at the local level, and community interviews show that public awareness of the SDGs has improved. This supports the government's development agenda and complements work being pursued under the GIDP project. In addition, provincial and district staff have benefitted from the training offered to carry out tasks that would previously have been left to consultants, for example, administration, managing resources and planning for activities based on local priorities. These initiatives feed into a long-term process that will strengthen organisational structures and help ensure more effective service delivery. Local capacity development lends support to the government's Sam Sang devolution initiative by creating the conditions for more effective local administrations to manage local development requirements.

9.4 Strategic Support to Strengthen the Rule of Law in Lao PDR (3S-RoL)

The government has sought to develop legal systems that encourage people's participation in the judicial process, and the ambition was to raise legal awareness in society through the dissemination of laws.⁵⁹ In support of these objectives, Lao PDR adopted a Legal Sector Master Plan (LSMP) in 2009 that aimed to establish the foundations for a Rule of Law State. The LSMP complemented the broader effort to promote governance and public administration reform in support of the government's ambition to attain the SDGs and graduate from Least Developed Country status by 2020. This emphasised the need to engage citizens in all aspects of the legal reform agenda and to strengthen relationships between the people and the state on these matters. The 3S-RoL project addresses this requirement through five proposed outputs designed to build on the work of the LSMP to advance progress towards achieving a Rule of Law state.⁶⁰ In terms of Governance programming, the project complements the other projects studied in this review. The expansion of legal services is constrained by human and financial factors, such as the costs of running legal aid facilities, the insufficient number of qualified lawyers and judges, and the limited understanding about access to justice.

UNDP has provided long-term support and is the main coordinator on legal issues with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). This enables it to work across the legal sector with stakeholders such as the People's Supreme Court, the Office of the Supreme People's Prosecutor, the Lao Women's Union and the Lao Bar Association, as well as with other ministries on related issues. In fact, UNDP is probably the one partner which all actors are comfortable working with. Unfortunately, as in the other projects examined, the only thing lacking is money. The project was designed with a budget of \$4 million, but \$3.3 million of that was unfunded. Despite this shortfall, no adjustments or revisions were made to the project. Meanwhile, other donors have continued to work in this field. CEGGA, through its support for the MoJ aims to enhance the implementation of the rule of law and to improve the access

⁵⁹ Government of the Lao PDR. "Strategic Plan: Governance of the Lao PDR to 2020," National Assembly, October 2011, p.5 (Unofficial translation)

⁶⁰ The five outputs are: 1. Enhanced ability of the Government to coordinate, monitor and identify resources to establish the rule of law state; 2. Expanded and systematised use of evidence-based policy and legislative development; 3. Strengthened capacity of Lao PDR to harmonise with, and transpose, international obligations and standards into domestic law and practice; 4. Improved access to justice and justice service delivery for citizens, and 5. Increased public awareness of legal rights, responsibilities, and confidence in, justice institutions.

of citizens to justice through, for example, helping the MoJ establish legal aid offices throughout the country. At a broader level, it also supports the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to incorporate ratified human rights conventions into the domestic legal framework.⁶¹ In addition, Luxembourg, through LuxDev, is in Phase 2 of its rule of law project; the first phase dealt with legal education (they built the faculty of law) and they work directly with the MoJ. All of this leaves UNDP somewhat sidelined. In fact, based on several interviews, the impression is that it is only marginally involved with strengthening the rule of law.

The UNDP approach has been described as weak in its programme depth; it supports no international experts on the 3S-RoL project and has had no in-house expertise. On a positive note, at the time of the evaluation, the country office has been strengthened by the addition of two people with RoL programming experience in other countries on the team. The perception is that UNDP is missing in action; it is noted that it has apparently not visited the legal aid offices, nor the village mediation centres. This is disappointing because there are huge needs and UNDP has a lot of experience it could bring to bear. The government's Strategic Plan flags the key areas where it sees gaps in the development of laws and the delivery of justice. UNDP has the access to government to support legal sector reform that others do not; it could place people in the ministries and thereby wield considerable influence. It is a distinct advantage and an opportunity that should not be overlooked.

Key findings on Outcome 3:⁶²

1. The GPAR/GIDP project has enhanced broader engagement between communities, local authorities and the central government. (2)
2. The support of the GIDP to the secretariat of the GSWG is probably one of the most relevant activities of the project, these activities are largely outside the project's main objectives. (2)
3. Continuing support to the District Development Fund (DDF) would help consolidate the decentralisation process and strengthen management capacities at the local level, especially on public financial and expenditure management. (3)
4. The Community Radio project has disseminated information on a range of issues such as elections, climate change, food and nutrition, maternal health, people trafficking, etc., and as an outreach programme, it has been cost-effective and shows great potential to support inclusive development and community awareness. However, funding shortages have stymied the development potential of the radio programme. (4)
5. In the NA/PPA project, a lot of effort has been put into linking the SDGs and parliament, especially at the local level, and public awareness of the SDGs has improved. (2)
6. Like in all other projects in the governance portfolio, UNDP's actions on the RoL have been peripheral and suffered from funds shortages and dearth of adequate in-house expertise. (2)

⁶¹ GIZ Project Brief

⁶² The numbers within parenthesis at the end of each finding denotes the 'Strength of evidence', as described in the methodology section of the report.

Section 4: Assessment against evaluation criteria

10. Relevance⁶³

10.1 Alignment with national priorities and priorities of the poor

A NIM modality which drives the CPD ensures strong convergence between national priorities and the support provided by UNDP. The CPD was drafted taking the 8th NSEDP and UNPF as reference points, and hence the three outcomes and a number of outputs mirrored those in the NSEDP (See Box). In section 3, evidence has been presented of UNDP's support on various outputs which directly contribute to government priorities. The NSEDP proposes reforms that support green and inclusive growth, recognising the limitations of a growth model that relies on natural resources and places increasing pressure on the environment. The green growth agenda aims to improve local livelihoods by diversifying income sources and encouraging the private sector to spur market development, for instance through sustainable forest management and nature-based tourism. UNDP's CPD puts all of these at the centre of its agenda. Of all the outputs and activities, several stand out as uniquely relevant on a national scale in terms of their breadth and scope: (a) support to the UXO sector; (b) integration of SDGs into national and provincial planning and orientation of Parliamentarians; (c) capacity building of NA/PPAs, (d) support to LWU and promoting livelihoods for women; (e) development of disaster management law, disaster recovery framework (ongoing) and capacity development of NDMO; (f) policies, guidelines and capacity building for land and forest resource management; and (g) community radio programme. Besides these, UNDP's ongoing support to the government on LDC graduation and SDG reporting are highly relevant. There are a number of other initiatives in response to unexpected events. In recent months, UNDP's timely and highly relevant support on Covid-19 adaptation has been addressing GoL's capacity to operate through remote management using modern communication technology and digitisation. Similar support following the Attapeu dam burst which led to severe flooding was geared towards enabling the Government agencies to provide relief assistance to affected people. KIIs with several government stakeholders at both central and provincial levels indicated that, while UNDP's assistance broadly fits into government priorities, there are times when UNDP undertakes or plans interventions/projects without adequate consultation with relevant departments, for example: the solar electricity system (the Government wanted micro-hydel power, as they have experience in this); the ecotourism project.

The 8th NSEDP Outcomes:

Outcome 1: Sustained, inclusive economic growth with economic vulnerability (EVI) reduced to levels required for growth support.

Outcome 2: Human resources developed and capacities of public and private sectors upgraded; poverty reduced, all ethnic groups and both genders have access to quality education and health services; culture of the nation protected and consolidated; political stability, peace and order, justice and transparency are maintained. **Outcome 3:** Natural resources and environment protection, according to green-growth and sustainable principles; readiness to cope with natural disasters and the effects of climate change.

The CPD emphasises UNDP's support to the GoL on policies and capacity building of key institutions. As was discussed in section 3, in several areas a number of policies, frameworks and guidance have been developed,

⁶³ *Questions addressed:* 1. To what extent has the current UNDP programme supported the GoL in achieving the national development goals, responding to unexpected events, implementing the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and delivering UNPF intended results? 2. To what extent has the UNDP programme responded to the priorities and the needs of target beneficiaries as defined in the programme document? 3. Is UNDP perceived by stakeholders as a strong advocate for improving Governance, Inclusive Growth and Environment and Natural Resource Management in Lao PDR? 4. Have the efforts made by UNDP and national partners to mobilise resources and knowledge been in line with the current development landscape? 5. To what extent did the UNDP programme promote South-South /Triangular cooperation? 6. Has UNDP been able to effectively adapt the programme to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Lao PDR?

and institutional capacity of departments/ agencies attempted (NRA, UXO Lao, PPAs, MPI, NDMO). In terms of end-beneficiaries, the CPD prioritises poor and vulnerable people most at risk of falling back into poverty, especially rural agricultural workers and communities in or near protected areas. UNDP has also focused on women for skills and entrepreneurship development through the work of LWU in particular. Support to farmers and youths through the UXO-related actions and various activities under the environment portfolio (protected areas, climate resilience in small scale rural infrastructure) were in accordance with CPD. Its support on RoL and strengthening local level governance were all aimed at ultimately benefitting the poor and vulnerable people by giving them space and tools to hold their local government accountable.

There were however a few interventions which were not of *direct* relevance to the needs of the poor people. The Brand Lao project, while not discounting the importance of such initiatives for developing trading capacity of the country in international markets, may not have immediate relevance for the targeted beneficiary groups, ethnic population, etc., as it does not have any downstream linkage with the latter (farmers, small producers, vulnerable women etc). Besides relevance, the appropriateness of some of the activities undertaken by UNDP in different areas can be called into question; within the protected areas project, the ecotourism initiative was one such example.

10.2 Influencing and advocacy

UNDP's close relationship with the government gives it space to have dialogue with it on policies and practices. In this role, there is an element of ongoing advocacy that is integral to the CPD implementation, particularly because it is implemented through the NIM modality. Development partners may like to see UNDP taking on a more proactive role in engaging with the GoL on some of the difficult issues of civic rights and democratic norms and standards. However, **UNDP is not seen to be able to leverage its relationship of trust with the government to be constructively critical of some of the latter's policies, for example, regulatory environment for the CSOs, treatment of certain ethnic groups, etc. Several individual interviewees noted that UNDP is often seen to be mirroring the language of the government and lacks deeper analysis of development issues.** They often find that UNDP lacks a depth of knowledge and analysis on critical issues which some of the INGOs are better able to articulate.

10.3 Resource mobilisation

UNDP's annual resource mobilisation has remained static at an average of about US\$12 million over the

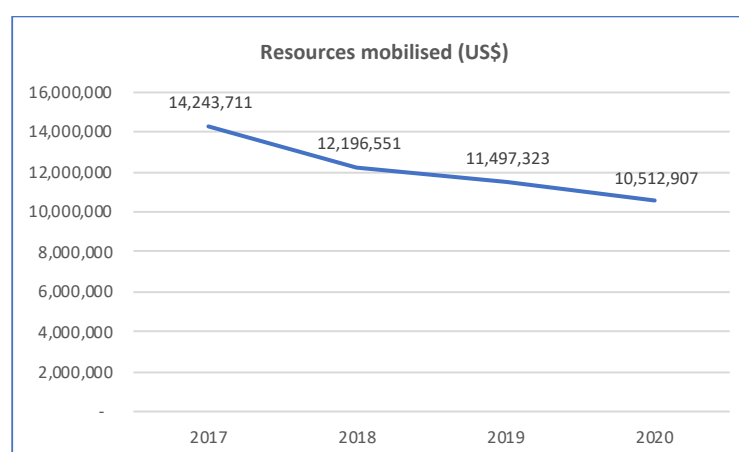


Figure 2: Funds mobilised, 2017-2020

period 2017-2020 (Figure 2). Considering the ambitious nature of the CPD goals, this is small for programming at scale. As the Table 4 presented earlier shows, **UNDP has been very successful in raising resources for its environment portfolio (96 percent) while struggling to raise any more than about 60 percent for the decent livelihoods and governance programme.** For the environment portfolio, the GEF has been a steady source, accounting for over US\$13 million of the total US\$ 19 million (68 percent) raised by the country office. For the other two outcomes, the required level of funding never materialised and no adjustments to the

results framework were made to reflect the situation. Not only has the shortage of funds affected programme delivery, it has also frustrated the local administrations responsible for implementation who had proceeded with their work on the expectation that budgetary commitments would be met.

Resource mobilisation through grants remains a challenge in Lao PDR. With official aid into the country remaining in the region of half a billion dollars or slightly higher (see Box), the grants component of the official development assistance (ODA) is only around 40 percent. In the ODA composition, the weight of ODA loans in total disbursements has increased by more than 15 percentage points, with grants expanding in real terms only by 1 or

Lao PDR ODA & FDI (US\$ million)		
	Net ODA received	FDI
2016	399.5	NA
2017	980 (Planned)	813
2018	565.1	1,300
2019	NA	557

(Source: data-worldbank.org)

2 percentage points per year (UNCTAD).⁶⁴ The UNCTAD report cites a World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) analysis which shows that Lao PDR is one of the two LDC countries (the other being Gambia) which has a high risk of debt distress (as of January 2019). With the global economic fallouts from the Covid-19 crisis, the ODA environment is going to get more unfavourable for all development actors and in this environment, it becomes crucial that a grant-dependent

organisation like UNDP continues to attract donors to its portfolio. Building on its strength as a trusted partner of the GoL and multi-sectoral project implementation capacity, UNDP has been successful in the recent period in attracting new donors (Turkey, Russia, China) for several projects which are now in pipeline. As donors are becoming increasingly result-focused and often have more options (INGOs, direct implementation⁶⁵), UNDP's experience with its governance portfolio discussed earlier portends the future as resources shrink.

10.4 South-South cooperation and other exchange visits

As part of capacity building, several exchange and learning visits were supported under different projects. The LNCCI officials associated with the Brand-Lao project visited Vietnam and Thailand to study how those countries were promoting their unique products in international markets. Officials from Vietnam involved in running one-door service visited Lao PDR to share their experience with GoL officials when the latter were setting up ODS facilities in Lao. There were exchange visits to Uganda to study women's group formation there; there was also a visit from a South Korean women's delegation to share their experience in women's group formation in livelihoods activities. Although not strictly "South-South, this and other such exchanges have been: faculty-to-faculty exchanges on the Rule of Law with the Association of ASEAN Lawyers and the University of Luxembourg; and MOHA participation in workshops in Korea and Japan. **These exchange visits were found by participants from Lao PDR to be useful; however, these were limited by their one-off exchange and did not result in an ongoing cooperation following the exchanges.**

Key findings on Relevance:⁶⁶

1. A NIM modality which drives the CPD ensures strong convergence between national priorities and the support provided by UNDP. Of all the outputs and activities, at least six stand out as uniquely relevant on a national scale in terms of their breadth and scope: (a) support to the UXO sector; (b) integration of SDGs into national and provincial planning and orientation of Parliamentarians; (c) capacity building of NA/PPAs, (d) support to LWU and promoting on livelihoods for women; (e) development of disaster management law, disaster recovery framework (ongoing) and capacity development of NDMO; (f) policies, guidelines and capacity building for land and forest resource management; and (g) community radio programme. (3)

⁶⁴ UNCTAD (2020). The Least Developed Countries Report 2019: Chapter 2 - Official flows and the evolving terms of aid dependence

⁶⁵ Noteworthy that a number of donors have in the past few years 'gone operational' with their own project staff executing projects in partnership with several government agencies in Lao PDR.

⁶⁶ The numbers within parenthesis at the end of each finding denotes the 'Strength of evidence', as described in the methodology section of the report.

