**LAO PDR**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY STRATEGIC SUPPORT PROJECT**

**(NASSP)**

**EVALUATION REPORT**

**Final Draft – 25 July 2015**

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This report expresses the findings and recommendations of the evaluation team. It does not necessarily represent the views of the National Assembly of Lao PDR, UNDP or SDC.

**Abbreviations & acronyms**

ARR Assistant Resident Representative

ASEAN Association of South East Asian Nations

AWPB Annual Work Plan & Budget

CD Capacity Development

CDAW Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CSO Civil Society Organisation

DP Development Partner

EPFC Economic, Planning & Finance Committee

GSI Gender & Social Inclusion

ICPMS International Cooperation & Project Management Secretariat

ICT Information & Communications Technology

ILS Institute of Legislative Studies

ITA International Technical Advisor

LC Law Committee

LSMP Legal Sector Master Plan

M&E Monitoring & Evaluation

M&RS Monitoring & Reporting Specialist

MP Member of Parliament

NA National Assembly

NACO National Assembly Constituency Office

NASSP National Assembly Strategic Support Project

NCAW National Commission for the Advancement of Women

NGO Non-Governmental Organisation

NIM National Implementation Modality

NPA Not-for-Profit Association

NPD National Project Director

NPM National Project Manager

QWPB Quarterly Work Plan & Budget

RRF Results & Resources Framework

S&D Security & Defence

SCA Social & Cultural Affairs

SDC Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation

SOP Standard Operating Procedures

SPLSMP Support Project for the Legal Sector Master Plan

STS Senior Technical Specialist

TA Technical Assistance

TSM Temporary Special Measure

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

WPB Work Plan & Budget

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

***INTRODUCTION***

This is the report of an evaluation of the Lao PDR National Assembly Strategic Support Project (NASSP), funded by UNDP and SDC, and implemented by the NA’s International Cooperation and Project Management Secretariat. The evaluation was conducted during June 2015, towards the end of NASSP’s first year of implementation.

***FINDINGS***

***Relevance***

NASSP remains highly relevant. The project is fully consistent with the State’s strategic socio-economic development priorities, as well with its declared approach to governance. NASSP is also entirely aligned with UNDP’s current (2012-2015) country programme and in line with SDC’s Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy (2013-2017). In addition, the project is consistent with the NA’s own capacity strengthening priorities, as witnessed by the high degree of NA ownership of NASSP. Finally, NASSP (as a key instrument of support for the NA) is of strategic importance to the Lao people, for whom the NA is the most important avenue for representation and mechanism for participation in national policy processes.

***Start-up and operations***

Following the signing of the project document in May 2014, NASSP start-up was rapid. The NA’s ICPMS is fully responsible for project management, through its own full-time staff, assisted by two international advisors and two UNDP contract staff. The UNDP country office provides additional operations and technical support to the project.

NASSP follows standard UNDP work planning processes. Annual and quarterly work plans are drawn up through wide-ranging consultations within the NA and follow the broad parameters defined by the Results & Resources Framework included in the project document. Quarterly work plans have consistently been late in getting approved, as a result of protracted preparation/submission processes and procedural delays.

Despite delays in work plan approval, NASSP budget execution has been good to date. Approximately 90% of the project’s 2014-2015 budget has been delivered.

In terms of its overall resources, roughly 30% of the project’s budget has been spent on the cost of employing two international advisors. The two international advisors have worked hard and gained the respect and trust of NASSP management. However, it is not entirely evident that optimal use has been made of the two international advisors.

***Deliverables***

The project’s RRF does not lend itself to easy interpretation or operationalization. To begin with, the RRF is ambiguous with respect to the role of NASSP in providing support to the NA’s oversight function. Secondly, the three outputs included in the RRF are long-winded, sometimes overlap (or be seen as overlapping) and do not provide as clear sense of intent or purpose as needed in order to be operationalized as deliverables. Sub-outputs, drawn up on the basis of the RRF, are sometimes portrayed as activities, rather than as deliverables or results. Finally, the project has not developed a full set of outcome- or output-level indicators – the absence of these indicators makes it difficult to identify the intent of the project and does not provide clear guidance on the identification of project activities.

***Project progress***

In the absence of clear output-level indicators, it is not easy to assess the progress (against agreed objectives and targets) made by the project – although it is abundantly clear that NASSP has been active.

1. Output 1: the activities undertaken by the project appear to be on track with regard to the assumed intent of output 1. Activities are aligned with the intent of strengthening NA Committees and are seen as being such by NA members. However, some activities appear to be more relevant and appropriate to the intent of output 1 than others. In addition, it is not always possible to clearly distinguish some project activities from general NA activities – which, in turn, underlines the limited extent to which the project takes into account the sustainability of its activities. There is a fine and difficult line to be drawn between providing start-up support for new NA committee activities and under-writing the operating costs of what NA committees would be expected to do whether or not NASSP existed.
2. Output 2: although it is not easy to distinguish between the intention of output 2 as compared to output 1, the evaluation understands output 2 to be focussed on the NA’s staff and support services, while output 1 includes NA members much more explicitly. Under output 2, the project has produced a good deal of documentation, much of which is pending full approval and finalization and little of which (accordingly) has been made widely available. In addition, a good deal of effort has been invested by the project in exploring the longer term organizational and institutional options for establishing an Institute of Legislative Studies (ILS). Unfortunately, little or no emphasis has been placed on piloting the potential value (or the kind) of any work that might be done by such an Institute. This would probably be more persuasive as a way of demonstrating the importance of an ILS to the NA. Finally, the project has begun to work on drawing up an NA capacity development (CD) plan; this has been an important activity and, once finalized and approved, this CD plan should become the basis for future NASSP activities.
3. Output 3: the intent of this output is to strengthen dialogue between citizens and the NA. Project activities appear to be on track and are clearly contributing to a greater degree of interaction between the NA and the Lao people. This would be even clearer if the sub-outputs were focussed around specific mechanisms (e.g. NA Constituency Offices, the NA Hotline). In addition, insufficient emphasis has been placed on: (i) providing the public with information on how to (and who to) get in touch with in the NA; and (ii) on monitoring the use made of interactive mechanisms (e.g. who is using the Hotline and for what reasons). NASSP has also begun to undertake activities aimed at strengthening the role of NA Constituency Offices as a key interface between citizens and the NA itself. Although all the activities undertaken under this output are consistent with the intent of the output, more thought needs to be given to their prioritization, especially in terms of their sustainability and eventual uptake by the NA.

