

Mid-Term Evaluation

**“Support Programme for NSEDP Implementation
towards LDC Graduation, MIC Transition and SDG
Achievement”**

(MPI-MOFA Programme)

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Executive Summary

The Government of Lao PDR and UNDP started in 2017 the implementation of the programme “*Support Programme for NSEDP Implementation towards LDC Graduation, MIC Transition and SDG Achievement*” (referred to in this report as the MPI-MOFA programme), aimed at enhancing the Government’s ability to formulate and implement plans, strategies and policies including the adoption of results-based management, achieving LDC graduation and coping with the associated impact of the transition process. The programme has supported the fulfilment of the vision of and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by advocating for policy coherence across sectors and policy domains to ensure that sustainable development is advanced in an integrated manner in its social, economic and environmental dimensions. It was also designed to support the implementation, monitoring and reporting on the Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan (VD-CAP) 2016-2025. The programme was funded by UNDP, Luxembourg and New Zealand and was implemented through UNDP’s National Implementation Modality (NIM). Its principal actors have been the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) and Department of Planning (DOP), both under the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), the Department of International Organizations (DIO) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Center for Development Research (CDR) and the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) under the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

This report presents the findings of a mid-term evaluation (MTE) commissioned by UNDP in Lao PDR and carried out during the period September 2020 – January 2021 by two independent evaluators. The MTE’s methodology was based on mixed methods and involved commonly applied evaluation tools such as documentary review, interviews, information triangulation, analysis and synthesis. A participatory approach was taken for the collection of data, formulation of recommendations and identification of lessons learned. The MTE is organized in the following sections: (i) Strategy; (ii) Relevance; (iii) Effectiveness; (iv) Efficiency; and, (v) Sustainability.

Strategy

The MPI-MOFA programme has not been a stand-alone and fragmented intervention, but has built on the foundations of a previous UNDP technical assistance programme, enabling a stronger partnership between UNDP and the lead ministries, as well as greater efficiencies given that activities build on an existing institutional infrastructure. Furthermore, programme components have been closely and logically interconnected with each other, with each component conceived as part of a broader institutional structure meant to help Lao PDR produce higher-quality development policies aimed at achieving national priorities, including LDC graduation. The programme has also convened relevant stakeholders - government and national development agencies, United Nations bodies, development partners, civil society organizations and the private sector – through the Round Table Process which has become a vital mechanism in the implementation of the NSEDP and achievement of SDGs.

For all these strengths, the programme has suffered from several design shortcomings that could have received greater attention from the stakeholders. First, the programme has been extremely ambitious, with activities that encompass too many areas which are quite complex and political by virtue of their strategic nature. Another challenge has been the programme’s open-ended design and the earmarked nature of financial commitments made by donors, coupled with a serious funding shortfall that has led to a gap in a number of activities. Another design shortcoming is the excessive focus on policy formulation as opposed to policy implementation, reflecting to some extent a mentality that “*developing policies or passing laws is all that matters*” when what ultimately matters is the way in which policies get implemented to deliver tangible results. Further, while the programme’s focus on strengthening the

capabilities of the civil service in the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) has been important and commendable, the approach has been piecemeal in that it was conceived as a one-off exercise and carried out outside of the formal structures that are in place within the government for the continuous training of public officials. Also, the programme would have benefitted from deeper consultations during the design stage, which would have minimized the need to revise the details of some activities once the programme document was submitted, thus avoiding implementation delays.

The Programme Document provides a thorough analysis of the country context and needs, but the Results Framework is not robust and does not provide clear guidance for the effective monitoring of the programme. The programme board has been well-representative of the national Government, but it has not had strong representation of sub-national governments and civil society. The five Government departments within the two key ministries have been directly responsible for the implementation of the programme. The Programme Support Unit (PSU) has played an important role in the day-to-day coordination of programme activities and the support provided to the respective Government departments involved in the programme. The PSU was designed to be of a more administrative nature, with limited substantive functions, which have been typically played by the respective departments. In hindsight, more substantive/technical skills (delivered through project staff experienced in areas such as planning, statistics, M&E, etc.) would have enabled the PSU to play a stronger coordination role.

Relevance

The MPI-MOFA programme is one of UNDP's most strategic projects in the country, operating in a very strategic area for the country and the Government by addressing the highest policy level, interacting with issues and processes that relate directly to the country's leadership and enabling access to highest levels policy making for civil society, private sector and development partners. It was conceived to support the Government in establishing a platform for effective development partnerships in line with the Vientiane Partnership Declaration. Through the Round Table Process and SWG mechanism, the Development Partners and other relevant stakeholders' feedback/comments, suggestions or recommendations on development cooperation effectiveness and national development agenda have been reflected in national and sectoral plans and strategies. Lao PDR has also placed great importance to forging inclusive partnerships in the achievement of national development objectives and, in particular, the SDGs. The Government has fully embraced mainstreaming of the 2030 Development Agenda and has adopted sustainable development principles into national development plans and strategies, especially the NSEDP. The National Steering Committee on SDGs is chaired by the Prime Minister. Further, Lao PDR is actually one of the few countries that uses the Round Table Process, co-chaired by the Government and UN, as a central mechanism to promote dialogue between the Government at the central and local level, development partners, private sector, civil society and other stakeholders in key issues such as identifying development priorities and intensifying cooperation as well as coordination and aid effectiveness.

Overall, Government counterparts highly value the programme's support in the formulation and implementation of the national development agenda, especially the NSEDP aimed at LDC graduation and achievement of SDGs. However, for all the relevance of the objectives and goals of this programme, in practice it has been difficult for programme stakeholders to mobilize the planned amount of financial resources. So, somehow the potential relevance of the programme due to its strategic nature has not been fully translated into actual relevance at the implementation stage.

Effectiveness

The MPI-MOFA programme is peculiar in that it does not have a tangible and direct impact on the lives of a group of people or community, as many other development projects do. This is a high-level policy programme that produces two types of effects – improvement in the capabilities of the Government departments targeted by the programme and strengthening of the public policies supported by the programme. The practical effects of the programme are largely indirect and take time to trickle down.

However, at the organizational and policy level, the programme's contributions have been tangible. At the organizational level, it is clear that the five government departments involved have directly benefited from the programme. They are now capable of better performing their functions. This is obvious when looking at the organizational infrastructure that has been put in place through the support of this programme for the implementation of SDGs and NSEDP or the organization of the round table process which has been revitalized with programme support to address existing and emerging development challenges. The programme has also supported the Government in reporting on progress made on the implementation of the Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2016-2025), in line with the principles of the effective development cooperation agenda, as agreed in Busan in 2011. The engagement of local governments and non-governmental actors and the organization of meetings and events outside of the capital city is another achievement. Also, at the policy level the effects are visible. The quality of the national development plans has improved through the programme's support for the mid-term review of the 8th NSEDP and the formulation of the 9th NSEDP (2021-2025). The country now has a stronger monitoring and evaluation framework for the NSEDP grounded on more adequate indicators. The SDGs have been streamlined into the NSEDP and the round table process is closely linked to these two processes. Also, at the sectoral level and sub-national level there is better cohesion now and more effective linkages to the national development masterplan.

Major activities that have not been pursued/completed by the programme due to time constraints and budget limitations are the following:

- Improvement of national capacity on RBM concepts, focusing on results-based planning;
- Transition to the post-2020 Lao Development Forum;
- 6th NHDR.

Key activities which are outstanding and expected to be pursued in 2021 are the following:

- Costing, financing strategy and M&E framework of the 9th NSEDP;
- (Organization of the 13th HL-RTM, its consultations and other associated events);
- Completion of the VDCAP review report;
- Streamlining of the SDG indicators into the 9th NSEDP.
- Preparation of the second VNR which is expected to be presented at the UN High Level Political Forum in the summer of 2021;
- Finalization of at least two-three more research papers contributing the development of 6th NHDR.

The programme team has developed a work plan for 2021, which was reviewed in the course of this evaluation. The work plan contains some crucial activities for the achievement of the programme's objectives, but they appear widely and thinly spread out across the components.

Efficiency

The programme has suffered from a funding shortfall, representing a serious shortcoming not only for the initiation of a number of activities that have been suspended or postponed, but also for the integrity of the programme, given that it was designed as an integrated package of interconnected interventions. Given MPI's and MOFA's interest in this programme and their need to resolve the budget challenge, it would be useful if both MPI and MOFA, with the help of UNDP, prioritized and publicized this programme in their bilateral contacts with development partners and flagged it as a possible avenue for channeling assistance by development partners. It will also be helpful for the Government to consider whether a more programmatic approach to dealing with multiple projects by development partners is more cost-effective and time efficient for the government departments and officials involved.

Coordination between the five Government departments, PSU and UNDP has been time-consuming and has slowed down decision making. Certain approval procedures within the departments may be expedited within the framework of existing Government rules and procedures. Further, the programme has experienced some operational delays (such as in the transfer of funds from UNDP to the respective implementers, submission of quarterly or annual reports, work plans, budgets, etc.). These delays have sometimes resulted in bottlenecks for the implementation of programme activities planned. Such delays indicate the need for more effective capacity building for national implementers on UNDP rules and procedures (as well as expectations). It has also been sometimes difficult for the programme support team to finalize programme-related documents (e.g., work plans and reports, etc.) without inputs or feedback from high-ranking officials who have usually been busy with other engagements. Also, in some cases it has been difficult for the PSU to quickly approach and get a response from the implementing parties, which has resulted in implementation delays. In this case, the respective Government departments should plan more effectively their internal roles and responsibilities dedicated to this programme.

Sustainability

As far as the sustainability of programme results that have been achieved thus far is concerned, they may be assessed more adequately at the end of the programme when all activities have been completed. There are clear indications, however, that some of the achievements are sustainable because they have been institutionalized and will be preserved going forward. An example of this is the development of the capacity of the National SDG Secretariat, which now functions as a fully-fledged and capable institution. The MPI-MOFA programme has contributed to the creation of a knowledge pool, accumulation of experiences, lessons learnt, resources and institutional memory that could be transferred to the next generation.

There are, however, a number of factors that seem to be important for sustainability and which could receive greater attention by the programme stakeholders. A key factor that will determine further sustainability will be the potential for further resource mobilization. The present challenge with resource mobilization represents the most serious challenge the programme's sustainability faces. Furthermore, this programme has a clear focus on capacity building for the five Government departments/organizations directly involved with the programme. While such focus on strengthening the capabilities of the civil service is important and commendable, as has been noted, the whole capacity building effort could perhaps have been approached more systematically and sustainably by making better use of the country's existing structures for the training of civil servants, under the Civil Service Management Strategic Framework and Public Administration Reform.

Gender Mainstreaming

The programme has created a good gender balance among the individuals involved in its activities. This was evident not only in the key positions that women hold in this programme, but also their overall involvement in the activities of the programme and interviews for this evaluation. At the policy level, the programme has supported the inclusion of the gender dimension in the various policy instruments that have been developed – in particular, NSEDP and the national SDG framework. This is very important and strategic work that does have long-term and sustainable impact on the lives of women and the gender balance. The programme has also taken into account gender equality in most activities, including participation, decision making and representation in trainings/seminars. Nevertheless, the review of programme-related documents conducted in the course of this evaluation showed the need for a more effective monitoring of the gender dimension in programme activities and results.

Recommendations

This evaluation has generated the following set of recommendations for the attention of programme stakeholders.

Recommendation	Responsible Parties
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 1 Resource Mobilization</p> <p>The three programme stakeholders should work more closely together on the issue of resource mobilization by instilling greater synergy and energy in the process. This should be done on the basis of a well-coordinated effort that rests on the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The parties should develop a well-thought-out resource mobilization action plan with clear roles and responsibilities identified for each stakeholder. • The parties should make an assessment of how much additional funding they will be realistically able to mobilize for the remainder of the programme. • The parties should also conduct a careful review of what activities are possible to achieve with the amount of financing that is realistically feasible for them to raise. • MPI and MOFA might consider a review of the annual work plan for in light of the above-mentioned review. • The parties should prioritize and publicize the programme in their bilateral contacts with development partners. • MPI and MOFA could consider a more programmatic approach for the delivery of bilateral assistance and will benefit from a clearer assessment of this programme as an avenue for channeling assistance by development partners. 	<p style="text-align: center;">UNDP MPI MOFA</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 2 Programme Integration and Coordination</p> <p>MPI and MOFA should strive for a more integrated “one programme” approach for this programme. They could consider the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the programme’s coordination mechanisms, especially the role of the PSU by giving it more access and reacting more quickly to PSU requests. • The parties should identify activities undertaken by each department that would benefit by greater engagement by other stakeholders. PSU could assist with the analysis and keeping track of joint engagements. • The parties should also identify synergies and collaborations more carefully in work plans. 	<p style="text-align: center;">MPI MOFA</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The programme will benefit if the number of programme board meetings will go up to two per year, as originally envisaged in the programme document. Given the online nature of most meetings now, this seems a lot more feasible than in-person meetings. 	
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 3 Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The PSU will benefit from a communications expert, even someone hired temporarily or on a part-time basis. The programme stakeholders should focus on communications with external audiences (including media) on the basis of a communication strategy for this programme. UNDP should communicate to MPI and MOFA in clear terms its expectations of documents, templates and formats for work plans, budgets, reports, etc. The programme will benefit from better structured communications between UNDP and the respective government departments and the PSU. This could involve regular online meetings – i.e. once a week – to discuss crucial programme-related matters. UNDP should strengthen communications with donors, by ensuring that reporting is timely and informative. 	UNDP MPI MOFA
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 4 Operational Matters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNDP and government departments should address the staff turnover issue. One way of dealing with this would be by creating a shadow position that could cover the primary position, in case that person leaves their job. Also, better documentation is necessary to maintain institutional memory. MPI and MOFA should better assess the workload of the officials they designate for the programme and ensure that these officials are able to allocate sufficient time for programme-related matters. They should plan for a greater amount of time and workload from relevant officials allocated to the activities of this programme. MPI and MOFA should review the current decision-making processes related to the programme and identify how within existing government rules and procedures they can accelerate the decision-making process. The MPI and MOFA departments should strengthen their monitoring and reporting functions dedicated to the programme. Board meetings should be organized well before the approval of work plans and budgets is due to allow for sufficient time for discussions and approvals. 	UNDP MPI MOFA
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 5 Capacity Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNDP should organize additional training on UNDP rules and procedures for relevant government officials responsible for planning, budgeting and reporting. UNDP should conduct this in the broader context of capacity support for government entities implementing NIM projects. 	UNDP
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 6 Coordination with Donors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the framework of this programme, UNDP, MPI and MOFA should conduct a careful mapping of all the other development partners providing support in the 	UNDP MPI MOFA

<p>areas covered by the MPI-MOFA programme and identify potential synergies and efficiencies between this programme and development partners' projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNDP should conduct a quick assessment of how its ongoing projects could be better coordinated with the MPI-MOFA programme and identify potential practical synergies. 	
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 7 Substantive Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme stakeholders should further develop the Lao Development Forum concept and come up with a plan for how the transition process could take place. • Programme stakeholders should develop measures to engage the general public more effectively with the SDGs. • Programme stakeholders should establish a more solid system for measuring the implementation of RTIM recommendations and more capacity building support for implementing agencies on how to implement RTIM instructions. • Programme stakeholders should establish a more solid system for monitoring the SDG indicators that have been assigned to line ministries to integrate into sectoral plans/strategies, as well as tracking of the extent to which those indicators get incorporated into those plans/strategies. • Programme data should be collected and reported more systematically on a gender-disaggregated basis across all components and activities. If a new phase of this programme will be undertaken, it will be beneficial to conduct a more detailed gender assessment to lay the ground for a better approach to gender mainstreaming in the new programme. 	<p>MPI MOFA UNDP</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 8 Sub-national Level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPI and UNDP should assess the feasibility of providing greater capacity development support for government officials at the sub-national level. • MPI and UNDP should also consider the possibility of greater engagement of communities at the local level on planning and SDG-related activities. 	<p>MPI UNDP</p>

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CDR	Center for Development Research
CPD	Country Programme Document
DIC	Department of International Cooperation
DIO	Department of International Organizations
DOP	Department of Planning
HL-RTM	High-Level Round Table Meeting
LDC	Least Developed Country
LSB	Lao Statistics Bureau
MIC	Middle-Income Country
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
MIS	Management Information System
MTE	Mid-Term Evaluation
MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-government Organization
NIM	National Implementation Modality
NPA	Non-profit Association
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PFM	Public Financial Management
PSU	Programme Support Unit
RBM	Results-based Management
RTIM	Round Table Implementation Meeting
RTM	Round Table Meeting
RTP	Round Table Process
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SWG	Sector Working Group
ToR	Terms of Reference
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VD-CAP	Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, Lao PDR has experienced consistently high economic growth, accompanied with poverty reduction, infrastructure development and progress in education. The Government has improved its capacities to manage economic growth and the changing structure of the national economy. However, challenges remain and it is crucial for the country to fully capitalize on its human resources, plan and budget, accordingly, improve productivity, diversify economically and reduce inequality. This will be particularly important in the context of the upcoming graduation from the status of Least Developed Country (LDC) and the likely changes it will bring about to the overall development scenario and agenda, including Official Development Assistance (ODA) and other instruments available to the Government to promote sustainable development. Annex I of this report provides a more detailed description of the country's development situation.

In this context, the Government of Lao PDR and UNDP started in 2017 the implementation of the programme “*Support Programme for NSEDP Implementation towards LDC Graduation, MIC Transition and SDG Achievement*” (hereinafter referred to as the *MPI-MOFA Programme*), which is aimed at enhancing the Government's ability to formulate and implement plans, strategies and policies including the adoption of results-based management, achieve LDC graduation and cope with the associated impact of the transition process. In the area of development effectiveness and LDC graduation, the programme aims to facilitate the coordination cooperation of all stakeholders engaged in the country's development process. This is achieved through the Round Table Process (RTP), which consists of a number of plenary meetings and Sector Working Groups (SWGs) organized along thematic areas of development based on the country's development priorities and agenda. The process is led by the Government and involves development partners such as UN agencies, Australia, EU, Japan, Switzerland, US, and others. The programme also supports the fulfilment of the vision of and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by advocating for policy coherence across sectors and policy domains to ensure that sustainable development is advanced in an integrated manner in its social, economic and environmental dimensions. The programme was also designed to support the implementation, monitoring and reporting on the Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan (VD-CAP) 2016-2025.

The MPI-MOFA programme builds on a previous phase of the programme which was aimed at supporting the achievement of MDGs (2011-2015). It is funded by UNDP, Luxembourg and New Zealand and is implemented through UNDP's National Implementation Modality (NIM), which implies the programme's full ownership of by the Government of Lao PDR. The programme's principal actors are the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) and Department of Planning (DOP), both under the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), the Department of International Organizations (DIO) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Center for Development Research (CDR) and the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) under the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

A more detailed description of the programme is provided in Annex I of this report. The following table provides a brief summary of the programme's key features.

Table 1: Programme Summary

Programme title	Support Programme to Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) for National Socio-economic Development Plan (NSEDP) Implementation toward
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	LDC Graduation, MIC Transition and SDG Achievement 2017-2021.	
Short Name	Support to NSEDP, SDGs & LDC graduation programme	
Atlas ID	Programme ID 00086274, output ID: 00093565	
Corporate outcome and output	Outcome 1: Advance poverty eradication in all its forms and dimensions Output 1.1: National and sub-national systems and institutions enabled to achieve structural transformation of productive capacities that are sustainable and employment	
Country	Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)	
Region	Asia and Pacific	
Date programme document signed	3 April 2017	
Programme dates	Start	Planned end
	3 April 2017	31 December 2021
Programme budget	USD 10 million as per signed programme document (about US\$ 3.6 million has been mobilized so far, out of which 2.6 million has been from UNDP Regular Resources).	
Programme expenditure at the time of evaluation	US\$ 3.2 million	
Funding source	Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, New Zealand & UNDP	
Implementing party	Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) with four responsible parties for each of the four outputs of the programme	

Evaluation Methodology

The mid-term evaluation (MTE) was commissioned by UNDP in Lao PDR and was carried out during the period September 2020 – January 2021 by two independent evaluators. Its main goal was to assess the project’s overall progress towards expected results, identify how activities were designed and implemented up to this point and derive lessons and recommendations for the remainder of the implementation period and the continuation of activities in this area. The methodology was based on mixed methods and involved commonly applied evaluation tools such as documentary review, interviews, information triangulation, analysis and synthesis. A participatory approach was taken for the collection of data, formulation of recommendations and identification of lessons learned. A more detailed description of the methodology used for this evaluation is provided in Annex II of this report.

Structure of the Report

The report begins with an introductory section that provides a very brief description of the programme and methodology used for the evaluation (current chapter). The second chapter presents the main findings of the report and consists of six parts: the project’s design and implementation strategy, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and gender mainstreaming. The third chapter identifies key “lessons learned” drawn from the experience of this project. The fourth chapter summarizes the main conclusions and the last (fifth) chapter provides a set of recommendations for the consideration of project stakeholders. Additional information supporting the arguments made throughout the document is provided in the annexes attached to this report.

2. FINDINGS

The findings presented in this chapter cover only the most essential aspects of the programme and, given the mid-term nature of this assessment, are to a considerable extent focused on those aspects that require the attention of stakeholders. The findings, and the rest of this chapter, are organized in the following sections: (i) *Strategy*; (ii) *Relevance*; (iii) *Effectiveness*; (iv) *Efficiency*; and, (v) *Sustainability*. Also, a short summary is provided on aspects of gender mainstreaming in the programme.

2.1. Strategy

This section of the report provides an assessment of the design of the programme. Findings related to the implementation and results of the programme are presented in sections 3.2 and 3.3 of this report (*Programme Implementation* and *Programme Results*, respectively).

Programme Approach and Logic

There are a number of strengths in terms of how this programme is conceived and designed. First, the programme is not a stand-alone and fragmented intervention,¹ but builds on strong foundations. It is a continuation of a previous five-year technical assistance programme named “*Realizing the MDGs in Lao PDR - Consolidated Programme of Support to Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) for the Achievement of the Valuable Goals of the Seventh National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED 2011-2015)*”. It also has been designed based on the recommendations of the “Review and Assessment of the Programme of Support to the Ministry of Planning and Investment” in June 2016, the “Country Analysis Report” in November 2015, and is aligned with the UNDP CPD (2017-2021) which is, in turn, aligned with the Lao PDR-United Nations Partnership Framework (2017-2021). As such, in the way it is conceived, the programme represents continuity in time and integration in space – hence the label *programme*, as opposed to *project*.

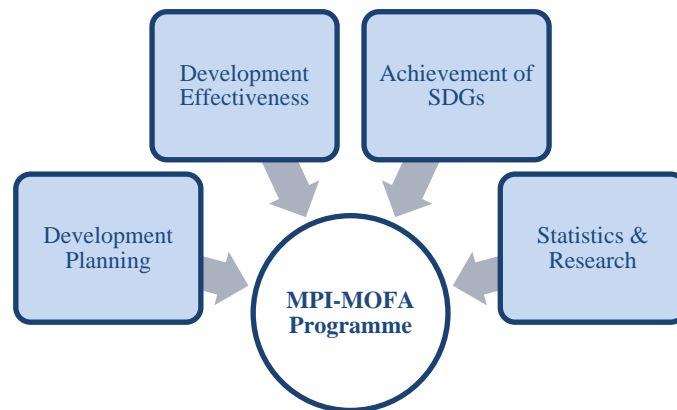
Such continuity through a programme approach represents a number of advantages. As a programme that reinforces previous work and builds on existing foundations, this intervention enables the development of incrementally stronger partnerships between UNDP and the two lead ministries. One of the main lessons from the previous programme is that capacity development needs to be approached systematically, rather than be driven in an ad-hoc way and by short term needs. Capacity in public administration organizations takes time to develop and requires sustained interventions over time. From this perspective, capacity building support for national institutions needs to be embedded in a long-term capacity development programme. Such an approach, in fact, addresses a common problem of many UNDP projects which typically suffer from short-term and fragmented interventions.² Further, through the continuation of a longstanding partnership, the programme approach has ensured greater efficiencies as activities build on an existing institutional infrastructure. Maintaining existing relationships and structures over time and not having to rebuild them every time a new project is initiated has a considerable cost advantage.