2. UNDP is not seen to be able to leverage its relationship of trust with the government to be constructively critical of some of the latter's policies. Several individual interviewees noted that UNDP is often seen to mirror the language of the government and lacks deeper analysis of development issues. (3)
3. UNDP has been very successful in raising resources for its environment portfolio (96%), while struggling to raise any more than about 60% for the decent livelihoods and governance programme. (4)
4. The exchange visits through South-South cooperation were found by participants to be useful, but limited by their one-off exchange and these did not result in an ongoing cooperation following the exchanges. (4)

11. Effectiveness⁶⁷

11.1 Results and factors affecting performance

The outputs and results achieved in the three outcome areas were discussed in section 3 earlier. Significant progress has been made on enabling the GoL to develop relevant policies and guidelines on integrating SDGs into the NSEDP, promoting investments, policies on environmental impact assessment, protected areas, conservation and sustainable forest management, NRA's work on policy and standards for the UXO sector, disaster management law, to name a few. There is greater awareness and understanding of the SDGs at central and provincial levels which UNDP's sustained advocacy, training and practical support in integrating these into the NSEDP have contributed to. There is greater sensitivity among key Ministries to the need to ensure that the needs of the poor and women in particular are focused in development programmes of the government, as happened in the case of livelihoods programmes in LWU or of the MAF, small farmers' vulnerability targeted in the GEF project (small-scale infrastructure), and so on. The DDF has demonstrated the potential of bottom-up planning and implementation with participation of communities in design and implementation of activities that address their needs. The community radio programme has been successful in enabling government's outreach to people. The Government's UXO programme is reorienting itself to focus on linking UXO clearance with livelihoods and economic development targeting vulnerable communities. Various policies, frameworks and guidelines have been developed which provide institutional frameworks for different departments and Ministries, though their implementation may not have received due attention. To this extent, **there is capacity building of different departments going on in the course of implementation of these various interventions supported by UNDP. However, not having a results framework for NSEDP (especially of the SDG component) in place has meant that the Plan's operationalisation, monitoring and reporting by various departments and provinces remain patchy.**

UNDP's support on the RTM process and SWGs which it led for over a decade since these were first started some 15 years ago gave it a convening role. **Following the UN reform in late 2018, UNDP needs to now redefine its distinctive role vis-à-vis the RC. The evaluation findings point to the enabling role of UNDP interventions have been successful when (a) it has enabled others (NRA, UXO Lao, provincial departments in implementing the small-scale rural infrastructure project or DDF, MICT on community radio) and (b) the results were specific and clearly defined.** As was shown in section 3, in a number of instances, UNDP's projects were ambitious, and often too complex, with too many activities and intended results, and these have had limited success. One of the common factors that underpin each of the less-successful interventions has been that the (mostly implicit) theory

⁶⁷ *Questions addressed:* 1. Is the UNDP programme on track to achieve intended results at the outcome and output levels? What are the key achievements and what factors contributed to the achievements or non-achievement of those results? 2. How have the small-size initiatives funded by UNDP regular sources fulfilled their objectives? What are the factors (positive and negative) that contribute to their success or shortcomings? Are there recommendations or lessons that can be drawn from this approach? 3. To what extent has UNDP programme contributed towards an improvement in national government capacity, including institutional strengthening? How could UNDP enhance this element in the next UNDP programme? 4. Which programme areas are the most relevant and strategic for UNDP to scale up going forward?

of change and assumptions behind the design of the project were not thought through clearly. In the absence of a clear analysis of the theory behind the interventions, these became a long list of activities and activity indicators, with poorly defined results frameworks. The other important factor contributing to sub-optimal results was the tendency to plan and implement interventions in silos – UXO clearance without strong linkages with economic development and addressing poverty in the past; Brand Lao initiative not being linked to farmers or women's groups, for example, of handicrafts and other products. A third factor behind the less-successful interventions has been the inability to bring on board those who could have helped fill the gap in areas where there may have been weak in-house technical capacity – for example, agencies like FAO/IFAD on livelihoods, UNCTAD on Brand Lao project, UNEP/IUCN on protected areas and biodiversity.

11.2 Use of UNDP TRAC funds for innovation and experimentation

Through the use of UNDP's own funds, several small initiatives were launched from time to time to either pilot and incubate new ideas or fill gaps in funding in actions that were considered too important to drop in the absence of donor funding. The Brand Lao project, Accelerator Lab, solar energy project, poverty-environment action, etc., are examples of this. In recent months, interesting initiatives on digitisation (in partnership with the MPI and Ministry of Posts & Telegraphs) and development of SDG financing framework are being launched, results of which will only be known in the coming years. The evaluation is unable to comment on the new initiatives. The Accelerator Lab which is a global initiative and was started in Lao PDR about a year ago holds good promise to generate new and appropriate solutions. **Going forward, all new ideas and concepts need to be tested for a valid theory of change (TOC) and must be backed by a good results framework based on the TOC before these are taken up for scaling up.**

11.3 Institutional strengthening and capacity building

Sections 3 and 11.1 above expound UNDP's contribution to strengthening capacity of government institutions. Institutional capacity development is a long term process and is often difficult to track and measure in the short term, especially when drivers for change are not clearly defined. In the absence of a TOC which could help identify the 'drivers' and make the change pathway clear, development of policies, guidance and providing training and exposure to individual staff involved in delivery of various activities/projects come to denote capacity building. This is true to a large extent in the case of UNDP as its support is often ongoing for several years, or many year (NRA, UXO Lao, LWU, MPI). As mentioned earlier, **capacity building has (and does) taken place through UNDP's actions, but it is difficult to attribute these to the current CPD as it is impossible to untangle the cumulative effect from the effect of recent interventions in the absence of clear baseline to compare against.**

Key findings on Effectiveness:⁶⁸

1. There is greater awareness and understanding of the SDGs at central and provincial levels and a greater sensitivity among key Ministries to the needs of the poor and women in particular being focused in development programmes of the government. The DDF has demonstrated the potential of bottom-up planning and implementation and the community radio programme has been successful in enabling government's outreach to people. (2)
2. The UXO programme is reorienting itself to focus on linking UXO clearance with livelihoods and economic development targeting vulnerable communities. Various policies, frameworks and guidelines have been developed which provide institutional frameworks for different departments and Ministries, though their implementation may not have received due attention. (3)

⁶⁸ The numbers within parenthesis at the end of each finding denotes the 'Strength of evidence', as described in the methodology section of the report.

3. Capacity building has taken place through UNDP's actions, but it is difficult to attribute these to the current CPD as it is impossible to untangle the cumulative effect from the effect of recent interventions in the absence of clear baseline to compare against. Not having a results framework in place has meant that their operationalisation, monitoring and reporting by various departments and provinces remain patchy. (3)

4. The evaluation findings show that UNDP interventions have been successful when (a) it *enabled* others (NRA, UXO Lao, provincial departments in implementing the small-scale rural infrastructure project or DDF, MICT on community radio), and (b) the results sought were specific and clearly defined. (3)

12. Efficiency⁶⁹

12.1 Resource management

Delays in project implementation have been quite common, requiring no-cost extension of several projects. Reasons are attributed to delays at the government's end with slow procedures and change in staff, and switching over responsibilities from one Ministry to another (Ecosystems project, disaster management), as well as delays within UNDP with its cumbersome funds disbursement and procurement. The NIM procedures require UNDP to procure high-cost items (over US\$10,000 for a single item) directly for the GoL agency; individual interviewees complained of severe delays in several procurements. Funds transfers from UNDP often took time, according to implementing partners. In some instances the transfers also involved a long channel from UNDP to the partner headquarters in Vientiane and then onwards to provinces, delaying project activities. Procurement of computer notebooks for LWU in provinces took over 6 months; the procurement of equipment for the solar electricity project which is implemented through Direct Implementation Modality (DIM) took over a year.

Cost-effectiveness and economy with regard to several interventions have been sub-optimal. Apart from timeliness, efficiency is a function of economy (cost per unit of input is *minimised*) and cost-effectiveness (cost per output is *optimised*). 'Cost' includes financial, human resources and expertise invested. Individual interviewees (both UNDP and partners) cited several instances of UNDP procuring equipment which were not only expensive but wholly inappropriate in the country context where facilities for services and repairs are limited to products generally manufactured in the ASEAN region. The example of solar installation was referred to earlier; walkie-talkies were procured by UNDP for the Humanitarian Army, but these broke down and are not in use as repairs of these are not possible in Lao. Two hovercraft were provided to NDMO for search and rescue operations in 2019; these are now not in functioning order due to lack of repairs. Reportedly, all this equipment was procured from Europe or North America and local suppliers are not familiar with these as they deal mostly in Chinese, Japanese or Malaysian equipment. This raises questions of economy as well as cost-effectiveness. Additionally, high staff turnover and frequent staff changes (MPI-MOFA project, UXO Lao, Small-scale rural infrastructure project, rural electrification project, ecosystems project,⁷⁰ BCRR, etc) in UNDP were cited by several individual interviewees as affecting delivery.

An organisation facing challenges in resource mobilisation, UNDP is caught in a classic conundrum: as it gets increasingly 'projectised' to raise project funds, it needs to get staff who can manage projects; yet the complexity of UNDP's role in a country like Lao PDR is that UNDP needs to demonstrate high level strategic thinking and analysis throughout its programme, and both these modes – managing projects and thinking programmatically – require a different set of competencies. The evaluation team noted that UNDP may have been conscious of this, and in the past 1-2 years, it has been trying to develop its in-house capacity in this regard.

⁶⁹ *Questions addressed:* 1. To what extent has there been an economical use of resources (funds, human resources, time, expertise, etc.)? What are the main administrative constraints/strengths? 2. Is the results-based management system operating effectively and is monitoring data informing management decision making? 3. To what extent has UNDP been efficient in building synergies and leveraging with other programmes and stakeholders in Lao PDR? 4. To what extent have programme funds been delivered in a timely manner?

⁷⁰ Part of the delay was due to change over from one Ministry to another which required setting up new systems and developing new working relationships.

12.2 RBM and monitoring

The Results and Resources Framework (RRF) accompanying the CPD presents reasonably clear articulation of results expected and key indicators to track them. However the biggest challenge UNDP has faced in use of this RRF lie in the wide gap between the CPD assumption/expectations on resources and the actual amount of resources UNDP was able to mobilise. When the objective is to create an additional 1,000 jobs (Output 1.1.2 of CPD RRF) through skills development programmes, and the resources available can only support training in tailoring or livestock rearing, all one can monitor is the number of people trained. Taking another example, to address the objective “national and provincial governments show improved capacities for results planning, monitoring and reporting on NSEDP implementation”, if UNDP’s work remain confined to working with MPI and MOFA to integrate SDGs into NSEDP and disseminate it to the provinces, one can only monitor and report *on the activities* (training conducted, NSEDP revised) undertaken with UNDP’s support. The Results-Oriented Annual Reports (ROAR) reflect this conundrum. For example, the ROAR 2018 report has numerous instances of descriptions like: ‘Consultation with villages conducted’; ‘Interviews conducted with community members’; ‘Supported the Ministry in drafting....’. The annual progress report and other related documents seen by the evaluation team were predominantly activity focused. As has been pointed out in section 3, the absence of TOC for several interventions has meant that a coherent *results* framework does not exist. What may exist is a logframe with a list of activities and indicators which, on their own, are inadequate tools for output and outcome monitoring. This might lead to a situation where even though all activities are undertaken, the desired outcomes may be elusive as the assumptions made during project designs were not tested for their validity in the context.

12.3 Creating synergy and working with others

There have been attempts made from time to time to work with other UN organisations namely, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (bio-diversity in agriculture), World Food Programme (cash for work), UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF, on DDF & GIDP). With the exception of DDF, other partnerships have been very light-touch, without any deep engagement or attempt to leverage each other’s distinctive competence. There could have been opportunities to draw in other relevant partners in some of the projects – for example, the UNCTAD on Brand Lao, UNEP or IUCN on the protected areas project – to develop strategic depth in the country programme. In recent months, following Covid-19, UNDP has been assisting the GoL in its digitisation process which offers the opportunity to build partnership with specialised agencies within the UN system (UN-DESA, for example).

Key findings on Efficiency:⁷¹

1. Cost-effectiveness and economy with regard to several interventions have been sub-optimal and there have been delays in implementation of several projects. (3)
2. As UNDP gets increasingly ‘projectised’ to raise project funds, it needs to get staff who can manage projects; yet the complexity of UNDP’s role in a country like Lao PDR is that UNDP needs to demonstrate high level strategic thinking and analysis throughout its programme, and both these modes require a different set of competencies. (3)
3. The Results and Resources Framework (RRF) accompanying the CPD presents reasonably clear articulation of results expected and key indicators to track them. However, the biggest challenge UNDP has faced in use of this RRF lay in the wide gap between the CPD assumption/expectations on resources and the actual amount of resources UNDP was able to mobilise. (4)

⁷¹ The numbers within parenthesis at the end of each finding denotes the ‘Strength of evidence’, as described in the methodology section of the report.

13. Sustainability⁷²

There are several areas where long-term support by UNDP and other organisations has created capacity that certainly bodes well for the future. Several major policies and guidelines have been developed which, along with training provided to officials, should put the GoL in a stronger position to further develop and expand its programmes and services in different areas if the GoL is enabled in the remaining period of the CPD to operationalise these. The MPI is now in a position to organise the RTM in partnership with the RC office. UXO Lao has acquired substantial capacity for mine clearance. LWU is already able to mobilise resources on its own directly from several donors. The disaster management policy and the capacity building of NDMO have been crucial in enabling the Government to response to some of the recent disasters. In that the projects reviewed directly build capacity at the local level, enable government officials and staff to implement and manage projects, enhance accountability and effectiveness and provide services that address the priorities of the communities, they are inherently “sustainable.”

In terms of institutional capacity, it is yet to develop to a stage where development partners would feel confident of supporting the GoL or local organisations directly. Most of the development assistance either flows through the UN and INGOs, or is implemented directly by development partners. In the context of Lao PDR, the construct of sustainability of development interventions has to be explicated in relation to the state of the country’s development, resources available and the capacity of its institutions. Though the economy has been growing, according to the World Bank, the COVID-19 shock has aggravated the long-standing structural vulnerabilities in the economy,⁷³ with a legacy of weak macroeconomic management and poor revenue collection, resulting in limited fiscal and foreign currency buffers even before the global pandemic. *“Limited fiscal space and the mounting pressure of deficit financing and debt servicing will limit the ability of the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) to stimulate the economy, exacerbating the downturn”* (World Bank). It is therefore highly improbable that the GoL will be in a position to continue to sustain most of the various outputs and outcomes on its own, without further assistance. The community radio programme is not hugely resource-intensive to run, but based on interviews, it is unlikely to be continued by the GoL for the recurring investment that’s involved; the same goes for the DDF to which the government currently contributes 15 percent of funds. A simple analysis of sustainability of the outputs delivered versus the funds available to continue building on these would indicate that the outputs delivered through the CPD face significant challenges when it comes to their long-term viability without further financial support for a phase of consolidation.

Key finding on sustainability:

1. Capacity building of local officials in different areas to provide services that address the priorities of communities and promote citizen’s engagement through community radio provide good foundations for sustainability, though further financial support for a phase of consolidation may be necessary. (3)

14. Cross-cutting issues⁷⁴

Several UNDP-supported interventions focus on vulnerable groups such as forest dwellers, small and marginal farmers, and poor rural women. Participation of these groups is mainly as beneficiaries of the activities

⁷² *Questions addressed:* 1. What outcomes and outputs have the most likelihood of sustainability and being adopted by partners and why? 2. Have the communities and the Government institutions who are the intended ultimate beneficiaries of activities acquired capacity to sustain the outputs and outcomes on their own in the absence of external assistance?

⁷³ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34048>

⁷⁴ *Questions addressed:* 1. What barriers have been seen to the inclusion of vulnerable groups in UNDP’s work and what can be done to improve inclusion of these groups? 2. To what extent have gender equality and the empowerment of women been addressed in the programme strategic design, implementation and reporting? In what way could UNDP enhance gender equality in the next country programme?

which are identified by officials/project managers of the implementing agencies in a top-down approach. Community group discussions during the evaluation point to a lack of consultation in needs assessment or during implementation. The work of LWU on women's livelihoods and GBV has been discussed under outcome 1. The Governance Prodocs all refer to the aim of addressing critical cross-cutting issues such as gender and human rights in their proposed Outputs. However, it is not evident that these cross-cutting issues are fully integrated into all project activities, nor is there a clear understanding of what this would involve. **In most cases reviewed, "gender equality" is manifested by the number of women versus men in a particular project and there is no indication that women play a significant role in determining development policy or any other area of relevance to gender policies and programmes.** When asked about the role of women in their projects, most respondents replied along the lines of: *'There are more women than men in the programme,'* or *'We recruit both men and women.'* The challenge of advancing gender equality is particularly evident in remote rural areas where the patriarchal culture inhibits the mobility of women and girls, their comfort level in voicing their opinions is low and traditional views of what a woman's role is in society predominate. For example, when asked how a particular project had promoted the role of women, an interviewee replied that women now had more time to do their housework. In essence, the situation reflects the lack of a gender strategy and the absence of a gender focal point, both of which make it difficult to address gender issues in a meaningful way.

Of the four governance projects reviewed, the GIDP is the most advanced in terms of integrating gender and works closely with the MOHA to ensure that gender equity and inclusion are understood and implemented in programmatic, rather than conceptual/abstract terms. The GSWG also serves as a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue on gender issues. There has been slow but steady progress on legislative and policy reform on gender-related issues. On Human Rights, the GIDP programme, by enhancing people's access to basic public services at the provincial level, supports the government's aim of strengthening good governance and increasing citizens' systematic engagement in areas that respond to their needs, i.e. it promotes their human rights. The Strategic Support to enhancing the Role of the NA and PPAs project includes a dedicated output on gender equality and women's empowerment but a systematic follow-up on the implementation of the proposed gender initiatives is lacking. Similarly, the gender mainstreaming component of the 3S-RoL project is undeveloped, particularly with respect to addressing the need to overcome traditional customs, such as inheritance rights and the role of women in society. Nonetheless, **programmes like the Community Radio project have changed people's views on women's roles in society.** Some women radio volunteers are active members of the Lao Women's Union (LWU) and have served as radio hosts of programmes dedicated to women and girls. Engagement with the LWU contributes to creating an enabling environment for women to speak up for themselves, which is critical to changing gender norms.

The evaluation did not find a strong focus on inclusion of persons with disabilities in the regular activities, except for the short-term victim assistance in the UXO programme. Disability is a big issue in the country, mostly as a consequence of the high contamination of village and forest lands with UXOs – Lao remains the nation with highest per capita UXO contamination in the world. Many persons with disabilities have limited opportunities for accessing education, health, suitable housing and employment opportunities. The issue of inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream development programmes remains a critical gap.

Key findings on cross-cutting issues:⁷⁵

1. In most of the programme, gender equality is manifested by participation of women as beneficiaries in particular projects and there is no indication that women play a significant role in determining development policy or any other area of relevance to gender policies and programmes. (4)

⁷⁵ The number within parenthesis at the end of each finding denotes the 'Strength of evidence', as described in the methodology section of the report.

