COMBINED OUTPUT & OUTCOME EVALUATION

VOLUME 5

FINAL REVIEW OF

GPAR SEKONG PROJECT

GOVERNANCE & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM

SUPPORT FOR BETTER SERVICE DELIVERY

LAO PEOPLE’S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

10th January 2010

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The evaluation team thanks all those who provided practical support before, during and after the mission. The team was warmly received wherever it went. It conveys special thanks to the Project Support Unit staff, the Project Managers and Vice Governors of the Provinces and Districts for their time and generosity. Thanks to Dirk Wagener, Assistant Resident Representative and Thilaphong Oudomsine, Programme Specialist for the United Nations Capital Development Fund, for their logistical and practical support during the mission. The team benefited very substantially from the insights of Jens Gnaur, advisor to GPAR SBSD, on the Human Resource and Institution Reorganisation outputs of the provinces and SBSD, for which we are grateful.

# ACRONYMS AND LAOTIAN TERMS

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ADSF | Agricultural Development Support Fund |
| AWP | Annual Workplan |
| CB/SD | Capacity building/service delivery |
| CCOP | Central Committee for Organisation and Personnel |
| CPAP | Country Programme Action Plan |
| CPC | Committee for Planning and Cooperation |
| CSF | Coordination Support Facility |
| DCOP | District Committee for Organisation and Personnel |
| DDC’s | District Development Committees |
| DDF | District Development Fund |
| DDT’s | District Development Teams |
| DoF | Department of Finance |
| DIAP | District Annual Investment Plan |
| DPACS | Department of Public Administration and Civil Service |
| DPC | District Planning Committee |
| DPI | Department of Planning and Investment |
| DPT | District Planning Team |
| DSEDP | District Socio-Economic Development Plan |
| ESSS | Enhance Salary Scale System |
| GoL | Government of Lao PDR |
| GPAR | Governance, Public Administration Reform Programme |
| GPAR SBSD | Governance, Public Administration Reform Support for Better Service Delivery |
| GPAR LP | Governance, Public Administration Reform Programme, Luang Praban Province |
| GPAR SK | Governance, Public Administration Reform Programme, Sekong Province |
| GPAR SP | Governance, Public Administration Reform and Decentralised Service Delivery Project |
| GPAR XK | Governance, Public Administration Reform Programme, Xieng Khouang Province |
| HRD | Human Resource Development |
| HRM | Human Resource Management |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IRDO | Integrated Rural Development Office |
| ISD | Infrastructure Service Delivery |
| JICA | Japan International Cooperation Agency |
| KB | Kumban |
| Kumban | A number of villages clustered together for planning purposes |
| Lao PDR & LPDR | Lao People’s Democratic Republic |
| LBRDPR | Leading Board for Rural Development and Poverty Reduction |
| LDP | Local Development Programme |
| LED | Local Economic Development |
| LWU | Lao Women’s Union |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MIS | Management Information System |
| MIS-LG | Management Information System – Local Government |
| MPI | Ministry of Planning and Investment |
| MoF | Ministry of Finance |
| MTR | Mid-Term Review |
| Naiban | Village chief |
| NAPPA | National Academy of Politics and Public Administration |
| NOSPA | National Organization for the Study of Politics and Administration |
| NCSMS | National Civil Service Management Strategy |
| NGPES | National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy |
| NSEDP | Sixth National Socio-Economic Development Plan |
| NPD | National Project Director |
| NPM | National Project Manager |
| OoG | Office of the Governor |
| OD Manual | Organizational Development Manual |
| ODS | One Door Service/One Door System |
| O&M | Operations and Maintenance |
| PACSA | Public Administration & Civil Service Authority |
| PCOP | Provincial Committee for Organisation and Personnel |
| PCAP | Project for Capacity Building for Public Investment Plan |
| PD | Project Document |
| PEM | Public Expenditure Management |
| PFM | Public Finance Management |
| PEMSP | Public Expenditure Management Support Programme |
| PSEDP | Provincial Socio-Economic Development Plan |
| PSU | Project Support Unit |
| PIP-FPR | Public Investment Plan – Fund for Poverty Reduction |
| PIMS | Personnel Information Management System |
| PLC | Project Leading Committee (in Saravane province) |
| PMO | Prime Minister’s Office |
| PO | Programme Officer |
| POP | Project Operational Plan |
| PRF | Poverty Reduction Fund |
| PST | Project Support Team |
| ROAR | Results Oriented Annual Reporting |
| SBSD | Support for Better Service Delivery |
| SDC | Swiss Development Cooperation |
| SDF | Service Delivery Fund |
| SDIS | Service Delivery Information System |
| SEDP | Socio-Economic Development Plan |
| Sida | Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency |
| SMART | Specific, Accurate, Measurable and Timed |
| SNV | Dutch Development Cooperation |
| SoG | Secretariat of Government |
| TA | Technical Advisor |
| TDF | Training and Development Framework |
| UNCDF | United Nations Capital Development Fund |
| UNDAF | United National Development Assistance Framework |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNV | United Nations Volunteers |
| WB | World Bank |
| WREO | Water Resources and Environmental Office |

[ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 2](#_Toc250901325)

[ACRONYMS AND LAOTIAN TERMS 3](#_Toc250901326)

[EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 7](#_Toc250901327)

[1. Background on the projects 7](#_Toc250901328)

[2. The country context 7](#_Toc250901329)

[3. The GPAR programme 8](#_Toc250901330)

[4. The terms of reference 8](#_Toc250901331)

[5. Evaluation approach 9](#_Toc250901332)

[6. Findings on GPAR SK 9](#_Toc250901333)

[7. Recommendations 10](#_Toc250901334)

[CHAPTER 1. Project design, approach & appropriateness 11](#_Toc250901335)

[1.1 The logical framework 11](#_Toc250901336)

[1.2 The core problem 12](#_Toc250901337)

[1.3 The core hypothesis 12](#_Toc250901338)

[1.4 The intended outputs and outcome 12](#_Toc250901339)

[CHAPTER 2. Financial inputs and expenditure 13](#_Toc250901340)

[CHAPTER 3. Output 1. Improved oversight & capacity in OoG & selected pilot offices 16](#_Toc250901341)

[3.1 Objective 16](#_Toc250901342)

[3.2 Achievements 16](#_Toc250901343)

[3.3 Challenges 17](#_Toc250901344)

[3.4 Recommendations 18](#_Toc250901345)

[CHAPTER 4. Output 2. Enhanced planning & coordination capacity in districts 19](#_Toc250901346)

[4.1 Objective 19](#_Toc250901347)

[4.2 Achievements 19](#_Toc250901348)

[4.3 Challenges 20](#_Toc250901349)

[4.4 Recommendations 20](#_Toc250901350)

[CHAPTER 5. Output 3. Capacities of village & Kumban leadership 22](#_Toc250901351)

[5.1 Objective 22](#_Toc250901352)

[5.2 Achievements 22](#_Toc250901353)

[5.3 Challenges 23](#_Toc250901354)

[5.4 Recommendations 24](#_Toc250901355)

[CHAPTER 6. Output 4. National policy makers informed of Sekong experience 25](#_Toc250901356)

[6.1 Objectives 25](#_Toc250901357)

[6.2 Achievements 25](#_Toc250901358)

[6.3 Challenges 25](#_Toc250901359)

[6.4 Recommendations 25](#_Toc250901360)

[CHAPTER 7. Gender 26](#_Toc250901361)

[7.1 Achievements 26](#_Toc250901362)

[7.2 Challenges/opportunities 26](#_Toc250901363)

[7.3 Recommendation 27](#_Toc250901364)

[CHAPTER 8. Overall assessment and outcome 28](#_Toc250901365)

[8.1 Intended outcome 28](#_Toc250901366)

[8.2 Findings: overall assessment 28](#_Toc250901367)

[8.3 Findings against evaluation hypothesis 29](#_Toc250901368)

[CHAPTER 9. Factors affecting outcome 31](#_Toc250901369)

[CHAPTER 10. Management 32](#_Toc250901370)

[10.1 Achievements 32](#_Toc250901371)

[10.2 Challenges 32](#_Toc250901372)

[10.3 Recommendations 32](#_Toc250901373)

[CHAPTER 11. Overall recommendations for a possible future phase of the project 33](#_Toc250901374)

[CHAPTER 12. Lessons 33](#_Toc250901375)

[ANNEX (See separate attachment) 33](#_Toc250901376)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1. Background on the projects

This Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the Governance Public Administration Reform Sekong Province Project (GPAR SK) is Volume 5 of a series of 6 evaluation reports.

In addition to this report, these six comprise an Overall Report on the GPAR Projects, Final Reviews of the Luang Prabang Project (GPAR LP) and Xieng Khouang Project, Mid-Term Reviews of the Sekong Project (GPAR SK), the GPAR Support for Better Service Delivery (GPAR SBSD) Project and the Saravane Project (GPAR SP), and a post MTR follow-up review of the GPAR Saravane Project (GPAR SP). These reviews were carried out between the 24th June and 5th August 2009. Two of the team members undertook a MTR of the GPAR (SP) Project in November and December 2008 as a separate exercise, the report of which constitutes a 7th volume in this series.

The present report should be read in conjunction with Volume 1, the Overall Report on the GPAR Projects, which provides details on the country context, GPAR programme, terms of reference and evaluation approach adopted for all the projects.

## 2. The country context

Details of the country context are provided in Chapter 2 of Volume 1, Overall Report on GPAR Projects.

In brief, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR), established in 1975, has a multi-ethnic population of around five and a half million people and a GDP per capita around US$ 330 per annum.