***Gender and social inclusion***

In general, the project does make a good deal of effort to include gender issues in its work. Activities under output 1, for example, have included the promotion of tools for mainstreaming gender concerns into law-making; under output 2, NASSP support for drawing up an NA CD plan has ensured that gender issues have been included in both the initial assessment and in the identification of CD activities. The project, however, has placed much less emphasis on wider social inclusion issues, especially those related to ethnic minorities. Under output 3, and although no activities would appear to exclude dialogue with women and citizens from ethnic minorities, the project has done little to establish whether, for example, women and ethnic minority people are using the NA Hotline or submitting petitions.

***Constraints***

In implementing its activities, the project has faced a number of external constraints, *inter alia*: the busy schedules of NA members and staff, who have not always been able to participate in activities; delays in the finalization of the Law-Making Manual (being developed by the Ministry of Justice); and NA needs far-outweighing available (and inevitably limited) budgetary resources and thus making for difficult decisions about priorities. More “internal” constraints have included: a complex RRF that has not made it easy to be clear about intent and purpose; the absence of output-level indicators, which would otherwise have helped clarify intent and purpose; and delays in the finalization and approval of work plans and budgets.

***WAYS FORWARD & RECOMMENDATIONS***

Very briefly: NASSP should continue, but in doing so the project needs to consider a number of recommendations.

***Continuation***

Overall, NASSP should continue. The project is very much “owned” by the NA and ICPMS is very clearly in the driving seat in terms of project management – all of which bodes well for the future and for full implementation of NASSP. Moreover, NASSP is fully “up-and-running”, has two trusted international advisors, and is fully capable of becoming increasingly effective and efficient. Finally, NASSP remains highly relevant, in terms of its wider strategic and policy environment, as well as in terms of the enduring importance of the NA to Lao citizens.

***Process and management***

Key recommendations for the way in which NASSP is managed are as follows:

* Ensure that the project maintains a focus on agreed outputs (and their intent), in order to guide and prioritize its activities and to avoid “dispersal” and taking on too much. While the NA itself has a very wide range of activities, NASSP has a much more circumscribed and limited set of activities and ambitions.
* Ensure that NASSP activities are operationalized as an integral sub-set of a wider ICPMS work plan. This will lead to clearer and transparent coordination of different ICPMS-managed projects and DP initiatives.
* Review and re-interpret the NASSP RRF: this is a matter of some urgency given the difficulties of clearly understanding the intent of project outputs (and their associated activities). A re-interpreted RRF and its outputs will enable the project to more clearly define intent and purpose, and thus better delineate and prioritize sub-outputs and activities. This will also entail drawing up an updated M&E framework and identifying a set of output-level indicators, which will also strengthen project focus.
* Begin work planning and budgeting as early as possible, so as to avoid delays in WPB submission and approval – and to thus avoid delays in project implementation.

***Outputs and activities***

Recommendations regarding the substance of NASSP outputs and activities are as follows:

* Output 1: the project should place more emphasis on: (a) providing support to the NA’s oversight function, particularly with respect to budget oversight – one of the most important activities of national parliaments throughout the world. This should be coordinated by ICPMS with other NA support projects; (b) strengthening the NA’s understanding of how laws are currently implemented, as a prelude to any amendments to or revisions of existing laws; and (c) rapidly disseminating the Law-Making Manual as soon as it is finalized and approved, so as to ensure consistency across Lao PDR’s legislative architecture.
* Output 2: here, the project should focus on: (a) ensuring that the draft NA CD plan is discussed and approved, so that it provides NASSP with a roadmap for its own activities; (b) providing support for the implementation of the NA CD plan; and (c) piloting legislative analysis (of carefully selected issues) as a way of demonstrating the potential value of an Institute of Legislative Studies.
* Output 3: for this output, it is recommended that the project: (a) re-organises sub-outputs so that they are targeted on the specific mechanisms (e.g. the NA Hotline, NA Constituency Offices) through which citizens and the NA engage in dialogue; (b) assists in providing the general public with information about how to engage with the NA; (c) maximises the extent to which existing channels of information are monitored so as to get an evidence-based idea of who is engaging with the NA and why; and (d) works intensively with NA Constituency Offices, which are the NA’s “frontline” and most accessible “face-to-face” points of engagement with citizens.

***Cross-cutting gender and social inclusion issues***

Recommendations for strengthening gender and social inclusion are as follows:

* NASSP should consider providing support to NA committees in order to ensure consistency between national laws and the State’s obligations based on international conventions, ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AIHCR) norms and other international policies.
* NASSP should consider the introduction of gender responsive budgeting (GRB) to strengthen the NA’s budget approval and oversight functions.
* Project support for capacity building for women parliamentarians should go beyond “routine” or generic subjects (such as report-writing, leadership, etc.) and become more focused on gender-sensitive analysis and how legislation in general can become more genderized and gender-responsive.
* Finally, NASSP should think hard about how it can support the mainstreaming of social inclusion issues into its activities, especially with regard to the particular needs, concerns and problems of ethnic minority citizens. This may entail working more closely with the Ethnic Affairs Committee, developing tools that enable NA committees to factor in ethnic minority concerns into their law-making activities, and ensuring that mechanisms for NA-citizen dialogue are as accessible as possible to ethnic minority groups.
1. **INTRODUCTION**

This is the report of an evaluation of the National Assembly Strategic Support Project (NASSP), conducted after one year of project implementation. It provides the findings, analyses and recommendations of the evaluation.