2. The GIDP is the most advanced in terms of integrating gender and works to ensure that gender equity and inclusion are understood and implemented in programmatic, rather than conceptual/abstract terms. The GSWG also serves as a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue on gender issues. Community radio project has contributed to changing people's views on women's role. (3)

3. The evaluation did not find a strong focus on inclusion of persons with disabilities in the regular activities, except for the short-term victim assistance in the UXO programme. (2)

Section 5: Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Overall conclusion

The evaluation concludes that the strategic priorities and areas of focus identified in the CPD have been perfect fit with the national needs and UNDP's position as a trusted partner of the GoL uniquely placed it to address the issues identified in the country programme. There have been mixed performance in different outcome areas, with the environment outcome having made relatively more progress than the others - the development of policies and tools, capacity building of provincial officials particularly on sustainable land and forest management and disaster management have made significant progress under outcome 2. Under outcome 1, work on UXO and livelihoods continues to make progress, albeit with limited resources and capacity UNDP is able to bring to this. Progress on integrating SDGs into national planning systems has been limited as UNDP has not yet been able to help develop a results framework for this. The community radio and work on DDF have been significant achievements under the governance outcome, which otherwise has witnessed a gradual decline in UNDP's role. The two most critical factors that contributed to success or failure in different areas of interventions have been: (i) UNDP's staff capacity in technical and programming areas, and (ii) availability of resources to implement activities at scale and for a consistent duration.

Relevance of UNDP programme

A NIM modality which drives the CPD ensures strong convergence between national priorities and the support provided by UNDP. Of all the outputs and activities, several stand out as uniquely relevant on a national scale in terms of their breadth and scope: (a) support to the UXO sector; (b) integration of SDGs into national and provincial planning and orientation of Parliamentarians; (c) capacity building of NA/PPAs, (d) support to LWU and promoting on livelihoods for women; (e) development of disaster management law, disaster recovery framework (ongoing) and capacity development of NDMO; (f) policies, guidelines and capacity building for land and forest resource management; and (g) community radio programme.

Results delivery

Building on its decades-long close relationship as a trusted partner of the Government of the Lao PDR, the UNDP country programme continues to deliver its assistance through a people-centred approach, with its focus on three outcomes: decent livelihoods, environment and governance. The evaluation concluded that there is greater awareness and understanding of the SDGs at central and provincial levels which UNDP's sustained advocacy, training and practical support in integrating these into the NSEDP have contributed to. There is greater sensitivity among key Ministries about ensuring that the needs of the poor and women in particular are emphasised in development programmes of the government. Continuing support towards the DDF demonstrated the potential of bottom-up planning and implementation with participation of communities in design and delivery of activities

that address their needs, and holds the promise of contributing to the decentralisation process. The community radio programme has been successful in enabling government's outreach to people, with relatively little resources. The Government's UXO programme is slowly reorienting itself to focus on linking UXO clearance with livelihoods and economic development targeting vulnerable communities. Working with the NDMO in developing the disaster management law and recovery framework have been significant achievements. Various policies, frameworks and guidelines have been developed which provide institutional frameworks for different departments and Ministries, though their implementation may not have received due attention.

Focusing particularly on addressing the needs of vulnerable women, UNDP's support has been providing women space to participate in their local communities through savings groups and economic activities including small enterprises development, though these are in an early stage of development and exploring markets. Work on UXO continues to clear cluster munitions; however, progress with regard to linking post-clearance with poverty reduction and livelihoods development has been limited. UNDP's actions on Rule of Law (RoL) have been peripheral and suffered from funding shortages and inadequate in-house expertise. RoL is an area where focused investments could have a broad impact across the board as all other activities depend on a credible legal system. For example, integrating customary law into the national system would provide the vast majority of people in the rural areas with a legal system that they understand.

UNDP's enabling role with a focus on clearly defined results has been a key factor in instances where the results can be considered a success. It has had less of a success where:

- a. the theory of change and assumptions behind the design of the project were not thought through clearly, with the result that indicators were driven by activities rather than desired change, and data around results was not gathered systematically;
- b. the initiatives were planned and implemented in silos without linkages between different components internally, and often without linkages with other major initiatives in the country; and
- c. inability to bring on board external partners who could have helped fill the gap in areas where there may have been weak in-house technical capacity.

Capacity building of institutions

Strengthening the disaster management capacity of the National Disaster Management Organisation (NDMO) has been prioritised through the development of Disaster Management Law and Recovery framework/guidance during this CPD period. Likewise, the capacity of MAF on land and forest management have made significant progress. In several areas, a number of exchange visits and learning events with other countries were organised, though these one-off exchanges did not result in ongoing cooperation. The evaluation concluded that though capacity building of various departments goes on in the course of implementation of various interventions/projects supported by UNDP, absence of a results framework has meant that their operationalisation, monitoring and reporting by various departments and provinces remain patchy. The relatively weak capacity of NRA even after 15 years of capacity building support remains a matter of concern. The capacity building of the National Statistical Bureau (NSB) which was one of the objectives of a major capacity building initiatives on SDG implementation did not progress.

UNDP's strategic positioning in the country

Historically, UNDP played the 'convening' role in the interface between the UN agencies, development partners and the GoL until the 2018 reform of the Resident Coordinator role. Following the reform, the latter (RC), now separated from UNDP, plays this distinctive role. This has obviously required UNDP to recalibrate its role in this regard, particularly with reference to the Annual (and five-yearly) RTM process. UNDP plays a vital role in facilitating SWGs which feed into the RTM process, but, with one or two exceptions, the SWGs are noted to be generally weak due to lack of strong leadership in some of the them and the absence of a results framework for NSEDP which UNDP has been unable to develop.

UNDP often brings to bear on its work good capacity to identify strategic areas for development, as it did in the case of UXO sector for over two decades, including support on establishment of the NRA. However, of late it has been unable to bring in the kind of cutting-edge thinking and expertise in this sector which several INGOs are better able to provide. This does challenge UNDP's forte, unless it is able to retool itself and gear itself up to provide stronger leadership in this sector.

Programme design and development

The CPD provides a good framework for programme development on outcomes. Broadly, all the core programmes which UNDP have focused on are (and will remain) relevant. However, the projects that are developed to translate the CPD objectives into reality are often weak on a clear articulation of the change pathway and an analysis of assumptions underpinning the actions proposed. Often the project designs are complex involving multiple stakeholders and without clear linkages in the relationship. In some instances, the project designs were not informed by solid technical understanding or a granular understanding of context. This results in creating M&E frameworks which can at best track activities, with poor links to intended overall results.

Policy & advocacy

While UNDP has helped draft several policy documents for the GoL, it is not seen to leverage its relationship of trust to engage or advocate with the GoL on potentially sensitive issues which may be against the interests of the people and their rights. This may sometimes be reflected in a lack of depth in UNDP in its analysis and articulation of development issues in the country.

Resource mobilisation

The biggest single challenge in implementing the CPD was the wide gap between the CPD resource expectations and the actual amount of resources UNDP was able to mobilise. Facing the challenges in resource mobilisation, UNDP is getting increasingly 'projectised' to raise project funds. This has required it to build its staff capacity around project management; yet the complexity of UNDP's role is such that it needs to demonstrate high level strategic thinking and analysis throughout its programme, which requires a slightly different set of competencies. Resource mobilisation also requires high quality results management systems and skills which UNDP has struggled to demonstrate to development partners.

Recommendations

Strategic positioning

- R1: Review the functioning of SWGs and redefine their role and results framework to ensure that these provide strategic inputs to the RTM process as well as to sector plans on an ongoing basis. This will need to be driven from the top with strong facilitation and leadership, working with relevant Ministries. The Government institutions provide the leadership for the SWGs, but UNDP can play a facilitating role in strengthening their capacity and this will need senior level engagement. This will be a demanding ask, so UNDP may, in consultation with GoL, prioritise a limited number of SWGs to start with.
- R2: Linking the above process of SWG development, facilitate development of clearly defined results frameworks, involving relevant Ministries and provincial departments, for each key sector, prioritising the most critical ones first.
- R3: Building on its Governance initiatives, UNDP should develop a comprehensive SDG support strategy to guide Lao PDR's attainment of the SDGs, linking it to the ninth NSEDP which is under development. It may

be that UNDP prioritises a limited number of SDGs which are most-critical and where UNDP has or can mobilise top-class expertise.

UNDP Internal capacity

- R4: Through advanced training, coaching, secondment from other UNDP offices and continuing professional development, as well as, where possible, fresh recruitment, develop high level staff skills in the following core areas:
- a. Developing theories of change and their use in programme design and results management⁷⁶
 - b. Strengthening internal monitoring and data collection system focusing on results
 - c. High-level technical expertise in the area of rural livelihoods and UXO, in particular
 - d. Development policy analysis and advocacy.
- R5: Senior managerial inputs need to go into exploring synergistic partnerships with UN organisations and other Agencies which may have technical capacity in specific areas of UNDP's programming interest, namely agriculture and biodiversity, rural livelihoods, digitisation.

Programme issues & resource mobilisation

- R6: The community radio programme which has proven to be effective with a relatively small investment should be continued, and if resources allow, expanded. In this regard, NDP may also consider using the Service User Feedback Survey (SUFSS); these surveys elicit people's views on public service delivery in order to measure the level of satisfaction and to identify where services could be improved.
- R7: The governance and public administration reforms undertaken by the GDP project, if they continue to be used by the government, will set the conditions for UNDP to end its broad support to the programme. However, ongoing support to the GSWG and the DDF could be valuable in maintaining UNDP's policy influence and participation in the governance reform process. The support to DDF should continue along with advocacy with the central government to gradually take over total funding of these in a phased manner. This will require new agreements to be drawn up with the government setting annual increase in government funding and corresponding decrease in UNDP allocations over the next three years.
- R8: UNDP should develop the digitisation initiative to cover e-governance and related areas of the GoL in a phased manner through developing partnership with agencies (DESA) specialised in complex process of government digitisation.
- R9: Ensure that when undertaking capacity building interventions, there is a clear baseline of the capacity gaps identified and a change pathway defined clearly before embarking on the process. One-off interventions, without clear links to the change pathway need to be avoided.
- R10: UNDP needs to develop a robust resource mobilisation strategy to strengthen its role in the country. In particular, UNDP needs to rebuild its relationships with key funding organisations, such as the EU. It should also explore funding opportunities for the GoL from the private sector.

⁷⁶ While developing TOC, particular attention needs to be paid to making assumptions explicit; this often prompts a deeper reflective (and self-reflective) analysis of causes and drivers of change. The entire process needs to address the following questions as precisely as possible: (1) What are the long-term changes that need to happen in the target group's lives? (2) Who and what needs to change in order to achieve those long-term changes? (3) What factors relationships, approaches, pathways influence change at each level? (4) What are the three to five key factors which will be vital in bringing about change? (5) Why should change will happen that way (rationale/ assumptions)? (6) What are the risks (external and internal) that might prevent change taking place?

- R11: Develop an inventory of all local EWS supported by UNDP and explore linking these up with the nationally-adapted Disaster Monitoring and Response System (DMRS) being currently developed in the country.

-Annexes-

UNDP COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

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1. Assignment Information

Title	The evaluation of the UNDP Country Programme for the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2017-2021)
Purpose	This term of reference (TOR) is designed to guide the evaluation of the 2017-2021 Country Programme Document (CPD) of UNDP Lao PDR and a Thematic Evaluation of UNDP's engagement in the Governance Sector
Location/Country	Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic <i>(Given the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic and travel restrictions that are in place, the consultant may be required to conduct many of the in-person missions/activities remotely using electronic conferencing means. However, required travel costs could be included into the financial proposal so that travel to Vientiane capital can be done if/when restrictions are lifted)</i>
Region	Asia and Pacific
Application categories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An individual international consultant (Team leader) to undertake the evaluation of the CPD 2. An individual international consultant to cover the theme of governance 3. An individual national consultant (Team member) to partner with the international consultants to undertake the CDP evaluation
Duration	Start date: July 2020 Complete date: 15 December 2020

1. Introduction

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) has made an impressive progress in social and economic development. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is putting some of these gains into question. Lao PDR is a landlocked country with an estimated population of 7.1 million. The country achieved its Millennium Development Goal targets on poverty, hunger reduction and access to safe water and sanitation. Significant challenges remain including food insecurity and nutrition, high maternal mortality rate, low educational completion rate at all levels with a wide gender gap and weak enforcement. Little progress has been made in improving environmental sustainability, reversing forest loss and clearing land contaminated by unexploded ordnance (UXO).

UNDP supports the Government and communities to meet the national development goals. The UNDP CPD 2017-2021 was formulated in consultation with the Government and other stakeholders to support the implementation of the 8th NSEDP (2016-2020), Sustainable Development Goals including a local Goal 18 on UXO, and achievement of the LDC graduation. The UNDP supports and works with the Government and partners in three major thematic areas (a) acceleration of human development through promotion of inclusiveness and reduction of inequalities; (b) promotion of sustainable management of natural resources and building resilience; and (c) improvement of governance capacity to formulate and implement high-quality public policies. The main partner for UNDP is the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

The current CPD 2017-2021 aligns with the United National Partnership Framework (UNPF). Both CPD and UNPF will come to the end in 2021. In conjunction with this, the Government of Lao PDR is formulating the 9th NSEDP in 2020 and expects to launch the national plan in early 2021. This evaluation of the CPD is commissioned to generate evidence and knowledge about the ongoing programme and help to guide UNDP's programming in the future. The evaluation will assist UNDP and national partners to learn from past experience and better understand what types of development support work well, not work well, and in what context. The evaluation

results will be used to inform the decision-making, course correction and development of the new CPD in 2021. The primary audiences of this evaluation are national and subnational government institutions, UNDP Executive Board, UNDP, the UN Country Team, donors and development stakeholders. Secondary audiences are but not limited to academia, researchers, civil-society organizations and communities.

2. UNDP's current programme¹

UNDP's country programme focuses on three outcomes, namely i) inclusive growth and reduced inequality; (ii) building resilience and environmental sustainability and natural resources; and iii) capable and more responsive governance. Throughout its programming, UNDP focuses on prioritizing those who are affected by and vulnerable to poverty, especially rural communities, as well as youth (particularly young women) for skills development and access to justice and public services. UNDP aims to also increasingly serve as a policy advisor and knowledge broker, facilitating South-South and triangular cooperation, particularly among ASEAN countries.

Inclusive Growth: Within the inclusive growth portfolio, the programme focuses on strengthening government capacity for the clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) through the National Unexploded Ordnance Programme (UXO Lao) and the UXO sector through support to the National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR. UNDP also supports the government to localize the SDGs and implement the 8th NSEDP. UNDP interventions target poverty reduction and livelihoods, in order to achieve Lao PDR's goal of non-LDC status, and support government for this transition.

Environment and Natural resources: There are three priority areas in the environment portfolio: developing national development planning capacities which recognize and address links between environmental degradation and poverty, strengthening climate change response, and improving environmental governance and community-based natural resource management. Projects include a multi-year GEF project on sustainable forest and land management, as well as projects supporting disaster and climate risk management, flood response, and other related activities.

Governance: UNDP's work in governance focuses on support to public administration reform for improved access to social services, strengthen access to justice, and enhanced public participation in government decision-making. The governance portfolio includes support to the national government and the legal sector (rule of law, domesticating and implementing international standards, and justice service delivery) and enabling governance for improved service delivery and local development (developed under the framework of the Government of Lao PDR's National Governance and Public Administration Reform Programme). UNDP also provides policy and capacity building support to the National Assembly. At the regional and local level, UNDP support builds capacity for local service provision and the People's Provincial Assemblies, local government service provision, and community-based media and participation. This programme also has a focus on supporting the Government's Sam Sang policy (on decentralization and local development), working to narrow the gap in quality and access to services between rural and urban areas. Much of this work builds on partnerships and progress made in the previous country programme cycle.

3. Evaluation purpose

This evaluation will assess the UNDP's contribution and performance in supporting the national development and priorities under the approved CPD. A special focus should be placed on the Governance thematic area. The evaluation will serve an important accountability function, providing national stakeholders and partners in Lao PDR with an impartial assessment of the results of UNDP support. The evaluation will capture evidence of the

¹ UNDP Lao PDR CPD (2017-2021), follow the link: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/836312/usage>

relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the current programme, which would be used to strengthen existing programmes and to set the stage for new the preparation of new CPD.

4. Evaluation scope and objectives

The CPD evaluation will focus on the formal UNDP country programme approved by the Executive Board. The scope of the CPD evaluation includes the entirety of UNDP's activities at the outcome and output levels covering from 2017 to date. The evaluation covers interventions funded by all sources, including core UNDP resources, donor funds and government funds. Initiatives from regional and global programmes will be included in the CPD evaluation. UNDP Lao PDR also supports a number of Sector Working Groups (SWGs) which form the core of the consultative and engagement process leading up to the annual Round Table Implementation Meeting (RTiM) and the once in 5 years High Level Round Table meeting (HLRTM). The SWGs also support in the drafting and implementation of the NSEDP. This type of support, which is not covered directly through a project is important for the political and social agenda of a country. Therefore, these activities will be included in the evaluation as well. The evaluation will also examine the UNDP's contribution toward cross-cutting issues, e.g. human rights, gender, leaving no one behind, and capacity development. The evaluation should be forward-looking by drawing lessons from the current CPD and propose recommendations for the next CPD.