The government’s poverty reduction objectives are laid out in the Sixth National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) of 2006, which sets poverty reduction and equitable economic growth targets consistent with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Section D of the NSEDP expresses a commitment to good governance in four areas: Public Service Improvement, People’s Participation, the Rule of Law and Sound Fiscal Management.

The government has set out its decentralisation intentions in Decree No. 01/PM of 2000, which is an instruction of the Prime Minister to build the provinces into strategic units, districts into budget-planning units and villages into implementation units.

## 3. The GPAR programme

Details of the GPAR programmes are provided in Chapter 2 of Volume 1, Overall Report on GPAR Projects.

In brief, the Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAR) programme assists the government to develop and implement its decentralization strategy. It is situated within the Public Administration and Civil Service Authority (PACSA), a sub-ministry within the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) whose mandate is to drive civil service reform. PACSA is the UNDP’s main government partner in promoting governance reform in Lao PDR.

The intended outputs of the GPAR projects are strengthened human, institutional and financial capacities in the public administration, and enhanced monitoring and oversight capacity. The latter output is intended to inform national reform by channelling lessons learned from the project into national policy debate. The intended outcome of all the projects is strengthened capacity of the national and local public administration to deliver pro-poor services and promote equitable economic growth.

The GPAR SK project responds directly to the CPAP Outcome 8, namely, “Increased efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of the public administration at both central and local levels” through its outputs, notably “Improved oversight function and enhanced management capacity of OoG and selected pilot offices”, “Improved planning and coordination capacity at district level” and “Enhanced capacities of village and Kumban leadership”.

Its outcome, which is “Improved access to public services for the multi ethnic people of Sekong”, responds directly to the CPAP 1 outcome on “Social services and environmental sustainability”.

The GPAR SK project outputs respond directly to the NSEDP VII Thematic and Cross-Cutting Areas, section D Governance, including the sub-sections on public service improvement, people’s participation and sound financial management. Its outcome responds directly to NSEDP VIII Sector and Regional Development, notably the sub-sections dealing with rural development, education, health and infrastructure.

## 4. The terms of reference

The terms of reference of the evaluation are set out in detail in Chapter 2 of Volume 1, Overall Report on GPAR projects. In brief, the terms of reference call for an assessment of the projects’ outputs and outcomes and their contribution to UNDAF outcomes, in particular CPAP outcome 8:

***“Increased efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of the public administration at both central and local levels”.***

The terms of reference also call for assessment of its contributions to other CPAP outcomes and to the NSEDP.

## 5. Evaluation approach

The team’s approach was to develop a hypothesis based on pre-mission reading of the documents and on its prior local knowledge. This hypothesis was then tested during the field work against emerging findings.

The team engaged the parties involved in the GPAR national and provincial projects in a structured dialogue in which the team asked questions about project performance, presented evolving findings and recommendations and elicited stakeholder response. In Sekong it interacted with 137 people, of whom 33% were women. The relatively high number of women results mainly from the attendance of quite large numbers of women in the community meetings.

The team developed quantitative measures of key variables, notably on capacity building and service delivery improvements, and applied these to each output to obtain a composite measure enabling a comparison of the projects. An explanation of these measures is provided in Annex 2.

## 6. Findings on GPAR SK

Overall, the project has made a fairly slow start and achievements in terms of outputs have been modest although the Project Management and Support Team are capable and committed, working well as a team and have good relationships with the OoG and line departments.

Part of the reason for the slow start relates to the complexity of the project document and the difficulty of the team interpreting it and prioritising actions for which it is able to achieve results.

The difficulties of access to remote areas and language barriers resulting from the multi-ethnic character of the province have also created obstacles to rapid implementation.

The project has had the support of the International Coordinator who is based 70% of his time in Saravane and 30% in Sekong, an arrangement that has not been ideal in terms of regular, on the spot, back-up. The Project has had the full support of three United Nations Volunteers whose main focus has been on enhancing the capacities of Kumban and village leadership through the village information systems, an output of the project in which there has been progress.

The project has done substantial preparatory work and training at the provincial, district and at the village level and this has started to build capacity for improved service delivery, but actual service delivery improvements are not yet strongly evident.

A remaining challenge is to work through the objectives of the Project with the line departments in the province or districts so as to ensure greater alignment of project and departmental objectives.

## 7. Recommendations

The team has provided recommendations for each output in the body of the report. Here we report only on the overall recommendations.

The project document should be reviewed and overlaps removed to make it more coherent and simpler to implement activities and track progress.

Having identified priority areas and worked through the project aims internally, the project team should engage in a dialogue with its partners in the province and districts to establish areas of support in which the project’s and line departments’ objectives are mutually achieved.

The project should apply a strategic focus to its activities that will lead more directly to the project outcome. This means focusing on capacity building activities that are more directly linked to the intended service delivery outcome.

The International Coordinator in Saravane should spend more time in Sekong to help the Project Manger and team redefine and focus activities to these ends.