* 1. **NASSP SUMMARY**

As a follow-up, building on earlier UNDP support to the National Assembly, NASSP was launched in July 2014. Co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and UNDP, the NASSP aims to strengthen the capacity of the NA to effectively draw up, review and deliberate draft laws, conduct oversight, and represent constituents. The following inset provides a very brief summary of the project.

**INSET**

**National Assembly Strategic Support Project – a snapshot**

**Intended Outcome**:

Strengthened legislative, oversight and representational role of the National Assembly to build and sustain democracy and development in Lao PDR

**Deliverables (outputs)**:

Output 1: Enhanced capacities of National Assembly committees in conducting their legislation-making role

Output 2: Strengthened institutional and human resource capacities for an effective National Assembly support service

Output 3: Increased dialogue promoted between the National Assembly and Citizens to strengthen citizen’s participation in decision making

**Project duration**: 3.5 years (30 June 2014 to 31 December 2017)

**Implementation**: by National Assembly (ICPMS – International Cooperation & Project Management Secretariat)

**Total budget**: Year 1: $0.7 million (total 3.5 year budget = $ 2.35 million)

**Funding sources** (for 3.5 years): SDC ($1.475 million – earmarked for output 3, with funding available only until the end of December 2016); UNDP ($0.875 million)

* 1. **EVALUATION: OBJECTIVES AND OUTLINE[[1]](#footnote-2)**

The evaluation, carried out just under a year after NASSP began, was intended to

1. Assess the Project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability and how outcomes and results were achieved in the first year of implementation of the project. The inset on the following page provides a summary of how the evaluation was expected to look at effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and relevance.
2. Provide recommendations for further programming development and/or the continuance/discontinuance of the Project beyond the first 12 months of implementation.

Undertaking an evaluation of NASSP at such a relatively early stage was also based on the need to assess the degree of ownership and effectiveness of the project, given the extent to which such issues had been a challenge during project formulation and design. This evaluation was therefore also intended to verify how far there was full ownership and how far such ownership translated into tangible implementation progress.

The evaluation was carried out in Lao PDR by a team of two independent consultants[[2]](#footnote-3) over the period 3-12 June 2015. The evaluation team was able to meet and to interact with a wide range of stakeholders[[3]](#footnote-4) and to visit one NA Constituency Office in Xieng Khouang. The team reviewed a large number of documents. Three debriefings[[4]](#footnote-5) took place at the end of the mission; comments made and feedback received during these debriefings have – as far as possible – been taken into account in this report.

**Effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and relevance: brief notes**

Effectiveness: the extent to which the project’s intended results (outputs and outcome) have been achieved or the extent to which progress has been made in achieving them. This entails measuring any changes in output/outcome indicators and assessing the extent to which project activities have contributed to those changes.

Efficiency: the extent to which project inputs have been economically converted into results. Measuring project efficiency is important in ensuring that resources have been used appropriately and in highlighting more effective uses of resources.

Sustainability: the extent to which benefits of initiatives are likely to continue after external development assistance has come to an end.

Relevance: the extent to which the project’s objectives are supportive of and consistent with national policies/strategies and development partner approaches.

The findings, analyses and recommendations of the evaluation are subject to several important **limitations or qualifications**:

1. The project has been operational for only 12 months. For such a relatively short period of time it is difficult to assess some aspects of the project’s effectiveness and efficiency;
2. Although the project team has worked to update sub-output indicators and to identify baseline gaps, the NASSP monitoring & evaluation framework currently does not yet include output-level indicators. Sub-output indicators exist but inevitably remain of limited value given the need to align them with output-level indicators (which are, as yet, unspecified);
3. The period available for the evaluation was relatively tight and did not allow for as much fieldwork or as many discussions to take place as might normally be required for a full evaluation. Inevitably, this has meant that the evaluation has relied heavily on available documentation. In addition, the relatively short period of time available for the evaluation has meant that some information may not have been gathered by the evaluation team.

In addition, it is important to note that the evaluation did not include any in-depth analysis of project design.

Finally, it is important to remember that the evaluation’s assessment and findings are related only to the project itself. They are emphatically **not** about the National Assembly’s wider functions and activities, which go well beyond the more limited scope of NASSP support. NASSP is a project that provides **support** to the National Assembly, in line with a **specific** **and agreed** set of objectives and activities.

* 1. **EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

The evaluation was conducted over a period of 10 days (3-13 June 2015) in Lao PDR. The evaluation team – guided by a flexible set of queries – relied on two principal methods for collecting information:

* Semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders, including:
* ICPMS staff (including the NPD)
* NASSP staff (particularly the two international advisers)
* NA members and staff
* NA Constituency Office staff in Xieng Khuang province
* Citizens in Xieng Khuang province
* Representatives of NPAs and NGOs
* SDC representatives
* UNDP representatives
* SPLSMP coordinators
* Reading and analysis of NASSP and other documentation.

One member of the evaluation team[[5]](#footnote-6) was able to make a brief 2-day visit to the NA’s Xieng Khuang Constituency Office to meet the constituency parliamentarian, office staff and citizens.

As outlined in the Evaluation Inception Report, interviews and documentation reviews were guided by a number of queries and pre-identified issues[[6]](#footnote-7). In addition, and over the period of the evaluation, additional issues were identified and evaluation questions nuanced to take into account the specific context (such as the somewhat protracted project formulation process or the recent start-up of NASSP) and to follow up on information obtained.