5. Evaluation criteria and key guiding questions

The evaluation will answer three broad questions as follows:

- ☐ What did the UNDP country programme intend to achieve during the period under review?
- ☐ To what extent has the programme achieved (or is likely to achieve) its intended objectives at the output level, and what contribution has it made at the outcome level and towards the UN Partnership Framework?
- ☐ What factors contributed to or hindered UNDP's performance and eventually, the sustainability of results?

In addition to the above questions, the evaluation is expected to produce answers surrounding the evaluation criterion of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Below are guiding questions. This evaluation will also include a special thematic evaluation of the Governance theme & UNDP's engagement in the same. Guiding questions for the governance thematic evaluation are listed in the Annex C

Relevance

- ☐ To what extent has the current UNDP programme supported the government of Lao PDR in achieving the national development goals, responding to unexpected events, implementing the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and delivering UNPF intended results?
- ☐ To what extent has the UNDP programme responded to the priorities and the needs of target beneficiaries as defined in the programme document?
- ☐ Is UNDP perceived by stakeholders as a strong advocate for improving Governance, Inclusive Growth and Environment and Natural Resource Management in Lao PDR?
- ☐ Have the efforts made by UNDP and national partners to mobilize resources and knowledge been in line with the current development landscape?
- ☐ To what extent did the UNDP programme promote SSC/Triangular cooperation?
- ☐ Has UNDP been able to effectively adapt the programme to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Lao PDR?

Effectiveness

- By reviewing the programme results and resources framework, is the UNDP programme on track to achieve intended results at the outcome and output levels? What are the key achievements and what factors contributed to the achievements or non-achievement of those results?

- By examining the small-size initiatives funded by UNDP regular sources, how have these projects fulfilled their objectives? What are the factors (positive and negative) that contribute to their success or shortcomings? Are there recommendations or lessons that can be drawn from this approach?
- To what extent has UNDP programme contributed towards an improvement in national government capacity, including institutional strengthening? How could UNDP enhance this element in the next UNDP programme?
- Which programme areas are the most relevant and strategic for UNDP to scale up going forward?

Efficiency

- ☐ To what extent has there been an economical use of resources (funds, human resources, time, expertise, etc.)? What are the main administrative constraints/strengths?
- ☐ Is the results-based management system operating effectively and is monitoring data informing management decision making?
- ☐ To what extent has UNDP been efficient in building synergies and leveraging with other programmes and stakeholders in Lao PDR?
- ☐ How well does the workflow between UNDP and national implementing partners perform?
- ☐ To what extent have programme funds have been delivered in a timely manner?
- ☐ When UNDP provides implementation support services as per MOU with an implementing partner, how well has UNDP performed?

Sustainability

- ☐ What outcomes and outputs have the most likelihood of sustainability and being adopted by partners and why?
- ☐ To what extent do national partners have the institutional capacities, including sustainability strategies, in place to sustain the outcome-level results?
- ☐ To what extent are policy and regulatory frameworks in place that will support the continuation of benefits?
- ☐ To what extent have national partners committed to providing continuing support (financial, staff, aspirational, etc.)?
- ☐ To what extent do partnerships exist with other national institutions, NGOs, United Nations agencies, the private sector and development partners to sustain the attained results?

Human rights

- ☐ What barriers have been seen to the inclusion of vulnerable groups in UNDP's work and what can be done to improve inclusion of these groups?

Gender Equality

- ☐ To what extent have gender equality and the empowerment of women been addressed in the programme strategic design, implementation and reporting? Are there key achievements?
- ☐ In what way could UNDP enhance gender equality in the next country programme?

An important note: Based on the above analysis, the evaluators are expected to provide overarching conclusions on achievement of the 2017-2021 CPD, as well as recommend key development priorities which shall inform the focus the new CPD. The evaluation is additionally expected to offer wider lessons for UNDP support in Lao PDR.

6. Methodology and approaches

The CPD evaluation methodology will adhere to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms & Standards. The evaluation will be carried out by an independent evaluation team. The evaluation team should adopt an integrated approach involving a combination of data collection and analysis tools to

generate concrete evidence to substantiate all findings. Evidence obtained and used to assess the results of UNDP support should be triangulated from a variety of sources, including verifiable data on indicator achievement, existing reports, evaluations and technical papers, stakeholder interviews, focus groups, surveys and site visits where/when possible. It is expected that the evaluation methodology will comprise of the following elements:

- Review documents (Desk Review);
- Interviews with key stakeholders including government line ministries, development partners, civil society and other relevant partners through a participatory and transparent process;
- Consultations with beneficiaries through interviews and/ or focus group discussions;
- Survey and/ or questionnaires where appropriate;
- Triangulation of information collected from different sources/methods to enhance the validity of the findings.

The evaluation is expected to use a variety of data sources, primary, secondary, qualitative, quantitative, etc. to be extracted through surveys, storytelling, focus group discussions, face to face interviews, participatory methods, desk reviews, etc. conducted with a variety of partners. A transparent and participatory multi-stakeholder approach should be followed for data collection from government partners, community members, private sector, UN agencies, multilateral organizations, etc.

Evidence will be provided for every claim generated by the evaluation and data will be triangulated to ensure validity. An evaluation matrix or other methods can be used to map the data and triangulate the available evidence.

In line with the UNDP's gender mainstreaming strategy, gender disaggregation of data is a key element of all UNDP's interventions and data collected for the evaluation will be disaggregated by gender, to the extent possible, and assessed against the programme outputs/outcomes.

Special note:

Given the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic and the resultant restrictions may require many of the in-person missions / consultations and data gathering / activities to be carried out remotely using electronic conferencing means. Alternatively, some or all in person interviews may be undertaken by the national consultant in consultation with the evaluation team leader.

7. Evaluation products (deliverables)

These products could include:

- **Evaluation inception report (up to 10 pages).** The inception report, containing the proposed the theory of change, and evaluation methodology should be carried out following and based on preliminary discussions with UNDP. The inception report should include an evaluation matrix presenting the evaluation questions, data sources, data collection, analysis tools and methods to be used. The inception report should detail the specific timing for evaluation activities and deliverables and propose specific site visits and stakeholders to be interviewed (this element can be shared with UNDP well in advance). The inception report should be endorsed by UNDP in consultation with the relevant government partners before the evaluation starts (before any formal evaluation interviews, survey distribution or field visits) and prior to the country visit in the case of international evaluator. **(see the inception report template in Annex H).**
- **Kick-off meeting.** Evaluators will give an overall presentation about the evaluation, including the evaluator team's approach, work plans and other necessary elements during the kick-off meeting. Evaluators can seek further clarification and expectations of UNDP and the Government partner in the kick-off meeting.
- **Evaluation debriefings.** Immediately following the evaluation, the evaluation team is required to present a preliminary debriefing of findings to UNDP, key Government partners and other development partners.

- **Draft evaluation report (max 60 pages including executive summary).** UNDP and other designated government representative and key stakeholders in the evaluation, including the UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub, will review the draft evaluation report and provide an amalgamated set of comments to the evaluator within an agreed period of time, addressing the content required (as agreed in the TOR and inception report) and quality criteria as outlined in these guidelines.
- **Evaluation report audit trail.** Comments and changes by the evaluators in response to the draft report should be retained by the evaluators to show how they have addressed comments.
- **Final evaluation report (see final evaluation template in the Annex I).**
- **A report on the governance thematic evaluation (max 15 pages) by the assigned consultant;** this paper will be presented as an appendix of the final report. The assigned consultant should integrate the important aspects of findings, recommendations and lessons learned into the final evaluation report.
- **Evaluation brief (2 pages maximum) and other knowledge products** or participation in knowledge-sharing events, if relevant.
- **Evaluation Recommendations (see the management response in the Annex J)**
- **Presentations to stakeholders (this maybe done remotely).**

8. Evaluation team composition and required competencies

The evaluation will be conducted by a team of three independent consultants comprising of:

- An Evaluation Team Leader (International);
- An Evaluation Member (International) focusing specifically on UNDP's governance portfolio; and
- A National Consultant who will provide knowledge of national context and support the full evaluation process as well as serve as an interpreter from English to Lao and vice-versa when needed.

(a) Evaluation Team Leader (international), 39 working days

S/he has overall responsibility for conducting the CPD evaluation and providing guidance and leadership to the international consultant for governance thematic evaluation and the national consultant. In consultation with the team member, s/he will be responsible for developing a methodology for the assignment that reflects best practices and encourages the use of a participatory and consultative approach as well as delivering the required deliverables to meet the objective of the assignment. S/he will lead the preparation and revision of the draft and final reports, ensuring the assignments have been completed in the agreed timeframe.

S/he has responsibilities as follows:

- Leading the documentation review and framing of evaluation questions;
- Leading the design of monitoring and evaluation questions and field verification tools;
- Ensure efficient division of tasks between evaluation team members;
- Leading the evaluation team in planning, execution and reporting;
- Incorporating the use of best practice with respect to evaluation methodologies;
- Incorporating results from the governance thematic evaluation into the report;
- Responsible for and leading the drafting of inception report, finalization/quality control of the evaluation report including timely submission and adjustment;
- Leading the kick-off meeting and debriefing meeting on behalf of the evaluation team with UNDP and stakeholders;

Required Qualifications:

- Minimum Master's degree in economics, public administration, regional development/planning or any other social sciences related to economic management and pro-poor development;
- 7 to 10 years relevant experience in undertaking evaluation in the development sector
- Strong knowledge of UNDP and its working approaches including partnership approaches with Government, civil society and community groups;
- Proven experience in conducting outputs/outcomes/impact/CPD/UNDAF evaluations;

- Experience in applying SMART (S Specific; M Measurable; A Achievable; R Relevant; T Time-bound) indicators and reconstructing or validating baseline scenarios;
- Demonstrated capacity in strategic thinking, problem solving and policy advice;
- Strong inter-personal skills, teamwork, analytical skills and organizational skills;
- Excellent presentation and drafting skills, and familiarity with information technology, including proficiency in word processing, spreadsheets, and presentation software;
- Fluency in English, both in speaking and writing;
- Previous experience working in Lao PDR or similar settings in the region is an advantage;
- Knowledge of the sensitivities of the context of Lao PDR is an asset.

(b) International Evaluation Consultant, Governance, 30 working days (*Advertised and Recruited Separately*)

S/he has overall responsibility for contributing to the CPD evaluation especially reviewing UNDP's engagement in the Governance thematic area including specifically the governance portfolio. In consultation with the team leader, s/he will be responsible for developing a methodology for the assignment that reflects best practices and encourages the use of a participatory and consultative approach as well as delivering the required deliverables to meet the objective of the assignment. S/he will substantively contribute to the preparation and revision of the draft and final reports, ensuring the assignments have been completed in the agreed timeframe. S/he will prepare a final report focusing on the findings, lessons learned and recommendations for UNDP's governance portfolio. The key elements and highlights of governance will be integrated into the final country programme evaluation report.

S/he has responsibilities as follows:

- Contributing to the documentation review and framing of evaluation questions;
- Contributing to the design of monitoring and evaluation questions and field verification tools;
- Ensure efficient division of tasks between evaluation team members;
- Conducting the evaluation of the governance portfolio while contributing to the overall planning, execution and reporting;
- Incorporating the use of best practice with respect to evaluation methodologies;
- Contributing to the drafting of inception report, finalization/quality control of the evaluation report including timely submission and adjustment;
- Contributing to and participating in the kick-off meeting and debriefing meeting on behalf of the evaluation team with UNDP and stakeholders;

Required Qualifications:

- Minimum Master's degree in economics, public administration, regional development/planning or any other social sciences related to economic management and pro-poor development;
- 7 to 10 years relevant experience in undertaking evaluation in the development sector
- Extensive professional experience in the area of governance and sustainable development, including gender equality and social policies;
- Strong knowledge of UNDP and its working approaches including partnership approaches with Government, civil society and community groups;
- Proven experience in conducting outputs/outcomes/impact/CPD/UNDAF/thematic evaluations;
- Experience in applying SMART (S Specific; M Measurable; A Achievable; R Relevant; T Time-bound) indicators and reconstructing or validating baseline scenarios;
- Demonstrated capacity in strategic thinking, problem solving and policy advice;
- Strong inter-personal skills, teamwork, analytical skills and organizational skills;
- Excellent presentation and drafting skills, and familiarity with information technology, including proficiency in word processing, spreadsheets, and presentation software;
- Fluency in English, both in speaking and writing;
- Previous experience working in Lao PDR or similar settings in the region is an advantage;
- Knowledge of the sensitivities of the context of Lao PDR is an asset.

(c) National Evaluation Consultant, 39 working days) (Advertised and Recruited Separately)

S/he will support the Team Leader by providing knowledge of the development context in Lao PDR. S/he is well aware of Lao cultural context and working with different government institutions; and when needed support as an interpreter between English and Lao and vice versa. S/he collects all relevant documents and reports needed for the review. S/he will support the team leader in coordinating with UNDP, government partners and other stakeholders. S/he will play a crucial role in organizing meetings, workshops, interviews, consultations during the field missions. S/he will draft some parts of the report as assigned by the team leader. The consultant will advise the Team Leader on relevant aspects of the local context where the projects have operated.

Under the supervision of Evaluation Team Leader, s/he has responsibilities as follows:

- Support the documentation review and framing of evaluation questions;
- Support the coordination with UNDP, government partners, stakeholders and other parties;
- Undertake field visits and collect feedback from beneficiaries, project stakeholders etc.;
- Support the Evaluation Team Leader and international consultant in planning, execution, analyzing and reporting;
- Incorporate the use of best practice with respect to evaluation methodologies;
- Support the drafting of inception report, finalization/quality control of the evaluation report;
- Participate and support the kick-off meeting and debriefing meeting with UNDP and stakeholders;
- Facilitate and support the field data collection in country;
- Translate the evaluation brief in Lao language;
- Perform translation from English to Lao and vice versa for the evaluation team when required.

Required Qualifications:

- Master's degree or equivalent in Development, Economics, Public Policy, Communications, English, Social Sciences, Humanities or any other relevant field;
- 7 to 10 years relevant experience in undertaking evaluation in the development sector;
- Experience with evaluation methodologies; programme development and project implementation;
- Have a strong understanding of the development context in Lao PDR and preferably understanding of the strategic Poverty and inclusive growth, environment and governance issues within the Lao PDR context;
- Experience in oral and written translations;
- Fluent in English (written and spoken) and Lao (written and spoken).

9. Evaluation ethics

This evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation' which are available here: <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/102>. The consultants must safeguard the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing collection of data and reporting on data. The consultants must also ensure security of collected information before and after the evaluation and protocols to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. The information knowledge and data gathered in the evaluation process must also be solely used for the evaluation and not for other uses without the express authorization of UNDP and partners.

10. Evaluation arrangements

The below table outlines key roles and responsibilities for the evaluation process. UNDP and evaluation stakeholders will appoint an Evaluation Manager, who will assume the day-to-day responsibility for managing the evaluation and serve as a central person connecting other key parties.

The evaluators will report to the Resident Representative (RR) who will be technically supported by the Regional M&E Advisor. The final approval of the report will be made by the RR. The final payment will be made upon the satisfactory completion and approval of the report.

11. Time frame for the evaluation process

The timeframe and responsibilities for the evaluation process are tentatively as follows:

Timeframe for the CDP evaluation process			
Activity		Responsible party	tentative timeframe
Selection of the evaluation team		UNDP	June 2020
Provide necessary information to Evaluation team		UNDP	Late June 2020
Conduct desk review		Evaluation team	Late June-Mid July 2020
Submit the inception report to UNDP		Evaluation team	Mid July 2020
Approve the inception report		UNDP	Late July 2020
Hold a kick-off meeting with UNDP, Government and development partners		Evaluation team	Early August 2020
Collect data/conduct field missions		Evaluation team	Early August -Mid August 2020
Organize a stakeholder workshop to brief on the preliminary observations (Participants include UNDP, UN agencies, Government and development partners)		Evaluation team & UNDP	Mid- August 2020
Analyse data and prepare a report		Evaluation team	Mid-August-September 2020
Submit the first draft		Evaluation team	Early October 2020
Review the first draft		UNDP	Mid October 2020
Submit the second draft		Evaluation team	Late October 2020
Review the second draft		UNDP, RBAP & MPI	Mid November 2020
Submit the final draft		Lead evaluator	Late November 2020
Accept the final report and submit the management response		UNDP	Late November 2020
Edit and format the report		Evaluation team	Mid December 2020
Issue the final report and evaluation brief		Lead evaluator	Mid December 2020
Disseminate the final report and evaluation brief / stakeholders workshop		UNDP	Mid December 2020

12. Application submission process and criteria for selection

Evaluation team will be evaluated based on the merit of the proposed approach, including following:

- ☐ 10%. Qualification and experience

- ☐ 15%. Technical approach as illustrated in the description of the proposed methodology.
- ☐ 10%. Timeline reflecting proposed activities, which emphasis the ability to meet the proposed deadlines
- ☐ 20%. Evidence of experience of the consultant in conducting evaluations as detailed in the CV
- ☐ 15%. Reference from Past performance. To enable this reference check is carried out, applicants are required to provide a list of all related consultancies/ evaluations conducted during the past three years with associated contact details of references.
- 30% Financial proposal

TOR annexes

- A. Lao PDR at a glance
- B. Country programme outcomes and indicative resources (2017-2021)
- C. Guiding questions for Governance thematic evaluation
- D. Key stakeholders and partners
- E. Document to be reviewed
- F. Evaluation matrix
- G. Schedule of tasks, milestone and deliverables
- H. Inception report template
- I. Require format for the evaluation report
- J. Evaluation recommendations
- K. Evaluation quality assessment
- L. Code of conduct

Annex A: Lao PDR at a glance

Development: UNDP considers the Lao People's Democratic Republic as a medium human development country, with a human development index (HDI) value of 0.604 (2018), ranking it 140 out of 189 countries and territories.² The country graduated from low-income to lower-middle income status in 2010, and aims to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2020.³ Lao PDR has shown steady improvement in human development, with increases in life expectancy, education, and income over last three decades. The Laotian population, 7.1 million people, is mainly rural based (65%) and is diverse and young with 50 ethnic groups, and over half of Laotians under 25 years. Despite development gains poverty remains a concern with 23.1% of Laotians living under \$1.90 per day.⁴ Equally, inequality is increasing between urban and rural populations, and within cities. It is expected that the effects of the COVID pandemic and the resulting lock-down will have serious socio-economic consequences. Rapid assessments are being conducted by numerous partners, including UNDP.