# CHAPTER 1. Project design, approach & appropriateness

## 1.1 The logical framework

Figure 1 illustrates the Sekong logical framework. Though simple in its main outlines, with the first output focussing reform in the reform in pilot offices of the OoG, the second on planning capacity at the district level and the third with the capacities of village and Kumban (KB) leadership, a closer examination shows that each of these outputs contains further sub-outputs which are not linked by a clear logic, making the design difficult to implement in practice.

A positive feature of the design is that capacity building outputs build towards a service delivery outcome, which avoids the conflation of outputs and outcomes that is a feature of the other GPAR provincial projects.

Figure 1. Sekong logical framework



Source: Reconstructed from the Sekong results and resources framework in the project document.

## 1.2 The core problem

The core problem which the Sekong Project aims to address is weak capacities for oversight and management of service provision at the provincial level, weak capacities for planning and coordinating service delivery at the district level and weak capacities in the leadership of the Kumbans and villages for implementation of these services.[[1]](#footnote-2)

## 1.3 The core hypothesis

The core hypothesis is that strengthening these capacities at provincial, district, Kumban and village level, the access of the poor to services will improve.

## 1.4 The intended outputs and outcome

The improvements expected from the project’s outputs are:

* Oversight and management capacity in the OoG
* Planning & coordination capacity in the districts
* Enhanced capacities of Kumban leadership
* National policy makers informed of Sekong experience

The expected outcome is improved access to public services for the multi ethnic people of Sekong.[[2]](#footnote-3)

# CHAPTER 2. Financial inputs and expenditure

Figure 2 shows donor funding sources, and Figure 3 shows project expenditure.

The main source of funding is the UNDP, followed by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV), both providing technical and financial assistance, and the UNCDF, providing the Development Fund (DDF).

Figure 2. Donor funding 2007-2009



Note in figure 3 overleaf that expenditure on the PSU is the highest single item and that expenditure on TA takes a very substantial part of total expenditure.

Figure 3. Project Expenditure 2006-2008

Figure 4, overleaf, presents expenditure on PSUs as a percentage of total project expenditure. Note that the GPAR SK project has the highest ratio. This reflects the fact that the project began only in 2007, so that start up costs outweigh implementation costs, and the fact that DDF funding has not yet flowed through on a substantial scale.

Figure 4. Expenditure on PSU as a % of total project expenditure



# 

# CHAPTER 3. Output 1. Improved oversight & capacity in OoG & selected pilot offices

## 3.1 Objective

This output seeks to strengthen the oversight function and enhance the management capacity of the OoG and selected pilot offices (namely PCOP, DPI and DoF). This includes the improvement of procedures and structure of the offices and the building of human capacity to strengthen effectiveness and efficiency which should result in better service delivery.

The activities under this output includes the introduction of ESSS and PIMS, the restructuring and reorganization of OoG and pilot offices, the improved oversight mechanism, and the delivery of training.

## 3.2 Achievements

With support from the UNDP International advisor, the functional analysis has been done for OoG and DPI. The analysis of OoG office has been approved by the governor and has been implemented. Previously the OoG had three units with incoherently organised functions and responsibilities. It now has five units with clear functions and responsibilities. The functions and roles of each unit, including the responsibilities of staff, are now clearly defined, and have thus resulted in improved efficiency.

The report on the functional analysis has been submitted to DPI and the Project is awaiting the department’s response. The DPI has to obtain approval from its national counterpart, MPI, before it can adopt any recommendation on reorganizing the office.

Job descriptions have been done and updated for the OoG and the mass organization offices. Core HR staff from PCOP received TOT training on Job description writing, and they then trained the HR staff from all provincial and district offices. These HR staff are responsible for writing or updating job descriptions in their offices and submitting the proposed job descriptions to PCOP and to their national counterpart for certification and approval.

For all offices under the purview of OoG (mass organization offices), job descriptions have been approved by the governor and put into practice. While for the vertical line departments, job descriptions have not yet been implemented, and are awaiting comment and approval from their counterparts in Vientiane.

Even though the Personnel Information System (PIMS) software is not ready, with financial support from the project, a large training exercise on PIMS implementation has been delivered to relevant staff from all provincial and district offices. Personal data have already been collected and some data exists in the form of hard copies for insertion into PIMS when the software is ready.

While awaiting PIMS, PCOP also conducted training on civil service management for all offices at provincial and district levels. This training mainly focuses on HR and civil servant management, such as the recruitment of new staff, the promotion of staff into higher grades and steps - salary increases, re-positioning and rotation of staff, and the implementation of social benefits.

This initiative is showing promising results. Where previously PCOP had to do these things for all offices by themselves, now the HR staff at each office will do it and submit their proposals to PCOP for approval. This makes the system more acceptable and transparent.

In addition to office reorganization, the project provided office management training to managers and key staff of pilot and other offices, a total of 43 people, of whom 10 were women. This training focuses on general office management, good working practice and filing systems. It has significantly improved office effectiveness.