¹ Many similar projects are one-off interventions that have no continuity and that are not able to create strong and sustainable foundations.

² A lot of evaluative work conducted on UNDP projects supports this broader conclusion. This general finding is corroborated by many UNDP country programme evaluations that may be found in the website of UNDP’s Independent Evaluation Website.

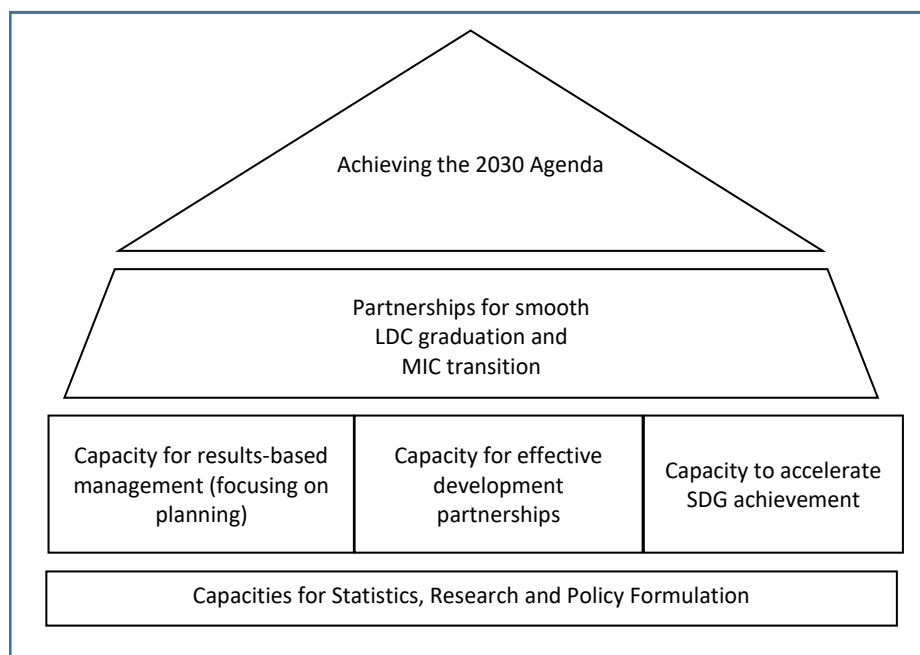
As mentioned in the programme description (section 1.2 of this report), the MPI-MOFA programme focuses on improving the capacities of the Government of Lao PDR to meet the challenges of implementing and monitoring the 8th NSEDP and formulating the 9th NSEDP. This process, conducted in a participatory fashion that involved development partners, civil society and the private sector, will eventually lead to LDC graduation, transition to Middle-Income Country (MIC) status and the achievement of SDGs. As such, the programme addresses four priority areas for the country: i) development planning; ii) development effectiveness; iii) achievement of SDGs; and, iv) research and statistics (see figure below). These are all very strategic and priority areas for the Government and the country.

Figure 1: Programme Components



Furthermore, all these components are in principle closely and logically interconnected with each other (as depicted in the figure below). In their entirety, each component is part of a broader institutional structure that is meant to help Lao PDR produce higher-quality development policies aimed at achieving well-defined national priorities, including LDC graduation.

Figure 2: Programme’s Institutional Structure



Consequently, the programme was designed to not only support the Government's capacity building efforts in each of the component areas, but also to facilitate the coordination and integration of efforts in these areas, given their commonalities and interconnectedness. The NSEDP, RTP and SDG processes are interconnected in various ways. The 8th NSEDP has served as main entry point to integrate the Agenda 2030 into national planning. It recognizes the requirement to better understand the needs of vulnerable groups, to be able to target them effectively through policy interventions. SDG indicators have been integrated into the NSEDP, so the implementation of the NSEDP by definition means the implementation of SDGs. Some of the SDGs are directly linked to the LDC graduation process, especially those related to poverty reduction, health, education, infrastructure development, trade, connectivity, etc. Further, by streamlining and coordinating support from the development community, the Round Table Process (RTP) is a vital mechanism for the country's efforts to meet its NSEDP and SDG goals. It serves as an important platform for both national stakeholders and development partners to consult and discuss various national development agenda, particularly the formation and implementation of the five-year and annual NSEDPs.

The programme is also important because it has a convening/coordination function. It is conceived to bring together relevant stakeholders. MPI leads the RTP, which convenes Government and national development agencies, United Nations bodies, development partners, civil society organizations and the private sector. By streamlining and coordinating support from the development community, the RTP is a vital mechanism in the implementation of the NSEDP and achievement of SDGs.

For all these strengths, there are some design shortcomings that could have received greater attention.

- First, the programme is extremely ambitious, even if the level of resources available for its implementation was fully adequate (the resource issue will be discussed further in this report). Its activities encompass too many areas that are quite complex and very political by virtue of their strategic nature – for example, NSEDP, Round Table Process, MTEF, SDGs, National Human Development Report, research papers, etc. The number of public organizations and other stakeholders involved in these processes is significant and the amount of coordination and policy support needed is immense. In the face of such complexity and given the limited budget of this programme (the planned budget, without considering the fact that resource mobilization was not fully achieved), it seems that resources have been spread far too widely and thinly. A programme of this scale and level of ambition could work well if it was supported by a large financial envelope (ideally, pooled funding) committed over a long timeframe and bringing together a group of enthusiastic donors working closely together towards a common purpose. Otherwise, in the conditions of a more limited budget (which in this case has amount to less than US\$ 4 m), a more concentrated intervention in fewer areas could have resulted in more depth and more focused impact. Furthermore, with hindsight the ability of the programme to mobilize resources seems to have been overestimated in the design of the concept. It is not clear in the programme document what assumptions might have led to the optimistic expectation that the programme was going to be able to raise about US\$ 10 m, which is far beyond what the programme partners have been able to raise by the point of this evaluation.
- Another challenging aspect of this programme's approach is the open-ended³ and earmarked nature of financial commitments to its budget. The programme has suffered from a serious funding shortfall (as will be discussed in more detail further in this report), as there were no firm financial commitments for it by interested parties. This open-ended nature of the programme, while attractive

³ Meaning no financial commitments obtained before the start of the programme.

in the sense that it really makes this a “programme” to which various development partners can add on or embed their initiatives, also represents a risk of funding shortages that does not seem to have been well-identified and recognized up-front in the programme document. This risk did in fact materialize and there was no mitigation strategy or set of actions in place to deal with it – another design shortcoming of the programme. Further, the earmarked nature of the funding provided by the two donors – New Zealand and Luxembourg⁴ – has not afforded the programme team the necessary flexibility to allocate the resources where most needed, dictated by the evolving situation and needs. While important from UNDP’s perspective, the programme approach has not been convincing enough for the development partners to enable them to channel their resources in unearmarked fashion.

- Another design feature of the programme is its greater focus policy formulation than policy implementation. As has been noted above, the MPI-MOFA programme has targeted selected improvements in government capacities for statistics, research and policy formulation. This is all very important as many analyses have shown the need for adapting the policy framework in many sectors to the requirements and realities of LDC graduation and MIC status. The development of NSEDP and the adoption of national SDGs is a case in point, as both are crucial policy instruments. However, policy formulation is one thing and policy implementation is another, and both are essential for results. For example, policy failures are not necessarily a result of weak policy design; they can also result from the lack of capability to implement the policy. Those programmes that exist on paper and do not get fully implemented fail to produce the expected results. When this happens, there can be a significant gap between the “*de jure*” situation and the “*de facto*” reality. Reforms and amendments in legislation and policies will yield only small improvements in the institutions’ capability to implement. The lack of implementation will make it difficult for partners to turn outputs (such as policies, laws, studies, trainings, etc.), into outcomes. Furthermore, even the best policies do not work well when the implementation capability is weak. It should be recognized that the issue of implementation is addressed to some extent in the way the programme has been set up – for example, through the work on the statistical framework for the monitoring and evaluation of policy frameworks, such as the NSEDP. However, the implementation dimension could have received much greater attention. The starting point is for the programme to challenge the mentality of “*developing policies or passing laws is all that matters*”, according to which the passing of a law or the adoption of a strategy is considered a success. Further, the programme should ensure that its activities cover the whole policy spectrum, including implementation aspects. The programme should be underpinned by an analysis of implementation bottlenecks, which should consider additional factors that constrain the capability of public organizations in Lao PDR to implement policies. In addition to the M&E activities which are already integrated in the programme design, it is equally important for the programme to focus on financing requirements and the public financial management system, which ensures that proper resources are available for implementation to lead to the desired effects.
- Furthermore, this programme has had a clear focus on capacity building for the five Government departments/organizations directly involved with its execution. A lot of effort under this programme has been dedicated to coaching and training for the relevant Government officials – including a number of officials from provincial governments (see Annex III for the list of trainings supported by the programme). While such focus on strengthening the capabilities of a section of the civil

⁴ New Zealand’s contribution was earmarked for the development of the 9th NSEDP, whereas Luxembourg’s contribution was earmarked for the Round Table Process.

service working in MPI and MOFA is important and commendable, the approach has been piecemeal in the sense that it has been conceived as a one-off exercise⁵ and carried out outside of the formal structures that are in place within the government for the continuous training of public officials. The whole capacity building exercise could perhaps have been approached more systematically and sustainably by making more effective use of the country's existing structures for the training of public officials and linking it to broader ongoing efforts such as the Civil Service Management Strategic Framework and Public Administration Reform.⁶ In other words, the training that has been developed under this programme could have been integrated on a permanent basis into the training programmes that are available on a regular basis for the Laos civil service.

- Also, one remark noted during interviews with programme stakeholders for this evaluation was the need for deeper consultations during the design of activities. When designing such broad interventions with a range of partners involved, it will be important to put in place a strong consultative that allows for intensive interaction not only with the government departments directly involved, but also with sub-national governments and non-governmental stakeholders. In the case of the MPI-MOFA programme, a strong consultative process at the design stage would have minimized the need to revise the details of some activities once the programme document was submitted, thus avoiding implementation delays.

Programme Results Framework

As for the way the Programme Document is formulated, in general terms it provides a thorough analysis of the country context and the needs to be addressed and identifies a clear set of objectives for the programme to pursue. Programme goals are well defined and respond to a clearly identified problem. Some risks and assumptions – but not all the major ones - facing the project are identified adequately and adequate monitoring and evaluation tools are conceived to track them (more on this in the following sections of this report).

However, there are certain design elements could have been addressed. In particular, the Results Framework (RF), in a large part does not meet the SMART criteria⁷ and provides limited guidance for an effective monitoring of the programme. Despite some challenges in its design, including the shortfall in the programme budget, the RF has not been modified since the beginning of the programme in April 2017. The following is a short discussion of some key challenges.

- Some indicators and targets are not measurable, which also represented a challenge for this evaluation. They are formulated in rather general terms, which does not help with the monitoring process. For example, first target in the RF reads “*National capacity on results-based planning is systematically improved*”. As it is framed, it is not possible to have a precise assessment of the achievement of this target, as the concept of capacity is not clearly defined. Similarly, the second indicator reads “*number of line ministries and provincial governments that have increased knowledge of basic RBM and fully adopted results-based planning, monitoring and reporting*”. Also, this indicator is difficult to measure, assess or monitor

⁵ The question here is how to ensure that the kind of training provided under the programme is delivered on a continued basis after the end of the project by existing government structures.

⁶ Without going into any details of Laos' Civil Service Management Strategic Framework and Public Administration Reform, there seem to be many ongoing reforms and efforts in the area of training for civil servants, supported by development partners such as the ADB and WB.

⁷ SMART is a well-established tool that assesses the quality of goals and indicators on the basis of them being Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

because of the lack of a clear definition of the concept of knowledge (how do we measure it?). The lack of specificity of indicators makes reporting challenging too, as poorly quantifiable measures are used in annual reports to indicate progress – i.e. “*partially achieved*”, “*more than partially achieved*”, etc. Such measures do not provide a clear understanding of the kind of progress that is made and leave the issue of achievement open to interpretation.

- Other indicators are more specific, but difficult to measure given that no instruments are available for their measurement. For example, Indicator 2.2.2 which reads “*% of the Round Table process outcomes and indicators implemented through the Sector Working Groups and other relevant mechanisms*” requires a system for tracking the implementation of Round Table recommendations which does not seem to be in place.
- One indicator is not directly related to the rest of the programme, and unsurprisingly has not been pursued by the programme team. This is Indicator 1.2.2. which reads “*Extent to which policies, systems and/or institutional measures are in place at the national and sub-national levels to generate and strengthen gender-sensitive employment and livelihoods*”. Employment and livelihoods are quite removed from the policy/strategic nature of the programme, as well as quite distinct from the other indicators used. Rather than a specific output, the gender and livelihoods issues here could have been framed as an objective cutting across all components.
- At this point in the programme, with less than one year left to go, it is clear that some activities are redundant and not possible to be achieved because they have not been initiated yet due to the lack of funding (please refer to Table 3 in page 41 for an overview of the status of the achievement of outputs and activities). A new results framework based on the realistic assessment of what is and what is not possible to be achieved till the end of the programme and linked with the work plan for 2021 will be useful.

Overall, programme stakeholders could draw some useful lessons from this programme on the design of more effective results frameworks for their programming.

Programme Stakeholders

As already noted in the programme description section of this report, the following have been the main Government departments responsible for the implementation of the MPI-MOFA programme.

- Output 1: Department of Planning (DOP), MPI
- Output 2: Department of International Cooperation (DIC), MPI
- Output 3: Department of International Organizations (DIO), MOFA
- Output 4: DIC – MPI and DOP – MPI supported by LSB and CDR (Center for Development Research)

The Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) is a key agency leading the development of NSEDP and the round table process, which brings government ministries and agencies, development partners, United Nations agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector together to ensure funds, time and knowledge bring maximum impact in development across the country. MOFA’s role in the programme is focused on the SDGs. The Prime Minister chairs an inter-ministerial SDG Steering Committee which oversees and advises on SDG implementation. The SDG Secretariat within MOFA, consisting of MOFA, MPI and LSB, has provided support to the inter-ministerial Steering Committee. MOFA serves as the bridge between the local and international players. Under the programme, MOFA

has facilitated interactions between the National Steering Committee with SDG focal points from line ministries and equivalents, and relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the SDGs. MOFA has also supported coordination between central authorities and relevant stakeholders at the sub-national level. As far as SDGs are concerned, MPI has led the mainstreaming of SDGs into national planning. LSB (currently part of MPI) has supported the monitoring of development policy through the collection, analysis and dissemination of data.

Key development partners who have been active in these areas include UNDP, Luxembourg and New Zealand – the main financing partners of this programme. Other development partners include ADB, Republic of Korea, Japan, World Bank, some UN agencies and UNRCO. Some of these development partners co-chair the RTP and SWGs, whereas others provide technical and financial support to implement the process and related mechanisms.

The programme's management arrangements presented in Figure 6 above have been maintained without modification throughout the programme's duration. The following is a brief description of the roles that the different programme bodies/structures have played.

Programme Board

The programme board has provided overall guidance and strategic direction on programme implementation. Stakeholders consider it not only a key decision-making body, but also a crucial platform of discussion and coordination among stakeholders. Even when stakeholders have not been able to reach consensus during a programme board discussion, a compromise has been usually reached at a later stage.

The programme board has had the following composition:

- Chairperson – Vice Minister of Planning and Investment
- Government members – Representatives from MPI, MOFA, 10 SWGs, Lao Women's Union (LWU) and the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (NCAWMC)
- Non-government members – UNDP Resident Representative and representatives of the embassies of Luxembourg and New Zealand⁸

While well-representative of the national Government, the programme board has not had strong representation of sub-national governments and civil society. Given that the programme's objectives involve both provincial governments and civil society, it should have ideally included more representatives from these two sectors to allow for a broader range of views in the process. This is something that the board is encouraged to consider for its upcoming meetings. If the procedures for granting these additional members full membership to the board are complicated, they could be considered for participation in selected meetings by invitation.

With regards to the board meetings, they have been organized in the month of January for years 2018 and 2019,⁹ whereas for 2020 no board meeting was organized due to Covid. Overall, one meeting per year has taken place, as opposed to two meetings per year defined in the programme document.¹⁰ One concern that was noted during the interviews was related to the timing of these meetings. Given that board meetings are used for the approval of work plans and budgets and given that changes to these

⁸ Occasionally, other interested donors have been invited to board meetings (i.e. Swiss SDC).

⁹ The launching board meeting was in March 2017.

¹⁰ Programme Document, page 11, paragraph 2.

plans are usually necessary after board discussions, having these meetings in January has resulted in certain delays in the final approval of plans and budgets and the initiation of certain activities. Therefore, one suggestion from this evaluation was to have board meetings organized at the end of the preceding year, so that each year could start with a well-consulted and approved work plan and budget.

Programme Support Unit (PSU) and Consultants

Given the NIM nature of this programme, the PSU has played an important role in the day-to-day coordination of programme activities and the support provided to the respective Government departments involved in the programme. The most crucial aspects of the PSU's work have been the coordination and support for programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting on progress and achievements. Specifically, the PSU has been responsible for collecting the inputs of the respective departments and integrating them into one unified plan, budget or report. The PSU has also been responsible for organizing and supporting programme board meetings, hiring consultants, etc. It has also provided substantive support in the organization of programme activities – such as meetings and training sessions – both at the national and provincial level.

The PSU has been located in the premises of MPI's DIC. Its physical proximity to one of the programme's key implementers is considered a great strength by the participants of this evaluation. The PSU has consisted of six staff, with the following positions:

- Project Coordinator
- Finance Manager
- Finance Assistant
- Administrative Assistant
- Two drivers

As noted in the previous section, the PSU was designed to be of a more administrative nature, with limited substantive functions, which have been typically played by the respective departments. In hindsight, it seems that more substantive/technical skills (delivered through project staff experienced in areas such as planning, statistics, M&E, etc.) would have enabled the PSU to play a stronger coordination role. Further, the programme design envisaged a communications specialist, a position which did not materialize in the implementation process. This also appears to have been a missed opportunity because, as will be seen further in this report, the programme's outreach to external audiences on matters such as the SDGs or the planning process could have been stronger. The respective Government departments are satisfied with the support received from the PSU, especially with the direction and advice PSU has provided on planning and budgeting matters. PSU has also been responsive to the departments' needs for coordination.

In addition to the PSU, the programme has involved several consultants. A key role has been played by a partnership and development cooperation advisor, who was hired locally, and a planning advisor, who was hired internationally.¹¹ These advisors played a crucial role with advice on the implementation of programme activities.¹²

¹¹ These two advisors were recruited by the UNDP.

¹² DIC also hosted a national consultant associated with the programme "Partnership Advisor for Effective Development" and a second national consultant who supported the SDG Secretariat on the "nationalization" of SDGs, stakeholder engagement and their implementation (until December 2019).

Central Government Bodies

As envisaged in the Programme Document, five Government entities within two key ministries have been directly responsible for the implementation of the programme under UNDP's NIM modality, which implies that they have been entirely responsible for the management and delivery of programme activities using Government regulations, rules and procedures (to the extent that they do not contravene the principles of the Financial Regulations and Rules of UNDP). These entities have been responsible for the planning, budgeting and execution of activities. The division of labour among the five respective Government entities has taken place as outlined in the programme document and as follows:

- **Component 1:** Department of Planning (DOP), MPI
- **Component 2:** Department of International Cooperation (DIC), MPI
- **Component 3:** Department of International Organizations (DIO), MOFA
- **Component 4:** DIC and DOP (MPI) supported by LSB and CDR

MPI has played a particularly key role in this programme, as four of the government entities listed above fall under the organizational structure of MPI - DOP, DIC, LSB and CDR (see a short description of the organizational structure of MPI in the box below).

Box 1: Organization of the Ministry of Planning and Investment¹³

MPI comprises a Permanent Secretary Office and 12 Departments and Offices as follow:

1. Permanent Secretary Office
2. Department of Organization and Personnel
3. Inspection Department
4. Legal Affair Department
5. Department of Planning
6. Department of Evaluation
7. Investment Promotion Department
8. Department of International Cooperation
9. Special Economic Zones Promotion and Management Office
10. Lao-Vietnam Cooperation Committee Office
11. Lao-China Cooperation Committee Office
12. Center for Development Policy Research

In addition to the above-mentioned institutions, the Lao Statistics Bureau, which comprises 1 cabinet office and 3 departments as well as number of other bodies, is a secretariat-level agency to the ministry operating under specific Decrees. MPI also comprises Departments of Planning and Investment, Provincial Statistics Offices as well as offices for Special economic zones (only in provinces with special economic zones) at provincial and district levels.

As noted, the activities carried out by these Government entities have been coordinated by the PSU, which has ensured that the programme plan and budget across all four components have been coherent and aligned with the overall goals identified in the programme document. The team has also ensured that programme activities have reflected the needs, priorities and duties of the Government as a whole and each of the involved departments.

¹³ From MPI's website: <http://investlaos.gov.la/about-us/ministry-of-planning-and-investment-mpi/>

- DOP has led all the NSEDP-related activities. In addition to the technical aspects related to the formulation and monitoring of the NSEDP, DOP has also facilitated consultations centrally and locally ranging from the technical level to the highest level, with stakeholders which include line ministries and agencies, private sector, civil society, international organizations and development partners.
- As the leading entity for the second programme component, DIC has played an important role – in addition to the PSU – in the coordination of programme activities with other relevant departments under MPI and MOFA, as well as UNDP CO at different levels. To this end, DIC assigned two technical divisions to be responsible for programme activities. The Division of International Organizations was responsible for the implementation of the RTP and SWG related activities, whereas the Aid Management Division was responsible for the implementation of the Vientiane Partnership Declaration, including the development of the Foreign Aid Implementation Reports and related inputs for the Global Survey on Global Partnerships for Effective Development Cooperation. At the management level, the Director General (DG) and/or Deputy Director General (DDG) of DIC/MPI has organized monthly meeting with different DGs within MPI and MOFA (DIO) to track and discuss the progress of each activity as stated in the quarterly work plan. At the technical level, weekly meetings were organized between the relevant Government officials, PSU and the Partnership Advisor.¹⁴
- DIO (under MoFA) has been overall responsible for the implementation of the programme’s third component. In particular, DIO’s United Nations Social and Economic Affairs Division¹⁵ has led the coordination and implementation of most SDG-related activities. DIO has served as the core of the National SDG Secretariat, which consists of three entities: (i) DIO as Head of the Secretariat and Office overseeing the overall implementation and serving as the focal point of all SDG implementers; (ii) DOP as a member overseeing related planning matters, especially on NSEDP and SDGs linkages to the plan; and, (iii) LSB as a member overseeing matters related to statistics, including SDG indicators.
- The role of LSB has been to ensure high-quality national statistics that allows for evidence-based policy making and the overall better public accessibility of quality information. Its focus under this programme has been on the integration of SDG indicators in the NSEDP.
- CDR has led the programme’s research agenda in both economic and social development topics, including the research paper on poverty and labour potential to provide evidence-based information supporting the implementation of NSEDP. In addition, the CDR has established a team to monitor the economic and social situation in the field at both central and provincial levels and follow up with policy recommendations to the government on how to resolve development challenges. Further, the development of the flagship National Human Development Report (NHDR) is a main task of the CDR team – in 2021 CDR is focused on the preparation of the 6th NHDR.