Governance: Lao PDR is a one-party republic governed by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. In 2016, Lao PDR elected its first People's Provincial Assemblies (PPA) to promote governance and development at the local level. Lao PDR set an ambitious agenda to mainstream international conventions and has made significant progress, accepting 116 of 196 recommendations made by the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review in 2015.⁵ However, there remain a number of challenges in awareness and experience of human rights conventions, funding, and ongoing challenges of UXOs, severe droughts and floods, and lower development in rural areas.⁶

National Socio-Economic Development Plan: Lao PDR has prioritized integration of the SDGs, which are embedded in its 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) 2016-2020. The overall objective is "To ensure political stability, peace and order in the society; the poverty of the people is reduced significantly in all areas; the country is developed out of LDC status by 2020 through continuous, inclusive and sustainable growth; there is effective management and efficient utilization of natural resources; development is enhanced through the national potential and advantages; Lao PDR participates in regional and international integration with ownership." Medium and long-term development planning are outlined in the Strategy 2025 (Ten Year Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2016-2025) and Vision 2030.

Economy: Lao PDR has experienced robust economic growth with GDP growth averaging 7.7% over the past decade with projected growth of 6.5% for 2019. In 2017, the World Bank ranked Lao PDR as the 13th fastest-growing economy globally and the second fastest-growing in the ASEAN region.⁷ Economic growth has relied on natural resources with an expansion of the mining and hydroelectric sectors, though these sectors are capital-intensive, with few new jobs being created, and have a detrimental impact on the environment. Most of Lao PDR's population are engaged in subsistence agriculture (62%) or are self-

² UNDP, Human Development Report 2019 – Lao People's Democratic Republic Briefing Note, 2019.

http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/LAO.pdf

³ World Bank, Historical classification by income, accessed 24 Feb 2020.

<https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>

⁴ UNDP, Human Development Report 2019 – Lao PDR Briefing Note.

⁵ Gov of Lao PDR, VNR.

⁶ Lao People's Democratic Republic, National Report to the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, A/HRC/WG.6/35/LAO/1, 11 November 2019, 16-17.

⁷ World Bank, Lao PDR – Systematic Country Diagnostic, 2017.

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/983001490107755004/Lao-PDR-Systematic-Country-Diagnostic-Priorities-for-Ending-Poverty-and-Boosting-Shared-Prosperity>

employed (20%).⁸ Lao PDR is the smallest and only land-locked state in Southeast Asia. Its development strategy has long focused on the country becoming a regional provider of hydroelectric power, the expansion of infrastructure to further economic development, including four new railways connecting Laos to neighbouring countries, and diversifying its economy beyond natural resources.

Unexploded ordnance (UXO): Lao PDR has added an additional SDG with SDG 18, “Lives safe from unexploded ordnance (UXO).” Lao PDR is the most heavily bombed country in the world stemming from the Indochina War (1964-1973), with an estimated 80 million cluster sub-munitions remaining, affecting 25% of all villages in 15 of 18 provinces.⁹ Unexploded ordnance (UXO) continues to be a serious barrier to development, limiting availability of arable land, raising the cost of construction and infrastructure, and impeding livelihoods. Lao PDR played a key role in the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) and set a goal to clear all cluster munitions in 2020. In September 2019, this deadline was extended to 2025 since progress was “nowhere near clearing the egregious levels of remaining UXO.”¹⁰

Climate Change: Lao PDR is vulnerable to climate change, with increased risk of rising temperatures and more severe floods and droughts, exacerbated by the depletion of natural resources. Capacities in disaster risk management, early warning systems, and integration of climate risk in development and agricultural planning all need strengthening. The country has recently reversed deforestation with forest cover increasing from 40.3% in 2011 to 58% (13.73 million hectares) in 2017, though the country is “off-track” in its goal of 70% forest coverage by 2020.¹¹ Most Laotians, especially rural poor, rely on natural resources for livelihoods and basic needs.

Gender: Lao PDR ranks 43rd of 153 countries in the 2020 Global Gender Gap Index, with high rates of educational attainment, economic opportunity, and positive health outcomes (women’s life expectancy is 58.8 years compared to 56.9 for men).¹² UNDP ranks Lao PDR 110 out of 162 countries in its Gender Inequality Index with gender gaps narrowing and near-parity achieved in education and economic opportunity. In education, women attend an expected 10.8 years of school compared to 11.3 for men, while 76.8% of women participate in the labour force compared to 79.7% of men¹³, with women representing 50.4% of professional and technical workers.¹⁴ However, there is a gap in terms of political empowerment: 27.5% of Parliament members are women, and the country ranks 98th in political empowerment on the Global Gender Gap Index.

⁸ World Bank, Lao PDR – Systematic Country Diagnostic, v.

⁹ Gov of Lao PDR, Lao PDR Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, July 2018, 2.

¹⁰ UNDP Lao PDR, <https://www.la.undp.org/content/laopdr/en/home/presscenter/blog/2019/bloodshed-in-a-time-of-peace.html>

¹¹ UNDP Lao PDR, <https://www.la.undp.org/content/laopdr/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-15-life-on-land.html>

¹² World Economic Forum, The Global Gender Gap Report 2020 data explorer, 2019, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2020/dataexplorer/#economy=LAO>

¹³ UNDP, Human Development Report 2019 – Lao PDR Briefing Note.

¹⁴ The Global Gender Gap Report 2020.

Annex B: Country programme outcomes and indicative resources (2017-2021)

Country Programme Outcome and Outputs	Indicative resources (2017-2021) US\$	Expenditure (2017-2019) US\$
<p>Outcome 1 All women and men have increased opportunities for decent livelihoods and jobs.</p> <p>1.1 National and subnational systems and institutions enabled to develop productive capacities that are employment and livelihoods intensive</p> <p>1.2 Post-2015 agenda / SDG priorities localized and incorporated in 8th NSEDP</p> <p>1.3 Institutional capacities are strengthened to further improve the contribution of UXO sector to human dev. in contaminated communities</p>	\$37.7	\$15.9
<p>Outcome 2 Forests and other ecosystems are protected and enhanced, and people are less vulnerable to climate-related events and disasters</p> <p>2.1 Increased climate resilience of communities through small-scale infrastructure initiatives</p> <p>2.2 Strengthened legal framework for climate change adaptation mitigation and disaster risk management</p> <p>2.3 Improved management of natural resources and ecosystem benefits through sustainable forestry and land management practices</p> <p>2.4 Ecosystem and agrobiodiversity management is contributing to food security and improved livelihoods in rural communities</p> <p>2.5 Improved monitoring and enforcement of investment compliance by State institutions and community groups</p> <p>2.6 Inclusive and sustainable solutions adopted to increase energy efficiency and rural energy access</p>	\$47.0	\$10.8

Outcome 3 Institutions and policies at national and local levels support the delivery of quality services that better respond to people's needs.		
1.1 Local administrations able to develop and finance multi-sectoral plans based on community priorities		
1.2 Accountability framework introduced and/or expanded at district level to capture and use citizen feedback for provision of basic services		
1.3 Multi-stakeholder governance processes promote dialogue and give feedback on implementation of policies related to delivery of basic services	\$18.6	\$5.4
1.4 People's institutions (NA/PPAs) better able to fulfil their legislative oversight and representation mandate		
1.5 Legal and judicial institutional structure arrangement and capacity improved to promote rule of law		
1.6 Increased public understanding of legal rights and information and increased public participation in the legal system for equal access to justice		
1.7 Lao PDR better able to fulfil its international human rights obligations through treaty reporting and UPR process		
Other (global, regional, management projects)		\$1.0
Total	\$103.3	\$33.1

Source: UNDP Lao PDR Country Programme Document 2017-2021 (DP/DCP/LAO/3); Atlas financial data for expenditures (19 Feb 2020).

Annex C: Guiding questions for the governance thematic evaluation.

Relevance

1. Was UNDP responsive to the evolution overtime of development challenges and the priorities in national strategies, especially significant shifts in Governance and related areas?
2. Are UNDP activities aligned with national strategies, policies, and other development initiatives in the country in particular in Governance and related areas?
3. How has UNDP engaged and partnered with National and subnational government in Governance such as local government service delivery, community participatory planning and budgeting, support to human rights and anti-corruption?

Effectiveness

1. What has been the effectiveness of UNDP governance portfolio in supporting the governance sector in Lao PDR?
2. Have the approaches taken by UNDP in governance been aligned with the governments approach or strategy?
3. What has been the impact of UNDP's governance support in decentralized governance and service delivery activities at the national and subnational levels? To what degree has implementation been successful?
4. What comparative advantage does UNDP hold in the governance area? Is this recognized by the Government of Lao PDR and other donors?
5. Did UNDP's programme facilitate the implementation of the national development strategies and policies related to good governance and play a complementary role to the Government (e.g. linking UNDP initiatives to government policies or coordination of development actors)?
6. What have been the opportunities for support? Has UNDP Lao PDR taken advantage of these opportunities and any comparative advantage to strengthen the governance and related areas, process?
7. What have been the main challenges faced in the UNDP's support to governance sector?

Efficiency

1. Has the governance programme been implemented within deadlines, costs estimates? What challenges have been faced?
2. Has UNDP and its partners taken prompt action to solve implementation and other managerial issues?
3. Has UNDP and the government used human & financial resources efficiently?
4. Did UNDP have an adequate mechanism to respond to significant changes in the country situation, in particular in crisis and emergencies?
5. Has UNDP used its network to bring about opportunities for South-South exchanges and triangular cooperation, and facilitate external expertise for government?
6. Has UNDP helped to mobilise other development partners (e.g. civil society, private sector, academia, etc.)?
7. How has UNDP integrated its governance work with other country office programme (such as inclusive growth, natural resources management and climate change and UXO)? Has UNDP been able to develop integration or cooperation amongst its outcome areas and leverage governance work into other areas?

8. Do the government and development partners see UNDP as a value for money partner? Is it happy with costs incurred and charged? What issues were faced in the development of this modality of support?

Sustainability

1. Were interventions designed to have sustainable results given the identifiable risks and did they include an exit strategy?
2. How did UNDP design to scale-up coverage and effects of its interventions? Or ensure adoption at a larger scale by the Government of the Lao PDR.
3. Has institutional, individual and/or national capacity been developed so that UNDP may realistically plan progressive disengagement?
4. How has UNDP responded to threats to sustainability during implementation?

Annex D: Key stakeholders and partners

Engagement of stakeholders is vital to a successful evaluation. Stakeholder involvement should include interviews with stakeholders who have project responsibilities, including but not limited to:

- Implementing Partner – Ministry of Planning and Investment – Dept of International Cooperation
- Responsible Partners – Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Dept of International Organizations, Ministry of Planning & Investment – Dept. of Planning and Lao Statistics Bureau.
- Project beneficiaries including government at national, and provincial (there may be a field mission at provincial level)
- Sector Working Groups (approx. 1-3)
- Sub-Sector Working Groups
- Donors and non-donor partners (approx. 3-4)
- Civil Society Organization, NGOs, Academic Institutions and Private Sector (approx. 3-4)
- Chair of the National Project Board
- The National Project Director (NPD) – Deputy Minister to the Government
- Deputy National Project Directors (2)
- Project Manager (PM)
- Project Staff in Vientiane Capital (3)
- National Consultants (1-2)
- UNDP staff (3)
- UN agencies (approx. 3-4)

Annex E: Documents to be reviewed and consulted.

Evaluation team are required to review various documents related to Lao PDR and UNDP programme including but not limited to following documents:

- UNDP Strategic Plan (2018-2021)
<http://strategicplan.undp.org/>
- Lao PDR-United Nations Partnership Framework (UNPAF 2017-2021)
<http://www.la.one.un.org/sdgs>
- UNDP Country Programme Document (2017-2021)
<https://www.undp.org/content/dam/laopdr/docs/Reports%20and%20publications/2016/UNDP%20Laos%20CPD.pdf>
- Project Documents and Project Brief
<https://www.la.undp.org/content/laopdr/en/home/projects/support-programme-for-the-8th-nosedps-implementation-towards-ldc-.html>
- 8th National Social and Economic Plan (2016-2020)
www.la.one.un.org/images/publications/8th_NSEDP_2016-2020.pdf
- Lao People's Democratic Republic: Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
<http://www.la.one.un.org/media-center/publications>
- UNDP Evaluation guidelines
<http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/index.shtml>
- UNEG norms and standard
- Human Development Reports
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LAO>
- Other UNDP Evaluation Reports
<http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/index.shtml>

- Gender Inequality Index
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>
- National Round Table Website
<https://rtm.org.la/>
- Voluntary National Review of SDGs – 2018
- VDCAP – Vientiane Declaration of the Country Action Plan 2016
- 8th NSEDP Annual Progress Reports
- Donor Agreements and reports
- Result Analysis Annual Reports
- Programme Monitoring Reports
- Project Board Meeting Minutes
- Technical Reports and
- Other relevant documents and resources.

Annex F: Evaluation matrix (suggested as a deliverable to be included in the inception report).

The evaluation matrix is a tool that evaluators create as map and reference in planning and conducting an evaluation. It also serves as a useful tool for summarizing and visually presenting the evaluation design and methodology for discussions with stakeholders. It details evaluation questions that the evaluation will answer, data sources, data collection, analysis tools or methods appropriate for each data source, and the standard or measure by which each question will be evaluated.

TABLE 1. SAMPLE EVALUATION MATRIX

Relevant Key evaluation questions criteria		Specific sub questions	Data sources	Data-collection methods/tools	Indicators/ success standard	Methods for data analysis

Annex G: Schedule of tasks, milestones and deliverables.

Based on the time frame specified in the TOR, the evaluators present the detailed schedule.

Annex H: Inception report template

Follow the link: [Inception report content outline](#)

Annex I: Required format for the evaluation report.

The final report must include, but not necessarily be limited to, the elements outlined in the quality criteria for evaluation reports. Follow the link: [Evaluation report template and quality standards](#)

Annex J: Evaluation Recommendations.

Follow the link: [Evaluation Management Response Template](#)

Annex K: Evaluation Quality Assessment

Evaluations commissioned by UNDP country offices are subject to a quality assessment, including this evaluation. Final evaluation reports will be uploaded to the Evaluation Resource Centre (ERC site) after the evaluations complete. IEO will later undertake the quality assessment and assign a rating. IEO will notify the assessment results to country offices and makes the results publicized in the ERC site. UNDP Lao PDR aims to ensure evaluation quality. To do so, the consultant should put in place the quality control of deliverables. Also, consultants should familiarize themselves with rating criteria and assessment questions outlined in the Section six of [UNDP Evaluation Guidelines](#)

Annex L: Code of conduct.