English and computer training were conducted by Department of Education. A total of 146 people, of whom 48 were women, from provincial and district offices have had English language training at different levels (elementary, intermediate, and advanced), and in the basic use of computers, notably MS Office. The results of these activities are very visible. Trained staff express a high level of appreciation for the training and report that they are now able to use computers in writing their reports and other work. The team was informed that there is still a large demand of such training.

Besides the English and basic computer training implemented by DoE, a number of trainings exercises support other project initiatives. One example is Photoshop and news writing. Another is the editing for Sekong Today, a magazine. An example is financial training on the National Accounting System (NAS). The Project team reported that revenue collected in the province increasing because of the strengthened auditing capacity of staff in relation to the private sector.

## 3.3 Challenges

The first challenge is the functional analysis at DPI. At the time of the mission it has not been approved. This was due to the fact that DPI was still waiting for its national counterpart’s comments. The functional analysis in the province was initiated by the project (International Advisor) without coordination with national level (neither PACSA nor line ministry). This omission will make it difficult for functional analysis that has been undertaken to be accepted and approved by the line ministries. In this respect, it differs from the functional analyses done with the OoG and mass organization offices, which the Governor has the power to approve.

Another challenge relates to the PIMS training. Given the fact that PIMS software is not yet ready and there is the possibility that the whole system may be changed, the training on PIMS may turn out to be fruitless.

The team visited the computer training center of the province operated by DoE. The center has relatively few computers, and these appear to be quite old and do not have headsets and other necessary ancillary equipment like a LCD projector. In order to deliver good training both in quantity and quality, there is a need to upgrade both staff capacity and equipment in this center.

The functional analysis at DoF (Department of Finance) was not done by the time of the mission, but was planned to be implement during the fourth quarter of 2009. In addition, an organization chart had been proposed for the DoF, but this needed to be reviewed with the Project Coordination Specialist so that a work shop with them could be organised.

## 3.4 Recommendations

In Cooperation with national level, the project should complete the office reorganization initiative in DPI and DoF using the new manual on functional analysis and organizational development developed by PACSA.

As the One Door Service has proved its usefulness in other places, the project should continue to support this center and make it operational, starting with the simple services such as marriage, birth and death registration and referral services and later adding referrals and information on other services and on provincial finances.

Regarding the computer and English training, the project should help upgrade the computer training center under DoE, make it a computer and English training center of the province and provide it with improved hardware and software.

# CHAPTER 4. Output 2. Enhanced planning & coordination capacity in districts

## 4.1 Objective

This output sought to enhance the district administration’s planning and coordination capacity and to improve citizen access to better service delivery information in the local language.

To this end it focused on implementing the District Development Fund (DDF)[[3]](#footnote-4) which provides funding for districts to plan and implement their own capital investments, village mapping initiatives and some public information initiatives.

To ensure the sustainability of the achievements of the project, this output also experimented with a scholarship fund for excellent students from the districts for further training. This fund provided the project with an opportunity for preferential selection of excellent ethnic students that will provide the districts with a greater base of trained local people as a pool for future improved public services.

## 4.2 Achievements

Mapping has created a basis for boundary identification by villagers and an opportunity exists to use these maps for more effective village and Kumban level planning.

Supported by the UNV Volunteers, substantial progress has been made in building the capacity of Kumban and village leaders through the introduction of information systems. In terms of information services, billboards have been established with relevant demographic and service delivery information put up on the boards.

Substantial preparatory work has been done for community radio including mobilising the community volunteers and training radio programme developers and announcers. High expectations have been raised in the community. The project has also supported the production of Sekong Today magazine.As for the DDF, the SBSD formed a provincial support team which has received training and mentoring visits from the SBSD national staff. Training in budgeting and planning took place in 2008 in two districts and in 2009 in three districts. This training included provincial staff.

The SBSD also performed several technical visits to provide on the job training in procurement and financial management.

Some DDF construction work has started in 2 districts. An official from GPAR SBSD is providing back-stopping to districts on DDF.

The project has provided scholarships to 30 students, including 10 women from 7 ethnic groups, and efforts have been made to ensure that the scholars’ education prepares them to fill gaps in expertise needed by the districts.

## 4.3 Challenges

In terms of information services, the team noted that the magazine appears to be pitched to government officials rather than ordinary citizens.

The UNDP procurement procedures are delaying the setting up of the radio stations, which is slowing down the momentum of implementation.

The implementation of DDF has been slowed down by late release of DDF funds (funding for 2008 projects in April 2009). There is uncertainly amongst district staff on how to complete DDF documentation. The DDF provincial backstopping team has not been fully prepared to play their role and key committees, e.g. the DPC are not fully functional.

For the scholarship fund the key challenge is that even though the project has a goal to ensure equal opportunity between male and female candidates, the pool of eligible women is small.

## 4.4 Recommendations

In order to reap the full benefits of the mapping experiments, it is important to complete the implementation of the mapping exercise and provide training in the use of maps for village level planning.