¹⁴ Three main issues were discussed in these technical meetings: (i) discussions over the government’s position and direction in relation to programme activities; (ii) briefing and coaching of technical government staff to ensure common understanding; (iii) discussions on roles and responsibilities for different programme activities.

¹⁵ This is also known as Division II.

Sub-national Governments

The programme has involved provincial authorities through a series of dissemination workshops and consultative meetings on various issues – dissemination workshops on SDGs and RTM outcomes to ensure common understanding of local/provincial authorities on the programme related issues, provincial consultations to solicit comments on drafts of the NSEDP, etc.

- With regards to planning, the programme has supported the conduct of provincial consultations to collect comments on NSEDP drafts. Support has also been provided to DOP (MPI) in organizing a series of seminars and training workshops for provincial authorities, particularly the provincial planning and investment department and relevant line departments to ensure they are able to understand and know how to develop their provincial development plans.
- Also, the round table process has involved provincial authorities. Vice governors and directors of the provincial “Planning and Investment Departments” from all 18 provinces have been invited to attend the High-Level RTMs and annual RTIMs. In addition, a number of the round table provincial consultations have been organized in the lead up to the annual RTIMs at the provincial level.
- With regards to the SDGs, the National SDG Secretariat has involved local authorities in the SDG process through their participation in advocacy and communication activities. SDGs have been integrated in the NSEDP, which lays out the master development plan that links to sectoral plans, as well as the local and provincial level plans. Workshops and seminars have been organized at the provincial level and other advocacy activities with local academic institutions. Through these activities, the Secretariat has reached out to more than 300 participants in each region (North, Central and South) in each implementing year. This has enabled the establishment of a SDG network with local authorities at the provincial and district levels, and it is hoped that in the upcoming years, they will be more active participation and contribution in the 2030 Agenda.
- With regards to research and statistics, as well as policy formulation, surveys and economic and social monitoring have been carried out at provincial and district levels throughout the country to collect raw data and information to support the formulation of the national five-year plan, etc.

For all these achievements of the programme at the sub-national level, there is room for further work with local authorities and communities, especially below the provincial level. Currently, the programme is structured to provide most of its support to central-level bodies. Several interviewees for this evaluation noted that the programme could have provided more support at the sub-national level, especially when it comes to capacity development activities for Government officials. Given that local level capacities are weaker, the programme would have greater impact if it could extend its support to capacity development at the local level (below the provincial level). A barrier to a possible expansion of activities at the sub-national level is the funding shortages that the programme has experienced. But going forward and in a potential successive phase, programme stakeholders could consider more active engagement at the sub-national level, within existing financial constraints.

Another challenge that was identified in the course of this evaluation was the limited institutional memory related to the programme at the provincial level due to the high turnover of staff in the respective administrations. Interviews with the provincial level revealed that the representatives of

provincial governments had limited knowledge of the MPI-MOFA programme and related activities.¹⁶ The main reason for this was the fact that these officials were relatively new in their positions, which had led to a gap in institutional memory about this programme. Better programme documentation should be transferred between the old and new staff to ensure continuity of programme implementation.

Civil Society and Private Sector

With broad stakeholder engagement as a key objective of the MPI-MOFA programme, it has supported MPI and MOFA in strengthening the inclusion of civil society in their activities related to planning, round table process and SDGs. In this context, the consultations that have been organized on the development of the NSEDP have involved civil society members. Government officials consider the voices of civil society important and have sought to reflect them in national plans. The round table process too has engaged non-governmental organizations and representatives of the private sector. Civil society members have also participated in a number of SDG-related activities. For example, a stakeholder engagement workshop on Voluntary National Review (VNR) was organized in 2018 with the participation of CSOs, INGOs, private sector and academia. Their opinions on how to improve the VNR were taken into account. In 2020, the National SDG Secretariat organized a series of stakeholder engagement meetings with CSOs, NGOs and the private sector to build and expand the SDG network aiming to promote and encourage their participation in the implementation of SDGs.

Despite the increasing engagement of civil society and private sector in the round table process and the formulation and implementation of NSEDP and SDGs, there is room for further strengthening their contributions. While civil society members are invited to express their views on key policy issues, it will be important to strengthen the process by which their views are taken into account and are made part of recommendations. Civil society representatives feel that there is still way to go for their recommendations and suggestions to become more adequately incorporated in official planning documents.

Also, the system of feedback and accountability to civil society could be further strengthened to ensure that their representatives feel meaningfully engaged. There also seems to be space for deeper engagement of CSOs and NPAs, as opposed to international NGOs. While international NGOs are well-equipped to play a greater role in awareness-raising, local CSOs and NPAs could play a greater role at the sub-national and community level. This, however, will require more capacity building support and policy dialogue, which the MPI-MOFA programme is well-positioned to facilitate in greater quantity than it currently is.

The private sector has now become an important part of the country's socio-economic development landscape. Under the MPI-MOFA programme, the private sector is involved as one of the ten sector working groups (SWGs) under the Round Table Process. Private sector representatives have been consulted through a series of consultative meetings organized by the programme, especially the Round Table Meetings, as well as the SWG meetings to discuss the formulation of NSEDP. For all these improvements, the engagement of the private sector in the above-mentioned processes remains limited (based on the review of the documentary evidence and interviews with stakeholders). Very few private sector entities have participated in the events facilitated by the programme. The main parties involved are representative bodies such as chambers of commerce, which is an important achievement, but

¹⁶ The information on programme activities at the provincial level is based on interviews with the respective Government departments and the review of the documentary evidence. As noted in the methodological section, due to the Covid pandemic, field work for this evaluation was rather limited and consisted of interviews with local authorities in two provinces where the programme had had activities (Champassak and Vientiane).

further engagement of a broader spectrum of representatives will be crucial – especially, if the private sector is expected to provide most of the financing for the realization of the 9th NSEDP.

UNDP Country Office

Given the NIM nature of this programme, the main responsibility of the UNDP Country Office (CO) has been the assurance of the programme's quality through the M&E process – in other words, ensuring that all planned activities, as well as the programme budget, have been implemented effectively and efficiently and money has been spent to meet the programme's objectives and goals, as stated in the signed programme document. To this end, and to ensure close coordination with the five implementing government bodies, the UNDP CO has assigned a programme analyst to closely monitor the implementation process by staying in close contact with the PSU and liaising, when necessary, with the respective Government entities. While useful in ensuring close oversight, this arrangement has also suffered from high turnover of staff. The person holding this position has changed three times since the start of the programme, which has constrained the amount of institutional memory available within UNDP on this programme. This evaluation found that greater consistency in this position would have ensured greater institutional memory on practical matters which are not covered on a day-to-day basis by the CO management.

In addition to monitoring programme implementation, UNDP has also been responsible for receiving funds from the donors and transferring the available budget to project implementers on the basis of the work plans and budgets submitted by the PSU. These transfers have taken place on a quarterly basis – and sometimes have resulted in delays, as will be discussed further in the efficiency section of this report.

UNDP has also been involved substantively and directly in several programme activities. Given the nature of this project involving key development actors and with UNDP as a major development partner in the country, it has participated in the round table process regularly, has attended consultative meetings on the NSEDP and SDGs, has provided comments or feedback on various documents submitted by Government entities, etc.

Another key role of the UNDP CO, shared with the key Government counterparts of this programme, has been the mobilization of resources. Out of a budget of about US\$ 10 m, only US\$ 3,380,875 has been available to the programme for the period 2017-2020.¹⁷ This constitutes about one-third of the total programme budget. With one more year remaining till the end of the programme, it is almost certain that the full budget will not materialize. This budget gap has constituted a serious challenge for the initiation or completion of a number of activities that will be reviewed further in this report. Government counterparts interviewed for this evaluation see UNDP in the leading role in this area and expect the UNDP CO to play a more active role in resource mobilization from interested development partners. As will be discussed in more detail further, this evaluation recommends a more systematic effort undertaken jointly by UNDP and government counterparts on the resource mobilization front.

Role of UNRC

As one of the development partners present in the country, the UN Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) has been involved in some of the programme activities, especially those related to national planning, SDG localization and RTM process. The RCO has also made some efforts recently in coordinating the engagement of UN agencies with the three processes in question. For example, the RCO has circulated

¹⁷ The estimation of available funds is based on data provided by the PSU.

with UN agencies drafts of the NSEDP and has collected and integrated agencies' comments and feedback. There is also a more coordinated approach now in how the agencies engage with the processes set in motion by the government. For example, UNDP has been designated as the agency with the technical lead in the area of planning, for obvious reasons related to the MPI-MOFA programme. The RCO has also contributed with some small amount of funding for this programme.¹⁸

Development Partners

In addition to providing financial support for this programme (Luxembourg and New Zealand), development partners (DPs) have regularly attended activities – including consultative meetings – organized by the programme. The round table process is a crucial instrument for the Government's engaged with the development partners. Based on the review of programme board meetings, their contributions with information and suggestions in these meetings are very useful. Key development partners associated with this process are Luxembourg, Switzerland, New Zealand, GIZ, WB, JICA, EU UNFPA, UNICEF, etc.

Some development partners – including New Zealand and Luxembourg – have bilateral projects with MPI and/or MOFA which run in parallel to the MPI-MOFA programme.¹⁹ There are various reasons why development partners maintain these bilateral projects, as opposed to following a more programmatic approach that involved the MPI-MOFA programme infrastructure (including a preference for better control, multiple projects, etc.). But ultimately it is up to the Government to decide whether a more programmatic approach is more appealing to them as it saves transactions costs and time by not having to deal with all these counterparts individually. This topic will be further taken up in this report's section on efficiency.

Management Arrangements

The management arrangements of the MPI-MOFA programme are shown in the organigram in Figure 6 (below). These arrangements have consisted of different levels – starting with MPI's Minister as the chairperson of the Programme Executive Board, the Vice Minister of Planning and Investment as the National Programme Director, the DIC Director General as the National Programme Manager, and other directors-generals of relevant departments under MPI and MOFA appointed in charge of various tasks related to the national planning, round table process, sustainable development goals, and statistics and research as output managers. The programme structure has very good representation from the government, with key officials in MPI and MOFA participating in the board and other implementation functions. The programme board has been the programme's main decision-making body. Its role and responsibilities have included overall oversight and monitoring of the programme, approval of annual work plans and budgets, as well as progress reports.

The programme has been supported by a Programme Support Unit (PSU), led by a programme coordinator who has reported directly to the National Programme Manager. The programme coordinator has also coordinated directly with the UNDP Programme Analyst. The PSU was designed to have primarily an administrative nature, as can be seen from the positions in the organigram below. Perhaps, more substantive responsibilities and functions within the PSU, carried out by people with more

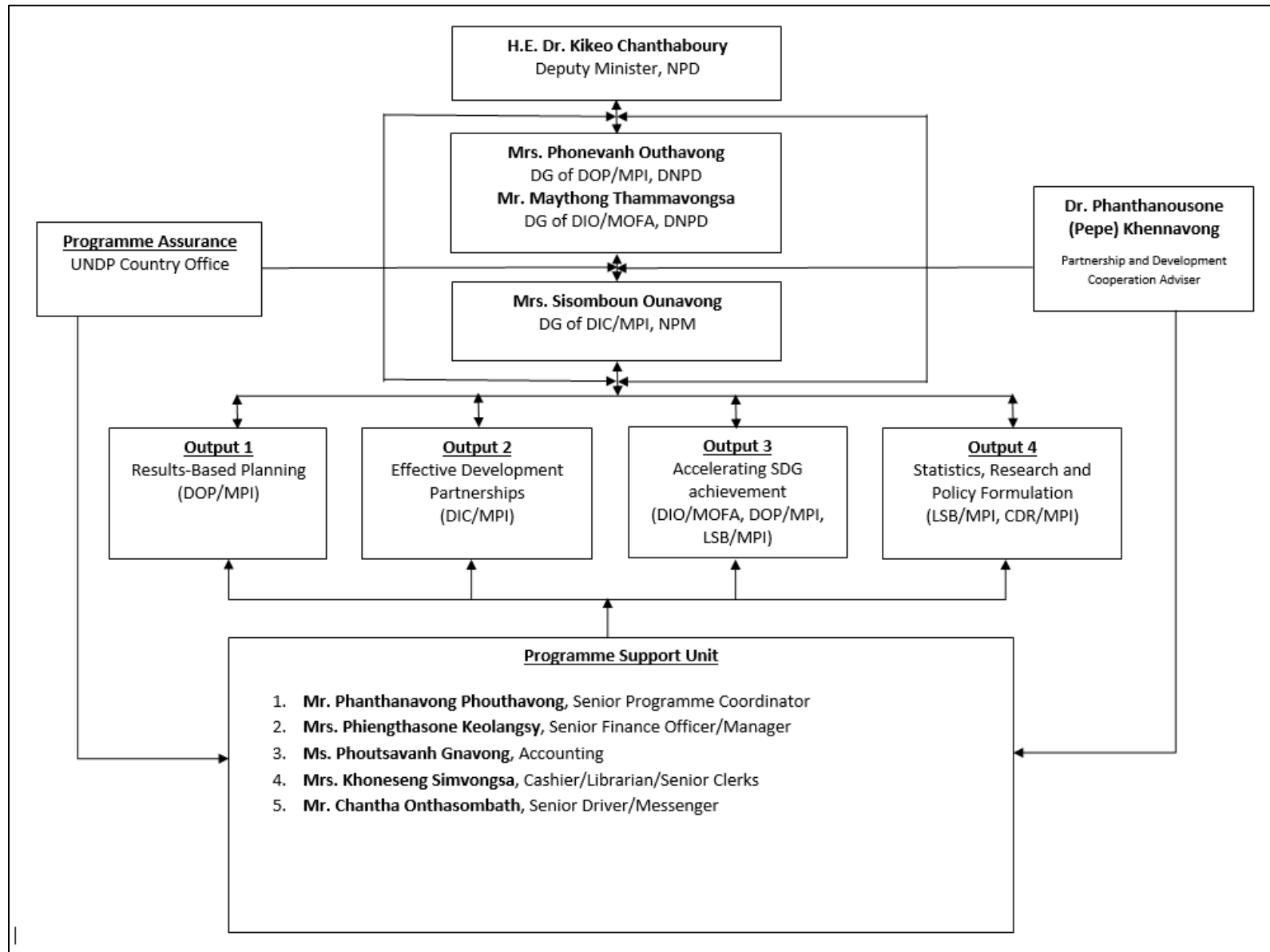
¹⁸ RCO's contribution for 2020 was 17,717 (Programme Annual Report – 2020).

¹⁹ For example, Lux Dev is implementing the project “Strengthening the Effectiveness of Official Development Assistance (ODA) Management in LAO PDR” to address Official development assistance management needs of the Ministry of Planning and Investment's Department of International Cooperation and six provincial Sections for International Cooperation. It is also implementing the “Support Programme for Legal Teaching and Training and to the Promotion of the Rule of Law Concept in Laos”.

substantive skills (i.e. planning, statistics, etc.) would have strengthened its role and would have facilitated more effective coordination between programme components. Also, the programme design included a communications specialist within the PSU – this is a key position for the programme’s outreach with internal and external audiences (which as will be seen further in this report has presented some challenges). However, during the implementation phase this position was not created.

The programme team has received support on administrative matters from the UNDP CO, which assigned a Programme Analyst to interact with the programme on a daily basis. As for political support and advocacy – which is crucial given the high-level and strategic nature of the activities of this project – government stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation noted that the project would benefit from more political support from both the donors and UNDP.

Figure 3: Project's Organigram



Key Programme Milestones

The following have been the programme's key milestones since its initiation:

- Date of the Local Project Appraisal Committee (LPAC) – 17th February 2017
- Date of first Programme Board Meeting – 15th March 2017
- Date of signature of Programme Document – 15th March 2017
- Date of recruitment of Programme Coordinator – 1st April 2017

As can be seen from the timeline above, the initiation of the programme has proceeded rapidly. The programme board has met once a year. The first meeting of 15th March 2017 was followed by two meetings on 16th January 2018 and 25th January 2019, respectively. The 2020 board meeting was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the Annual Work Plan and Budget, as well as the 2019 report were discussed via emails prior to their finalization and approval by the board. With the global pandemic still continuing, no board meeting had taken place yet by the time of this evaluation (end of January 2021) – with a meeting tentatively planned for February 2021.

Key Implementation Features

Planning

Programme planning and budgeting has been conducted on the basis of quarterly and annual work plans prepared by the respective departments and aggregated by the PSU into one unified plan. Similarly, the respective departments have prepared their own reports and the PSU has synthesized them into one common report. The preparation and approval in time of the work plans and budgets has sometimes been a challenge and is related to the fact that programme board meetings have usually taken place in January. This, combined with the lack of understanding of UNDP requirements, limited resources, unclear roadmaps, etc., has resulted in the late approval and initiation of the plans for that year. Another challenge that has been relevant in particular to the budgeting process is the capacity of the departments to prepare adequate budgets in the right format. This is an area to which programme stakeholders – in particular UNDP – could provide greater attention and come up with more capacity building support for the respective programme implementers.

Implementation

With technical and operational support from the programme team, the respective departments have been responsible for implementing their corresponding activities. While most activities have been specific to the respective departments and have been carried out independently, certain activities have been organized jointly – i.e. the dissemination workshop on NSEDP, SDGs and RTM outcomes, etc.

Overall, the implementation of planned activities has gone well. The PSU and the team of national and international experts mobilized to support the implementation of the programme have been instrumental. The team of experts, embedded in the MPI, have contributed directly to the development of the 8th NSEDP M&E framework, the “nationalization” of SDGs and the facilitation of the round table process, including the organization of the annual round table meetings (see Table 4 on page 52 for the full list of RTMIs supported by the programme). The embeddedness of these experts within the structures of the ministry has been crucial in giving them full access to the process, but also in enabling them to gain the trust of their Government colleagues. This was evidenced in this evaluation not only by the experts themselves, but also their counterparts.

Communications

The respective Government departments responsible for the implementation of the programme have appointed focal persons for this programme. The PSU has maintained regular (often day-to-day) communication with these focal persons via telephone calls, WhatsApp and email. In addition, coordination and communications have been facilitated through monthly and quarterly meetings. These meetings have often also involved the UNDP CO and other development partners. While this coordination infrastructure is important and should be maintained, several stakeholders feel that there is a need for stronger coordination of activities across components (outcome areas). Some of the activities undertaken in one area by one of the departments could engage more effectively stakeholders in the other areas. Also, the flow of information could be more intensive. In particular, communication with external audiences, especially with the media and general population, could be more extensive. For this, a systematic and functional communication strategy is required to guide the increasingly challenging tasks of the programme.

M&E

The programme has used its monthly and quarterly meetings, as well as relevant reports, to monitor and keep track of progress in the implementation of programme activities. To monitor the execution of the budget, an analytical review sheet has been developed and used to track budget utilization by component. The UNDP CO has provided overall oversight of the programme through a standard reporting mechanism. UNDP has also assigned an analyst to follow this programme on a day-to-day basis by coordinating with the PSU and the respective Government departments, as needed. The turnover of UNDP staff covering this position has been unusually high, as will be seen further in this report, which has presented a challenge for the effective coordination of the programme at the operational level and its institutional memory. UNDP CO has also been responsible for reporting to the donor organizations that have provided funding for this programme – the embassies of New Zealand and Luxembourg. As will be noted further in this report, there is room for improving communications by providing more frequent updates and more timely reporting.

Major Challenges and Adaptive Management

Given the highly strategic and political nature of the MPI-MOFA programme, it would be inconceivable to expect an implementation process that proceeds without any major challenges. Therefore, it is important to examine in the context of this evaluation the major challenges that the programme has encountered and the way the stakeholders have dealt with them. The following is a brief summary of what turned out to have been the main challenges.

Resource Mobilization

The gap in the budget due to a shortage in mobilized resources is one of the key challenges identified by this evaluation. According to the programme document, the programme was designed and expected to spend around US\$ 10 m to carry out planned activities within a five-year timeframe, starting from 2017 to 2021. The programme is now past its fourth year of implementation and only about one-third of the planned budget has been available. As a result, a number of activities have been either cancelled or postponed due to the shortage of financial resources available. Some key priorities included in the work plans remain unfunded. For example, the RBM and VDCAP related activities have been delayed, given the time constraints and budget limitations. Also, the production of 6th Human Development

Report (NHDR) is still pending.²⁰ As a result of this situation, the programme has undergone budget revisions at least twice a year to cope with changes in terms of activities.

Integrated “One Programme” Approach

In addition to the complexity of the programme by virtue of its wide scope, five key Government departments/entities have been involved with major responsibilities in the implementation of the programme’s four components. While there is stronger integration when all components of a programme are implemented by a single organization, ensuring coordination among five implementers is naturally a challenge. In this particular case, the prevailing perception among some stakeholders is that stronger integration between the four components could be forged – be it at the planning stage, as well as implementation and reporting. Moving toward an integrated “one programme” approach needs time and shifts in various areas of programme management and execution. Particularly, greater efforts are needed for carrying out joint programme activities of some key areas such as the preparation for the 9th NSEDP, the follow-up on the SDGs VNR, LDC graduation transition strategy and the implementation of the RTIM key recommendations. This will not only help minimize the transaction costs, given the limited budget available, but also help avoid duplications. Overall, the “*programmatic approach*” taken by UNDP and its partners in this programme has its merits (highlighted earlier in the report) and is commendable, but what matters even more is how it is executed in practice in terms of harmonization and coordination between the various moving pieces.

Coordination and Communications

There is also a need for faster decision-making on key matters related to the programme. The need for coordination between the five Government departments, the PSU and UNDP is certainly time-consuming and does have an effect on the speed of decision making. Certain approval procedures within the departments could be expedited within the framework of existing Government rules and procedures. This was evident even in the course of this evaluation whereby certain approvals for the organization of field interviews or clearance of responses to questionnaires took a long time. Also, the issue of the transfer of funds from UNDP to the programme bank account and from there to the respective implementing departments has experienced delays due to the late submission of work plans and financial reports by the various departments and differences in procedures between the Government and UNDP. As will be noted in more detail in the efficiency section of this report, there have been cases when work plans, budgets and reports have been submitted multiple times by the respective Government to UNDP because of the need for compliance with UNDP requirements. These cases bring to the fore the need for more effective communications between UNDP and the Government departments, simpler programme designs and works plans, and also the need for more capacity building on UNDP rules and procedures for the implementing national counterparts.

Further, as noted above, certain implementation delays are also related to the organization of board meetings in January of the respective year. Organizing board meetings at the end of the preceding year would enable the approval of work plans and budgets before the start of the year, which would greatly enhance the efficacy of implementation.

Also, greater and faster access to the PSU team, especially by the departments responsible for components I and III – which are focused on strategic aspects of the national development agenda – would facilitate more effective implementation. Furthermore, as has been noted in the previous section,

²⁰ In the past, five NHDR reports were produced under this programme.

there is also a need for a stronger and more systematic communication strategy, not only within the programme infrastructure, but also with external audiences.

Another matter that was brought to the attention of the evaluators by the development partners is the need for better communications from UNDP's side on the progress and achievements made by the programme. There is a need for more frequent updates and timely reporting on programme activities, especially to the donors that have provided the funding for this programme.

Staff Turnover

As noted, there has also been a higher-than-usual turnover of key staff in the respective institutions – in particular, in the relevant Government departments, provincial governments and UNDP CO. The institutional memory of this programme and associated activities and processes at the provincial level seems to be limited. Also, the UNDP CO analyst responsible for following up on this programme has changed frequently (almost every year), creating a gap in UNDP's institutional memory.