1. **EVALUATION ASSESSMENT & FINDINGS**

This section of the report covers the assessments and findings of the evaluation with respect to NASSP deliverables and processes. It is intended to:

* Highlight issues related to the effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and relevance of NASSP activities; and
* Identify, where possible, some of the factors that appear to underlie the project’s effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and relevance.
	1. **PROJECT RELEVANCE**

In assessing the relevance of NASSP as a whole, the evaluation’s finding is that the project’s overall objectives and intended results remain highly relevant and entirely consistent with broader national and other policy frameworks.

The State’s 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2011-2015) continues to stress the importance of and need for popular participation in public affairs. The 7th NSEDP, in looking back on implementation of the earlier NSEDP, underlines the progress made by the NA in legislating, providing oversight and in engaging with citizens. The 7th NSEDP outlines the need to further strengthen the NA’s legislative and oversight capacities. The National Assembly, as an elected body, is clearly seen as a key instrument through which citizens are represented and thus able to participate at the highest level. Moreover, the State’s Draft Strategic Plan on Governance[[7]](#footnote-8) places the National Assembly at the centre of efforts to strengthen popular participation and representation. Given that NASSP’s basic objective is to strengthen the role of the NA in its legislative, oversight and representational role, the project is (and remains) highly relevant.

NASSP remains consistent with UNDP’s current country programme (covering the period 2012-2015).[[8]](#footnote-9) Indeed, one of the key indicators of UNDP’s country programme is the percentage of National Assembly (NA) members with improved skills in legislative drafting and review. NASSP is central to delivering the target (80%) for this indicator, underlining the relevance of the project to UNDP’s wider programmatic objectives in Lao PDR.

The project also remains consistent with SDC’s Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy (2013-2017) and its Lao PDR component. Through its third output, NASSP directly fits into SDC’s focus on local governance and citizen participation, which explicitly includes fostering dialogue between parliamentarians and their constituents and enabling Lao citizens to better voice their opinions on national governance, legal concerns, and policy issues.

For Lao citizens, NASSP’s objective of strengthening the National Assembly’s inter-related legislative, oversight and representation functions is of great importance given the limitations of other formal, State-sanctioned mechanisms through which the general public is able to engage with policy and decision-making processes. Indeed, the NA is perhaps the most important, full, and formal instance of open-ended political space in Lao PDR – and insofar as NASSP strengthens the NA, the project is helping Lao citizens to engage in wide-ranging national policy debates and decisions.

Finally, and importantly, NASSP is seen by members of the National Assembly as being relevant and useful in terms of providing strategic and practical support to the NA.[[9]](#footnote-10) Strategically, NASSP is in line with the NA’s overall plans to strengthen its roles in law-making, monitoring and representation. At a more practical level, NA members see NASSP as providing valuable support for the NA to engage with grassroots issues.

* 1. **PROJECT OPERATIONS**

This section of the report examines some of the processes that underlie NASSP management and implementation, many of which have implications for the effectiveness and efficiency of project activities.

* + 1. **Project start-up and operational arrangements**

The project document was approved on 30 June 2014, a little less than a year before this evaluation was carried out. Operational responsibility for project implementation was immediately assumed by the International Cooperation and Project Management Secretariat (ICPMS) of the NA.[[10]](#footnote-11) An NASSP unit was established within ICPMS[[11]](#footnote-12) and began project work planning and implementation in the third quarter (July-September) of 2014. The two international technical staff were quickly recruited and were fully on board by the start of October 2014.

By any standards, this was a **rapid start-up**. This is **creditable** on the part of ICPMS and UNDP, both of which worked hard and effectively to make NASSP operational in a very short space of time following official approval of the project document. This was perhaps helped by the relatively long period of project gestation (2012-2014), which meant that all parties had come to a broad and binding agreement on the design of NASSP prior to official approval.

Within ICPMS[[12]](#footnote-13), NASSP implementation is the overall responsibility of the NPD (who is the Secretariat’s Head) and the day-to-day responsibility of a designated NPM (a full-time ICPMS staff member), assisted by other ICPMS staff, and supported by a project-funded finance officer and driver. In addition, the project employs two full-time international technical advisors (ITAs). One ITA, formally designated as the Senior Technical Specialist (STS), provides technical support for NASSP’s substantive parliamentary inputs. The other ITA, formally designated as the Monitoring & Reporting Specialist (M&RS), is responsible for M&E, reporting and process management support; the M&RS, however, also appears to be fairly heavily engaged in direct project management tasks, in ways that would appear to go beyond an advisory or supporting role (as specified in the M&RS’ terms of reference). Finally, the UNDP Programme Officer, based in the UNDP office in Vientiane (and responsible for a wider project portfolio), provides substantial programmatic and management support to NASSP, supervised by UNDP’s Assistant Resident Representative (ARR) and Head of Governance.

As can be seen from the above, NASSP is largely “owned” by the NA and managed by ICPMS; project implementation is very much in the hands of full-time ICPMS staff, with relatively few project-funded administrative support staff. This signals a high degree of ICPMS project “**ownership**”, as well as being a **sustainable approach** **to the management** of NASSP operations and activities.

* + 1. **Work planning and budgeting processes**

In much the same way as other UNDP projects, NASSP’s work planning and budgeting (WPB) process – in principle – follows a quarterly and annual rhythm. NASSP work plans are developed through a process of consultation with NA focal points and the ICPMS Advisory Board, thereby ensuring a high degree of NA ownership and involvement. To date, the project has drawn up four quarterly work plans and budgets (Q3 and Q4 in 2014, Q1 and Q2 in 2015), as well as an Annual WPB for 2014 and a (revised) AWPB for 2015[[13]](#footnote-14).

Quarterly activities are planned in relation to the overall RRF (Results & Resources Framework) and in line with the Annual Work Plan, taking into account implementation in the previous quarter. In addition, NASPP quarterly activities are also identified in relation to emerging priorities and specific requests made by NA committees.