For the information services the team suggests that in place of the magazine, production of simple leaflets providing useful information on health, education, agriculture and other subjects for villagers could be more beneficial for village communities.

While the bill boards contain a space for a village map and another space for posters and other relevant activities, use of bill boards could be improved by pinning up leaflets on essential village services that reflect the priorities of the NSEDP. Examples of such services could be in agriculture, education and health. The bill boards could even be used to pin up citizen responses to radio programmes once the radio becomes operational.

Apart from suggestion boxes, there is also need to make provision for citizen feedback on the radio programme content. For example, this could be in a form of direct call-in programmes or special programmes that would air written responses and suggestions According to the project staff this has already been conceptualised with stakeholders and community and it should come into effect upon the full implementation of the community radio. This has the potential of improving the quality of the radio programmes and enhancing participation of villagers in the radio programme

For the scholarship fund, to enlarge the pool of eligible female candidates, specific measures should be taken to enrol girls at both primary and secondary level. One way of doing this would be to create an incentive fund to support girls’ education. A mechanism should be introduced to encourage the candidates to return to take up work in the district. It would also be important to ensure that there are positions available for them in the province.

To enhance the effectiveness of DDF implementation, the team recommends that there is need to give adequate training to all relevant actors involved in the DDF process, and to provide for an enlarged role of provincial staff in backstopping district activities.

# CHAPTER 5. Output 3. Capacities of village & Kumban leadership

## 5.1 Objective

This output aims to strengthen the capacity of Naibans (village chiefs), especially the non-Lao speaking Naibans, and the capacity of Kumban leaders so that they can manage their villages and Kumbans more effectively. It is intended to help motivate the community to engage in its own development. The goals of this output were to provide Naiban training, including simplified training for non-Lao speakers, the training for Kumban leaders, the development of village statistics books, and the training of village volunteers.

## 5.2 Achievements

The first achievement is the Naiban training itself. This activity was implemented by local NAPPA (National Academy of Politics and Public Administration), previously known as NOSPA (National Organization for the Study of Politics and Administration), with financial support from the project.

So far, 247 potential Naibans, including 65 women, from Thateng and Lamam districts have been trained, all of whom are Lao speakers. These trainees will become Naibans in future. The training course lasts 20 days and there are various subjects in this training such as village administration, rules of law, finance, roles and responsibilities of mass organizations at village level and security issues.

All the Naiban trainees were selected by their own community in accordance with criteria specified in the local administration law. However, due to the time constraint the team was unable to assess the capacity of these trainees. The project has not yet conducted an assessment to see how many trained aspirant Naibans have actually become Naibans in practice, and how many of them are women.

The Kumban leadership training is implemented by the Office of Integrated Rural Development. With financial support from the project, the training for Kumban leaders has been delivered to all 28 Kumbans in the province. The training aims to upgrade the capacity of Kumban leaders. There were 83 participants including 7 women. A two day assessment workshop for such training was also organized to evaluate the performance of those trained as Kumban leaders. There were 69 participants including 9 women. The results show that the Kumban leaders can now produce the monthly and quarterly planning reports.

A the study tour for these Kumban leaders to Vapi and Laongam districts in Saravane Province was also organized with 22 participants including 6 women. This study tour aimed at learning lessons on agricultural production, for example improved rice cultivation, high quality coffee plantation, and inter-cropping (cassava and peanuts).

In addition, training took place on the dissemination of laws conducted by the Department of Justice, with the aim of creating crime free villages. This training was delivered to over 286 participants, including 50 women.

The other achievement in the area of capacity building was the training of village statistics volunteers. So far, 332 statistics volunteers, including 88 women, in 91 villages were selected and trained. After their training, the village volunteers started collecting data on village/household profiles and on poverty. With financial support from the project and input from village volunteers, DPI has produced 504 village statistic books for 68 villages. These books are perceived to be a valuable resource for monitoring and planning for the village development.

## 5.3 Challenges

The first challenge is that Naiban training curriculum for non-Lao speakers has not been finalized and therefore non-Lao speaking Naiban from the two poorest districts of Kalum and Dakchung have not yet been trained.

The Local NOPPA has limited capacity for training delivery, even though it is getting the trainers from line departments to help teach in their respective areas. The officials concerned are not always available or not available full time for the training implemented by NOPPA.

Not all candidates selected for Naiban training then become Naibans and not all current Naibans receive training. The current Naiban training is delivered for aspirant Naibans, who are then candidates for Naiban election. This means that there is a risk that they will not be elected by their villagers.

The project has not yet conducted the assessment to see how many trained persons have actually become Naibans. However, the two villages visited by the team reported that none of current Naibans in their villages had received training. On the other hand, NAPPA reported that out of the 247 persons trained there were 64 (26%) were serving as Naibans at the time of the training. Eight of the Naibans trained were females, namely 3% of the total.

Regarding the village statistics books, only some villages, 91 out of a total of 239, and some districts, 2 out of 4, have so far received training, and only 68 villages have village statistic books. The books are currently used for reporting purpose only. They have not, as yet, been fully utilized as the tools for planning or fund raising from donors.