Capacity Development

Also, some limitations in the capacities of national stakeholders in relation to programme implementation were noted during the evaluation. Limitations in capacities of national implementing bodies are of two types.

- One type is related to the fact that the officials in the respective MPI and MOFA departments are quite busy with their regular functions. These are important departments that carry a lot of weight within the respective ministries and the Government in general. The busy agenda of these departments was evident during the conduct of this evaluation – receiving responses to evaluation questionnaires took a long time due to the busy schedule of the officials in these departments. Granted, this was a busy period for the whole Government, given the party congress which took place in the beginning of 2021.²¹ As another example, the finalization of programme-related documents (i.e. work plans and reports) is usually challenging without input or feedback from high-ranking officials, who are usually busy with lots of engagements. This has resulted in implementation delays.
- The second type of capacity limitation relates to planning, budgeting and reporting. Preparing programme budgets based on required standards has been a challenge for the national counterparts, indicating the need for more capacity support in the area of programme management. Also, the monitoring functions within the respective departments and the reporting of monitoring data could be further strengthened.

In this regard, there is a need for a more systematic approach to capacity development. This need was actually identified and acknowledged in the programme document, which recommended a capacity development programme based on a comprehensive needs assessment oriented towards the future.²²

²¹ The 11th National Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) was held in Vientiane from 13 to 15 January 2021. The congress occurs once every five years. The respective government officials and departments were quite busy with participation in the preparation and workings of the congress.

²² From the Programme Document: Clear plans for capacity development to address this specific deficit will be an integral part of the Programme. Under the Programme, capacity development needs will be identified in MPI (DIC, DOP, LSB), NERI or its successor entity, MOFA and other institutions involved in key aspects of the Programme. These needs will be identified by the institutions with support from UNDP, external experts if required, following an agreed upon methodology. This will lay the foundation for a longer-term capacity development program which will prepare the Government for the very different demands that will be placed on it

This is something that UNDP and the government partners could revisit, especially in light of future interventions.

Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic did have an impact on programme implementation in 2020. Since the nature of the programme involves the organization of meetings and participation in various regional and global conferences, in 2020 it was challenging for the programme to complete planned activities on a timely basis. Given the COVID-19 outbreak, several activities were postponed for the following months, quarters or years. The pandemic led to delays in the finalization of key documents, especially the NSEDP, and the postponement of the 13th HL-RTM to early 2021. Virtual discussions and meetings were organized to move activities forward. Programme stakeholders were also concerned that the budget in support of the research component might be cut down due to COVID-19, as the funds might be reallocated.

It should also be noted that following the lock down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, MPI's DIC received additional support from UNDP in the form of video conferencing facilities funded through UNDP's Rapid Response Facility.

Adaptive Measures

To deal with the above-mentioned challenges, programme stakeholders have sought to strengthen coordination by undertaking *ad hoc* meetings, in addition to the regular ones. In addition, some adaptive measures, as shown by the following examples:

- Merged and combined activities to reduce costs – for example, the SDG dissemination workshops in the provinces included the dissemination of other issues, including RTM, LDC and VDCAP.
- Minimized the cost by using the most economical venues, select the cheapest production companies, car rental companies, copies and documents company, among others.
- Initiated further discussion among relevant stakeholders to mobilize more necessary fund for the activities under the third component (output).

Areas where adaptive measures could have been more effective are the resource mobilization front that represents the programme's most daunting challenge and the coordination of the implementing entities, PSU and UNDP, especially with regards to decision-making, transfer of funds, etc. There is definitely room for greater efficiencies in the interactions between programme partners, as will be seen further in the efficiency section of this report.

2.2. Relevance

The MPI-MOFA programme is one of UNDP's most strategic projects in the country. It operates in a very strategic area for the country and the Government by addressing the highest policy level, interacting with issues and processes that relate directly to the country's leadership and enabling access to highest levels policy making for civil society, private sector and development partners. The crucial nature of this programme's activities is evident – the Government, for example, has clearly embraced mainstreaming of the 2030 Development Agenda and has adopted sustainable development principles

post LDC graduation, in particular. Individual capacity development and training needs will also be identified as part of the process, leading to a more effective training program, with clear objectives whose achievement can be monitored.

into national development plans and strategies, especially the NSEDP. The National Steering Committee on SDGs is chaired by the Prime Minister. The country has also showed strong commitment not only to formulating strategies but also implementing them – hence the focus of this programme on indicators and monitoring frameworks. Further, Lao PDR is actually one of the few countries that uses the Round Table Process, co-chaired by the Government and UN, as a central mechanism to promote dialogue between the Government at the central and local level, development partners, private sector, civil society and other stakeholders in key issues such as identifying development priorities and intensifying cooperation as well as coordination and aid effectiveness.

The MPI-MOFA programme was conceived to support the Government in establishing a platform for effective development partnerships in line with the Vientiane Partnership Declaration. Through the Round Table Process and SWG mechanism, the Development Partners and other relevant stakeholders' feedback/comments, suggestions or recommendations on development cooperation effectiveness and national development agenda have been reflected in national and sectoral plans and strategies. Lao PDR has also placed great importance to forging inclusive partnerships in the achievement of national development objectives and, in particular, the SDGs. Implementing the 2030 Agenda is no easy feat because it places significant demands on the public budget and capacities. Therefore, in order to maximize mobilization and efficient use of resources for development, the Government has placed great emphasis on promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships between Government departments and development partners. The Round Table Process has helped relevant stakeholders work closer together, bringing the Government and national development agencies, United Nations bodies, civil society organizations and the private sector together to ensure funds, time and knowledge bring maximum impact in development across the country.

It should also be noted that the MPI-MOFA programme is not a stand-alone initiative, but builds on the foundations of previous partnerships. Furthermore, it was designed based on the recommendations of the “Review and Assessment of the Support Programme to the Ministry of Planning and Investment” (June 2016), the “Country Analysis Report” (November 2015) and other analyses; is aligned with the UNDP Country Programme Document (2017-2021) and the Lao PDR-United Nations Partnership Framework (2017-2021). The programme builds on the previous phase the programme to support the achievement of MDGs (2011-2015).

Another important factor is the fact that the programme is implemented through UNDP's NIM, which implies the full ownership of the programme by the Government of Lao PDR. The Programme Director is the Deputy Minister of Planning, key position in the Government. Key departments in the Government are the implementers of the programme, with DIC as the programme manager.

Overall, Government counterparts interviewed for this evaluation highly value the programme's support in the formulation and implementation of the national development agenda, especially the NSEDP aimed at LDC graduation and achievement of SDGs. However, for all the relevance of the objectives and goals of this programme, in practice it has been difficult for programme stakeholders to mobilize the planned amount of financial resources. So, somehow the potential relevance of the programme due to its strategic nature has not been fully translated into actual relevance at the implementation stage. This points to a need for strengthening the way in which UNDP, MPI and MOFA have collaborated to translate the strategic relevance of this collaboration into an appealing proposition for development partners – persuading them to not only provide funding for this important initiative, but also consider channeling some of their existing assistance through channels enabled by this programme.

2.3. Effectiveness

This section provides a brief overview of the programme’s main achievements for each component, based on the indicators and targets identified in the results framework. A more detailed analysis of the results framework and status of targets and indicators is provided in Table 5 further in this section. The following is a brief overview of the programme’s main achievements under each component.

Component I

The programme’s first component was conceived to support the overall planning process in the country – at the national, sectoral and provincial levels. This component rests on two pillars. The first pillar – as can be seen from the results framework in Table 5 below – consists of activities in support of results-based planning and management practices and the linking of the NSEDP with the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). As can be seen from the analysis in Table 5, activities in this area have largely been suspended due to the programme’s budget shortfall. Given the limited amount time remaining, it seems almost certain, at this point, that these activities will not be pursued for the remainder of the programme.

The first component’s second pillar consists of the support for the NSEDP process, under the leadership of MPI’s DOP. In this area, there are two key achievements worth highlighting.

- ***Mid-term review of the 8th NSEDP***, finalized at the end of 2018 and with dissemination of its findings carried out at both central and local levels.
- ***Formulation of the 9th NSEDP (2021-2025)***, following the mid-term review of the 8th NSEDP. The new NSEDP consists of six key outcomes and twenty outputs and its M&E framework has been updated with key baseline figures and targets. At the request of MPI, the programme mobilized a senior international expert²³ to offer the expert guidance on the process. With programme support, several drafts (currently third draft) have been developed in consultation with various national and international partners. After consultations with national and international stakeholders, an initial concept was presented to wider audiences in the 2019 Round Table Implementation Meeting (RTIM).

The design of the first component also contained a rather unusual sub-component on gender-sensitive employment and livelihoods – topics that do not fit very well with the nature of this programme.²⁴ No activities were pursued in this area.

Component II

Programme activities under the second component have centered on the Round Table Process and the Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan (VD-CAP).

Round Table Process

Laos’s Round Table Process has been revitalized in recent years to address existing and emerging development challenges. Under the second component, the programme has provided technical and financial support for the organization of Round Table Implementation Meetings (RTIMs) since 2017

²³ Former head of the Nepal Planning Commission.

²⁴ This indicator reads as follows: “Extent to which policies, systems and/or institutional measures are in place at the national and sub-national levels to generate and strengthen gender-sensitive employment and livelihoods”.

(see list of meetings supported by the programme in Table 4 below). These meetings have focused on development results at the national, sectoral and provincial levels and they have served as a policy discussion platform for the identification of development priorities. With programme support, RTIMs have been organized in Champasak, Vientiane (capital) and Luang Prabang provinces. Overall, these meetings are perceived by national and international participants as interactive, open, inclusive and comprehensive. They have been accompanied with a process of consultations, dialogues, seminars and field visits organized at various levels (national, sectoral and provincial) to discuss and identify progress, challenges and opportunities for the country moving toward sustainable and inclusive growth.

Table 2: RTIMs supported by the programme since 2017

RTIM	No. of Participants (Govt. & DPs)	Female	Male	% Female
1. 2017 RTIM on 22-23 November 2017 in Champasak province.	350 (Govt. = 237; DPs = 113)	85	265	24%
2. 2018 RTIM on 4-5 December 2018 in Vientiane Capital.	370 (Govt. = 205; DPs = 165)	130	240	35%
3. 2019 RTIM on 25-26 November 2019 in Luangprabang province.	295 (Govt. = 171; DPs = 124)	85	295	29%
4. 2020 High-Level RTM postponed to mid-2021				

The RTIMs have resulted in the identification of key development priorities and recommendations, which have reflected the opinions and views of participants, including development partners, CSOs and the private sector.²⁵ Key recommendations derived from this process have been translated into Prime Minister’s instructions to line ministries and provinces to guide their development agendas. However, there is a need for a more solid system for measuring the implementation of RTIM recommendations and more capacity building support for implementing agencies on how to implement those instructions.²⁶

The programme document had foreseen the transition of the Round Table Process to the post-2020 Lao Development Forum by 2021. As of the time of this evaluation, the Lao Development Forum concept had not been developed yet. Going forward, it will be important for programme stakeholders, under this programme, to further develop the Lao Development Forum concept and come up with a plan for how the transition process could take place.

Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan (VD-CAP)

The programme has supported the Government in reporting on progress made on the implementation of the Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2016-2025), in

²⁵ For example, based on the consultations and consensus made at the 2019 RTIM, ten areas of policy recommendations/discussion points were identified.

²⁶ There is actually a “Follow-up Action Matrix” for tracking actions in response to RTIM recommendations, but it is not implemented systematically.

line with the principles of the effective development cooperation agenda, as agreed in Busan in 2011. In line with the global framework, the Government prepared in 2018 a country progress report which provides a snapshot of the implementation of Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan (VDCAP).²⁷ Key highlights from this country report were taken on board by the Global Partnership team to redefine (revise) the ten global partnership indicators with the aim of ensuring that the areas monitored at the global level reflect actual progress made at the country level.²⁸ A new VD-CAP progress report has been under preparation, but its finalization was hampered by the Covid crisis in 2020. Expected to be finalized by June 2021, this report will generate new quantitative information on progress that has been made on the implementation of VD-CAP.

The MPI-MOFA programme has contributed to the VDCAP implementation process through technical and financial support for the organization of a series of quarterly VD-CAP Secretariat meetings and dissemination workshops, as well as the provision of necessary training for Government officials at both central and provincial levels to ensure greater understanding of VD-CAP principles, action areas, key indicators, indicative baselines and targets, etc. The VD-CAP Secretariat is now more capable of tracking the progress made on the VD-CAP implementation and the challenges facing the process and identifying interventions for the implementation of lagging indicators. It should also be noted that existing VD-CAP indicators have been integrated into the Official Development Assistance Management Information System (ODA-MIS) to ensure systematic monitoring and reporting on VD-CAP implementation progress.

The programme has also enabled Government officials to attend a number of international and regional conferences on global partnerships for effective development cooperation, as well as to prepare necessary inputs for the global survey on global partnerships for effective development cooperation. Annex V shows the complete list of study tours and travel-related events for relevant Government officials supported by the programme.

This component has experienced certain delays primarily due to the funding shortfall.²⁹ A number of activities planned under this component have been postponed or cancelled. The programme document set a target of 40% for the implementation of the VD-CAP actions. However, the programme team has not been able to assess what percentage of actions have been implemented thus far. Further work is required to complete this assessment, which is expected to be presented in the next VDCAP progress report.

Component III

A key area of programme support has consisted of the elaboration and adaptation of SDG indicators to the Laos context. Initially, a set of 92 SDG indicators (out of a total of 238) were integrated into 8th NSEDP (2018-2020), constituting about 60% of a total of NSEDP 160 indicators. The indicators were

²⁷ Based on the 2018 country report for the global survey, 7 out of 14 VDCAP indicators are monitored and are in line with the global ones.

²⁸ A concept note on this work was published in the Republic of Korea at the end of 2019, where Lao PDR participated as a guest speaker to share experiences on the country implementation of the global agenda through the VDCAP process.

²⁹ Not all the resources identified in the programme document have been mobilized, especially for the output 2.1 relating to the implementation of the Vientiane Partnership Declaration and other related activities, and some for RTM related activities. Until the end of 2020, only about US\$ 765,000 had been spent for the second component, which represents about 30.8% of the total financial requirement based on the Programme Document. Around US\$ 250,000 were raised for the second component for 2021.

identified in close consultation with the line-ministries, which provided all the necessary information.³⁰ The remaining indicators are planned to be integrated into the 9th and 10th NSEDPs, as appropriate.

With programme support, the Government formally adopted 238 *SDG indicators* (SDGi) during the national SDG Steering Committee meeting held in June 2019. These indicators are categorized into the following three types:

1. Same as global SDGi (104): These indicators are identical to global SDG indicators, albeit some differences exist in the data disaggregation requirements.
2. Adapted SDGi (61): These are proxy indicators that respond to the requirements of the global SDGs.
3. Additional SDGi (73): These are new indicators specific to the Lao context (not similar to the global SDG indicators). However, they are still relevant to the SDG requirements.

Furthermore, LaoInfo,³¹ the data portal of the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB), was revamped to provide a snapshot of SDG indicators. With support from the programme, an LSB team has updated the baseline figures and available information on each SDG indicator. Out of 238 indicators, 138 come with metadata (some from global metadata, whereas others from data produced for the 8th NSEDP M&E framework). Work is continuing in the development of additional metadata for the remaining SDGi-s.

The programme has supported the development of an SDG roadmap, as well as an annual action plan that is implemented by line ministries and equivalents (so called “SDG Owners and Implementers”). These institutions have designated focal points who report on SDG indicators’ baseline, targets and goals in accordance with their respective institutions. Progress is reported to the SDG Secretariat, which collates information on progress and reports at the national level to the National Steering Committee. SDG indicators have been assigned to line ministries to integrate into sectoral plans/strategies, but the tracking of the extent to which these indicators have already been incorporated into those plans/strategies, or whether they have costed, needs to be improved. The adoption of SDG indicators by line ministries or their equivalent will ensure that the SDG framework is aligned with sectoral plans and the NSEDP, which means that while implementing their sectoral plan, line ministries are also simultaneously implementing the NSEDP and achieving the respective SDGs. This alignment also means that the SDG financing strategy/plan is the same as the NSEDP financing strategy/plan. Further, SDG’s Monitoring and Evaluation framework is the same as the one for NSEDP.

In addition to the above-mentioned support, the MPI-MOFA programme has also contributed through capacity development related to policy formulation, planning, coordination and institutional arrangements on SDG implementation. Some of the products of the programme’s support here include the preparation of the Voluntary National Review (2018),³² SDG Roadmap and Communication Workplan (2019), National SDG Advocate (2019), SDG Mobile Application (2020), dissemination of SDG both at national and central levels, preparation of SDG advocacy material, etc. The National SDG Secretariat has been established as a well-functioning institution with regular coordination and monitoring

³⁰ There is an expectation that going forward data will be collected from other relevant SDGs stakeholders in addition to the SDG focal points in line ministries and equivalents, including provincial institutions, local communities, NGOs, CSO, private sector and others.

³¹ <http://www.dataforall.org/laoinfo/libraries.aspx/home.aspx>

³² The first Voluntary National Review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of Lao PDR was published and presented at the High-Level Political Forum by the Government in 2018.

responsibilities over the SDGs.³³ In 2020, preparations for the second VNR were initiated, with the data collection process already underway.

Government officials and partners have been fully engaged in the SDG localization process. Training and dissemination workshops have been organized for both central and provincial authorities for a better understanding of SDGs. The SDG materials prepared by the Secretariat have been disseminated at national, sectoral and provincial levels. However, more work remains to be done to engage the general public with the SDGs. This area will require greater attention in the future.

Component IV

The programme's fourth component has supported practical research activities and policy formulation related to socio-economic development. Annex IV of this report lists the research activities supported by the programme. In particular, the programme has supported the preparation of five research papers related to topics such as economic structural transformation, poverty reduction, international trade, labour mobility and agricultural productivity. Amongst other uses, this research has contributed to the formulation of the 9th NSEDP.³⁴ In addition, study tours have been organized for Government officials involved in the preparation of quarterly macroeconomic briefs in support of the NSEDP. The programme has also supported young CDR researchers undertake a research project that improved their ability to write research proposals, develop research methodologies, collect and analyze data, present research findings and draft research reports.

Under this component, the programme supported the preparation of the 2017 National Human Development Report (NHDR). A new NHDR was planned for 2020, but activities have not started yet due to the lack of funding. If funding will be secured, one idea is for CDR to lead the research with support from the experts UNDP's regional hub in Bangkok. For all its usefulness, some stakeholders think that the findings of small research projects are not sufficient to respond to the significant demand from policy makers. MPI expects this kind of research support to be continued further and be prioritized on the most essential topics. Ideally, this type of support could focus on priority policy questions through comprehensive flagship research programmes such as the NHDR report.

It should also be noted that following the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, MPI's DIC received additional support from UNDP in the form of video conferencing facilities funded through UNDP's Rapid Response Facility. MOFA has also received assistance in SDG mainstreaming, funded by UNDESA, complementing the activities of the MPI-MOFA programme.

³³ The National SDG Secretariat is quite capable in delivering its functions; specifically, it serves as the main focal point of SDG focal points of line ministries and equivalent. It also has the wide connection and network that valuable to the implementation of SDGs, including the pools of knowledge and resources in terms of the socio-economic development areas in countries. This is because DIO, MoFA, beside its functions as the SDGs Secretariat, it also serves as the secretariat for LDC and LLDC. More importantly, the Secretariat has a long-standing history of achievement, experiences and implementation in development works, especially since the MDGs era. Despite its limited resources, and capacity, the National SDG Secretariat is no doubt still capable to delivering its functions as required.

³⁴ Two key research papers were produced and published to support the realization of the 8th NSEDP (2016-2020) and formulation of the 9th NSEDP (2021-2025) including the LDC graduation and SDG achievement in the future. The first research paper is titled "Rural Development and Sustainable Poverty Reduction", and the second paper is titled "Policies supporting job creation and labour allocation into domestic industries in Lao PDR by 2025".

Table 3: Analysis of Achievement of Programme’s Results Framework

CPD 2017-2021 Outcome 1: All women and men have increased opportunities for decent livelihoods and jobs.								
CPD Outcome indicator 1.1: Percentage of population living below the national poverty line. Baseline 1.1: 23.2% (2012-2013); Target 1.1: 16.2% (2020)								
CPD Outcome indicator 1.2: Gini coefficient. Baseline 1.2: 36.2 (2012/2013); Target 1.2: To be determined (2021)								
UNDP Strategic Plan 2014-2017 Output 1.1: National and sub-national systems and institutions enabled to achieve structural transformation of productive capacities that are sustainable and employment – and livelihoods- intensive.								
Project title and Atlas Project Number: Support Programme for NSEDP Implementation towards LDC Graduation, MIC Transition and SDG Achievement.								
OUTPUTS / INDICATORS / ACTIVITY RESULTS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE		TARGETS (by frequency of data collection)				Status of Achievement
		Value	Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Output 1. The Government, at central and provincial levels, has fully adopted results-based five-year/annual planning towards green growth and sustainable development and has taken steps to link planning with budgeting.								
Activity Result 1.1: The Department of Planning at the Ministry of Planning and Investment is better able to support results-based planning and management practices and to link the NSEDP with Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) in the line ministries and provincial governments.								
Indicator 1.1.1: Availability of the national institutional mechanism for systematic capacity building of line ministries and the provincial governments on basic RBM concepts, focusing on results-based planning.	Training curriculum; Resource Group records	There is no systematic training on RBM	2016	The National Resource Group is established with the assigned staff for the Training of Trainers.	The training curriculum is prepared and the national Resource Group conducted the first two trial trainings.	National capacity on results-based planning is systematically improved by the National Resource Group through the institutionalized curriculum (at least two extensive trainings a year)	National capacity on results-based planning is systematically improved by the National Resource Group through the institutionalized curriculum (at least two extensive trainings a year)	No substantial achievement. Though the National Resource Group has been established by DOP, no major achievement has been made so far under this activity due to lack of funding. With funding support from New Zealand, a training was organized by DOP RMB on Q4/2020.

OUTPUTS / INDICATORS / ACTIVITY RESULTS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE		TARGETS (by frequency of data collection)				
		Value	Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	Status of Achievement
<p>Indicator 1.1.2: Number of line ministries and provincial governments that have increased knowledge of basic RBM and fully adopted results-based planning, monitoring and reporting.</p> <p><i>(capacity is assessed on the scale from 1-5 through pre/post training surveys).</i></p>	Published Annual Plans of the ministries and provincial governments that are in line with RBM; pre/post assessment surveys	0	2016	0	1 ministry; 2 provincial governments (with the assessment rate ≥ 4)	2 ministries and 5 provincial governments (with the assessment rate ≥ 4)	3 ministries and 5 provincial governments (with the assessment rate ≥ 4)	No substantial achievement. Same as above
<p>Indicator 1.1.3: Number of line ministries and provincial governments with increased knowledge of Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) concepts <i>(assessed on the scale from 1-5 through pre/post training surveys).</i></p>	Summary of the training modules & pre/post assessment surveys	0	2016	0	1 ministry; 2 provincial governments (with the assessment rate ≥ 4)	2 ministries and 5 provincial governments (with the assessment rate ≥ 4)	3 ministries and 5 provincial governments (with the assessment rate ≥ 4)	No substantial achievement. Same as above

OUTPUTS / INDICATORS / ACTIVITY RESULTS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE		TARGETS (by frequency of data collection)				
		Value	Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	Status of Achievement
Activity Result 1.2: The national and provincial governments benefit from improved capacity for monitoring of the 8 th NSEDP implementation and for formulation of the 9 th NSEDP in a results-based manner.								
Indicator 1.2.1: Extent to which national and provincial governments show improved capacities for results-based monitoring and reporting on 8 th NSEDP implementation and planning for 9 th NSEDP (CPD Indicator 1.2.1).	8 th NSEDP annual progress reports; <i>(indicator is measured on the scale 1-4)</i>	1 – not adequately	2016	1 – not adequately	2 – very partially, a Programme-Based Approach and Sector-Wide Approach concepts are adopted taking into account needs at the national, provincial and village levels.	3 – partially, national and provincial work plans on 8 th NSEDP achievement are monitored and reported based on Results-Based Management principles.	4 – largely, national and provincial work plans on 8 th NSEDP achievement are monitored and reported based on Results-Based Management principles. The national and provincial authorities are able to retrieve lessons learned and the unfinished agenda from the 8 th NSEDP.	On track to being achieved. Mid-Term Review of the 8 th NSEDP in 2018 provided a platform for better understanding of relevant partners. As a follow up of the review, the formulation of the 9 th NSEDP has taken place with inputs from all ministries, provinces and partners. The 9 th NSEDP's finalization is expected within the 1 st Q of 2021. Provincial governments have improved their capability of providing input which has been integrated into the preparation process.