All four NASSP **quarterly WPBs** to date have been subject to **some degree of delay** in approval, as shown in the following table. To date, all four NASSP quarterly WPBs have been approved one or more months into the quarter in question – meaning that at least a third of the period covered has already lapsed before work plans become administratively effective. Delays in WPB approval have been due to a variety of factors, including: the time taken to draft and submit WPBs, the need to consult with and taken into account the viewpoints of NA focal points and the ICPMS Advisory Board, the need to settle previous budget expenditures, and the process for assessing advance requests.

Table 1: approval of NASSP quarterly work plans and budgets

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **WPB** | **Period** | **Date of approval** | **Notes** |
| Q3 WPB 2014 | 1 July – 30 Sept 2014 | 27 August 2014 | Finalisation almost two months into QWPB period |
| Q4 WPB 2014 | 1 Oct – 31 Dec 2014 | 30 October 2014 | Finalisation one month into QWPB period |
| Q1 WPB 2015 | 1 Jan – 31 March 2015 | 17 February 2015 | Finalisation one and a half months into QWPB period |
| Q2 WPB 2015 | 1 April – 30 June 2015 | 15 May 2015 | Finalisation one and a half months into QWPB period |

The delays in finalising quarterly WPBs have probably been a constraint to project implementation, given that UNDP disbursement and financial management (in ATLAS) require official WPB approval before becoming effective.

It is, however, important to note that the time spent on preparing WPBs can be seen as a trade-off for extensive consultations with and a high level of buy-in by the NA itself. The resulting ownership of NASSP by the NA has probably assisted the project in subsequent implementation. Nonetheless, the lengthy process associated with WPB preparation and submission does result in delays to WPB approval and thus to NASSP implementation.

* + 1. **Disbursements and budget execution**

As in any project, there have been issues related to disbursements and payments, with some minor delays noted by various actors. Most of this can probably be attributed to an initial (and understandable) lack of familiarity (on the part of NASSP staff) with prescribed procedures and the need to link spending with approved WPBs and other supporting documents.

In terms of overall budget execution (see the table below), NASSP has been fairly effective. For 2014-15, the project has been able to **deliver about 90% of its planned budget**. Output 2 spending has seen the lowest delivery rate (about 70%), while spending on Output 1 has been a little more than budgeted. The delivery shortfall can partly be attributed to planned activities that were not undertaken, some savings, and delays in implementation (partly due to an upstream hold-up in the flow of funds between SDC and UNDP headquarters).

Table 2: NASSP budget execution (2014-2015)

|  |
| --- |
| **NASSP BUDGET & EXPENDITURE** |
|
| **Outputs** | **2014-2015 planned (US$)** | **2014-2015 expenditure\* (US$)** | **Delivery rate (%)** |
| Output 1: Enhanced capacities of NA committees in conducting their legislation-making role | 120,000  | 132,741 | 111 |
| Output 2: Strengthened institutional and human resource capacities for an effective NA support service | 190,000  | 133,505 | 70 |
| Output 3: Increased dialogue promoted between the NA and citizens to strengthen citizen’s participation in decision making | 420,000 | 391,876 | 93 |
| **Totals** |  **730,000** |  **658,123**  |  **90**  |

Note:\* = this assumes 100% expenditure against budget in Q2 2015

* + 1. **Use of spending: a note on efficiency and effectiveness**

NASSP budgets and spending include the costs of employing two full-time international technical advisors: the Senior Technical Specialist (STS) and the Monitoring & Reporting Specialist (M&RS). Taken together, the STS and M&RS account for around 30% of total project expenditure. In both cases, this international technical assistance provides very useful and very helpful support. Given the relative budgetary importance of international technical assistance (ITA), the evaluation examined the extent to which project resources spent on ITA are being used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

The STS provides the project with a wide range of technical support and advice. The STS is highly knowledgeable about and has a great deal of experience of parliamentary activities, is extremely hard-working, very competent and dedicated to doing whatever is asked of him. He provides technical input on and training for almost all substantive issues – not just on parliamentary issues, but also on survey/assessment methodologies, data collection/analysis and for actual assessments. The STS has been responsible for drafting almost all NASSP “technical” documents (guidelines, concept notes, working papers, briefs, etc.), as well as most of its training materials – as such, the STS has proved extremely flexible. However, it is not clear how far the STS’s output (in terms of working papers, guidelines, notes, etc.) has been fully endorsed/approved, how far it has been used or is valued by NA members and staff, or how far all the STS’s output has been fully disseminated or circulated. Without knowing this, it is difficult to assess how far his considerable drafting work has been effective. The STS has been widely deployed and used by the project – with the caveat that the STS may have worked on subjects/activities (e.g. survey design, assessments, technical dimensions to information management) for which there may be better qualified national or international TA – but for which NASSP has little or no budget or for which the project does not want to accord budgetary priority. At the same time, the use of the STS’s time on such “non-parliamentary” issues may have detracted from focusing on crucial parliamentary subjects for which the STS is well-qualified. There are, then, reasons to suppose that the STS’s time and effort could be more effectively and efficiently managed than is actually the case.

The M&RS is equally hard-working, experienced and a key team player – and very much respected by NASSP management. However, the M&RS does seem to spend a great deal more time on assisting in day-to-day management (directly carrying out a range of urgent and regular management tasks) – and rather less time on providing management advice and on monitoring and evaluation activities. As such, the M&RS is being managed expediently and in line with immediate project management priorities. This can be partly justified by ICPMS’s relative inexperience in project management and lack of familiarity with NIM/SOP in particular. However, this is not an especially effective nor efficient way of using relatively costly international TA – which should be used to build management capacities (rather than actually handling management processes) and to bring expertise to technical areas in which national skills and capacities are limited. The M&RS’s input on management issues has probably been at the expense of NASSP’s overall M&E framework – which, as has already been pointed out, still lacks clear **output-level** indicators. In addition, the use of the M&RS would probably be more effective if she had worked more on revisiting and clarifying the project’s overall Results & Resources Framework.