UNDP requests each member of the evaluation team to read carefully, understand and sign the 'Code of Conduct for Evaluators in the United Nations system', which may be made available as an attachment to the evaluation report. Follow this link: <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/100>

Annex 2: Evaluation matrix, CPD (2017-2021) evaluation

Evaluation criteria and EQ	Judgement criteria	Data sources	Method of data collection	Data analysis method
RELEVANCE: The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries', country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.				
1. To what extent has the current UNDP programme supported the GoL in achieving the national development goals, responding to unexpected events, implementing the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and delivering UNPF intended results?	Relevant support at national and provincial levels to improve capacities to plan, monitor and implement the NSEDP and the SDGs (including SDG18 on UXO), strengthening national statistical systems, strengthening NA, PPAs and regulatory frameworks for disaster risk management, climate change and forest and wildlife protection UXO sector aligned with poverty reduction goals; All major projects assessed for coherence in ToC.	Prodocs of major projects on 3 outcomes; NSEDP; UNPF; UNDP staff; MPI; DIC; LWU; MONRE; NRA & UXO Lao; National Statistical Bureau	Desk review; key informant interview (KII)	Multi-source evidence assessment (MEA); ToC analysis
2. To what extent has the UNDP programme responded to the priorities and the needs of target beneficiaries as defined in the programme document?	Actions directed at development of skills and capacities among women and design of policies for SMEs and farmers; supporting policies that promote sustainable land use and agrobiodiversity; promote access to justice and legal aid services, focusing on women, ethnic groups and elderly people; citizen engagement with district administrations.	Communities/beneficiaries targeted by livelihoods activities, mine clearances, MRE, legal aid, radio programme; Frontline staff of IPs; Previous evaluation/review reports	KII; Focus Group Discussions (FGD); site visits; Desk review	Analysis of mixed-methods data
3. Is UNDP perceived by stakeholders as a strong advocate for improving Governance, Inclusive Growth and Environment and Natural Resource Management in Lao PDR?	Relevant advocacy interventions undertaken on strengthening governance, inclusive growth/ SDGs, disaster risk management, climate change adaptation and environment & natural resource management; strong advocacy messages.	IPs, donors and Government agencies, UNDP staff	KII	MEA
4. Have the efforts made by UNDP and national partners to mobilise resources and knowledge been in line with the current development landscape?	Strong partnership developed with ADB, World Bank, donors, UN agencies, private sector and civil society.	Mid-term reviews, Donors, World Bank, EU, UNDP staff	Desk review KII	MEA
5. To what extent did the UNDP programme promote South-South /Triangular cooperation?	Knowledge exchange with Viet Nam on people's engagement in legal sector; bottom-up rural development initiative with the Republic of Korea; and facilitating experience sharing on	CO staff, RBAP staff, NA review, Country exchange visit reports	KII, Desk review	Descriptive data analysis

	people's engagement with National Assembly and regional counterparts.			
6. Has UNDP been able to effectively adapt the programme to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Lao PDR?	Adaptiveness of UNDP to continue its programme in the Covid scenario; proactive support for relevant institutions to ensure that vital services for the population are delivered.	IP, GoL, UNDP staff, Covid mitigation strategies/briefings	KII	Descriptive data analysis
EFFECTIVENESS: The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.				
7. Is the UNDP programme on track to achieve intended results at the outcome and output levels? What are the key achievements and what factors contributed to the achievements or non-achievement of those results?	Key indicators for all outputs as per Table 1; key drivers of change/outcomes	UNDP staff, IP staff, GoL & PPA officials, local authorities, communities/beneficiaries; IP reports, Mid-term evaluations, Quarterly reports, ROARs	KII, FGD, site visits, desk review	Contribution analysis; Quantitative & qualitative analysis
8. How have the small-size initiatives funded by UNDP regular sources fulfilled their objectives? What are the factors (positive and negative) that contribute to their success or shortcomings? Are there recommendations or lessons that can be drawn from this approach?	Key outcome indicators of the following projects: SDG5 Livelihoods, Brand Lao, Attapeu flood recovery framework, NA/PPA strategic support, 3SROL and EPPCR (Community Radio programme)	UNDP staff, IP staff, GoL officials, local authorities, communities/beneficiaries; IP reports, Quarterly reports, ROARs	KII, FGD, site visits, desk review	Contribution analysis; MEA
9. To what extent has UNDP programme contributed towards an improvement in national government capacity, including institutional strengthening? How could UNDP enhance this element in the next UNDP programme?	Clear diagnostic of institutional capacity weaknesses in NRA, UXO Lao, Provincial authorities, Statistical Bureau, MPI, LWU; activities follow a clear pathway to capacity development, with evidence of outcome monitoring	IP staff, UNDP staff, other development partners, progress reports; ToC	KII, desk review	Contribution and ToC analysis
10. Which programme areas are the most relevant and strategic for UNDP to scale up going forward?	UNDP's distinctive competence and strategic positioning within the development landscape in the country.	Development partners, UNDP staff, RC, sector plans, draft 9 th NSEDP	KII	Meta-analysis based on emerging findings on EQs 1-9
EFFICIENCY: The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.				
11. To what extent has there been an economical use of resources (funds, human resources, time, expertise, etc.)? What are the main administrative constraints/strengths?	All major projects demonstrate Cost, Quality, Timeliness (CQT) factors taken into consideration throughout the implementation cycle.	Finance and operations data on funds disbursement, major cost drivers, contract management and major decision timelines; previous evaluations & Mid-	Desk review, KII	Quantitative analysis, timeline analysis of major project

		term reviews; UNDP staff; IP staff		implementation and procurement
12. Is the results-based management system operating effectively and is monitoring data informing management decision making?	Key elements of ToC are coherent; evidence of ToC parameters reflected in monitoring and reporting.	Monitoring reports, BTOR, output & outcome reports in ROARs; UNDP Transparency Portal, UNDP staff	Desk review, KII	Progress & monitoring reports assessed against ToC and CPD outputs/outcomes
13. To what extent has UNDP been efficient in building synergies and leveraging with other programmes and stakeholders in Lao PDR?	Linked to EQ4	Mid-term reviews, Donors, World Bank, EU, UNDP staff, joint programme reports	Desk review KII	MEA
14. To what extent have programme funds been delivered in a timely manner?	UNDP finance data on funds disbursement and feedback from IPs.	UNDP finance staff, IPs Mid-term reviews, evaluations Quarterly reports, project meeting minutes	KII, desk review	Timeline analysis and MEA
SUSTAINABILITY: The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue beyond the life of a project/programme.				
15. What outcomes and outputs have the most likelihood of sustainability and being adopted by partners and why?	Alternative resources (funds, policies, regulatory framework, budgetary support, partnerships) for continuation of relevant outputs and outcomes identified and agreed.	IPs, GoL, DPs, CSOs UNDP staff, Communities, beneficiaries; Multi-year resourcing plans of IPs	KII, desk review	Analysis and assessment of drivers of sustainability
16. Have the communities and the Government institutions who are the intended ultimate beneficiaries of activities acquired capacity to sustain the outputs and outcomes on their own in the absence of external assistance?	Resilience and capacity at community level; local institutions at the frontline of delivery of services to communities have capacity to continue services.	Communities and local authorities who are currently involved in implementing UNDP-supported activities.	KII, FGD	Qualitative analysis
CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES: The extent to which the CPD addressed human rights and gender equality issues.				
17. What barriers have been seen to the inclusion of vulnerable groups in UNDP's work and what can be done to improve inclusion of these groups?	All activities/projects which have any direct interface with communities must demonstrate directly addressing the needs of the most vulnerable.	Needs assessment reports; Beneficiary selection criteria; Cross-section of beneficiaries/target communities	Desk research, KII, FGD	Qualitative analysis
18. To what extent have gender equality and the empowerment of women been addressed in the programme strategic design, implementation and reporting? In what way could UNDP enhance gender equality in the next country programme?"	Prodocs demonstrate gendered analysis of poverty and vulnerability; progress reports disaggregate gender; Rigorous use of Gender marker.	Prodocs, Progress reports, Beneficiary data Mid-term evaluations, IPs, Project staff,	Desk review, KII	Quantitative & qualitative analysis

Annex 3 - List of key documents studied during inception phase

Asian Development Bank (2011), “Civil Society Briefs, Lao People’s Democratic Republic,” September 2011.

Asian Development Bank (u.d). Lao People's Democratic Republic: Country Partnership Strategy (2017-2020)

Askwith, Michael, Andrea Lee Esser, Sharon Low, Souklaty Sysaneth (2015). “Lao PDR Evaluation Report, United Nations Development Assistance Framework, 2012-2016.” 23 October, 2015.

Dr. Khosada VONGSANA, Guido Corno (2017). Terminal Evaluation of the UNDP-GEF funded project “Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Lao PDR’s Agricultural and Land Management Policies, Plans and Programmes (ABP)”, Project ID 0075435

Eugenia Katsigris, Latsany Phakdisoth (2020). Mid-Term Review – Laos SAFE Ecosystems Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, UNDP, GEF), April 7, 2020

Government of the Lao PDR, “8th Five-year National Socio-economic Development Plan (2016–2020),” Ministry of Planning and Investment, June 2016.

Government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR): “The Millennium Development Goals and Lessons Learnt for the Post-2015 Period: A Summary Review,” September 2015.

Government of the Lao PDR (2016). Vientiane Declaration on Partnership For Effective Development Cooperation (2016-2025)

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Annex 4: List of People Interviewed /Met

Government

Name	Organisation	Job Title	Location
Strategic Support to Strengthen the Rule of Law (3S-ROL)			
1. Ms. Saykhit Visisombath	MOJ	Deputy Director of International Cooperation	Vientiane
2. Ms. Mayulath Luanglatbandith	MOJ	Project Coordinator	Vientiane
3. Ms. Soulita Chanthalath	MOJ	Senior Finance Officer	Vientiane
4. Mr. Xaiya Huamaksone	Justice Department of Xiengkhaung province	Director of Justice Division	Xiengkhaung province
5. Mr. Thavon Sengpaseuth	Justice Department of Xiengkhaung province	Deputy Head of Legal Assistance Division	Xiengkhaung province
6. Ms. Padit Phoumchampa	Pek justice Office	Deputy Head of Justice Promotion	Pek district
Moving towards Achieving SDG18- Removing the UXO Obstacle to Development in Lao PDR (UXO Lao)			
7. Mr. Bounpamith	UXO Lao	NPD	Vientiane
8. Mr. Kingphet Phimmavong	UXO Project	Provincial coordinator	Xiengkhaung province
9. Mr. Wanthong Khamdala	UXO Lao	Deputy NPD	Vientiane
10. Mr. Saomany Manivong	UXO Lao	Project Officer	Vientiane
11. Mr. Kolakan Chanthavongsa	UXO Project	Deputy Provincial coordinator	Xiengkhaung province
12. Mr. Vandee Vilavongsa	UXO Project	Technical Team leader	Xiengkhaung province
13. Mr. C. Phengthongsawat	NRA	NPD	Vientiane
14. Mr. Bounpheng Sisawath	NRA	Deputy NPD	Vientiane
Debris Management for Lifesaving in UXO-contaminated Flood Zones (CERF project),			
15. Mr. Sihai Keokaikin,	Department of Labor and Welfare	Head of Department	Khammouane Province
16. Mr. Sengphet Khamsoukthavong	Department of Labor and Welfare	Deputy Head of Department	Khammouane Province
17. Mr. Latthanong Xayvongkeo	Department of Labor and Welfare	Head of Cabinet Office	Khammouane Province
18. Mr. Bounthavon Sisuphanthong	Department of Labor and Welfare	Director of Social Welfare Division	Khammouane Province
Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystem of Southern Lao PDR (SAVE ECOSYSTEMS)			
19. Mr. Keophoung Chanthapanya	MAF	Project Manager	Vientiane
20. Mr. Phaivieng	MAF	Assistant PM	Vientiane
21. Mr. Khamphai Xayalath	Ong Mang Forest Ecological Conservation Center	Director	Savanakhet province
22. Mr. Phai Vieng Vongkhamheng	Project Team	Assistant to project manager	Vientiane
23. Mr. Bounthan Sunivong	Project Team	Assistant to project manager	Vientiane
24. Mr. Bounmun Keomorakod	Project Team	Provincial Project Coordinator	Savanakhet province
Enhancing People's Participation through Community Radio (EPPCR) (2017-2021)			
25. Mr. Bounhap Soulingo	MICT, Media Department	Deputy Director General	Vientiane

26. Mr. Somsack Sakounkham	MICT	Chief of Mass Media Office	Vientiane
27. Mr. Somasack Souvannalath	MICT	Project Coordinator	Vientiane
28. Mr. Xayasana Sisavath	Lakhonepheng District	Deputy District Governor	Lakhonepheng District, Saravan province
29. Mr. Bounchanh Hangsengthong	District Culture, Information and Tourism Office	Head of the office	Lakhonepheng District, Saravan province
30. Mr. Sithon Xaysavath	District Culture, Information and Tourism Office	Deputy Head of the office	Lakhonepheng District, Saravan province
31. Mr. Somchit Phoummala	District Culture, Information and Tourism Office	Deputy Head of the office, Head of Radio Station	Lakhonepheng District, Saravan province
Achieving SDG5 in Lao PDR-Women's Economic empowerment through better livelihoods (SDG 5 Women Livelihoods)			
32. Mme. Bouachanh Syhanath	Lao Women's Union	National Project Director	Vientiane
33. Ms. Vilayvanh Keopaseuth	Lao Women's Union	Coordinator	Vientiane
34. Mrs. Seng Arun Chanthalath	Provincial Lao Women's Union	Vice President	Saravan province
35. Mrs. Manisa Chanthavongsa	Provincial Lao Women's Union	Head of Cabinet office	Saravan province
36. Mrs. Soukta Ramixay	Provincial Lao Women's Union	Technical staff	Saravan province
Governance for Inclusive Development Programme (GPAR GIDP)			
37. Mr. Nisith Keopanya	Planning and Cooperation Department	Director General	Vientiane
38. Mr. Soukan Chanthavong	District Health Office	Acting Head of the health office	Saysetha district, Attapeu province
39. Mr. Khamlien Sengkalao	Department of Home Affair	Deputy Head of the Department	Attapeu Province
40. Ms. Khonsavanh Inthavong	Community Hospital	Director, Project Manager	Saysetha district, Attapeu province
41. Mr. Bounlieng Bounyakheth	GIDP Project team	Project coordinator	Vientiane
Attapeu 1, 2 and 3 project			
42. Ms. Vimla Khounthalngsy	MLSW	Deputy Director of Disaster Management	Vientiane
43. Mr. Sombath Douangsavanh	MLSW	Technical Officer	Vientiane
44. Mr. Sithan Xayanam	Department of Labour and Social Welfare	Director of Social Welfare Division	Attapeu Province
45. Mr. Somphone Sonbounhuang	Labour and Social Welfare Office	Head of Social Welfare Unit	Sanamxay district, Attapeu province
NT2 Community Radio Project			
46. Ms. Sounapha Chaleunsouk	Corporate Social Responsibility	Director	Vientiane
47. Mr. Phouthakone Luangyotha	Corporate Social Responsibility	Manager	Vientiane
'Strategic Support to the NA and PPAs (2018-2021)			
48. Mme. Sounthai Xaignavong,	PPA	Vi-President of PPA Salavan	Saravan province
49. Mme. Vilaythone Xaymongkhoun	MOHA	Deputy Head of Cabinet	Vientiane
50. Dr. Bountham Bounvilay	Institute of Legislative Research	Head of the International Cooperation and Project Management Secretariat	Vientiane

51. Ms. Sabine Miehlau	Technical Officer	Assistant Technical Advisor Legislative Research	Vientiane
MPI/MOFA project on NSEDP & Brand Lao			
52. Mr. Sysomphan Phetdaoheung	DIC/MPI	Deputy Director General	Vientiane
53. Ms. Souphaphone Khamsennam	LNCCI	Deputy Secretary General	Vientiane
54. Mr. Thanongsinh Kanlagna	LNCCI	Brand Lao Project Manager (Vice President)	Vientiane
55. Ms. Chanthachone Vonsay	LNCCI	Vice President	Vientiane
56. Mr. Manitto Phomphothi	LNCCI	Assistant to PM	Vientiane
Others			
57. Mr. Souphaxay Komany	Department of Climate Change	Head of Division	Vientiane
58. Dr. Seumkham Thommavongsa,	IREP, MEM	NPD, Deputy Director General	Vientiane
59. Mr. Phimphone Latsavong	IREP, MEM	Head of Division	Vientiane
60. Mr. Outakeo Keodouangsanh	Investment Promotion Department, MPI	Dy Director General	Vientiane
61. Mr. Oula Somchanmavong	Ministry of Planning and Investment	Deputy Director General of Planning	Vientiane

B. Development partners

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. Mr. S.J Kim | Deputy Representative, KOICA |
| 2. Mr. Nathanun Elliott Kirton | First Secretary, New Zealand Embassy |
| 3. Mr. Nicolas Tasche | Attaché, Luxembourg Embassy |
| 4. Mr. Timothy Edwards | Charge d'Affaires, DFATD, Embassy of Canada |
| 5. Francesca Arato | EU Attaché, Governance and Rule of Law. |
| 6. Michal Harari | Swiss Development Cooperation (formerly responsible for Governance in Vientiane). |
| 7. Pamela Jawad | Programme Manager Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). |
| 8. Aurelie Righetti | Head of Governance and Citizen Participation, SDC |
| 9. Syphasong Anhsany | SDC. |
| 10. Anongly Phimmason | Policy and Projects Officer, British Embassy |
| 11. Jane Chandler | Deputy Head of Mission, Australia Embassy |
| 12. Kaykhoun Khounvisith | Programme Manager (Education) Australia Embassy |
| 13. Reginald Pastrana | Chief Technical Advisor, Higher Legal Education and Rule of Law, Luxembourg Development Cooperation. |

Other organizations (including other UN agencies)

- | | |
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| 1. Todd Wassel | Country Representative, Asia Foundation. |
| 2. Photmany Xaychalanne | Country Representative, Westminster Foundation for Democracy |
| 3. Paul Martin | Regional Technical Advisor, ASEAN and Pacific, UNCDF |
| 4. Elimnor Bajraktari | MPI/MOFA Evaluation team |

UNDP

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|----------------------------|--|
| 1. Jinha Kim | Technical Specialist, Governance |
| 2. Margaret Jones Williams | Former Head of Natural Resource & Climate Change Unit. |
| 3. Shigeyi Ito | Programme Specialist, UXO Unit |
| 4. Pradeep Bagival | CTA, GPAR/GIDP. |
| 5. Ricarda Rieger | Resident Representative. |
| 6. Adam Starr | Technical Specialist, Environment Unit |
| 7. Victor Igbokwe | Disaster Risk Reduction Specialist |
| 8. Manipet Phengs | Head of Exploration, Accelerator Lab |

9. Ketmany Vilayvong	Head of Solution Mapping
10. Khavi Homsomb	Head of Experimentation
11. Justin Shone	Head of UXO and Natural Resources Units
12. Minyoung Kim	Programme Officer, UXO project
13. Murali Balasubramanian	Former Deputy Resident Representative
14. Catherine Phuong	Deputy Resident Representative
15. Souphalack Bounpadith	M&E focal point
16. Gerry O'Driscoll	Former CTA GARP/GIDP.
17. Kiattisack Senephansiri	Operations Manager
18. Surith Sengsavang	Procurement & Admin Analyst
19. Simon Dennett	Programme Analyst, Poverty Reduction & Livelihoods Unit
20. Vipapone Aphayvanh	Programme Analyst, Poverty Reduction & Livelihoods Unit
21. Lisa Farroway	Regional Technical Adviser, GEF Unit, RBAP
22. Somaya Banchorntakarakul	Programme Associate, GEF Unit, RBAP
23. Chitlada Keomuongcho	(Formerly) Environment Unit
24. Nils Christensen	Former Head of UXO Unit
25. Thome Xaisongkham	Programme Analyst, Natural Resource Management Unit
26. Shutong Ren	Programme Analyst

Annex 5

Governance Programming in Lao PDR

Paul George, Ph.D.
Independent Consultant
December 3, 2020

Introduction

The focus on the Governance component of UNDP's programming in the Lao PDR assesses its overall contribution to the achievement of the national governance goals and policies of the government as presented in the Country Programme Document (CPD), 2017-2021. The rationale behind the projects is to support better government but this requires measured implementation of systems and regulations in order to effect sustainable change. The four projects reviewed - public administration reform for improved delivery of social services; the rule of law and access to justice; enhanced public participation in government decision-making; and, information sharing through community-based media - encapsulate UNDP's work in supporting good governance in Lao PDR:

- National Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAR) Programme - Governance for Inclusive Development Programme (GIDP);
- Enhancing People's Participation through Community Radio;
- Strategic Support to Enhancing the Role of the National Assembly and the Provincial People's Assemblies;
- Strategic Support to Strengthen the Rule of Law in Lao PDR.