<p>Indicator 1.2.2: Extent to which policies, systems and/or institutional measures are in place at the national and sub-national levels to generate and strengthen gender-sensitive employment and livelihoods (UNDP SP Output Indicator 1.1.2).</p>	<p>8th NSEDP annual progress reports; MPI Programme Review/Evaluation (<i>indicator is measured on the scale 1-4 as per UNDP SP IRRF method. Note</i>)</p>	<p>2 – very partially, there has been a national policy debate and an agenda for change agreed for policies, systems and institutional measures at the national or sub-national levels to generate and strengthen employment and livelihoods.</p>	<p>2016</p>	<p>2 – very partially, there has been a national policy debate and an agenda for change agreed for policies, systems and institutional measures at the national or sub-national levels to generate and strengthen employment and livelihoods.</p>	<p>3 – partially, policy reform or new and improved systems and institutional measures have been formally agreed and budgeted that are intended to generate and strengthen gender-sensitive employment and livelihoods at national or sub-national levels.</p>	<p>3 – partially, policy reform or new and improved systems and institutional measures have been formally agreed and budgeted that are intended to generate and strengthen gender-sensitive employment and livelihoods at national or sub-national levels.</p>	<p>4 – largely, a change in policies, systems and/or institutional measures has occurred and is being demonstrably implemented at the national and sub-national levels aimed at generating or strengthening gender-sensitive employment and livelihoods.</p>	<p>No achievement. Not carried out due to funding shortfall.</p>
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OUTPUTS / INDICATORS / ACTIVITY RESULTS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE		TARGETS (by frequency of data collection)				
		Value	Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	Status of Achievement
Output 2. The Government has stronger and diversified platform for effective development partnerships in line with the Vientiane Partnership Declaration (2016-2025).								
Activity Result 2.1: By 2021, the Round Table Process has graduated into the Lao Development Forum (tentatively name – subject to change later) enabling timely progress towards the Vientiane Partnership Declaration Country Action Plan (2016-2025).								
Indicator 2.1.1: Transition to the post-2020 Lao Development Forum that is fully consulted and officially adopted in line with the Vientiane Partnership Declaration (2016-2025).	RTIM progress reports (annual) and a decision on the set up of the Lao Dev Forum.	In its current form, the RTP is successful but will become increasingly irrelevant post-2020.	2016	In progress – capacity needs assessment of the DIC is completed and a plan for the transition to the new Lao Development Forum is ready.	In progress – consultations with all line ministries, DPs, civil society and private sector on the shape and form of the new RTP completed.	In progress – design of the post-2020 Lao Development Forum concept is under development, taking into account feedback from all line ministries, DPs, civil society and private sector through expanded Sector Working Groups.	Design of the new Lao Development Forum concept is completed and announced through a Government decision as a replacement of the RTP.	Some achievement. The Lao Development Forum concept has not been developed yet. In this area, most of the work has revolved around the Round Table Process, which has been revitalized in recent years to address emerging development challenges. The setup and the preparation of the RTM/RTIM has focused on results at national, sectoral and provincial levels. The mechanism has improved as a platform for the discussion of policy related matters.

<p>Indicator 2.1.2: Progress in implementation of the Vientiane Partnership Declaration Country Action Plan (2016-2025), in %</p>	<p>Progress reports on the VD-CAP II implementation (annual).</p>	<p>VD-CAP II is developed.</p>	<p>2016</p>	<p>10% of VD-CAP II is implemented.</p>	<p>20% of VD-CAP II is implemented.</p>	<p>30% of VD-CAP II is implemented.</p>	<p>40% of VD-CAP II is implemented.</p>	<p>Some achievement.</p> <p>Based on the country report for the global survey conducted in 2018, 7 out of 14 VD-CAP indicators are monitored and in line with the global ones.</p> <p>It is not clear though what percentage of the VD-CAP is already implemented. A report for the VD-CAP implementation is being prepared and is expected to be finalized before June 2021. It will provide quantitative information on the VD-CAP indicators.</p>
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Activity Result 2.2: The Round Table Process is based on measurable outcome results and indicators from the annual meetings that are followed through by the Sector Working Groups.

<p>Indicator 2.2.1: Extent to which annual Round Table (Implementation) Meetings result in clear and measurable outcomes and indicators in the spirit of the Vientiane Partnership Declaration (2016-2025).</p>	<p>Outcome Documents of the RT(D)Ms. <i>(indicator is measured on the scale 1-4)</i></p>	<p>1 – not adequately; the outcomes are articulated without indicators to measure progress.</p>	<p>2016</p>	<p>≥3 – more than partially, outcomes and indicators are set in consultation with all line ministries, DPs, civil society and private sector</p>	<p>≥3– more than partially, outcomes and indicators are set in consultation with all line ministries, DPs, civil society and private sector</p>	<p>4 – largely, measurable outcomes and indicators are set reflecting all relevant recommendations of line ministries, DPs, civil society and private sector</p>	<p>4 – largely, measurable outcomes and indicators are set reflecting all relevant recommendations of line ministries, DPs, civil society and private sector</p>	<p>Some achievement.</p> <p>All RTIMs result in key recommendations, which have been translated into Prime Minister’s instructions to line ministries, provinces and partners to ensure their implementation.</p> <p>There is a need for a more solid system for measuring the implementation of recommendations and more capacity building support on how to implement the instructions.</p> <p>There is a “Follow-up Action Matrix” for tracking actions in response to RTIM recommendations, but it is not implemented systematically.</p>
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Indicator 2.2.2: % of the Round Table process outcomes and indicators implemented through the Sector Working Groups and other relevant mechanisms.	RTIM progress reports (annual)	RTMs have stated outcomes but not systematically applied and followed up on.	2016	$\geq 70\%$	$\geq 80\%$	$\geq 90\%$	100 %	Same as above.
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OUTPUTS / INDICATORS / ACTIVITY RESULTS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE		TARGETS (by frequency of data collection)				
		Value	Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	Status of Achievement
Output 3. The Government has accelerated progress towards SDG achievement.								
Activity Result 3.1: The national roadmap has been adopted with the strong SDG Secretariat in place to coordinate multilateral development cooperation for achievement of SDGs.								
Indicator 3.1.1: Availability of a national roadmap for the achievement of SDGs by 2030 with costed Annual Work Plans and their implementation progress.	Government decree/endorsement of the National Roadmap and the plan of action; Annual Progress reports on the Roadmap implementation.	The Prime Minister issued a decision on establishment of the National Steering Committee on SDGs under his leadership;	2016	The National SDG Roadmap 2030 is developed together with an implementation plan 2017-2021, incorporating inputs from Government (central & provincial), DPs, civil society and private sector. Action Plan for 2017 is implemented.	A costed 2018 Action Plan of the National SDG Roadmap is up to date, approved and implemented through sectoral strategies/work plans and other mechanisms.	A costed 2019 Action Plan of the National SDG Roadmap is up to date, approved and implemented through sectoral strategies/work plans and other mechanisms.	A costed 2020 Action Plan of the National SDG Roadmap is up to date, approved and implemented through sectoral strategies/work plans and other mechanisms.	Largely achieved. The SDG Roadmap approved by the PM in 2019 and it was disseminated to all partners at all levels in 2020. The action plan was not costed.

<p>Indicator 3.1.2: Extent to which the SDG Secretariat is able to coordinate information sharing, dialogue, engagement and cooperation on SDGs among the Government ministries/agencies, DPs, civil society and private sector in the spirit of “transparency and accountability to each other”³⁵</p>	<p>Feedback from the ministries/agencies, DPs, civil society and private sector at the annual RT(I)Ms; Mid-Term evaluation of the programme.</p>	<p>The Prime Minister issued a decision on establishment of the National Steering Committee on SDGs under his leadership;</p>	<p>2016</p>	<p>3 – partially: The inter-agency SDG Secretariat is established and has successfully facilitated preparation of the SDG Roadmap and implementation plan 2017-2021 in a consultative manner.</p>	<p>≥3 –more than partially: The SDG Secretariat is well-functioning with regular coordination and monitoring of the Annual Work Plan of the SDG Roadmap in a consultative and transparent way.</p>	<p>4 – largely: The SDG Secretariat is well-functioning with regular coordination and monitoring of the Annual Work Plan of the SDG Roadmap in a consultative and transparent way, ensuring active flow of information, dialogue, better coordination and stronger ownership among stakeholders.</p>	<p>4 – largely: The SDG Secretariat is well-functioning with regular coordination and monitoring of the Annual Work Plan of the SDG Roadmap in a consultative and transparent way, ensuring active flow of information, dialogue, better coordination and stronger ownership among stakeholders.</p>	<p>Largely achieved. The programme has supported the SDG Secretariat in the development of national SDG indicators, SDG communication plan, 2018 VNR and SDG mobile app. In 2020, preparations for the second VNR were initiated. Data collection for the formulation of the VNR is underway.</p>
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³⁵ [Outcome Document of the 4th High Level Forum on Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, 2011](#)

OUTPUTS / INDICATORS / ACTIVITY RESULTS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE		TARGETS (by frequency of data collection)				
		Value	Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	Status of Achievement
Activity Result 3.2: SDG localization and dissemination at national and provincial levels supported.								
Indicator 3.2.1: Level of understanding among the central and provincial authorities of the National SDG Roadmap and their ability to contribute to its implementation.	Pre/post assessment surveys	1 – not adequately, general familiarity with the SDG indicators & targets exists but not on the way how to achieve them.	2016	2 – very partially A communication and training strategy has been completed.	≥3 – more than partial level of understanding is achieved through implementation of the communication and training strategy.	4 – large level of understanding is achieved through systematic communication and training. Authorities at all levels are able to contribute to the National SDG Roadmap implementation.	4 – large level of understanding is achieved through systematic communication and training. Authorities at all levels are able to contribute to the National SDG Roadmap implementation.	Some achievement. Government officials and partners have been fully engaged in the SDG localization process. The SDG materials prepared by the Secretariat have been disseminated at national, sectoral and provincial levels. More work to be done to engage the general public.

<p>Indicator 3.2.2: Extent to which the SDG targets are integrated and implemented under the sectoral strategies/work plans with a clear financing strategy (including SWGs’ costed annual plans).</p>	<p>Sectoral strategies/ plans & costed work plans of the Sector Working Groups.</p> <p><i>(indicator is measured on the scale 1-4)</i></p>	<p>60% of 8th NSEDP indicators are linked to the SDGs, including those linked to LDC graduation. No linkage to the sectoral strategies done yet.</p>	<p>2016</p>	<p>1 – not adequately, sectoral strategies and work plans are in progress of integrating the relevant SDG targets with a clear financing strategy.</p>	<p>3 – partially, sectoral strategies/work plans both at central and provincial levels partially incorporate the SDG targets and are formally approved with a financing strategy, contributing to implementation of the National SDG Roadmap.</p>	<p>≥3 – more than partially, sectoral strategies/work plans both at central and provincial levels more than partially incorporate the SDG targets and are formally approved with a financing strategy, contributing to implementation of the National SDG Roadmap.</p>	<p>4 – largely, sectoral strategies/work plans both at central and provincial levels largely incorporate the SDG targets with a financing strategy and are well on track, contributing to implementation of the National SDG Roadmap.</p>	<p>Some achievement.</p> <p>Currently, 60% of SDG indicators have been integrated into the 8th NSEDP. These indicators have been assigned to line ministries to integrate into sectoral plans/strategies, but there is no systematic tracking of the extent to which these indicators have already been incorporated into those plans/strategies, or whether they have costed.</p>
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OUTPUTS / INDICATORS / ACTIVITY RESULTS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE		TARGETS (by frequency of data collection)				
		Value	Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	Status of Achievement
Output 4. The Government has improved quality of national statistics and research, allowing for increased evidence-based policy making and the overall better public accessibility of quality information.								
Activity Result 4.1: The Lao Statistics Bureau has a well-functioning public platform (LaoInfo) for monitoring progress on NSEDP / SDG targets and is able to produce, analyze and disseminate a better-quality data for evidence-based policy making.								
Indicator 4.1.1: Extent to which national statistical systems allow collection of relevant data to track progress against NSEDP and localized SDGs with necessary disaggregation (UNDP CPD Output Indicator 1.2.2).	LSB reports (annual)	1 – not adequate, LaoInfo functions reasonably well but needs further improvements and strengthening; no metadata is publicly available; horizontal exchange of data among ministries is limited; information disaggregation needs improvement.	2016	2 – very partially, LSB has a costed Action Plan to monitor and assess progress towards 8 th NSEDP and SDG targets; LaoInfo Dashboard is developed in a user-friendly manner in coordination with the relevant ministries/Govt agencies.	3 – partially, LSB is on track in implementing its Action Plan and the LaoInfo Dashboard provides an up-to-date monitoring data for the 8 th NSEDP Mid-Term Review and any revision of the SDG targets with disaggregation on key target groups and areas.	3 – partially, LSB is on track in implementing its Action Plan and the LaoInfo Dashboard provides an up-to-date monitoring data on the 8 th NSEDP/SDG targets with disaggregation on key target groups/areas and a possibility to generate metadata.	4 – largely, LSB is on track in implementing its Action Plan and the LaoInfo Dashboard provides public with an up-to-date monitoring data on the 8 th NSEDP/SDG targets with disaggregation on key target groups/areas and a possibility to generate metadata. LSB has sufficient data and capacity to inform final review of 8 th NSEDP and design of 9 th NSEDP, as well as any update on SDG targets.	Some achievement. About 1/3 of all SDG indicators have baseline values and work is ongoing to collect all data for all SDG indicators and those related to the NSEDP. SDG meta data is currently being developed.
Indicator 4.1.2: Progress in implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the National Statistical System (SDNSS 2016-2025).	Progress reports by LSB; final review by PARIS21 of the SDNSS 2016-2025.	LSB with the assistance from PARIS21 conducted Mid-Term Review of the Strategy	2016	50% of SDNSS 2016-2025 is implemented.	65% of SDNSS 2016-2025 is implemented.	80% of SDNSS 2016-2025 is implemented.	≥95% of SDNSS 2016-2025 is implemented.	No support provided in this area.

Indicator 4.1.3: The level of satisfaction of the national/sub-national authorities and DPs with the quality of statistical products and their accessibility.	Measured through annual surveys on the scale 1-4	LSB data are used by other ministries for planning and monitoring policy implementation, however data accessibility and sharing needs improvement.	2016	≥2 – very partially	≥2 – very partially	≥3 – partially	≥4 – largely	No support provided in this area.
OUTPUTS / INDICATORS / ACTIVITY RESULTS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE		TARGETS (by frequency of data collection)				
		Value	Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	Status of Achievement
Activity Result 4.2: The national research capacity is improved to inform policy making and to measure progress towards LDC graduation and achievement of 8 th NSEDP and SDG targets.								
Indicator 4.2.1: Publication of high quality National Human Development Reports and % of recommendations that feed into the policy acts/sectoral programmes/legislation.	Follow-up to NHDR recommendations; Government decisions/policies.	The 5 th NDHR on LDC graduation is prepared and launched.	2016	25% of NHDR recommendations feed into the policy acts/sectoral programmes/legislation, targeting LDC graduation.	40% of NHDR recommendations feed into the policy acts/sectoral programmes/legislation, targeting LDC graduation; The 6 th NHDR is prepared.	55% of NHDR recommendations feed into the policy acts/sectoral programmes/legislation, targeting LDC graduation.	70% of NHDR recommendations feed into the policy acts/sectoral programmes/legislation. The 7 th NHDR is prepared.	Some achievement. The development of the 2017 NHDR was supported by the programme. The share of recommendations that fed into the policy acts and sectoral programmes is not tracked. Support is planned for for the next NHDR in 2021.

<p>Indicator 4.2.2: Number of studies, research products and policy briefs produced to inform decision-making and to fill in the data gaps for 8th NSEDP/SDG targets monitoring.</p>	<p>MPI records; publications</p>	<p>The 5th NDHR on LDC graduation is prepared and launched; The SDG Baseline Report is under preparation.</p>	<p>2016</p>	<p>At least 5 high quality studies / research products / policy briefs are produced, filling the data gap for the 8th NSEDP / SDG targets monitoring.</p>	<p>Cumulatively at least 10 high quality studies / research products / policy briefs are produced, filling the data gap for the 8th NSEDP / SDG targets monitoring.</p>	<p>Cumulatively at least 15 studies / high quality research products / policy briefs are produced, filling the data gap for the 8th NSEDP / SDG targets monitoring.</p>	<p>Cumulatively at least 20 studies / high quality research products / policy briefs are produced, filling the data gap for the design of 9th NSEDP and the SDG targets monitoring.</p>	<p>Partially achieved. Five research papers have been prepared by the CDR with the support of the programme.</p>
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Major activities that have not been pursued/completed by the programme due to time constraints and budget limitations are the following:

- Improvement of national capacity on RBM concepts, focusing on results-based planning;
- Transition to the post-2020 Lao Development Forum;³⁶
- 6th NHDR.

Key activities which are outstanding and expected to be pursued in 2021 are the following:

- Costing, financing strategy and M&E framework of the 9th NSEDP;
- (Organization of the 13th HL-RTM, its consultations and other associated events;
- Completion of the VDCAP review report;
- Streamlining of the SDG indicators into the 9th NSEDP.
- Preparation of the second VNR which is expected to be presented at the UN High Level Political Forum in the summer of 2021;
- Finalization of at least two-three more research papers contributing the development of 6th NHDR.

The programme team has developed a work plan for 2021, which was reviewed in the course of this evaluation. The work plan contains some crucial activities for the achievement of the programme's objectives, but they appear widely and thinly spread out across the components. Perhaps, greater focus on what is essential to be completed by 2021 would make the plan more impactful. For example, the work plan contains some activities in the area of RBM, which is a project component that has remained largely silent due to limited resources. It might be useful for the programme team to assess the degree of depth that may be achieved in this area with one year and limited resources left and whether it will be more appropriate to concentrate activities in fewer activities/areas where the programme can create more depth. The key activities listed above could provide some guidance as to where the programme could focus for the remainder of its lifetime.

It is also important to add to this report a short note on the programme's impact. While it is still early to have a full discussion of impact, given the mid-term nature of this evaluation, it is possible to make certain remarks about where the real impact of this programme has been and is expected to be.

The MPI-MOFA programme is peculiar in that it does not have a tangible and direct impact on the lives of a group of people or community, as many other development projects do. This is a high-level policy programme that produces two types of effects – improvement in the capabilities of the Government departments targeted by the programme and strengthening of the public policies supported by the programme. The practical effects of the programme are largely indirect and take time to trickle down.

At the organizational level, it is clear that the five government bodies involved have directly benefited from the programme. Given the achievements highlighted in the previous section, these organizations are certainly capable of better performing their functions. This is obvious when looking at the organizational infrastructure that has been put in place through the support of this programme for the implementation of SDGs and NSEDP or the organization of the round table process. The engagement of local governments and non-governmental actors and the organization of meetings and events outside of the capital city is another achievement.

³⁶ The Government has agreed with UNDP to discuss this transition issue after 2020.

Also, at the policy level the effects are visible. The quality of the national development plans has improved over time. The country now has a stronger monitoring and evaluation framework for the NSEDP grounded on more adequate indicators. The SDGs have been streamlined into the NSEDP and the round table process is closely linked to these two processes. Also, at the sectoral level and sub-national level there is better cohesion now and more effective linkages to the national development masterplan. As the 2018 Voluntary National Review demonstrated, the country has made significant progress in establishing a comprehensive policy and legislative framework across all SDG areas.³⁷

These improvements are certainly going to have an impact in the country's quality of life. At the end of the current phase of the project, the stakeholders might be interested to take a closer look at the impacts that this programme has generated at the policy level by examining more systematically the scale of change that has resulted thanks to this work through a comprehensive impact assessment.

2.4. Efficiency

This section provides an assessment of the project's efficiency by focusing on a number of parameters closely associated with efficient project management. These parameters are categorized into the following categories: i) mobilization of resources; ii) budget execution rates; iii) timeliness of the implementation process; iv) coordination of the programme with other UNDP projects; and, v) coordination of the programme with the activities of other development partners.

Resource Mobilization

According to the programme document, the programme was designed and expected to spend around US\$ 10 m for the planned activities within a five-year timeframe, starting in 2017 and ending in 2021. The programme is now past its fourth year of implementation and only one-third of the resources have been mobilized. In addition to UNDP, the donors who have contributed thus far to this programme are Luxembourg and New Zealand. As has also been noted, the Government has been unable to provide direct financial contributions due to financial/budget difficulties and limited resources. Therefore, Government contributions for this programme have consisted only of in-kind contributions, such as the time of technical staff involved in programme activities and the office premises they have utilized.

The overall consensus among stakeholders is that the funding shortfall is the programme's greatest challenges to date. It represents a serious shortcoming not only for the initiation of a number of activities that have been suspended or postponed, but also for the integrity of the programme, given that it was designed as an integrated package of interconnected interventions (which, as such, has implications for its efficiency). For example, one major set of activities under the planning component in the programme's results framework is the block dedicated to results-based management (RBM) or public financial management (PFM). This block of activities has for the most part not been initiated due to the funding shortfall. The lack of direct linkages between work on the NSEDP under this programme and PFM aspects represents a missed opportunity because costing and financial planning with clear outcomes in mind is an essential part of the overall planning process.

It also appears that the design of the programme itself has been overly ambitious – as was noted in this report's previous sections. This is a large programme that covers four wide areas – which admittedly, are also closely interconnected. Typically, projects of this nature in other countries cover just one or two of these areas in depth, with a secondary focus on the other areas (i.e. projects focused on the nationalization of SDGs, the formulation of the national development plan, or the development of an

³⁷ <https://rtm.org.la/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Lao-PDR-Voluntary-National-Review.pdf>

aid database). Given the programme's considerable size, the availability of funding for such a wide range of activities does not seem to have been assessed adequately before the inception of the programme. Furthermore, it would have been more judicious to have launched such a programme only upon firmer commitments from relevant financing entities for the bulk of the programme's budget. A programme like this, with an open-ended set of commitments on the budgetary front, represents a significant risk, which in this case has materialized, but with no clear mitigation response to it.