In terms of effectiveness and efficiency, the use made by NASSP of its international advisers has probably been less than optimal. In particular, the STS’s time and comparative advantages (as a parliamentary expert) could be more effectively used by ensuring that other national or international experts were used for specific technical tasks (such as designing survey methodologies or carrying out capacity assessments) and by ensuring greater STS focus on more “parliamentary” issues and on producing notes and documents that are of clear interest to and use for NA members and staff. The M&RS has not been used very effectively – as witnessed by the incomplete nature of the project’s M&E framework (which remains without crucial output-level indicators); in addition, the M&RS has not been used very efficiently, in that her management-related work has amounted more to “substitution” (of less costly national staff in ICPMS) and less to capacity building and mentoring.

* 1. **PROJECT DELIVERABLES AND ACTIVITIES**
		1. **Results and Resources Framework (RRF)**

The table on the next page provides a summary of the project document’s RRF, with outcome and output narratives taken directly from the NASSP project document and sub-output narratives from NASSP work plans. Sub-outputs are NASSP’s operational interpretations of some of the more detailed “activity results” described in the original project document; sub-outputs are therefore intended to provide greater clarity with respect to output results.

Although the scope of this evaluation does not include an appraisal of project design, it is nonetheless important to make a number of observations about the ways in which NASSP’s outcome, outputs and sub-outputs are presented. These observations about the design and formulation of NASSP’s objectives and outputs are necessary simply because, as stated in the RRF and WPBs, they do not always provide for clarity of intent and may also be somewhat confusing. Key issues worth noting here include:

* The project’s outcome is broad and encompasses the NA’s three major functions - namely representation, law-making and oversight. That said, none of the three outputs explicitly addresses the NA’s oversight function – unless this is assumed to be tacitly the case in output 1. This does lend itself to a degree of ambiguity. It would seem sensible (and consistent with the project’s outcome) to be explicit in seeing output 1 as including oversight (as part and parcel of the law-making process) and output 2 as including actions that strengthen this oversight role.
* The outputs, as expressed in the NASSP project document, are fairly long-winded and complex. The “intent” or “direction” of the outputs, especially outputs 1 and 2, is not as clear as might be the case – and can be either misunderstood or mis-interpreted. The complex way in which NASSP outputs are framed does not make it easy to plan for their delivery.
* Some sub-outputs are expressed in ways that make them appear to be activities, rather than deliverable results. Sub-outputs 1.2 (“Capacity Building of Committees in discussing and debating on draft laws within their scope”) and 1.3. (“NA committees interact more with women organisations and marginalised groups in order to better integrate Gender and Social Inclusion issues in the legislation-making process”) for example, are activity descriptions and are not clear stated as deliverables. This again leaves somewhat ambiguous their “intent”.
* Finally, some sub-outputs appear to overlap. Sub-outputs 2.3. for example, approximates to sub-outputs 1.1. and 1.2., taken together; activities aimed at delivering sub-output 2.3. might also be seen as delivering sub-outputs 1.1. and 1.2. (insofar as the intent of the latter is clear). This, again leads to some confusion in terms of the identification of activities.

It should also be noted that although the RRF (in the NASSP project document) does include outcome and output indicators, these are not very precise; moreover, baselines for output level indicator targets are often non-existent. Project RRFs may often include ambiguous indicators and lack some baselines – and this is not unique to NASSP. In the case of NASSP, however, the project has not yet developed a comprehensive and updated/revised M&E framework that specifies output-level indicators, targets or baselines[[14]](#footnote-15). This is problematic, as NASSP does not have clear output level benchmarks or milestones against which progress towards delivering results can be easily measured.

Table 3: summary of NASSP Results & Resources Framework (RRF)

|  |
| --- |
| **OUTCOME**:STRENGTHENED LEGISLATIVE, OVERSIGHT AND REPRESENTATIONAL ROLE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO BUILD AND SUSTAIN DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN LAO PDR |
| **OUTPUTS** | **SUB-OUTPUTS** |
| **OUTPUT 1:** ENHANCED CAPACITIES OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES IN CONDUCTING THEIR LEGISLATION-MAKING ROLE. | **1.1:** NA members are better informed about the legislative development process in line with the LSMP. |
| **1.2:** Capacity Building of Committees in discussing and debating on draft laws within their scope. |
| **1.3:** NA committees interact more with women organisations and marginalised groups in order to better integrate Gender and Social Inclusion issues in the legislation-making process |
| **OUTPUT 2:** STRENGTHENED INSTITUTIONAL AND HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITIES FOR AN EFFECTIVE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SUPPORT SERVICE. | **2.1:** NA **capacities** better match the needs of committees and members to implement their assigned tasks |
| **2.2:** Research and Information provision for the legislation and oversight work of the NA improved. |
| **2.3:** Well-planned and managed trainings and skills development activities for NA members and NA staff. |
| **OUTPUT 3:** INCREASED DIALOGUE PROMOTED BETWEEN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND CITIZENS TO STRENGTHEN CITIZEN’S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING. | **3.1:** Constituents are able to access timely information about the legislative work of the NA and participate in public consultations. |
| **3.2:** NA discussions and deliberations better reflect the points of view and needs of constituents. |
| **3.3:** NA outreach skills and ability to interact with citizens and stakeholders strengthened at the national and local levels. |
| **3.4:** Strengthened responsiveness by the NA to citizens’ concerns. |
| **3.5:** Increased capacities of women/men from stakeholders and NA committees to engage on substantive issues through provision of technical expertise and flexible funding modalities. |

Note: indicators omitted

Sources: outcome and outputs – NASSP project document (June 2014); sub-outputs – NASSP work plans (2014-2015)

* + 1. **Progress against NASSP outputs**

Although the project has clearly made progress in terms of implementation – in that activities have been implemented – it is difficult to assess the extent to which there has been progress against agreed output deliverables. In the absence of output-level indicators (see section 2.2.1. above), associated targets and baselines, it is simply not possible to objectively assess the extent to which deliverables are being met by the project.