These projects also reflect the government's view, as laid out in a number of policy documents, that enhancing governance is an essential foundation for sustainable development and a key enabler to harmonize services between rural and urban areas.

The "*Strategic Plan: Governance of the Lao PDR to 2020*" provides the overarching framework for governance reform in Lao PDR and aims to strengthen governance through four thematic areas, namely:

- Development of the People's Representation and Participation;
- Public Administration Improvement;
- Rule of Law;
- Public Financial Management.⁷⁷

Prior to that, the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED), 2011-2015, stressed the need for the public administration system to be accountable, effective, transparent and responsive as a condition for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. This flagged the higher levels of economic, social and human development needed to enable Lao PDR to graduate out of the ranks of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) by 2020.⁷⁸ This objective was echoed in the 8th Five-Year NSED (2016-2020) which argued that the country's graduation from LDC status, and progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - including the central Agenda 2030 objective of "leaving no one behind" - is dependent on strengthening governance and clearly dividing tasks between the centre and local administrative levels (provincial, district and village).

Clearly, Governance institutions need to be reinforced if these objectives are to be achieved. It is evident that the kinds of robust bodies and governance mechanisms sought by the government will help ensure the sustainability of development by supporting the delivery of "traditional" activities; they will also be beneficial as Lao PDR responds to new development challenges through natural disasters mitigation and climate change adaptation. Nevertheless, despite the value of programming in the governance area, this should not be seen as the quick-fix answer to Lao PDR's development requirements. Efforts to improve governance must be seen as a long-term commitment which, if successful, will improve the capability of the government to build, manage and modify the essential institutional foundations of the state and thereby enhance development.

⁷⁷"Strategic Plan: Governance of the Lao PDR to 2020," National Assembly, October 2011, p.5 (Unofficial translation)

⁷⁸ UNDP Lao PDR, "UN Joint Programme Document," National Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAR) Programme - Governance for Inclusive Development Programme (GIDP) 1 April 2017-31 March 2021. Undated. The 2020 goal has since been deferred to 2024.

The Process of Governance Reform

At the operational level, sustainable governance and administrative reforms are largely focused on systems-building. In essence, this is what the UNDP projects do and, in theory, they will provide the government with the tools to sustain the governance reform process. In conjunction with an integrated long-term focus on the social and economic development priorities of the state, governance reform will reinforce the importance of local participation and local decision-making and support social peace, political stability, economic expansion and sound macro-economic management. However, even under the best conditions of domestic capacity, political commitment and sustained leadership support, progress in governance reform will be measured in increments and there will be no particular end to the process. The benefits will accrue over time and will be marked by more efficient and effective delivery of government programmes and by improvements in the operating and regulatory environment. **The UNDP projects seem to be on the right track in supporting these objectives but a general criticism is that they are being implemented on the basis of weak Prodocs, with a deficient results framework and insufficient performance indicators.** As will be discussed below, the efficacy of the approach has yet to be determined.

UNDP and Governance Programming in Lao PDR

On the surface, UNDP has considerable advantages in programming in the Governance area in Lao PDR. It is held in high regard and trusted by the government; it is perceived to be a neutral partner. UNDP's global experience in areas such as capacity building, decentralisation, policy development, participatory development and women's empowerment is a "good fit" with the governance priorities of the country. Moreover, UNDP's long-standing presence in Lao PDR, its deep understanding of the historical and cultural context of the society, and its good working relationship with the government should make it the leading actor in the governance sector. This may be the case on paper but, unfortunately, this is not so in reality. The Governance programme is not as strong as it should be. The following are contributory factors.

The one-party system in Lao PDR makes working in the governance sector very challenging. Governance, with its emphasis on decentralisation and developing local capacity and greater autonomy at the provincial and district level, is at odds with the "Democratic Centralism" of the political system in the country.⁷⁹ This is particularly telling with respect to the role - or lack thereof - of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the development framework of the country. Normally, CSOs would be important actors in ensuring development effectiveness by improving transparency, good governance and holding government to account. Although the government is slowly coming to accept a greater role for CSOs, and related Non-Profit Associations (NPAs), they remain strictly regulated in Lao PDR and must prioritise their survival over playing a significant role in the development of the country, especially in sensitive areas such as governance. In a situation where the concept of "reform" is inherently threatening to the status quo, there is a clear connection between how confident the state feels that it is in control and the ability of UNDP (and other development partners) to move reform forward. This emphasises the need for an extended period of political stability, as well as a durable commitment by the leadership, to ensure the success of reform.

A fundamental problem in the projects reviewed is the lack of adequate funding to deliver the outputs and outcomes envisaged in the Prodocs, as well as to ensure the long-term sustainability of the interventions. Projects were designed when the Country Programme Document (CPD) was formulated in 2016 and were planned to run for the entire CPD period. The risk of a funding shortfall was identified in the CPD: "Programmatic risk arises largely from the potential for reduced levels of support from traditional donors and the consequent lack of resources to implement programming." Yet, attempts to mitigate this risk through "strong plans to mobilize resources, including from non-traditional sources, and by programme design"⁸⁰ were not successful. The required level of funding never materialised and no adjustments were made to reflect the situation. Not only has the shortage of funds affected programme delivery, it has also frustrated

⁷⁹ Article 3 of the amended constitution of 2015 defines the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) as the "leading nucleus" of the political system, whilst Article 5 "subordinates all state organizations to the principle of 'democratic centralism.'" Simon Creak & Keith Barney (2018) Conceptualising Party-State Governance and Rule in Laos, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 48:5, 693-716, DOI: [10.1080/00472336.2018.1494849](https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2018.1494849)

⁸⁰ Country programme document for the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2017-2021), p. 6 paragraph 36.

the local administrations responsible for implementation who had proceeded with their work on the expectation that budgetary commitments would be met.

In part, the failure of UNDP to acknowledge the contributions of its development partners, exemplified by what has been described as an elitist attitude towards them, contributed to their unwillingness to provide additional funding for UNDP's programmes and, indeed, induced them to put their resources elsewhere. As a case in point, the Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and the Rule of Law (CEGGA) project, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (GIZ) and co-funded by the European Union and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), essentially mirrors UNDP's governance programme and has the same target groups. Several interviewees have voiced the opinion that **the reason why the CEGGA project was initiated reflects donors' general frustration with UNDP as an implementing partner, including discontent with its management and performance, a sense that programme impacts were negligible and that its reporting lacked substance. In effect, UNDP wasn't perceived as offering value for money.**

In addition, the issue of "personalities" was clearly a factor with relationships between some individuals on the donor side and UNDP staff said to have been "difficult." Be that as it may, the most significant result of the European's decision to "go it alone" in governance programming was that UNDP lost one of its most important sources of funding - the EU. Indeed, general pressures on shrinking envelopes have led to funding shortages across the development community; the UNDP/CEGGA situation has simply compounded the problem. As a result, **UNDP has not had the means to build on its acknowledged expertise in governance to "deliver the goods" and, in many respects, has "missed the boat" in leading the governance agenda.**

In conjunction with the funding challenges, UNDP's role as a credible development partner has also been questioned. **A perception, widely voiced in the course of this study, is that UNDP lacks strategic vision, is not focused on the substance of its work and has often been absent from the discussions surrounding the design and planning of the development policy agenda.** In addition to the negative opinions about management, complaints about poor communications, high staff turnover and an overly bureaucratic system all feed into a general narrative that the Country Office is weak and out of touch.

These opinions reflect how things were viewed in recent times and it is recognised that there is now a new Governance team in place at UNDP. Whether this will result in changes to perspectives and results remains to be seen but the dynamic has changed and it appears to be a positive development.

What is the relevance of UNDP's Governance Programming?

The four projects under review all contribute to governance reform and support important elements of the government's commitment to sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda. However, a continuous improvement in governance performance demands the effective implementation of reform measures that not only balance the need to provide essential services with a least-cost strategy, but which also take into account the broader requirements of systemic change. Essential capacity requirements include the ability to formulate a policy for reform from the design phase through to implementation and subsequent monitoring and evaluation. Planning must also include an assessment and analysis of what is feasible considering the political, economic and social factors at play. In addition, there must be the capacity to manage an integrated long-term reform process that corresponds to the overall priorities of the state. There is, therefore, a need for a sound institutional framework supportive of reform, built on an established capacity to manage, but which pays due attention to the complexity of the reform process. In most successful reform programmes, implantation has been the responsibility of a particular executing agency, which possesses a balance of management skills, credibility and prestige as well as enjoying the unequivocal support of the political leadership. This level of competence is wanting in the case of Lao PDR. In particular, the lack of a consistent strategic approach by UNDP hampered effective implementation of the reforms and coordination among the projects. This has also caused some constraints in sharing timely information, disseminating results and feeding lessons learned into the national policy dialogue.

The following summaries of the Governance projects reflect both on successes and weaknesses that have been taken into account in this review.

National Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAR) Programme - Governance for Inclusive Development Programme (GIDP)

The GPAR/GIDP project, implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) (in close collaboration with the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and the Provincial and District administrations) is **the most advanced and the best funded of the projects reviewed – not surprising since it has effectively been in existence since the mid-1990s. It is also the one which seems most likely to disappear as a UNDP project when the current programme cycle ends.** However, it was always the intention that external support would be phased out as MoHA staff gained the skills to run the programme. It remains to be seen if there will be a successful transfer of “ownership” but, for now, GPAR/GIDP’s work in enhancing local governance through systemic change is highly relevant and is aligned with the cross-cutting governance goals of the 8th NSEDP. However, the long-term duration of GPAR/GIDP raises a legitimate question as to whether it represents an ongoing subsidy to the government rather than being a distinct project with a clearly defined end date.

In combination with support for the government’s Sam Sang decentralisation and local development process, and the establishment of the Provincial People’s Assemblies (PPAs), **the GPAR/GIDP project has undoubtedly enhanced broader engagement between communities, local authorities and the centre.** Nevertheless, the major donor, SDC, will not be continuing support for it in its present form when the current phase ends. It is not clear that the government wishes to take over responsibility for carrying forward the governance and public administration systems that have been developed. A valid argument could be made that if the government is not prepared to continue GPAR/GIDP then why should UNDP devote any more human and financial resources to it? This is a reasonable question but rather than abandoning the project, given the investments already made, it would be more apposite to consider what elements of it are worth preserving. **What stands out as being the most consequential is support to the Governance Sector Working Group (GSWG).**

The GSWG, co-chaired by MoHA, the Ministry of Justice, UNDP and Switzerland is designed to promote dialogue and feedback on governance issues, advocate and influence governance-related policies and service delivery, while also encouraging the participation of Non-Profit Associations (NPAs). The support of the GIDP to the secretariat of the GSWG is probably one of the most relevant activities of the project, albeit that its activities are largely outside the project’s main objectives. The GSWG is an important platform for discussion between all governance stakeholders and, as one of the co-chairs, UNDP has a high profile role in it. The work of the GSWG feeds directly into the annual Round Table Implementation Meeting as well as the High Level Round Table Meeting, which occurs every five years.

As an information exchange, the GSWG presents the opportunity to question the government on governance issues and sensitive matters in general; it can also provide coordination support to the development agenda. An important aspect of its work is the role the GSWG has played in encouraging the participation of NPAs in its deliberations. NPA’s are primarily engaged in community development activities rather than advocacy and they are treading carefully to establish their role in the development framework. They wish to engage in meaningful policy dialogue at the sub-national and national levels and the GSWG presents them with the opportunity. The participation of NPA’s in the GSWG and Round Table Meetings is seen as movement in a positive direction vis-à-vis government acceptance of a greater role for civil society.

In addition, **continuing support to the District Development Fund (DDF) would help consolidate the decentralisation process and strengthen management capacities at the local level, especially public financial and expenditure management.** Significantly, as a NIM, the government has functional ownership of the DDF and has a committed budget allocation to co-finance projects. As a funding mechanism for small-scale local projects to deliver more effective public services, the DDF is incentive driven and performance based. It complements the devolution objectives for national inclusive and sustainable development initiatives under Sam Sang. By spreading management functions to the local level

and giving people access to a source of funding tied to their needs, it promotes good governance and capacity development. The DDF initiative, piloted in Saravan (and subsequently in four other provinces), for example, introduced public expenditure management systems that have significantly improved the capacity of the districts to manage expenditure and plan for small scale investments that have a direct impact on improved service delivery. The DDF represents a cost-effective bottom-up development initiative and, as an innovative approach, it targets those most in need and, through citizens' participation at the district level, helps ensure that nobody is left behind. The DDF could also be seen as complementing the Global Environment Facility (GEF) programme, focusing on Climate Change Adaptation. GEF projects are designed to build on the comparative advantage of UNDP by working in close collaboration with on-going or new UNDP projects and programme initiatives.

The governance and public administration reforms undertaken by the GIDP project, if they continue to be used by the government, will set the conditions for UNDP to end its broad support to the programme. However, ongoing support to the GSWG and the DDF could be valuable in maintaining UNDP's policy influence and practical participation in the governance reform process.

Enhancing People's Participation through Community Radio

The Enhancing People's Participation through Community Radio project addresses the limited access to information which restricts people in remote ethnic communities from participating in the development process and being aware of important issues that affect their lives. UNDP and the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICT) established the first community radio station in Khoun District, Xieng Khouang province in 2007. The radio project has since been extended to eight priority districts in rural and remote areas, reaching out to around 300,000 people in their own ethnic languages. The Community Radio project has disseminated information on a range of issues such as elections, climate change, food and nutrition, maternal health, people trafficking, etc., and has increased people's understanding of gender equality.⁸¹ It is a key means by which to reach the many illiterate populations of the country. Community Radio has also provided a forum for policy-makers, such as the Provincial People's Assembly (PPA) representatives, to exchange views with their constituents. **As an outreach programme, it has been cost-effective and shows great potential to support inclusive development and community awareness.**

According to the Prodoc, the overall goal is for community radio to be sustainably managed at the local level and the number of stations and their outreach expanded over the four-year duration of the project. The aim is for the radio stations to be independently run by the community with sufficient income generated to fund operations. However, at every level, interviewees have cited the lack of funding as being a major impediment to achieving the project's objectives. The Prodoc recognised this possible challenge to programme delivery and stated that the implementing partner (MICT) would, with the help of UNDP, "devise a robust resource mobilization strategy which will be in operation throughout the life of the project."⁸² In addition, it stated that a "potential short-fall in resources, human or financial, will be countered through more streamlined management structures to improve synergy and the sharing of resources, and less resource-intensive activities." It is not evident that any of these measures occurred and disbursements have fallen far short of the \$3 million originally budgeted for the project. Overall, radio stations need to be supported in financial planning and resource mobilisation. Aspirations that sufficient funds to sustain operations may be available from the private sector should be dismissed; this is unlikely to happen.

This draws into question the further expansion and sustainability of the project. This is unfortunate because Community Radio has a big impact and it would not require a huge investment to expand its footprint and deliver quality broadcasts across a wider area. UNDP has provided a lot of assistance in building up the stations by providing transmitting equipment and training, as well as helping to pay the salaries and expenses of radio programmers and volunteers. It would be a shame if this investment was lost. Furthermore, Community Radio provides a number of opportunities to widely share information about UNDP's other governance projects - 3S-RoL, GIDP, National

⁸¹ Some women radio volunteers are active members of the Lao Women's Union (LWU) and have served as radio hosts of programmes dedicated to women and girls.