## 5.4 Recommendations

The project should continue to support NOPPA and DoE to finalise the non-Lao Naiban training curriculum. It should then be used for the upcoming training for non-Lao speaking Naiban from the two districts of Kalum and Dakchung.

Given that there is no written language for these ethnic groups, the curriculum could be simple in content with pictures or symbols replacing words, where possible. During the training sessions interpretation should be provided when these are needed.

The project should undertake a review of the current Naiban training to count the number of trainees who have actually become Naibans and assess their post-training performance. This is to ensure that, in future, the objective of the training is achieved and the efforts are not wasted on training people who do not take up these positions thereafter. A way to reduce the risk of trainees not becoming Naibans after training is to do the training after they have been elected or appointed.

Given that its capacity is very limited, NOPPA should train district officials to do Naiban training in their respective districts, giving priority to those trainers who can speak ethnic languages.

Regarding the village statistics, the project should extend the system to fully cover all villages and districts. The village statistic books and village volunteer idea is a very valuable tool for village planning and development.

The project should carefully explore the results and take advantage of the successes of this initiative. In addition to reporting, the statistics should be used together with mapping to deepen village planning and develop and submit project proposals for funding to donors.

# CHAPTER 6. Output 4. National policy makers informed of Sekong experience

## 6.1 Objectives

The aim of output 4 was to ensure that national policy makers are informed of the Sekong experience.

## 6.2 Achievements

The GPAR Sekong project has held regular quarterly meetings and has recorded lessons learned in the mandatory quarterly and annual reports.

GPAR Project has no M&E staff. However, after every release of its budget to stakeholders, someone is assigned from the Project to go in the field to monitor progress. For the monitoring of the DDF, the Governor has agreed to assign a provincial evaluation team of three, one form the OoG, one from the DPI and one from the DoF.

## 6.3 Challenges

Notwithstanding the arrangements made by the Governor, there is no formal project M&E system in place, making it difficult to accurately track project progress. There project does not involve itself in a process of reflection on its experience that enables it to continuously adjust and innovate.

## 6.4 Recommendations

Building on the governor’s M&E initiative, the project should install an effective M&E system to enable close tracking of progress.

It should institute the practice of conscious reflection within the project to enable continuous adjustment & innovation to improve performance. It should share lessons from experience regularly with other provinces and national actors, going beyond the current mandatory quarterly and annual reporting which amounts essentially to a description of progress rather than a reflection on what is working, what is not working, how to draw the lessons and adapt accordingly.

# CHAPTER 7. Gender

Gender is generally treated as a crosscutting issue in all GPAR projects. Gender issues arise where the prevailing social, cultural, political and economic circumstances disadvantage one sex. In Laos as many other countries, there is documented evidence that women are more disadvantaged in many areas in relation to men. In the context of a project, gender issues may arise and may affect all stages and components of a project. Thus if a decision is taken to treat gender as a cross cutting issue, the expectation is that gender activities must be taken into account in all stages and should reflect in all the components of the project. It is also expected that this process should be informed by an analysis that reveals how gender issues arise and affect each project component.

## 7.1 Achievements

The project is making efforts to provide gender disaggregated data for all its training activities. Basically gender-disaggregated data makes it possible to portray, analyze, study and assess social phenomena from a gender perspective. This makes it possible to assess the status and effect on both men and women of a programme's activities. Such data makes clear through concrete figures whether or not a particular policy or activity is gender biased or not

The project has also supported LWU and PCAW to conduct gender awareness training at provincial, district and village level. In particular it has supported the orientation on roles of, organization, and activities of Lao National Commission for the Advancement of Women to the provincial and district staff, supported training to provincial trainers of the Lao National Commission for The Advancement of Women in VTE, supported Lao Women’s Union’s orientation on Gender, and has supported capacity development of Lao Women Union Organization at village and Kumban levels. Evidence from contributions of LWU members who were part of district consultations in Thateng demonstrated a great deal of conceptual clarity of gender analysis and a clear articulation of gender issues evident in the Sekong Province.

## 7.2 Challenges/opportunities

Unlike the case of Xieng Khoung Province, there was no prior gender assessment to guide the development of an action plan in Sekong.

Consequently there is no coherent plan on gender mainstreaming in all project activities beyond supporting LWU and PCAW. However, the demonstrated expertise from the two organisations- LWU & PCAW - can be utilised to bring gender as a cross cutting issue into all components of the GPAR Sekong project in a more practical way.

While the project is making an effort to collect gender disaggregated data as an important indication of the degree of disparities that exist, there is no indication that it is being analysed and effectively utilised to inform future programming of suitable gender related activities or interventions to deal with the observed disparities, let alone the monitoring of such initiatives.