Given this, the evaluation has instead focused on the sub-outputs and activities associated with each of NASSP’s outputs and tried to determine whether these are consistent with the intent of each of the three outputs. What activities have been undertaken? Are they consistent with the output which they are expected to deliver? Do they appear to be leading to delivery of the output in question?

* + 1. **NASSP activities and outputs**
1. ***Output 1 and related activities***

Under output 1, the project has undertaken a range of activities. These are summarised as “work streams”[[15]](#footnote-16) in the following table.

Table 4: NASPP Output 1: activities

|  |
| --- |
| **OUTPUT 1: Enhanced capacities of National Assembly committees in conducting their legislation-making role** |
| **Sub-Outputs** | **Main work streams** |
| * 1. NA members are better informed about the legislative development process in line with the LSMP
 | * Law reviews by NA Committees (EPFC, LC, SCA)
* Inter-session: support for law assessments and reviews; preparations for next NA ordinary session
* NA Cabinet: annual meeting & planning
* Orientation and awareness building of military personnel by S&D Committee
 |
| * 1. Capacity Building of Committees in discussing and debating on draft laws within their scope
 |
| * 1. NA committees interact more with women organisations and marginalised groups in order to better integrate Gender and Social Inclusion issues in the legislation-making process
 | * Needs assessment of NA Women’s Caucus
* Interactions with women and women-related GoL departments
* Study tour (to Hanoi)
* GSI input for Law Making Manual
* Preparation (drafting, discussion, etc.) of guidelines and papers (e.g. Quick Reference Brief on GSI issues)
 |

Source: NASSP work plans and reports

As a preliminary to the evaluation’s assessment/findings with regard to these activities, it is useful to highlight the intent/direction of output 1: strengthened law-making capacity of NA committees.

In general, activities linked to output 1 would appear to be on track – most activities (*per se*) are consistent with the intent expressed in the output and would appear to have strengthened the capability of NA committees. NA Committee members certainly seem to think that they have benefited from NASPP activities with respect to their law-making functions: reviews, NA inter-session and other activities supported by NASSP are seen as being important contributions to the committees’ law-making functions. NA committee members think that NASSP has helped them improve laws and increase the number of laws that are approved by the NA. In addition, the project has drawn up a wide range of high quality documents that are of use to the NA and its committees in terms of law-making[[16]](#footnote-17), although many of these are pending approval from the NA and may require revision and finalization.

Project activities related to sub-output 1.3. (“NA committees interact more with women organisations and marginalised groups in order to better integrate Gender and Social Inclusion issues in the legislation-making process”) have been aligned with output intent. Drafting a quick reference guide on gender and social inclusion (GSI) issues, for example, contributes to mainstreaming GSI considerations into strengthening the law-making capacity committees; the same can be said of feeding GSI concerns in the Law-Making Manual. Assisting the NA’s Women’s Caucus (and others) in being aware of and meaningfully taking into account GSI is clearly an effective way of meeting project objectives. NASSP activities here have largely been about starting up or institutionalising processes and ways of working (rather than supporting regular or ongoing committee activities) – and thus lend themselves to being sustainable.

That said, there are nonetheless a number of ways in which activities related to sub-outputs 1.1. and 1.2. have not been as effective, efficient or sustainable as might have been the case.

In the first place, some activities may not be fully consistent with the intent of output 1. This is most clearly the case for NASSP support for the orientation and awareness building seminars for military personnel in Luang Nam Tha, Houaphane and Xieng Khouang provinces by the NA’s Security & Defence (S&D) Committee. While this kind of activity is seen as important by the NA, the issue for NASSP is whether this is consistent with the intent of output 1 – which is to strengthen the law-making capacity of NA committees. The evaluation considers that the activity in question is not fully appropriate to output 1, and that undertaking this kind of activity is not an effective way of delivering output 1 results.

It is also sometimes unclear as to exactly what NASSP’s activity or input has been when the project is described as “providing support” to a given NA law-making activity. There is a tendency in NASSP planning and reporting to refer to NA committee activities as if these were project activities. Given this, it is not always clear exactly what NASSP inputs and supports consist of and how these add value to regular committee activities in terms of strengthened law making capacities. From discussions with NASSP team members, project inputs have included a variety of items – ranging from STS-led seminars or sessions to logistical support for organizing meetings. But this is not easily determined on the basis of project reporting.

Related to this, there are also grounds for questioning the sustainability of some NASSP activities. Where NASSP support for NA committee activities has included meeting the costs of meetings, reviews and the like, the question arises of how far such “regular” expenditures are sustainable and whether they can eventually be met out of the NA’s annual operating budget. There is a fine and difficult line to be drawn between providing start-up support for new NA committee activities and under-writing the operating costs of what NA committees would be expected to do whether or not NASSP existed. The project, then, may not be devoting as much effort as necessary to thinking through the sustainability of the support or inputs that it provides to NA committee activities. The project’s identification of activities to be included in project work plans, for example, does not include a rigorous assessment of sustainability issues – and is limited to a weighing up of priorities and the level of demand for such activities by NA committees and/or members.

Output 1 activities, in general, underline the need for the project to make a clearer distinction between its own activities and inputs and the activities of NA committees – and for the project to thus be more aware of the need to align its support to NASSP objectives and to reflect rather more on sustainability issues. This has been successfully done for some NASSP activities (especially those related to sub-output 1.3. GSI issues) – but not across the board.

1. ***Output 2 and related activities***

The following table summarises NASSP activities related to Output 2.