It should also be noted that the actions that have been taken so far to address this challenge have been insufficient. The expectations of Government stakeholders on the UNDP CO to address this issue are high, but this evaluation takes the view that this challenge requires the joint and well-coordinated effort of both relevant Government bodies involved in this programme and UNDP. There is definitely a need for more synergy and energy from both sides in tackling this challenge by working closely together. The development partners interviewed for this evaluation are interested in the processes that the MPI-MOFA programme covers. They are keen on further supporting the planning process, development effectiveness, "nationalization" of SDGs, etc. However, some of them are funding separate activities in these areas by interacting directly (bilaterally) with the same Government departments involved in this programme. For example, the EU is providing bilateral support in both the planning and SDG areas, similarly to what the MPI-MOFA programme is doing. Given MPI's and MOFA's interest in this programme and their need to resolve the budget challenge, it would be useful if both MPI and MOFA, with the help of UNDP, prioritized and publicized this programme in their bilateral contacts with development partners and flagged it as a possible avenue for channeling assistance by development partners. It might also be useful for the Government to consider whether a more programmatic approach to dealing with multiple projects by development partners is more cost-effective and time efficient for the government departments and officials involved. If the programmatic approach makes more sense, ways could be found to turn the MPI-MOFA programme into a framework that facilitates that approach.

Going forward, for remainder of the programme (until the end of 2021 or further, if the programme is extended), programme stakeholders should focus on three key priorities.

1. First, a more concentrated resource mobilization effort is required from all key stakeholders. This should be a coordinated effort involving the respective Government departments and UNDP and should be based on a well thought out action plan with roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder. The PSU could support the drafting of such an action plan and the coordination of its implementation.
2. Second, based on the above-mentioned plan, the parties should make a quick assessment of how much additional funding they will be realistically able to mobilize for the remainder of the programme.
3. Third, based on the two actions above, the parties should also conduct a careful review of what activities are possible to achieve with the amount of financing that is realistically feasible to raise. The annual work plan for 2021 that has already been drafted could be revisited and revised in line with this review.

Budget Execution Rates

Budget execution rates are an indicator of programme efficiencies because inefficient programmes usually have delays in expenditure which results in higher amounts of spending occurring at accelerated rates closer to project end dates. This typically leads to hurried decisions and hastened implementation which is rarely efficient.

Table 6 below shows the programme’s execution rates by year based on planned expenditures in the project document. The following are some key observations on the programme’s budget execution that may be derived from the table. Execution rates have varied by year and output area. For example, the programme has had an execution rate as low as 32% for Output 2 in 2020 (this is clearly related to the restrictions created by the Covid pandemic and the inability to organize meetings). Also, as can be seen from the table below, year 2020 has had the lower budget execution performance – in large part also due to the pandemic. Overall, the programme’s execution rate for the entire period stands at 90%, which compared to man similar projects is not a bad rate.

Table 4: Project Budget Execution by Year

No.	Outcome Area	Budgeted (as per Pro Doc)	Spent	Execution Rate
Year 2017				
1	Output 1	152,000	107,037	70
2	Output 2	227,397	297,798	131
3	Output 3	120,000	144,220	120
4	Output 4	177,000	166,916	94
5	Project Management & M&E	341,803	299,616	88
	Total	1,018,200	1,015,587	100
Year 2018				
1	Output 1	147,010	81,479	55
2	Output 2	258,950	230,629	89
3	Output 3	86,900	75,957	87
4	Output 4	46,799	43,395	93
5	Project Management & M&E	322,451	286,562	89
	Total	862,110	718,022	83
Year 2019				
1	Output 1	77,390	51,534	67
2	Output 2	255,687	209,436	82
3	Output 3	76,255	144,917	190
4	Output 4	57,308	56,641	99
5	Project Management & M&E	313,619	259,105	83
	Total	780,259	721,633	92
Year 2020				
1	Output 1	321,700	306,409	95
2	Output 2	146,810	46,314	32
3	Output 3	40,350	45,662	113
4	Output 4	95,000	93,683	99
5	Project Management & M&E	319,140	274,511	86
	Total	923,000	766,579	83
ALL YEARS				
1	Output 1	698,100	546,459	78
2	Output 2	888,844	784,177	88
3	Output 3	323,505	410,756	127
4	Output 4	376,107	360,635	96

No.	Outcome Area	Budgeted (as per Pro Doc)	Spent	Execution Rate
5	Project Management & M&E	1,297,013	1,119,794	86
	Total	3,583,569	3,221,821	90

Timeliness of Implementation Process

The timeliness of the completion of planned activities is an important indicator of efficiency, as implementation delays add unnecessary costs, lead to last-minute rushes in the implementation process and usually undermine the quality of results. This section looks at the issue of administrative delays from the perspective of stakeholders.

Stakeholders to this evaluation identified two types of delays.³⁸ One type of delay, as has been noted previously, relates to the activities that have been postponed (or cancelled) due to the budgetary shortage (i.e. the RBM component or the VDCAP-related activities). These delays are not of a daily operational nature, but more strategic in nature, as they are related to the ability of UNDP, MPI and MOFA to mobilize the planned resources. The other type of delay is more operational in nature as it relates to day-to-day procedures and activities.

In this context, some stakeholders have noted some challenges related to the transfer of funds (quarterly advances) from UNDP to the programme's bank account. There have also been frequent delays in the submission of quarterly or annual reports, work plans, budgets, etc. These delays have sometimes resulted in bottlenecks for the implementation of programme activities planned. Such delays indicate the need for more effective capacity building for national implementers on UNDP rules and procedures (as well as expectations). These challenges can be resolved through two types of actions. First, UNDP and the respective Government departments need to communicate more effectively on what each side expects from the other and based on what standards. Certainly, the high staff turnover rate on both sides hasn't made this easier. Also, the fact that board meetings are typically organized at the beginning of the year introduces challenges, as a part of the year is spent discussing issues which could have been settled in the preceding year. But more effective communications on practical matters such as these will reduce delays and improve the efficiency of the programme.

In addition to the challenges noted above, it has also been sometimes difficult for the programme support team to finalize programme-related documents (e.g., work plans and reports, etc.) without inputs or feedback from high-ranking officials who have usually been busy with other engagements. Also, in some cases it has been difficult for the PSU to quickly approach and get a response from the implementing parties, which has resulted in implementation delays. In this case, the respective Government departments should plan more effectively their internal roles and responsibilities dedicated to this programme. They should also plan for a greater amount of time and workload from relevant officials allocated to the activities of this programme. A system and set of rules should be devised for the submission of work plans and reports on time to avoid unnecessary delays.

³⁸ It should be noted here that the procurement process has proceeded smoothly under this programme. The programme has procured some office equipment (e.g., computer desktops, printers, LCD projector, fax machine, air-conditioners and external hard dish) for relevant components/departments (DOP, DIC, DIO, LSB and CDR). This procurement had been done based on NIM SOP guideline, have proven efficient.

Coordination with Other UNDP Projects

Under the current Country Programme Document, UNDP has been implementing a number of projects in Laos PDR. Some of these projects have potential for synergies with the MPI-MOFA programme and are listed in the box below. For example, a few of the projects in listed in the box have a direct connection to the SDG agenda – i.e. mainstreaming of gender into the national development agenda and SDGs. However, interviews for this evaluation showed limited knowledge and interaction of programme partners with these other UNDP projects. Also, the documentary review conducted for this evaluation (including programme board meetings minutes, annual reports, etc.) did not show substantive linkages between the MPI-MOFA programme and other projects under UNDP’s execution.

Stronger linkages of the programme with other projects would not only have improved the efficiency of the resources, but could perhaps have improved the allocation of resources by letting some of the other project take some of the burden of unfunded activities in the work plans. The other projects would have also enabled greater engagement and participation of stakeholders in the national planning, round table and SDG processes. For example, a new project that UNDP initiated in 2017 with the private sector through the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) could have provided a good entry point for the engagement of the private sector in the consultative process described in this report.

Box 2: UNDP Projects with Potential Synergies with the MPI-MOFA Programme

The following are some examples of UNDP projects under implementation with potential synergies with the MPI-MOFA programme:

- Project on Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women for Mainstreaming Gender into the National Development Agenda in Lao PDR
- Enhancing Social and Economic Opportunities for Youth in the Lao PDR
- Strategic Support to Enhancing the Role of the National Assembly
- National Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAR) Programme - Governance for Inclusive Development Programme
- Strategic Support to Strengthen the Rule of Law
- Strategic Support to Achieve SDG5
- Improving Quality Investment for Achieving Sustainable Development

Coordination with Development Partners (DPs)

Overall, the nature of the MPI-MOFA programme is such that it facilitates donor coordination and development effectiveness. Therefore, this programme is particularly visible to development partners and has a more direct engagement with them. This was evident in all interviews with development partners involved in this evaluation. It should also be noted that given the NIM nature of this programme and the fact that it is implemented directly by the five Government entities themselves, it is structurally easier to coordinate its activities with the activities financed by other donors and thus avoid overlaps and inefficiencies. A good example of this type of coordination is the fact that the EU is supporting the “costing” and “financing” aspects of the planning process,³⁹ which are areas not covered by the MPI-MOFA programme (due to the shortage of funding, as noted previously).

³⁹ EU’s intervention is called “Support Facility for EU Budget Support Operations in Lao PDR”.

However, there are a number of concurrent donor-funded activities in all the four areas covered by the MPI-MOFA programme that could be better coordinated with it. From the interviews for this evaluation, no clear picture emerges in how this programme coordinated in practice with the activities funded by the EU in the area of SDGs or financial planning, or the activities of the WB in the area of public financial management. The UNDP also does not have a fully clear picture of what specifically are the other donor-funded activities in the four respective areas. It seems that as a starting point it would be useful for the UNDP and relevant partners to carry out a more comprehensive mapping exercise of all the donor-supported activities in the areas of planning, round table process, SDGs and statistics/research.

2.5. Sustainability

As far as the sustainability of programme results that have been achieved thus far is concerned, that may be assessed more adequately at the end of the programme, when all activities have been completed.

There are clear indications, however, that some of the achievements are sustainable because they have been institutionalized and will be preserved going forward. An example of this is the development of the capacity of the National SDG Secretariat, which now functions as a fully-fledged and capable institution. The MPI-MOFA programme has contributed to the creation of a knowledge pool, accumulation of experiences, lessons learnt, resources and institutional memory that could be transferred to the next generation.

There are, however, a number of factors that seem to be important for sustainability and which could receive greater attention by the programme stakeholders. The MPI-MOFA programme was deliberately set up as a “programme”, rather than as a project, to allow for continuity over time. Continuity through different phases over time has been a key feature of the programme. A key factor that will determine further sustainability will be the potential for further resource mobilization. The present challenge with resource mobilization represents the most serious challenge the programme’s sustainability faces. The previous section discussed this challenge in detail. From a sustainability perspective, UNDP and the Government partners need to come up a clear strategy for how to sustain this programme beyond the current phase (if they wish to do so). There seem to be two options available – either the required funds will be mobilized from the development partners who take an interest in the areas that the programme covers or the two parties themselves (UNDP and the Government) will have to sustain it using their own resources. A third option would be a combination of the two. If the first option is pursued, it should be done through a more vigorous joint effort by the Government and UNDP. The respective Government departments are in a very good position to elevate the importance of this programme in their discussions with the development partners, especially in the course of conversations about bilateral development projects in the areas covered by the programme. It will be useful for UNDP, MPI and MOFA to have a discussion on whether this programme could actually be used more effectively as a platform for channeling the assistance of the donor community in this area. If this option is perceived by MPI and MOFA as a more efficient and sustainable avenue, it will then be necessary to create better incentives for development partners to support the programme and use it as their interface with the respective areas/sectors. Whatever option is eventually chosen by the parties will need to be grounded in a clear vision and strategy for how programme stakeholders want to tackle the issue of resource mobilization and the programme’s sustainability.

Furthermore, this programme has a clear focus on capacity building for the five Government departments/organizations directly involved with the programme. A lot of effort under this programme has been dedicated to coaching and training for the relevant Government officials – including a number

of officials from provincial governments. While such focus on strengthening the capabilities of the civil service is important and commendable, as has been noted, the whole capacity building effort could perhaps have been approached more systematically and sustainably by making better use of the country's existing structures for the training of civil servants, under the Civil Service Management Strategic Framework and Public Administration Reform.

2.6. Gender Mainstreaming

One of the objectives of the MPI-MOFA programme was to address the issue of women's representation by empowering them and promoting gender equality as a cross-cutting theme in all activities. Overall, the data collected for this evaluation shows that there has been a good gender balance among the individuals involved in this programme. This was evident not only in the key positions that women hold in this programme, but also their overall involvement in the activities of the programme and interviews for this evaluation. The programme board has included the Lao Women's Union (LWU) and the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (NCAWMC).

At the policy level, the programme has supported the inclusion of the gender dimension in the various policy instruments that have been developed – in particular, NSEDP and the national SDG framework. This is very important and strategic work that does have long-term and sustainable impact on the lives of women and the gender balance. The programme has also taken into account gender equality in most activities, including participation, decision making and representation in trainings/seminars. The programme has encouraged women's participation and contribution in all activities - for instance, in panel discussions, it has ensured the presence of women representatives. The programme has regularly invited representatives from the Lao Women's Union and NCAWMC to participate in consultations, such as the Round Table Meetings. When organizing workshops/meetings at the provincial level, the programme has taken into account the representation of women and their participation in the events.

Nevertheless, the review of programme-related documents conducted in the course of this evaluation showed the need for a more effective monitoring of the gender dimension in programme activities and results. While there have certainly been contributions towards gender mainstreaming in the design and implementation of interventions, the gender perspective is not tracked and reported effectively. Programme data could be collected and reported more systematically on a gender-disaggregated basis across all components and activities. This is an area that will require further improvement. Given the strategic nature of this programme, roles and power within decision making need to be assessed from the gender perspective. Overall, if a new phase of this programme will be undertaken, it will be beneficial to conduct a more detailed gender assessment to lay the ground for a better approach to gender mainstreaming in the new programme.

3. LESSONS LEARNED

The MPI-MOFA programme has been a learning experience and has generated many lessons, three of which are highlighted here.

- **Lesson 1:** One important lesson for the design of similar programmes in the future is that before initiating them, it is important that the partners secure the financing upfront. Open-ended arrangements, where financing is left to be mobilized later creates many risks which, when materializing, undermine the integrity and consistency of the programme. An additional lesson related to financing is that programmes with a wide scope of activities encompassing too many issues and stakeholders require ample financial resources. When smaller financing envelopes are realistic, it is more appropriate to tailor interventions to narrower areas and aim for more depth.
- **Lesson 2:** One important lesson for the UNDP CO that may be drawn from this evaluation is the need for certain level of capability in national implementing organizations to manage NIM projects. NIM involves full ownership of the project by Government entities, but it also implies adherence to UNDP's rules, regulations and processes. Consequently, relevant national institutions should be fully aware of and adept in these rules, regulations and processes while implementing the project – this applies to all projects, but especially NIM ones. In the case of this programme, the lack of full awareness and understanding of UNDP rules and procedures by the implementing entities has caused some delays that have been pointed out in this report. Such delays could have been avoided if UNDP CO had undertaken a greater and more systematic capacity building effort targeted at the implementing organizations well before the beginning of the programme. This should become a standard practice of UNDP, whereby before the beginning of an NIM project it put in place a small capacity development programme for implementing partners to ensure that they are familiar with UNDP's expectations and its rules and procedures.
- **Lesson 3:** Another pertinent lesson from this programme is related to the role and composition of the Programme Support Unit. In this case, the PSU was conceived primarily as an instrument of administrative support with no technical capacities and skills – including in the crucial area of communications (as noted earlier in this report). For programmes of this scale and importance, it is crucial to establish technical within the programme coordination unit – people who understand the substantive issues and are able to communicate with and provide support to the relevant government departments, technical consultants hired by the programme and partners. These people will also be able to talk to other technical projects going on in the respective areas, which will have a positive impact on coordination and collaboration with other development partners and entities.
- **Lesson 4:** Programmes that involve more than one government department or organization in equal roles are more complex than programmes implemented by just one organization. Such programmes require strong coordination between all involved entities, grounded in a clear coordination mechanism that is well-understood and accepted by all.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The MPI-MOFA programme is a highly relevant and important instrument of cooperation between the Government and UNDP. This is a longstanding initiative that has brought many benefits to the government in the area of capacity development in key strategic areas such as development planning, development effectiveness and the adoption and achievement of SDGs. This programme has provided very tangible and practical contributions to very strategic policy instruments such as the NSEDP, VD-CAP, RTIM process, SDG indicators, LaoInfo Database System, NHRDs, etc. Each of these instruments is extremely influential and impactful at the policy level.

Where this programme has suffered is in resource mobilization. Communications with development partners and external audiences should have been more effective. The respective Government departments and UNDP could have worked more closely together in demonstrating more effectively the importance and achievements of this programme to development partners and mobilizing the required resources. As this evaluation has demonstrated, there is also a need to strengthen coordination and communications not only at the strategic level, but also at the operational level.

For the remainder of the programme duration, MPI, MOFA and UNDP need to resolve the following key issues:

- How much additional resources could realistically be mobilized for the remainder of this programme?
- What activities are feasible until the end of the programme, based on the above-mentioned estimation of resources?
- Would it be beneficial to extend this programme, if more resources could be available and more activities could be carried out?

Going forward, the Government and UNDP should also discuss how they will continue their cooperation in this area. The capacity needs of the Governments departments interviewed for this evaluation are evident. The only question is how to design a programme of support that meets some of those needs in a strategic and prioritized fashion, using effectively the lessons that have been derived from this cooperation over years, including those generated by this evaluation. It will be also important to involve in this discussion development partners and see how best to harmonize activities together and take a more coordinated approach on the mobilization of resources. The feasibility of a more programmatic approach for the delivery of assistance by development partners in these areas should be part of that discussion.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation makes the following set of recommendations on the basis of the analysis presented in the previous sections of this report.

RECOMMENDATION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 1 Resource Mobilization</p> <p>The three programme stakeholders should work more closely together on the issue of resource mobilization by instilling greater synergy and energy in the process. This should be done on the basis of a well-coordinated effort that rests on the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The parties should develop a well-thought-out resource mobilization action plan with clear roles and responsibilities identified for each stakeholder. • The parties should make an assessment of how much additional funding they will be realistically able to mobilize for the remainder of the programme. • The parties should also conduct a careful review of what activities are possible to achieve with the amount of financing that is realistically feasible for them to raise. • MPI and MOFA might consider a review of the annual work plan for in light of the above-mentioned review. • The parties should prioritize and publicize the programme in their bilateral contacts with development partners. • MPI and MOFA could consider a more programmatic approach for the delivery of bilateral assistance and will benefit from a clearer assessment of this programme as an avenue for channeling assistance by development partners. 	<p>UNDP MPI MOFA</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 2 Programme Integration and Coordination</p> <p>MPI and MOFA should strive for a more integrated “one programme” approach for this programme. They could consider the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the programme’s coordination mechanisms, especially the role of the PSU by giving it more access and reacting more quickly to PSU requests. • The parties should identify activities undertaken by each department that would benefit by greater engagement by other stakeholders. PSU could assist with the analysis and keeping track of joint engagements. • The parties should also identify synergies and collaborations more carefully in work plans. • The programme will benefit if the number of programme board meetings will go up to two per year, as originally envisaged in the programme document. Given the online nature of most meetings now, this seems a lot more feasible than in-person meetings. 	<p>MPI MOFA</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 3 Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PSU will benefit from a communications expert, even someone hired temporarily or on a part-time basis. 	<p>UNDP MPI MOFA</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The programme stakeholders should focus on communications with external audiences (including media) on the basis of a communication strategy for this programme. • UNDP should communicate to MPI and MOFA in clear terms its expectations of documents, templates and formats for work plans, budgets, reports, etc. • The programme will benefit from better structured communications between UNDP and the respective government departments and the PSU. This could involve regular online meetings – i.e. once a week – to discuss crucial programme-related matters. • UNDP should strengthen communications with donors, by ensuring that reporting is timely and informative. 	
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 4 Operational Matters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNDP and government departments should address the staff turnover issue. One way of dealing with this would be by creating a shadow position that could cover the primary position, in case that person leaves their job. Also, better documentation is necessary to maintain institutional memory. • MPI and MOFA should better assess the workload of the officials they designate for the programme and ensure that these officials are able to allocate sufficient time for programme-related matters. They should plan for a greater amount of time and workload from relevant officials allocated to the activities of this programme. • MPI and MOFA should review the current decision-making processes related to the programme and identify how within existing government rules and procedures they can accelerate the decision-making process. • The MPI and MOFA departments should strengthen their monitoring and reporting functions dedicated to the programme. • Board meetings should be organized well before the approval of work plans and budgets is due to allow for sufficient time for discussions and approvals. 	UNDP MPI MOFA
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 5 Capacity Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNDP should organize additional training on UNDP rules and procedures for relevant government officials responsible for planning, budgeting and reporting. UNDP should conduct this in the broader context of capacity support for government entities implementing NIM projects. 	UNDP
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 6 Coordination with Donors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the framework of this programme, UNDP, MPI and MOFA should conduct a careful mapping of all the other development partners providing support in the areas covered by the MPI-MOFA programme and identify potential synergies and efficiencies between this programme and development partners' projects. • UNDP should conduct a quick assessment of how its ongoing projects could be better coordinated with the MPI-MOFA programme and identify potential practical synergies. 	UNDP MPI MOFA
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 7 Substantive Issues</p>	MPI MOFA UNDP

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme stakeholders should further develop the Lao Development Forum concept and come up with a plan for how the transition process could take place. • Programme stakeholders should develop measures to engage the general public more effectively with the SDGs. • Programme stakeholders should establish a more solid system for measuring the implementation of RTIM recommendations and more capacity building support for implementing agencies on how to implement RTIM instructions. • Programme stakeholders should establish a more solid system for monitoring the SDG indicators that have been assigned to line ministries to integrate into sectoral plans/strategies, as well as tracking of the extent to which those indicators get incorporated into those plans/strategies. • Programme data should be collected and reported more systematically on a gender-disaggregated basis across all components and activities. If a new phase of this programme will be undertaken, it will be beneficial to conduct a more detailed gender assessment to lay the ground for a better approach to gender mainstreaming in the new programme. 	
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation 8 Sub-national Level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPI and UNDP should assess the feasibility of providing greater capacity development support for government officials at the sub-national level. • MPI and UNDP should also consider the possibility of greater engagement of communities at the local level on planning and SDG-related activities. 	<p>MPI UNDP</p>

ANNEX I: PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Programme Background

Over the last two decades, Lao PDR has experienced consistently high economic growth, accompanied with poverty reduction, infrastructure development and progress in education. The Government has improved its capacities to manage economic growth and the changing structure of the national economy. However, challenges remain and it will be important for the country to fully capitalize on its human resources, plan and budget, accordingly, improve productivity, diversify economically and reduce inequality. This will be particularly important in the context of the upcoming graduation from the status of Least Developed Country (LDC) and the likely changes it will bring about to the overall development scenario and agenda, including Official Development Assistance (ODA) and other instruments available to the Government to promote sustainable development.

The Government has put in place a number of instruments and processes to guide the development process. The following are the most important for the country and the most relevant to the programme whose evaluation is presented in this report.

- **National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP)** is the country's guiding strategic document that paves the way towards graduation from LDC status and lays the foundations for the achievement of Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). NSEDP has been developed in every five-year cycle. The 8th five-year NSEDP (2016-2020) was aimed at ensuring Lao PDR's graduation from LDC status by 2020.

Box 3: Brief Overview of the NSEDP Process

In 2019, the Government of Lao PDR stated its intention to start preparing for the formulation of the 9th NSEDP, using the results of the 8th NSEDP Mid-Term Review (MTR) as a guidance. The Government was committed to ensure that the preparation of the 9th NSEDP was evidence-based, such as lessons learned from implementing the earlier 8th NSEDP. It will outline the strategy that supports further growth in employment across different sectors, agricultural production, trade, and resource mobilization. The Government is also committed to social policies to support creating a healthy and educated population. Important efforts are also being undertaken to build the resilience of institutions, communities and households against economic and natural shocks.