## 7.3 Recommendation

In the short run it is important for the project not only to support LWU and PCAW in their awareness and organisational building initiatives but to involve them on how to bring in gender as a cross cutting issue in into the GPAR SK project work plan in a practical way and how to monitor its implementation.

For the future it is important for the UNDP and its main partner PACSA to draw from the varied experiences that all the GPAR projects have had with regard to gender as a cross cutting issue and develop a simple gender tool/manual that should provide practical guidance to all GPAR projects on how to handle gender as a cross cutting issue in project activities.

While we acknowledge that the current setup is that each project is an independent project, the development of this guide would be more effective if centrally coordinated. This could be part of the current effort by the GPAR SBSD which is currently undertaking some work through a consultant to elaborate gender in a governance strategy.

GPAR and Provincial staff need to have an orientation on the analysis and use of gender disaggregated data in order to improve planning, targeting and monitoring of gender related project activities.

# CHAPTER 8. Overall assessment and outcome

## 8.1 Intended outcome

The intended outcome of the SK Project is that GPAR Sekong government institutions have reduced the poverty levels of its people by improving access to public services.

## 8.2 Findings: overall assessment

Table 1, overleaf, provides a summary of the quantitative assessment of the project undertaken by the team against each output. Details of the assessment methodology are set out in Annex 2.

Most progress has been made with the strengthening of the management capacity of the OoG and pilot offices. Less progress has been made with the other outputs, but the evidence collected by the team indicates that the project is moving forward in these areas.

Table 1. GPAR SK Quantitative assessment



Source: Team estimates. See definition of measures used. Note: In the case of Sekong, but not the other provinces, the project document outcome is access to improved service delivery. The outcome for the other provinces and for SBSD is a capacity building outcome.

In short, the project has done substantial preparatory work and training at the provincial, district and at the village level and this has started to build capacity for improved service delivery, but actual service delivery improvements are not as yet evident.

## 8.3 Findings against evaluation hypothesis

Figure 5 shows the team’s findings for the final reviews against the evaluation hypothesis. Details of the methodology used for this evaluation are provided in Chapter 2 of the Overall Report on GPAR projects.

It can be seen that the team’s findings place the project close to its hypothesised location.

Capacity has been built up by the project, particularly in the area of OoG management, but the project has a considerable way to go, particularly in showing service delivery improvement results.

Figure 5. Findings against evaluation hypothesis



# CHAPTER 9. Factors affecting outcome

The project design, though simple in its main outlines, has a complex set of sub-outputs the causal logic of which is difficult to interpret, making implementation difficult.

A further factor accounting for the slow start in Sekong is that it does not have a resident TA. The International Coordinator based in Saravane officially gives 30% of his time to the project, though it was reported that he allocates a considerably larger proportion of his time there in practice.

Attempting to implement a project that has a specific focus on improving the circumstances of “multi-ethnic” groups is particularly challenging when minority languages are not officially recognised and are not set down in written form. This makes it difficult, for example, to produce manuals specifically targeted to these groups.

The geographical terrain of Sekong makes remoter communities difficult to access, especially in the monsoon season.

# CHAPTER 10. Management

## 10.1 Achievements

The team is cohesive, capable, committed and working hard to implement project activities. Project staff meetings are being held regularly.

Good working relationships have been established with line departments in the province and the district visited by the team.

## 10.2 Challenges

The team is focusing hard on its immediate activities, while losing sight of the goals set down for the outputs and the service delivery outcome of the project. This is a tendency found in many projects during their early stages and it can be expected that this will change, given the capability and commitment of the team.

Reporting does not show how activities are related to the project goals and is misleading in that it measures progress against the target for an activity during the reporting time frame, rather than progress against output goals since the beginning of the project. This gives the impression that more has been achieved than is actually the case.

The PSU and management do not sufficiently think through how line department activities can be made to relate to the objectives of the project, which requires more intense dialogue with the line departments concerned. The project staff are not thinking through which of the project’s activities will further goals of the project most effectively, and should be prioritized.

## 10.3 Recommendations

More intense dialogue is needed between project staff and partner line departments over their mutual objectives and how align these.

The project should be more strategic about which activities will promote the project objectives and should thus be supported and followed.

# CHAPTER 11. Overall recommendations for a possible future phase of the project

Detailed recommendations are provided for each output reviewed in the output sections above. Here only overall recommendations are made.

The project document should be reviewed and overlaps removed to make it more coherent and simpler to implement activities and track progress.

The project should target activities over which it has control.

The project should apply a strategic focus on activities that will lead more directly to the project outcome. This means focusing on capacity building activities that are more directly linked to the intended service delivery outcome.

The International Coordinator in Saravane should spend more time in Sekong to help the Project Manger and team redefine and focus activities to these ends.

# CHAPTER 12. Lessons

Especially during the start up period of a large and complex project of this kind, it is important to have the back-up of a resident TA.

# ANNEX (See separate attachment)

1. Source: Reconstructed from Sekong project document. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This is part of the GPAR SBSD project, which is reviewed in a separate report. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)