⁸² Prodoc, Risk Annex, p.40.

Assembly/PPAs - and to focus on relevant elements of these at the local level. Radio is the key information sharing mechanism able to reach the largest number of people in the most distant parts of the country. This highlights the powerful effect Community Radio could have in strengthening civil society if it were to be properly funded and supported by UNDP.

Strategic Support to Enhancing the Role of the National Assembly and the Provincial People's Assemblies.

UNDP has a long-standing relationship with the National Assembly (NA) and, through an earlier project: “National Assembly Strategic Support Project “(NASSP), it supported the legislative branch in becoming a more accountable institution through the promotion of good governance and the rule of law. UNDP’s track record in the governance sector means that it can draw on its expertise, especially in the parliamentary sector, to promote closer ties between the two Assemblies. The 2016 National Assembly elections resulted in a significant number of new parliamentarians, and Provincial People’s Assemblies (PPAs) were elected for the first time. Both institutions require on-going capacity-building to oversee implementation of the NSEDP, and to help attain the SDGs. The NA and PPAs work together closely but the PPAs are semi-independent. They have their own mandates but still need a lot of support from the centre. Strengthening close collaboration between the NA and the PPAs is essential if inclusive sustainable development is to be achieved nationally.

UNDP’s focus has been on high outcome activities, such as capacity building for the NA and PPA and technical staff in areas such as drafting of regulations and oversight to monitor implementation of the constitution and laws at the local level. The ultimate objective is to strengthen people’s participation and representation in decision making on national and local development issues. In part, meeting this objective requires the promotion of better service delivery and good governance. One of the mechanisms for enhancing service delivery and promoting transparency and effectiveness in the provision of local government services is the One Door Service centre model (ODS). An effective ODS system will reinforce decentralisation and improve the delivery of public services. It is a method that has been used successfully in Vietnam (and elsewhere) and the approach to ODS in Lao PDR builds on the Vietnamese experience. Typically, ODS’ provide a number of one-stop services, e.g. land use and building permits, immigration documents and business registration. In Lao PDR, the development of ODS centres has been funded through the GIDP/GPAR project but, in order to augment people-centred service delivery at the district level, the capacity of local administrations (PPAs) needs to be enhanced. In particular, they need support for coordination with the legislative branch. **The question is whether UNDP’s capacity-building of the NA and PPAs has achieved the aims of better governance and public administration reform and benefited the majority of citizens? Unfortunately, it has not.**

Support to the NA/PPA is in line with the government’s agenda but it has been the least successful of the Governance projects largely because it has failed to attract donor support and has only received funding from UNDP. In fact, the project has a shortfall of \$2.7 million out of its \$3 million budget. This raises the question about what can realistically be achieved given such a massive gap between the approved budget and the actual funds available. More importantly, why have donor contributions not been forthcoming?

The CEGGA project, by targeting strengthening of the parliamentary and oversight functions of the NA and PPAs, has undoubtedly syphoned off funds that would normally have been expected to go to UNDP. The reasons why CEGGA has supplanted UNDP’s governance role have been explored above. In the context of the NA/PPA project, the lack of funds has made it difficult to disseminate information and to build awareness in rural society about laws and regulations as well as to procure essential equipment, for example, to provide internet service to the PPAs. As a result, the benefits of governance reform have not been demonstrated to the people, especially to those ethnic groups in remote areas. Nevertheless, there have been some successes in the NA/PPA project. **A lot of effort has been put into linking the SDGs and parliament, especially at the local level, and public awareness of the SDGs has improved. This supports the government’s development agenda and complements work being pursued under the GIDP project.** In addition, provincial and district staff have benefitted from the training offered to carry out tasks that would previously have been left to consultants, for example, administration, managing resources and planning for activities based on local priorities. These initiatives feed into a long-term process that will strengthen organisational structures and help ensure more

effective service delivery. Moreover, the development of local capacity is a fundamental requirement if the project is to become sustainable after UNDP support ends. In turn, local capacity development lends support to the government's Sam Sang devolution initiative by creating the conditions for more effective local administrations to manage local development requirements.

That said, it is not obvious that the government is particularly supportive of decentralisation as envisaged in the PPAs. As noted previously, the very concept of giving more authority to the provinces runs counter to the established political system. Sam Sang, conversely, is fundamentally driven by the political imperative to secure the regime and to increase the control over regional administrations by local Party committees. Nevertheless, the work of the NA and PPAs is very important and to further invest in them would have a big impact. Support for the NA, in particular, would give UNDP a tremendous opportunity to leverage its influence over the government. The end of the first legislature including PPAs is at hand and the second legislature will expand their membership. They have been widely accepted by the people and have demonstrated their potential to contribute to the socio-economic development of the provinces. The challenge, as in other areas, remains the limited budget.

Strategic Support to Strengthen the Rule of Law in Lao PDR (3S-RoL)

Since the founding of the Lao PDR on 2 December 1975, the government has sought to develop legal systems that encourage people's participation in the judicial process, and where laws are aligned with regional and international frameworks. Further, the ambition was to raise legal awareness in society through the dissemination of laws.⁸³ In support of these objectives, Lao PDR adopted a Legal Sector Master Plan (LSMP) in 2009 that aimed to establish the foundations for a Rule of Law State. The LSMP complemented the broader effort to promote governance and public administration reform in support of the government's ambition to attain the SDGs and graduate from Least Developed Country status by 2020. Although significant progress was made by the LSMP it was less than was expected, especially in terms of implementation and service delivery at the grassroots level. This emphasised the need to engage citizens in all aspects of the legal reform agenda and to strengthen relationships between the people and the state on these matters.

The 3S-RoL project addresses this requirement through five proposed outputs designed to build on the work of the LSMP to advance progress towards achieving a Rule of Law state.⁸⁴ In terms of Governance programming, the project complements the other projects studied in this review. However, of the four, enhancing the rule of law should be the priority. Steady progress has been made towards establishing rule of law, but significant challenges remain. **The expansion of legal services is constrained by human and financial factors, such as the costs of running legal aid facilities, the insufficient number of qualified lawyers and judges, and the limited understanding about access to justice.** An efficient and effective justice system would address the main goals and objectives of the government.

UNDP has provided long-term support and is the main coordinator on legal issues with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). This enables it to work across the legal sector with stakeholders such as the People's Supreme Court, the Office of the Supreme People's Prosecutor, the Lao Women's Union and the Lao Bar Association, as well as with other ministries on related issues. In fact, UNDP is probably the one partner which all actors are comfortable working with. Unfortunately, as in the other projects examined, the only thing lacking is money. The project was designed with a budget of \$4 million, but \$3.3 million of that was unfunded. Again, the CEGGA project may be to blame for the dearth of donor contributions. CEGGA, through its support for the MoJ aims to enhance the implementation of the rule of law and to improve the access of citizens to justice through, for example, helping the MoJ establish legal aid offices throughout the country. At a broader level, it also supports the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to incorporate ratified human rights conventions into the domestic legal framework.⁸⁵ In addition, Luxembourg, through LuxDev, is in Phase 2 of its rule of law project; the first

⁸³ Strategic Plan

⁸⁴ The five outputs are: 1. Enhanced ability of the Government to coordinate, monitor and identify resources to establish the rule of law state; 2. Expanded and systematized use of evidence-based policy and legislative development; 3. Strengthened capacity of Lao PDR to harmonise with, and transpose, international obligations and standards into domestic law and practice; 4. Improved access to justice and justice service delivery for citizens, and 5. Increased public awareness of legal rights, responsibilities, and confidence in, justice institutions. 3S-RoL ProdDoc

⁸⁵ GIZ Project Brief

phase dealt with legal education (they built the faculty of law) and they work directly with the MoJ. They also adhere to the ASEAN University Network standards to provide English training, support faculty-to-faculty exchanges in ASEAN (with the Association of ASEAN Lawyers) and fund an exchange with the University of Luxembourg. France is also coordinating support to the justice sector. All of this leaves UNDP somewhat sidelined. In fact, based on several interviews, the impression is that it is only marginally involved with strengthening the rule of law.

The UNDP approach has been described as not cost-effective and as basically subsidising the government; it supports no international experts on the 3S-RoL project, has no in-house expertise and only sends local staff to MoJ meetings. The perception is that UNDP is missing in action; it is noted that it has apparently not visited the legal aid offices, nor the village mediation centres.

This is disappointing because there are huge needs and UNDP has a lot of experience it could bring to bear. The government's Strategic Plan, flags the key areas where it sees gaps in the development of laws and the delivery of justice: "The performance of the legal mechanisms, in some areas, is not as adequate and effective as required. Measures to ensure law enforcement are yet to be adequately implemented. Awareness raising regarding the law has not been adequately achieved, and people's awareness regarding compliance with the laws has not yet reached high levels."⁸⁶ This emphasises the fact that legal reform is a high-level political process. UNDP has the access to government to support legal sector reform that others do not; it could place people in the ministries and thereby wield considerable influence. It is a distinct advantage and an opportunity that should not be overlooked.

The 3S-RoL project is small but it should focus on capacity building and technical assistance to address some of the structural problems of the legal system. Priorities include working on integrating customary law into the national system and aligning it with international obligations, developing capacity to disseminate the law and raise people's awareness of their legal rights and obligations. In addition, the legal infrastructure is poor and there is a need to systematically improve the effectiveness of its institutions.

Cross-Cutting Issues

The Governance Prodocs all reference the aim of addressing critical cross-cutting issues such as gender and human rights in their proposed Outputs. As such, they reflect the fundamental values that should form the basis of all development objectives and institutional practices. However, it is not apparent that these cross-cutting issues are fully integrated into all project activities, nor that there is a clear understanding of what this would involve. For example, gender equality is considered a societal norm whereby women play active roles in decision-making on issues that affect their lives. In most cases reviewed, "gender equality" is manifested by the number of women versus men in a particular project; there is no indication that women play a significant role in determining development policy or any other area of relevance to gender equality.

Of the four projects reviewed, the GIDP is the most advanced in terms of integrating gender into its initiatives and works closely with the MOHA to ensure that gender equity and inclusion are understood and implemented in programmatic, rather than conceptual/abstract terms. Although much remains to be done, people's views on the role of women in Lao society are slowly changing and this will lead eventually to a more balanced gender profile.

Conclusion

People constitute the principal force for development but they must be given the right incentives, opportunities and support in order to achieve their objectives. That said, UNDP has to work in a society where people are still cautious about expressing their opinions and it is not always going to be easy to get their input. Ideally, governance programming in Lao PDR, by increasing the effectiveness of public administration, strengthening the rule of law, raising the public's

⁸⁶ Strategic Plan

awareness of the issues that affect their lives and building harmony between the national and local legislatures, should fortify the institutions that respond to the people's needs and priorities. In general, however, the Governance programmes have been a disappointment, not least because of the shortage of stakeholders willing to contribute financial support to them.

The main requirement arising from the evolving governance policy environment in Lao PDR is the urgent need to support the implementation of reforms by strengthening local institutions through capacity building. In this context, capacity building goes beyond training of staff and focusing on their individual skills and competencies, but also on creating an enabling environment, including policies, laws and regulations, that support the overall development priorities of the state. At the same time, it must be recognised that the unique circumstances of Lao PDR mean that capacity building is not just a question of educating people, it also requires working within the hierarchy that exists and understanding where people fit in to the political system. It is a complex process and coordinating these efforts with the government, the people and the development partners requires strong leadership from the Country Office, adequate resources and a strategic plan. All of these elements are lacking in Lao PDR.

UNDP's governance role should be much more prominent but it lacks the in-house technical depth and expertise to design, develop and deliver effective governance programming. It also appears reluctant to draw on partners from throughout the UN system to assist it; instead, it tries to go it alone. The CO maintains a strong public profile by focusing on events, such as chairing a lot of meetings, but it needs to be more engaged in the process behind such events. There is clearly a disconnect between its activities and what should rightly be the role of the Resident Coordinator's office. When all is said and done, UNDP's Governance programme actually doesn't deliver much. Part of the problem is that UNDP lacks strategic direction in its approach to governance programming. It needs to bring in specialists to help it develop a workable strategy. More importantly, it needs to carve out a niche in governance that would tighten its focus and then it could undoubtedly achieve more.

Recommendations

Given that the lack of resources has limited programme delivery across the board, the priority is to develop a robust resource mobilization strategy to strengthen UNDP's role in the country. This needs to include the major players, e.g., the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, as well as development partners. In particular, UNDP's short-term goal must be to repair relationships with key funding organizations, especially the EU. There should be a concerted effort by UNDP's senior management to seek areas of mutual interest where collaboration with the EU is possible. To this end, there should also be regular communications at the desk level to explore programming and funding opportunities. Given reports that GIZ will shortly withdraw from Lao PDR, there will be a huge vacuum in governance programming that UNDP would be well-placed to fill. If it had the confidence of the EU, UNDP could pick up its game and, ideally with EU support, once again become the lead player in governance programming. The reality is that this will not happen overnight but UNDP should at least try to position itself with that objective in mind.

It is not regarded that the EU is the partner the government is most comfortable working with. In large part, this reflects an idealistic approach by the EU when dealing with sensitive subjects, such as human rights or the role of CSOs. For example, when the CEGGA project was started there was a moratorium on working with CSOs but the EU proceeded anyway through INGOs. This naturally raised tensions with the government. In essence, the EU has sometimes demonstrated a basic misunderstanding of Lao society and culture. This is not the case with UNDP.

At the same time, it has been argued that UNDP has been too close to the government and not independent enough in tackling sensitive issues. There is obviously a fine line to be drawn between doing what is considered right and normal in the development community, and what might upset the government. Nevertheless, because of the government's comfort with UNDP, there is an opportunity for it to regain the ground it has lost in the governance sector.

UNDP must also improve its strategic position by exploiting its comparative strengths, including in particular its strong reputation with the government. It should, for example, encourage government efforts to achieve the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). Providing support to governments for the SDGs is part of UNDP's core business and its projects should clearly demonstrate the cross-cutting linkages to relevant SDGs. Lao PDR was among the earliest countries to localize the SDGs and integrate them into its national planning framework and its first report on the SDG Voluntary National Review was well received at the High-Level Political Forum. UNDP should build on this and develop a comprehensive SDG support strategy for the country, including how to secure funding and expand its engagement with other parts of the government. Thus far, UNDP's support to the SDGs has lacked a coordinated approach. This is a missed opportunity. Guiding the government's nationwide SDG efforts will help to solidify UNDP's Governance programme.

UNDP should also encourage what appears to be a positive trend in the government's attitude towards CSOs. In the interest of strengthening community and regional development, accessing hard-to-reach areas, and reaching the poorest and most vulnerable people, there needs to be a strong push to get the government to effectively engage with CSOs.

Another important area worth investing in is the Service User Feedback Survey (SUFS), these surveys, as part of the accountability framework listed under Outcome 2 of the GIDP Prodoc, basically ask people for their views on public service delivery in order to measure the level of satisfaction and to identify ways in which the service could be improved. On one level, they provide the people with a means to judge government accountability and transparency but they also give them a voice in the governance matters that directly affect their lives. SUFS are also particularly valuable at the local level in order to identify gaps that might impact on the attainment of the SDGs. SUFS are an important initiative because people, especially in the rural areas, have limited access to information and they have rarely been involved with monitoring the work of the government, especially in local development. SUFS present the opportunity to generate wider consultation and feedback on public service issues.

Public administration reform is an area of great importance and support for it should be the focus of a special effort by UNDP. The pressures for public sector reform in developing countries are obvious and arise from the need to contain costs, to avoid duplication of services, to enhance the transparency and accountability of the public sector, to remove corruption and, ultimately, to provide the best possible service to the citizens at an affordable cost. A well-managed and efficient civil service is essential for the implementation of social and economic development policy, the effective distribution of public resources and the competent administration of public expenditure.

ASEAN has adopted the most innovative policies towards public sector reform seen anywhere and provides stimulating examples of success which could have significant applications in the Lao context. For example, the reforms introduced in Malaysia and Singapore go beyond the familiar "first generation" reforms, such as cost-reduction measures. They include significant "second generation" efforts to improve the competence and quality of service delivery in the public sector. At the same time, greater efficiencies have been sought through the application of modern technologies in keeping with the need to "do more with less" in an environment where shrinking resources are the norm.

This implies that the adoption of Information Technology is a key means by which to improve efficiency and performance in governance. The present COVID-19 crisis points the way to greater use of digitization in the development community and the pandemic can be seen as a development opportunity. Least Developed Countries are the most vulnerable to the human and economic costs of the pandemic and also lag farthest behind in digital readiness. The main takeaway from this is that countries like Lao PDR can, and should, seize the opportunity presented by the pandemic to leap forward into a new digital age, join the "connected" world, and enhance their development prospects. This is already happening in Vietnam, where "e-government" aims to overhaul the entire government infrastructure through, for example, digitalising all public services and administrative procedures. Under this scheme, all government-related documents will eventually be digitalised and will be publicly available online. The possibilities are endless. There is an opportunity for UNDP to work with Lao PDR to identify ways in which digitization can help advance development, generate efficiencies and deliver more effective programming. This would require UNDP to access the right level of technical expertise in order to design a digitization strategy that would ultimately support the country's development agenda.