The 9th NSEDP (2021-2025) will follow the Government's longer-term planning and particularly the 10-year plan to 2025 and the 2030 Vision with overall objectives:

1. A stable socio-economy reform
2. A resilient country, ensuring political stability, peace and social order
3. Continued efforts for LDC graduation.
4. Public administration and rule of law
5. Human resource development and skillful labour force
6. Continued efforts to move toward the modernized industrialization
7. Regional and global integration and cooperation in an effective manner.

The 9th NSEDP will be a fully result-based plan and its formulation will be informed by several pieces of analysis. These include:

- Setting quantitative NSEDP benchmark targets,
- Descriptive analysis of Government actions and initiatives,
- Analysis of provincial disparities, and sector performance.

Each of these analyses will be underpinned by the participation of relevant stakeholders. This includes all levels and sectors of the Government (national, sectoral and provincial), the private

sector, non-government organizations (NGOs)/non-profit associations (NPAs), development partners, and academia. Critical to the sector performance will be the collective perspectives on outcomes, outputs and measures to overcome challenges by the relevant Sector Working Groups (SWGs).

In terms of the strategic plan, focuses will also address key recommendations from the 8th NSEDP MTR as follows:

Strengthening linkages between planning and budgeting systems

- Introduce better tracking of sector/thematic financial needs, planned and approved budgets, and expenditure, building on the good practices in some ministries as models for possible expansion across government in a phased manner.
- Strengthen longer-term planning, costing, and financing to 2030, including the development of cost estimates to help guide financing strategies.
- Strengthen the consistency of ministerial development plans and their linkages with each other and the NSEDP, such as the possibility of standardizing plans that link activities to financing.

Aligning strategies in support of the NSEDP, LDC graduation, SDGs, and green growth

- Strengthen the National SDGs Secretariat's mandate and role in ensuring integration of the 2030 Agenda into the country's 9th NSEDP (2021-2025), 10th NSEDP (2026-2030) and accompanying sector and thematic strategies. This includes the systematic collaboration with line ministries and other partners for strengthening approaches and the use of tools for multi-dimensional prioritization and decision-making, and for tracking progress towards SDG objectives.
- Build on the existing work to develop strategies for durable LDC graduation and preparation for the no-longer eligibility to LDC support measures that align with the principles of the 2030 Agenda, especially those areas where there has been slower progress.
- Mainstream green growth priorities and targets (including as outlined in the Green Growth Strategy) into national and sector strategies, including the 9th NSEDP.

Strengthening systems for development partner cooperation

- Re-invigorate the aid management platform to better track international commitments and disbursements, ensure alignment with plan priorities, and enforce partner accountability.
- Adapt as necessary the Round Table Meeting mechanism to strengthen effective development partnerships, including enhanced the contribution of the private sector, shifting the development dialogue further into discussion and agreement on implementation mechanisms, and strengthening monitoring of commitments in the context of the VD-CAP II.

Adjusting monitoring and evaluation frameworks

- For the remaining period (2019 -2020), review the MTR outcomes and adjust goals, targets and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to reflect the progress made and lessons learned.
- Develop the 9th NSEDP at the same time as the supporting Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to ensure that targets and indicators have baselines and are realistic and measurable.

Introducing new cross-cutting priorities in the 9th NSEDP

- Establish unexploded ordnance (UXO) as a cross-cutting Output on its own to give it due importance and attention as Lao PDR's Special SDG 18 on UXO.
- Establish the issue of disability as another cross-cutting issue in the NSEDP.

- **Round Table Process (RTP)** was launched in 2000 and has served as a forum for bringing together all stakeholders involved in the country's development process – government departments and agencies, civil society organizations, private sector, United Nations bodies,

and other development partners. Chaired by the Prime Minister, this forum seeks to ensure that all stakeholders are working closely together and utilizing funds, time and knowledge to achieve maximum impact in the country's development. Round Table Implementation Meetings (RTIMs) are held every year starting from 2005 to take stock of progress made in the preceding year and set joint priorities for the coming year. So far, 11 RTIMs have taken place, respectively in 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. RTIMs have resulted in recommendations for policy improvements in various priority area.⁴⁰ Each year, these recommendations are translated into the Prime Minister's instructions to line ministries and provinces for further implementation.

Box 4: Round Table Meetings

Round Table Meetings (RTMs) have been held since 1983. They were held in Geneva of Switzerland every three years from 1983 to 1999. The continuing and dynamic RTP was launched in Lao PDR in 2000. Currently, High-Level Round Table Meetings (HL-RTM) take place every five years to provide inclusive forums to support the design and implementation of the country's national development plans. Also, Round Table Implementation Meetings (RTiM) are held every year to take stock of progress made in the past year and set joint priorities for the coming year.

The Round Table process includes 10 Sector Working Groups to coordinate actions among various stakeholders by theme. The groups serve as key links between local progress and national plans and policies. They cover health, education, governance, infrastructure, macroeconomics, trade and the private sector, mine action/UXO, illicit drug control, agriculture and rural development, and natural resources and the environment. A number of Sub-Sector Working Groups provide additional platforms for coordination around specific priorities within these sectors.

The RTP is guided by globally agreed principles on effective development cooperation. These include host government ownership of development priorities and plans, a focus on results, inclusive development partnerships and transparency and accountability to one another.

All development partners including those residents and non-residents in Bangkok of Thailand and Hanoi of Vietnam have been involved in the round table process through having participated in the HL-RTMs and RTiMs. UNDP is a co-chair of the RTP in Lao PDR, who co-chairs both the high level and implementation dialogues. UNDP also has a role in coordinating with other development partners and mobilizing supports to implement the process to ensure successful results of the process.

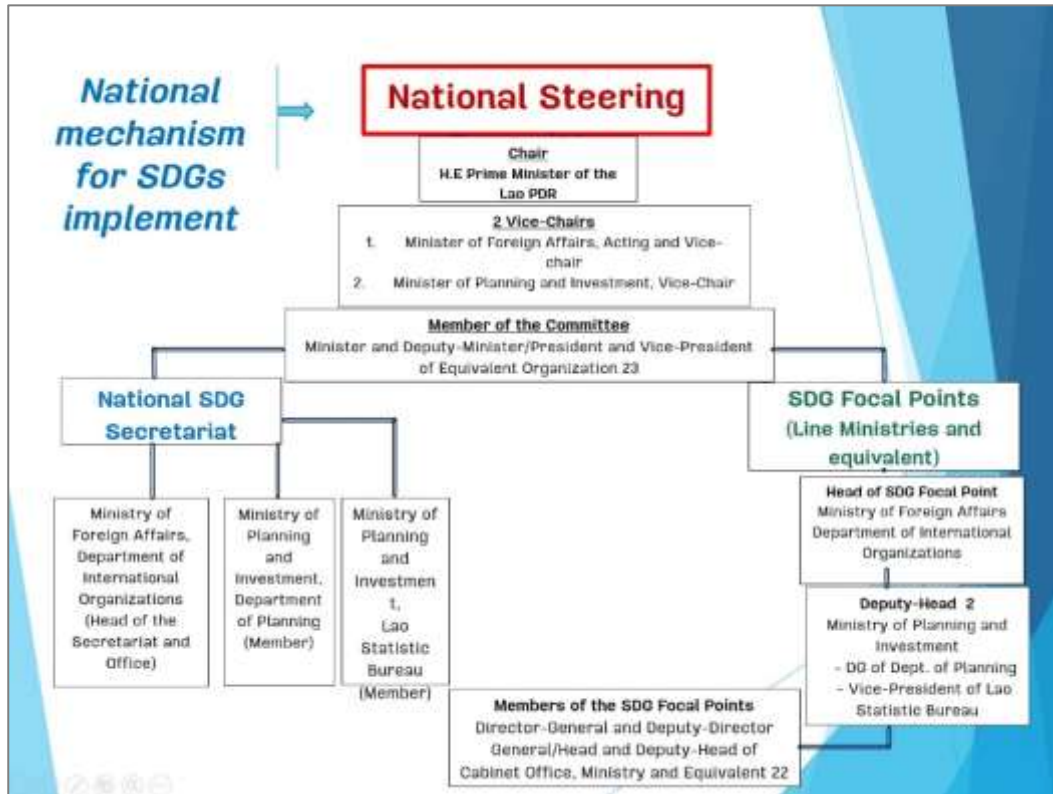
- ***Sustainable Development Goals*** (SDGs) have been embraced by the Government of Lao PDR, which has from the beginning been fully committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Prime Minister's decree on MDGs was revised to provide the legal basis for SDG implementation. The Prime Minister chairs an inter-ministerial SDG Steering Committee to oversee the SDG implementation process. Lao PDR has been one the earliest countries to

⁴⁰ These include enabling inclusive and sustainable growth; enhancing macro-economic management; agriculture; increased investments to the priority sectors; from MDGs to SDGs; food and nutrition security; access to quality education and health; environmental sustainability; the VDCAP implementation; good governance; space for civil society; illicit drugs and other related issues; UXO related issues; structural economic transformation toward sustainable and green growth targeting non-resource-based diversification; macroeconomic stability; a link between planning and budgeting; the role of private sector; quality, efficiency and safety of the infrastructure, power and water sectors; connectivity and integration; further improvements to CSO enabling environment; human capital development and poverty reduction; levels of investment in human capital and skills development; tackling rural poverty and inequalities; determined perseverance to address food insecurity and malnutrition; maternal and child mortality; post disaster needs assessment; climate change adaptation and natural disaster management; rule of laws and gender equality, etc.

localize the SDGs and integrate them into its national planning framework (see Box 3 for more details on how the SDGs governance system is organized in Lao PDR). To this end, the current 8th NSEDP incorporates the SDGs into its three outcomes, each of which is related to one of the three dimensions of the 2030 Agenda: economic, social, and environmental.⁴¹ To achieve the SDGs, the Government has emphasized the importance of science, technology and innovation. Nearly 60 percent of the 8th NSEDP indicators are linked to SDG indicators, showing the Government’s strong commitment for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The remaining SDG indicators which are not in the current NSEDP will be integrated into the 9th and 10th NSEDP. In September 2016, Lao PDR adopted its own SDG 18 called ‘*Lives safes from unexploded ordnance (UXO)*’.⁴²

Box 5: SDG Governance

On 20 September 2017, the President issued a Decree on appointing the Prime Minister to chair the National Steering Committee for the SDG implementation, with members of the committee drawn from all concerned ministries, ministry-equivalent agencies, and mass organizations. The committee appointed the National SDG Secretariat, led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Planning and Investment, as well as SDG Focal points within each of the relevant line ministries to lead and take ownership of each SDG, ensuring smooth coordination and collaboration within the Government.



It should also be noted that the programme in question and its evaluation have taken place against the backdrop of the global Covid-19 pandemic. The full extent of the pandemic’s impact in Laos remains

⁴¹ The 8th NSEDP built on the unfinished works of the MDGs and the progress and lessons from the 7th NSEDP.

⁴² During the Indochina War (1964-1973), the Lao PDR became one of the most heavily bombed countries. UXO contamination continues to affect national development by limiting the use of land for agriculture, making infrastructure construction costly and dangerous, and holding back development.

to be seen as the situation is evolving. However, so far Laos has had fewer infection cases on a per capita basis than most other countries. Despite this positive feature, the impact of the global pandemic on the economy and wellbeing of people, especially the poor and vulnerable, is expected to be significant. According to the World Bank, economic growth in 2020 is projected to range between negative 1.8 and 1 percent due to the impact of COVID-19 and the measures adopted to contain its spread.⁴³ Main vulnerabilities are related to high fiscal deficits and public debt, as well as low reserves. The economic impact could seriously set back graduation goals. There is also a risk of loss of some ODA/preferential treatment, which might further exacerbate the situation.

Programme Description

In the area of planning, the MPI-MOFA programme has aimed to enhance the Government's ability to formulate and implement plans, strategies and policies including the adoption of results-based management, to achieve LDC graduation and cope with the associated impacts of the transition. In the area of development effectiveness and LDC graduation, the programme aims to facilitate the coordination cooperation of all stakeholders engaged in the country's development process. This is achieved through the Round Table Process, which consists of a number of plenary meetings and Sector Working Groups (SWGs) organized along thematic areas of development based on the country's development priorities and agenda.⁴⁴ The process is led by the Government and involves entities such as UN agencies, Australia, EU, Japan, Switzerland, US, and others. The programme also supports the fulfilment of the vision of and the achievement of SDGs by advocating for policy coherence across sectors and policy domains to ensure that sustainable development is advanced in an integrated manner in its social, economic and environmental dimensions.

The programme was also designed to support the implementation, monitoring and reporting on the Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan (VD-CAP) 2016-2025. The Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation was adopted in 2015 by the Government of Lao PDR and Development Partners as a means to strengthen the dialogue and maximize development results till 2025 and beyond (see the principles of the Vientiane Partnership Declaration in the box below). The declaration is set to provide support for national poverty reduction efforts and sustained and inclusive growth, while taking into consideration the economic, social and environmental dimensions. It is complemented by the VD-CAP and its Draft Monitoring Framework. The VD-CAP identifies concrete time-bound actions for implementation of the declaration, providing sectorial and provincial counterparts with key actions, indicators and targets for enhancing the partnership for effective development cooperation in line with principles of the declaration.⁴⁵

⁴³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lao/publication/covid-19-to-impact-lao-pdr-growth-debt-in-2020-new-world-bank-report>

⁴⁴ SWGs organize their executive-level meetings at least twice a year, and the technical meetings at least every quarter. These meetings normally discuss on various sectoral strategies and plans, as well as relevant issues including the implementation of the RTIM recommendations. In this regard, since the round table process and SWG mechanism is one of the main outputs of this MPI-MOFA programme, coordination and facilitation support from the programme have been providing to various SWGs to ensure SWG meetings have been organised and discussed issues relevant to the RTIMs. VDCAP activities are related to the organization of quarterly VDCAP secretariat meetings, VDCAP dissemination workshops, provision of inputs for the global partnerships survey, and integration of the VDCAP indicators into the ODA-MIS, etc. By doing this, the VDCAP secretariat could be able to track key progress and challenges of VDCAP implementation thus far, and know what should be done in the near future to ensure all indicators have been successfully implemented as planned.

⁴⁵ Description taken from - <https://rtm.org.la/government-of-lao-pdr-and-partners-consult-on-the-vientiane-declaration-and-its-country-action-plan-implementation/>

Box 6: Vientiane Partnership Declaration

The five key principles of the Vientiane Partnership Declaration are:

Increased country ownership over development policies, planning, implementation and aid coordination

1. Better alignment of development partner's support to national policies and plans, and increased support to and use of national systems
2. Harmonization and simplification of development partner's procedures and activities
3. Managing for results in order to ensure effective use of resources
4. Both Government and development partners have mutual accountability for progress

The MPI-MOFA programme builds on a previous phase of the programme which was aimed at supporting the achievement of MDGs (2011-2015). It was designed on the basis of the recommendations of a number of reviews and analyses, including the “*Review and Assessment of the Support Programme to the Ministry of Planning and Investment*” (June 2016) and “*Country Analysis Report*” (November 2015). Further, it is aligned with the UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD - 2017-2021) and the Lao PDR-United Nations Partnership Framework (2017-2021).

The box below summarizes the programme’s four expected outputs.

Box 7: Project Outputs as Defined in the Results Framework

Outputs/results	Description
Output 1	The Government, at central and provincial levels, has fully adopted results-based five-year/annual planning towards green growth and sustainable development and has taken steps to link planning with budgeting.
Activity Result 1.1	The Department of Planning at the Ministry of Planning and Investment is better able to support results-based planning and management practices and to link the NSEDP with Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) in the line ministries and provincial governments.
Activity Result 1.2	The national and provincial governments benefit from improved capacity for monitoring of the 8th NSEDP implementation and for formulation of the 9th NSEDP in a results-based manner.
Output 2	The Government has stronger and diversified platform for effective development partnerships in line with the Vientiane Partnership Declaration (2016-2025) (see a summary of the Vientiane Partnership Declaration in the box below).
Activity Result 2.1	By 2021, the Round Table Process has graduated into the Lao Development Forum (tentatively name – subject to change later) enabling timely progress towards the Vientiane Partnership Declaration Country Action Plan (2016-2025).
Activity Result 2.2	The Round Table Process is based on measurable outcome results and indicators from the annual meetings that are followed through by the Sector Working Groups.
Output 3	The Government has accelerated progress towards SDG achievement.
Activity Result 3.1	The national roadmap has been adopted with the strong SDG Secretariat in place to coordinate multilateral development cooperation for achievement of SDGs.
Activity Result 3.2	SDG localization and dissemination at national and provincial levels supported.

Output 4	The Government has improved quality of national statistics and research, allowing for increased evidence-based policy making and the overall better public accessibility of quality information.
Activity Result 4.1	The Lao Statistics Bureau has a well-functioning public platform (LaoInfo) for monitoring progress on NSEDP / SDG targets and is able to produce, analyze and disseminate a better-quality data for evidence-based policy making.
Activity Result 4.2	The national research capacity is improved to inform policy making and to measure progress towards LDC graduation and achievement of 8th NSEDP and SDG targets.
Cross-cutting Theme	Gender equality and women’s empowerment will be a theme that will be weaved throughout the evaluation and will underpin the assessment of all four components above.

The programme is funded by UNDP, Luxembourg and New Zealand and is implemented through UNDP’s National Implementation Modality (NIM), which implies the programme’s full ownership of by the Government of Lao PDR.⁴⁶ The programme’s principal actors are the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) and Department of Planning (DOP), both under the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), the Department of International Organizations (DIO) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Center for Development Research (CDR) and the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) under the Ministry of Planning and Investment. The four programme components were designed to be led by the following respective Government departments:

- **Output 1:** DOP (MPI)
- **Output 2:** DIC (MPI)
- **Output 3:** DIO (MOFA)
- **Output 4:** DIC and DOP (MPI) supported by LSB and DPRC

It is important to note here that the programme was also designed to address the issue of women representation by promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women as cross-cutting theme.

⁴⁶ Within the National Implementation of UNDP projects, the Government is responsible for the management and delivery of programme activities to achieve project outputs. Government regulations, rules and procedures therefore apply to project implementation to the extent that they do not contravene the principles of the Financial Regulations and Rules of UNDP. (file:///C:/Users/elino/Downloads/NIM_for_Government_english.pdf)

ANNEX II: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The mid-term evaluation (MTE) was commissioned by UNDP in Lao PDR and was carried out during the period September 2020 – January 2021 by two independent evaluators. This chapter provides an overview of the objectives of the evaluation and the methodology employed for the collection of information and the analysis of data. Readers who are not interested in the methodology can skip this chapter and go straight to Chapter 3 on the evaluation’s main findings.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The evaluation’s goal was to assess the project’s overall progress towards expected results, identify how activities were designed and implemented up to this point and derive lessons and recommendations for the remainder of the implementation period and the continuation of activities in this area. More specifically, the evaluation was conceived and conducted with the following specific objectives in mind:

- To assess overall project performance against project objectives and outcomes as set out in the Project Document, the Logical Framework, and other related documents;
- To assess the extent to which results have been achieved, partnerships established, capacities built, and cross cutting issues such as gender equality addressed;
- To establish whether the project implementation strategy has been optimal and recommend areas for improvement and learning;
- To identify gaps and weaknesses in the project design and provide recommendations as to how it may be improved in the future;
- To assess project strategies and tactics for achieving objectives within established timeframes;
- To critically analyze the project’s implementation and management arrangements;
- To provide an appraisal of the project’s relevance and efficiency of implementation;
- To review and assess the strength and sustainability of partnerships with Government bodies, civil society, private sector and international organizations;
- To draw lessons that may help improve the selection, design and implementation of project activities in the remainder of the project;
- To provide the project team and partners with feedback on issues that are recurrent and need attention, and on improvements regarding previously identified issues.

The results of this mid-term evaluation are intended to be used for the following purposes:

- Support the decision making of the project team and UNDP CO management, Government partners and donors on: i) implementation modalities of the present stage, and ii) strategic planning of activities in this area in the coming years.
- Provide project stakeholders with lessons from this particular project on overall project implementation and delivery, including potential corrective/adaptive measures that need to be applied to the design/implementation of other country programme interventions to enhance their effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and sustainability prospects.

Evaluation’s Scope and Methodology

This evaluation covers the period from the project’s initiation in 2017 to the point of this evaluation (December 2020). Given the project’s designated end date of December 2021, it represents a mid-term evaluation which allows the project stakeholders take stock of progress achieved and chart out the next steps in the process during the remaining year (including any extension period, if that will be necessary and granted). The Terms of Reference (ToR) that guided the evaluation process are attached in Annex I of this report. Key issues on which the evaluation focused were:

- Project design and its effectiveness in achieving stated objectives.

- Assessment of key financial aspects, including planned and realized budgets, financing, etc.
- The project’s effectiveness in building the capacity of local institutions and strengthening policy framework to encourage sustainable development.
- Strengths and weaknesses of project implementation, monitoring and adaptive management and sustainability of project outcomes including the project’s exit strategy.
- Recommendations, lessons learned, best practices that may be used further in the project or in future interventions.

The evaluation used OECD DAC criteria and definitions and followed the norms and standards established by the United Nations Evaluation Group. It was guided by UNDP’s evaluation toolkit, and in particular the “*Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluation for Development Results*”⁴⁷.

The methodology was based on mixed methods and involved commonly applied evaluation tools such as documentary review, interviews, information triangulation, analysis and synthesis. A participatory approach was taken for the collection of data, formulation of recommendations and identification of lessons learned.

Evaluation activities were organized according to the following stages: i) planning; ii) data collection; and, iii) data analysis and reporting. Figure 2 below shows the three stages and the main activities under each of them.

Figure 4: Evaluation Stages



Table 1 (below) further details the main activities that were undertaken by the evaluators under each stage.

Evaluation Planning

The planning and preparation phase included the development of the ToR by the project team and UNDP CO and the design of the evaluation framework by the evaluators. The evaluators developed a detailed programmatic scope of evaluation activities, as well as sample interview guides for interviews with stakeholders.

Table 5: Evaluation Steps

<p>I. Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the ToR • Start-up teleconference and finalization of work plan • Collection and revision of project documents • Elaborated and submitted evaluation work plan
<p>II. Data Collection</p>

⁴⁷ <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/handbook/documents/english/pme-handbook.pdf>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewed key stakeholders • Further collected project related documents • Debriefings
III. Data analysis and reporting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth analysis and interpretation of data collected • Follow-up interviews • Developed draft evaluation report • Circulated draft report with UNDP and stakeholders • Integrated comments and submitted final report

Data Collection

The data collection process involved a comprehensive desk review of programme documents and interviews with stakeholders (see Table 2 for a list of data sources).

- **Desk Review** - The evaluators started by analyzing relevant documents, programme documents and progress reports, as well as national policies and strategies. Documents from related initiatives, as well as reports on the specific context of the project formed part of the analysis.
- **Semi-structured Interviews** – Interviews were conducted remotely through questionnaires or by phone, given the impact of COVID-19 and associated travel restrictions. They included programme staff, Government officials at the national and provincial level, UNDP representatives and development partners. For the Government entities involved in the implementation of the project detailed questionnaires were used to collect their feedback. Open-ended questions were used to enable interviewees to express their views freely and raise the issues they considered most important. The questionnaires were followed up with interviews with the heads of the respective departments. The national consultant undertook interviews with the provinces of Champassak and Vientiane, interviewed government officials and Lao civil society organizations who had been engaged by the programme and benefitted from it. Annex II shows the full list of people interviewed for this evaluation.

Table 6: Data Sources

Evaluation tools	Sources of information
Documentation review (desk study)	General documentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNDP Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures • UNDP Handbook for Monitoring and Evaluating for Results
	Programme documentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual work plans • Programme Board Minutes • Annual Reports • A large number of reports produced by the project.
	Governments documents/papers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including relevant policies, laws, strategies, etc.
	Third party reports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including those of independent local research centres, etc.
Interviews and questionnaires with	These included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews/questionnaire with the Programme Coordinator.

Evaluation tools	Sources of information
programme coordination team and key project stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questionnaires and interviews with relevant stakeholders, including UNDP, Government departments at the national and provincial level, development partners, civil society, etc.

Data Analysis

Information obtained through the documentary review and interviews was triangulated against available documented sources and was synthesized using analytical judgement. The method of triangulation is depicted in Figure 3 below.

Figure 5: Method of Triangulation

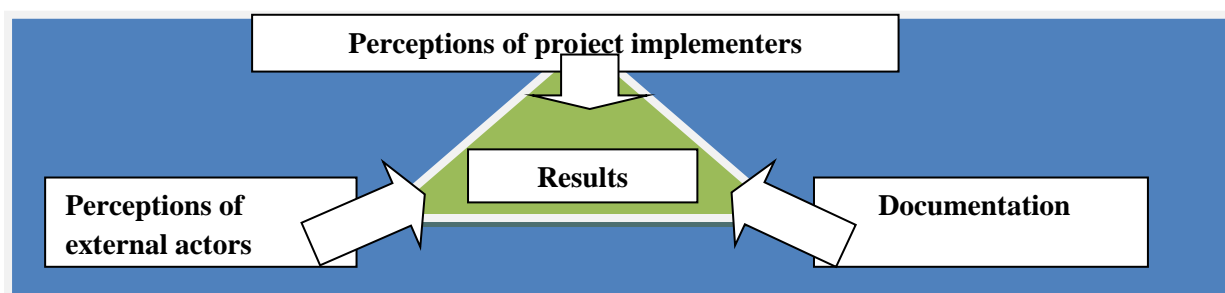
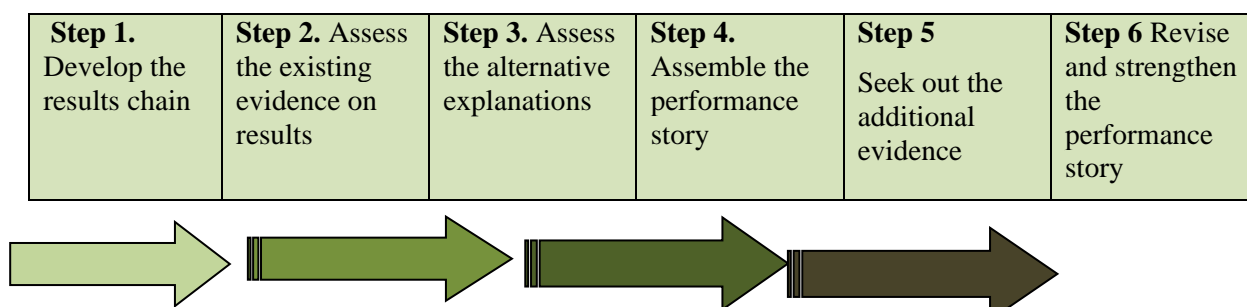


Figure 4 shows the steps that were taken for the analysis which was conducted on the basis of the standard criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability (see Annex II for a more detailed list of questions that were used for the analysis of information).

- **Relevance**, covering the assessment of the extent to which outcomes were suited to national development priorities and organizational policies, including changes over time;
- **Effectiveness**, covering the assessment of the achievement of the immediate objectives (outputs) and the contribution to attaining the outcomes and the overall objective of the project; and an examination of the any significant unexpected effects of the project;
- **Efficiency**, covering the assessment of the quality of project implementation; adequacy of financial management; efficient implementation;
- **Sustainability**, covering likely ability of the intervention to continue to deliver benefits for an extended period of time after completion.

Figure 6: Steps in Analysis Process



The analysis also covered aspects of project formulation, including the extent of stakeholder participation during project formulation; design for sustainability; linkages between project and other interventions; adequacy of management arrangements, etc.

Evaluation Limitations

All possible efforts were made to minimize the limitations of this evaluation. UNDP provided good support for the evaluation process. The main challenges encountered during this evaluation were the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic which began in the winter of 2019. The international consultant was not able to travel to the country and most of the evaluation work was conducted remotely with the help of the national consultant. No face-to-face meetings were conducted for this evaluation. To mitigate this challenge, the evaluation team used questionnaires and interviews for a number of key stakeholders, such as the Project Support Unit, UNDP and the implementing national counterparts, as well as previous government staff involved in the programme and consultants engaged by the programme. Also, data collection at the provincial level was limited due to the Covid-19 restrictions. Interviews were conducted only with two provincial governments in the provinces of Champassak and Vientiane. Another challenge to this evaluation was the slow pace of the data collection process which was due to the heavy workload of the related Government departments, as they were busy participating in the ministerial party meetings and the XI Party Congress.

ANNEX III: EVALUATION'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

Over the last two decades, Lao PDR has experienced consistently high economic growth, with poverty reduction, infrastructure development and progress in education. The Government has made similar strides in terms of improving its capacities to manage the with economic growth and the changing nature of the national economy. However, challenges remain, and it will be important for Lao PDR to fully capitalise on its human resources, plan and budget, accordingly, improve productivity, diversify economically, and reduce inequality. This will be particularly important in the context of the upcoming LDC graduation (2024) and the likely changes it will bring about to the overall development scenario & agenda including Official Development Assistance (ODA) and other instruments available to the Government to promote sustainable development.

The development challenge this project seeks to focus on is overall support to Government in developing and strengthening individual and institutional capacities, to facilitate implementation of the National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP), to support the efforts in achieving graduation from the status of Least Developed Country (LDC), and progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The programme has been designed based on the recommendations of the “Review and Assessment of the Support Programme to the Ministry of Planning and Investment” (June 2016), the “Country Analysis Report” (November 2015) and other analyses; is aligned with the UNDP Country Programme Document (2017-2021) and the Lao PDR-United Nations Partnership Framework (2017-2021). The project seeks to build on the previous phase the programme to support the achieving the MDGs (2011-2015).

Capacity development is the key expected result, across the main partners, both nationally and sub-nationally. The principle foci are the Department of International Cooperation and Department of Planning of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), the Department of International Organisations of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB).

The project aims to enhance the Government’s ability to formulate and implement plans, strategies and policies including the adoption of results-based management, to achieve LDC graduation and cope with the associated impacts of the transition. The project also supports the fulfilment of the vision of and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, which advocates for policy coherence across sectors and across policy domains to ensure that sustainable development is advanced in an integrated manner in its social, economic and environmental dimensions. The programme thus contributes to improving coordination between different national institutions involved in the implementation of the SDGs.

Crucial to this coordination across all activities are the Sector Working Groups (SWGs). Each of the ten SWGs concentration a thematic area of development established to contribute to the annual Lao PDR Round Table Process, which helps set the annual development priorities / agenda. They are led by the Government and co-chaired by, among others, by UNDP and development partners. Some of these partners include other UN entities, Australia, the EU, Japan, Switzerland and the US.

The programme has four thematic outputs and one crosscutting theme:

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

Output 2: The Government has stronger and diversified platforms for effective development partnerships in line with the Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2016-2025).

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

Output 4: The Government has improved quality of national statistics and research, allowing for increased evidence-based policy making and the overall better public accessibility of quality information.

Cross-cutting theme: Gender equality and women's empowerment.

Apart from a Programme Management Unit in the Dept of International Cooperation in the Ministry of Planning & Investment, which is the primary implementing partner, currently, there is one national consultant associated with the project: a Partnership Advisor for effective development. Until December 2019 there was a second national consultant working with the project, in support of the national SDG secretariat on localisation, stakeholder engagement and implementation.

Giving the critical and strategic entry point of the implementing partners, several traditional and non-traditional donors had expressed positive views and strong support to the project's initiatives at the designing stage. Per project document, a total of USD 10 million was identified as the budget for the five-year period. The project has so far received USD 2.6 million during 2017 and 2019. The government of Luxembourg committed to supporting exclusively the Round Table Process for a period of 4 years with a total grant of EUR 400,000, New Zealand has agreed in 2019 to support the 9th NSEDP (2021-2025) preparation process with USD 500,000 starting from 2020, while UNDP's core resources for Lao PDR support project activities across four thematic areas. In addition, contributions from other entities like UNCTAD, UN RC's office and others have also contributed to the programme.

1. Evaluation purpose, scope and objectives

UNDP, in consultation with the government of Lao PDR, will recruit an evaluation team to conduct a mid-term evaluation which is expected to provide recommendations to guide the project strategic focus and implementation during the rest of the project cycle. The main purposes of this evaluation are:

- (a) To measure the level of progress against expected results in the four thematic areas/outputs outlined in the results framework, and assess any early signs of success in enabling Government institutions, nationally and sub-nationally, to effectively implement the 8th NSEDP, preparation of the 9th NSEDP, achievement of the 2030 Agenda, and address the challenges related to the graduation from LDC status;
- (b) To review the existing level of project inputs, interventions, strategies, outputs, outcomes and impacts in order to define more clearly the project's theory of change and the complementarity between the outputs. This will help define and prioritise activities to best achieve goals for the remainder of the project;
- (c) Analyse the efforts made to mobilize additional resources into the development projects, including government co-financing to accelerate the SDG achievements. The evaluation team will consult with government stakeholders to map out policies and procedures to access to government funding.

- (d) To analyse the perceived attractiveness of the project to Government and prospective donors to improve the potential mobilisation of resources for the remainder of the project.

The evaluation results will be used to dialogue with government and development stakeholders to foster further the effectiveness and efficiency of project to broaden development impacts in the short and long-term stage.

2. Evaluation criteria and key guiding questions

The evaluation will address 3 fundamental questions:

- What did the project intend to achieve during the period under review?
- To what extent has the project achieved its intended objectives so far?
- What factors have contributed to or hindered the project's performance and eventually the sustainability of the results?

Strategy

- To what extent are the project outputs aligned with UNDP's current strategic plan and contribute to CPD outcome level?
- How well has gender been integrated in the project activities and output levels? In what ways can the project better incorporate gender elements in the next two years?
- Are there any potential risks that may pose constraints in achieving the project objectives?
- Looking at the past and current project, what are valuable lessons that can inform future project formulation and give recommendations on the way forward to achieving the project objectives?
- To what extent has the project applied the result-based project management concept?

Relevance

- To what extent are the objectives of the programme still valid with respect to the current national development priorities / needs?
- Has the project researched and, if necessary, adopted initiatives to stay relevant with any changes to national priorities or in the development context?
- Are the activities and outputs of the programme consistent at each level with the overall objectives?

Effectiveness

- To what extent did the project contribute to CPD outcomes and outputs, the SDGs, the UNDP strategic plan, and national priorities? What are the most important areas that the project should focus on in the next two years?
- To what extent are the objectives likely to be achieved?
- How can UNDP exercise its integrator role best with this project?

- How effectively did the project manage and mitigate the risks identified during the project design and implementation stages? What lessons can be learned from this element?
- In which areas did the project have the greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the project build on or expand these achievements?
- In which areas did the project have the least achievements? What have been constraining factors and why? How can they or could they be overcome?
- To what extent have the SDG indicators been integrated and implemented at provincial and district levels? And in what ways can this potentially be done better?
- How effective, in itself, is the annual Round Table Meeting, as well as towards the achievement of the project's objective?
- How effective has the project been so far in building the capacity of national implementing partners in particular MPI?

Efficiency

- Are activities cost-efficient?
- Can it be considered that, if progress is being made, it is fast enough?
- Is the programme or project implemented in the most efficient way compared to potential alternatives?
- Has the project helped mobilize other development partners and used UNDP's network to bring about opportunities for South-South exchange and facilitated external expertise for the government?
- How well have the resources been utilized within four thematic areas?
- How well has the project utilized resources (Human resource, technical and financial) as well as the national capacity to support the delivery of project outputs, in particular, RTP and NSEDP & SDG component?
- How well did the project mobilize resources to fill the funding gaps? What lessons can be learned from this element? And how can the project do better?

Sustainability and national ownership

- To what extent has the project passed over the knowledge and expertise to individual and government institutions? What lessons can be learned from this element and in what ways can the project do better?
- How well did the project integrate the green growth concepts into the planning process? in what way can the project do better?
- How well is government prepared to manage the objectives at the end of the project?

3. Methodology

The consultants are required to propose an evaluation methodology and a detailed plan for the assignment as part of the evaluation inception report, in line with the UN Evaluation Group Norms and Standards. In general, 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. The methodology should be robust enough to ensure high quality, triangulation of data sources, and verifiability of information. It is expected that the evaluation methodology will comprise of the following elements:

- Review documents and project theory of change (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;
- Triangulation of information collected from different sources/methods to enhance the validity of the findings.

4. Evaluation products (deliverables)

These products could include:

- **Evaluation inception report (10-15 pages).** The inception report, including the theory of change, should be carried out following and based on preliminary discussions with UNDP after the desk review and should be produced and 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 evaluators. (see **template in Annex G**).
- **Kick-off meeting.** Evaluators can seek further clarification and expectations of UNDP and other project implementing / responsible partners in the kick-off meeting.
- **Evaluation debriefings.** Immediately following an evaluation, evaluators are required to present preliminary debriefing and findings to UNDP and if required including to other project implementing / responsible partners.
- **Draft evaluation report (within an agreed length).**⁴⁸ UNDP, project implementing / responsible partners and other designated (by UNDP & Government) key stakeholders in the evaluation 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 template in Annex F).**

⁴⁸ A length of 40 to 60 pages including executive summary is suggested.

- **Presentations to stakeholders**
- **Evaluation brief and other knowledge products** or participation in knowledge-sharing events, if relevant.

ANNEX II: INTERVIEWED STAKEHOLDERS

UNDP CO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Catherine Phuong • Mr. ABHIJIT Bhattacharjee • Mr. Simon Dennett • Mr. Chanthalath Pongmala • Ms. Souphalack Bounpadith • Ms. Vipapone Aphayvanh
Department of Planning, Ministry of Planning & Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Phonevanh Outhavong, Deputy National Programme Director; DG of DOP/MPI • Mr. Oula Somchanavong Deputy Director General of DOP/MPI • Mrs. Sipaphaphone Chounramany Deputy Director of Division • Thippaphone Phongvichith Deputy Director of Division
Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Planning & Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Sisomboun Ounavong, Director General of the Department of International Cooperation • Mr. Alounsith Manyphol • Mr. Vilakone Soudachanh Official
Department of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Maythong Thammavongsa, Department of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs • Mr. Khamphinh Philakone Director of Division • Ms. Viengdalat Somphet Official
Lao Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Planning & Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Khamphanh Chaleunphonh, Acting Director General • Mr. Kingphet Ardsanavong, Deputy Director General
Center of Development Policy and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Sitthiroth Rasphone, Acting Director General • Ms. Boupvannh Keomixay, Deputy Director of Division
Program Support Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Phanthanousone Khennavong Partnership and Development Cooperation Advisor • Mr. Phanthavong Phoutthavong Senior Programme Coordinator
Champassak Province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Souliga Napheuangvilay Deputy General Director of Planning Department Champassak Province • Mr. Savy Kenephomma Planning Division of Champassak Province • Mrs Telavanh Vice President of Lao Women’s Union Champasack Province • Mr Khamphong International Relation Department of Champassak Province
Vientiane Province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Phoutthasack Keovixay Planning Department Vientiane Province • Miss Souphaphone Planning Department Vientiane Province
Non-profit Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mrs. Phuangkham Chanthavisay Director of Disadvantage Children and Youth Development Association (DCYA), representing Lao CSO Coordination Committee, responsible for RTM
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Morakot Vongxay ex. UNDP Division/MPI • Mr. Ignacio Olivier Cruz EU Coordinator

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Siritharin Chareonsiri mfat Newzeland• Mr Soulinthone Leuangkamsing ADB Laos |
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ANNEX III: TRAINING ACTIVITIES

List of all training activities supported by the programme since 2017

2017

1. NIM Manual training for implementing partners in May 2017
2. Orientation training on use and administration of the LaoInfo Database System for Government officials at both central and provincial levels (Luangprabang, Oudomxay and Sayabouly provinces) in June 2017
3. SDG training for SDG secretariat and SDG focal points from line ministries in August 2017
4. Orientation training on establishment and utilization of the LaoInfo Database System for 6 middle provinces in Bolikhamxay province in 24-30 September 2017
5. Training on SDGs and green growth integration into NSEDP for MPI female officials and Government officials in November and December 2017, respectively.
6. Training on project management for new UNDP supported projects in December 2017.

2018

1. Training on statistics related principles particularly production of the 8th NSEDP and SDG indicators for line ministries in 11-15 June 2018 in Vang Vieng, Vientiane province.

2019

1. Training on management and administration of the statistics database system for 4 Southern provinces (including Champasak, Saravane, Sekong and Attapeu provinces) on 17-23 March 2019 at Champasak University in Champasak province.

2020

1. Training on calculation of statistics indicators necessary for line ministries and 18 provinces to support the development of 9th NSEDP and its M&E framework, during the period from 25 July to 2 August 2020, at Vang Vieng, Vientiane provinces.

ANNEX IV: RESEARCH SUPPORTED BY THE PROGRAMME

List of all surveys and data collection activities conducted at the provincial/local level

2017

1. CDR mission to Savannakhet province to monitor and collect data/info on macroeconomic situation: case study on “export opportunity and impact on international trade balance”, during 23-26 May 2017.
2. CDR missions to monitor and collect data and information on macroeconomic situation especially on the following topics:
 - “Tourism Industry Development of Lao PDR” in Luangprabang during 6-9 August 2017;
 - “Migration of the labour force from the agricultural sector to non-agricultural sectors” in Oudomxay during 22-30 August 2017;
 - “Migration of the labour force from the agricultural sector to non-agricultural sectors” in Luangprabang during 31 August – 10 September 2017;
 - “Migration of the labour force from the agricultural sector to non-agricultural sectors” in Savannakhet during 17-27 September 2017;
3. Provided financial support (DSA) to the Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) Survey Team to conduct data collection for the survey in 18 provinces, during the Q3 (July-September 2017).

2018

1. CDR mission to Savannakhet province to monitor macroeconomic situation on “Impact of Foreign Exchange Rates on Domestic Enterprises”, during 25-28 March 2018.
2. CDR survey in Sekong province to collect data and information for preparation of a research paper on “Child Nutrition” during the Q2 (4-18 June 2018).
3. CDR survey in Khammouane province to collect data and information for preparation of a research paper on “Enabling Environment for Business Operationalization and Production” during the Q2 (24-27 June 2018).

2019

1. CDR missions to Luangnamtha, Luangprabang and Oudomxay provinces during 2-8 March 2019 to monitor and collect data and information on macroeconomic situation especially related to overall development, business operation of provinces, including field visits to Lao-China Railway and Borten Special Economic Zone, etc.
2. CDR survey in Oudomxay and Savannakhet provinces during 19-24 May 2019 and 9-14 June 2019, respectively. The objective of the survey was to collect data and information for preparation of a research paper on “Structure Transformation and Economic Diversification in Lao PDR”.
3. CDR missions to Khammouane, Savannakhet, Sekong and Champasak provinces during 23-29 June 2019 to monitor and collect data and information on macroeconomic situation especially related to overall development, business operation of provinces, including field visits to Pak Song Highland Coffee Production Company in Champasak, livestock (Pig Farm) in Sekong, Sugar Factory in Savannakhet, and Salt Production Factory and SCG Cement Production Factory in Khammouane province, etc.

2020

1. CDR research paper on “Rural Development and Poverty Reduction based on Sustainable Development” to support the implementation of 8th NSEDP, preparation of 9th NSEDP including LDC graduation and SDG achievement. The survey missions were done in Oudomxay, Luangnamtha and Savannakhet provinces in Q2 (April-June) of 2020.
2. CDR missions to Champasak and Savannakhet provinces to monitor and collect data and information on macroeconomic situation: a case study on “Agricultural Production Chains in Southern part of the Lao PDR”. The missions were conducted on 21-27 June 2020.
3. CDR research paper on “Directions and Development to Human Capital Development Policy of the Lao PDR by 2025”. The survey missions were done in Saravane, Sekong and Luangprabang provinces in Q3 (July-September) of 2020.
4. CDR missions to Xiengkhouang and Luangprabang provinces on 2-8 August 2020 to monitor and collect data and information on macroeconomic situation: a case study on “Promotion of Livestock for domestic use and export”. Also, the missions were followed by a case study on “Policies supporting job creation and labour allocation into domestic industries in the Lao PDR by 2025” in Oudomxay and Bokeo provinces during 12-20 August 2020.

ANNEX V: STUDY TOURS AND MISSIONS

No.	Date for request	Description	Name of Travellers
1	2017-05-18	TA of Participation the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development Follow-up 22-25 May 2017 in New York	Dr. Arounyadeth Rasphone, DDG of DIC/MPI
2	2017-07-12	TA of Participation the High Level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) on 10-19 July 2017 in New York	H.E. Mr. Thongphane Savanphet, DM of MOFA
			Mr. Daovy Vongxay, DDG of DIO/MOFA
			Mr. Sengfa Soukhathivong, Technical of DIO/MOFA
			Mr. Sysomphorn Phetdaoheuang, DDG of DIC/MPI
3	2017-07-07	TA of Participation the High-Level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) on 10-19 July 2017 in New York	Mr. Lienthong Souphany, DDG of DOP/MPI
4	2017-08-18	TA of Participation the Regional Dialogue on Strategic Partnership to Meet SDG Commitments 24-25 Aug 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand	H.E. Mr. Kikeo Chanthaboury, DM of MPI
			Mr. Anouparb Vongnorkeo, DG of DIO/MOFA
5	2017-09-12	TA of Participation the General Assembly on 15 Sep-01 Oct 2017 in New York	Mr. Asoka Rasphone, Director of Division of DIO/MOFA
6	2017-09-22	TA of Participation the Round Table Pre-Meeting with Non-Resident Development Partners in Hanoi and Bangkok 02-06 Oct 2017	H.E. Mr. Kikeo Chanthaboury, DM of MPI
			Ms. Sisomboun Ounavong, DG of DIC/MPI
			Mr. Anouparb Vongnorkeo, DG of DIO/MOFA
			Mr. Morakot Vongxay, Director of Division of DIC/MPI
7	2017-09-28	TA of Participation Regional Knowledge Exchange on the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development on 02-04 Oct 2017 at Manila, Philippine	Mr. Santy Songnavong, Deputy Director of Division of DIC/MPI
			Ms. Vongdeuan Siphaseuth, Deputy Director of Division
8	2017-10-11	TA of Participation the National Evaluation Capacities Conference 2017 on 16-20 Oct 2017 in Istanbul, Turkey	H.E. Mr. Kikeo Chanthaboury, DM of MPI
			Ms. Sisavanh Diravong, Deputy Director of Division of DOP/MPI
			Mr. Morakot Vongxay, Director of Division of DIC/MPI
			Mr. Asoka Rasphone, Director of Division of DIO/MOFA
9	2017-10-03	TA of Participation of the 7th Session of the ASEAN Community Statistical System (ACSS) Committee on 11-13 October 2017 in Manila, Philippines	Ms. Sulaphanh Phimpaphongsavath, DDG of LSB/MPI
			Ms. Korrakoon Silaphet, Deputy Director of Division of LSB/MPI
10	2017-11-13	TA of Countesy visit to Champasak Governor for the preparation of the 2017 RTIM in Pakse, Champasak province, 14 Nov 2017	Ms. Sisomboun Ounavong, DG of DIC/MPI