Table 5: NASPP Output 2: activities

|  |
| --- |
| **OUTPUT 2: Strengthened institutional and human resource capacities for an effective National Assembly support service** |
| **Sub-Outputs** | **Main work streams** |
| * 1. NA capacities better match the needs of committees and members to implement their assigned tasks.
 | * AIPA-related work
* NA capacity assessment (reviews of earlier assessments, ToRs, survey)
* NA capacity development plan (preparation, drafting, etc.)
* ICPMS/DP consultations (workshop)
 |
| * 1. Research and Information provision for the legislation and oversight work of the NA improved
 | * Review of NA research & information functions (library and ICT) and issues (website, management, functions, ToRs etc.)
* Proposals for restructuring of research/information functions (ILS, library, ICT, etc.)
* Preparation of guidelines and manuals (legislative analysis training manual)
* Training: preparation of legislative briefs, IT and information
* Study tour to Cambodia – focus on ILS issues
 |
| * 1. Well-planned and managed trainings and skills development activities for NA members and NA staff.
 | * Legislative research and analysis: concept note, discussions, monitoring
* Coordination between law drafting bodies
* Training of NA Committee staff (module, FAC staff, etc.)
* NASSP: NIM guidelines, NIM training etc.
 |

Source: NASSP work plans and reports

The intent/direction of Output 2 can be summarized as follows: strengthened (or better) central support services (information, legislative, research, etc.) for the National Assembly’s legislative and oversight functions. Although it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between outputs 1 and 2, the latter can be interpreted as being focused on the various “cross-cutting” technical and other departments staffed by full-time NA civil servants, while the former is best seen as being focused on the various NA committees (including both elected NA members and support staff).

Overall, NASSP activities related to output 2 appear to have been consistent with the intent of the output. In most cases, the links between activities and the output deliverable are clear. Output 2 activities are on track and are strengthening central support services (such as the IT unit) within the NA. In the absence of agreed indicators (and targets), however, it is difficult to determine the extent to which outputs and their related activities are on track.

It should also be noted that there is sometimes an overlap between output 1 and output 2 activities (particularly with respect to activities aimed at NA committees, NA members and staff) – this is understandable given that there may actually be some overlap ! Clarification is needed so as to mark the distinction between the intent and direction of the two outputs.

There is also a good deal of conceptual overlap between sub-outputs 2.1. and 2.3. – again, clarification and perhaps revision of these two sub-outputs would be useful and provide greater focus for activities.

In the same way as for output 1, the project has produced an impressive quantity of high quality documents related to output 2 – concept notes, guidelines, briefs, assessments and the like. Indeed, much of this documentation constitutes a big part of output 2 delivery – and the project should do more (in its reporting) to point to the large number of potentially useful documents that have been produced through NASSP’s technical work. The project could do more to make some of these documents more widely available or accessible; as it is, they are very much “in-house” and largely unknown to other stakeholders (including DP funding partners). While many such documents may require final approval or further revision before they can be regarded as “official” project products and properly disseminated, materials that have already been used in training or in briefings could certainly be disseminated to a wider range of stakeholders, if only to “showcase” project activities; those documents that remain a work in progress or subject to full approval or further revision could simply be referred to as such, if only to provide an informal benchmark for and evidence of project progress. In addition, it is often unclear as to how far the various documents produced have been used or are of use to NA members, committees and staff; during the course of the evaluation, little mention was made of specific NASSP notes or documents by NA members or staff. The project needs to assess the value attached to and use made of the many guidelines, working papers and other documents that have been produced.

In substantive terms, the project’s support in assessing NA capacities and in then beginning to assist the NA in drawing up its own capacity development (CD) plan is very important and very useful – not just for the NA itself, but also for the project. Indeed, NASSP activities aimed at assessing NA capacities and then designing a capacity development strategy to meet NA needs should figure much more highly in the project. For the project, such a needs- and evidence-based assessment and consequent CD strategy provides a useful baseline and – at the same time – a roadmap to follow for identifying/prioritizing project activities and inputs, aligned to the specific deliverables/outputs that have been assigned to NASSP.

NASSP has also focused on providing support to the establishment of an Institute of Legislative Studies (ILS), the purpose of which would be to endow the NA with an independent capacity to research and explore issues related to key pieces of legislation. This is important for the NA and would provide the NA with a much enhanced capacity to meaningfully scrutinize draft legislation put forward by the Government – and would strengthen the NA’s role and weight in the legislative process as a whole. However, the project has perhaps spent too much time and devoted excessive energy to exploring longer term institutional arrangements for the ILS, rather than focusing on actually piloting and thus demonstrating the usefulness of meaningful scrutiny (as a function). This might have been done by supporting “real-time” legislative research/analysis on actual pieces of draft legislation, working with one or more NA committees and the NA as a whole to seriously scrutinize one or more pieces of draft legislation. This would provide the NA with a foretaste of what a future ILS might deliver.

1. ***Output 3 and related activities***

Table 6 (below) provides a summary of the sub-outputs and activities undertaken by NASSP within the aim of delivering output 3.

Table 6: NASPP Output 3: activities

|  |
| --- |
| **OUTPUT 3: Increased dialogue promoted between the National Assembly and Citizens to strengthen citizen’s participation in decision making** |
| **Sub-Outputs** | **Main work streams** |
| * 1. Constituents are able to access timely information about the legislative work of the NA and participate in public consultations
 | * NACO assessments (preparations, methodology, etc.)
* Guidelines on dissemination of information by NA (discussion, drafting etc.)
* Guidelines on public consultations by NA and NACOs
* Training on petitions management
* Organisation of outreach missions by NA Committees (SCA, Ethnic, LC, Def & Sec, NA Cabinet, EPFC, etc.)
* Monitoring of NPA projects funded by China and Vietnam
 |
| * 1. NA discussions and deliberations better reflect the points of view and needs of constituents
 | * Preparation of citizen reporting guidelines
* Training of NACOs
 |
| * 1. NA outreach skills and ability to interact with citizens and stakeholders strengthened at the national and local levels
 | * Assessment of NA outreach capacities
* Survey of citizen perceptions of NA
* Training of NA members on public consultation and outreach
 |
| * 1. Strengthened responsiveness by the NA to citizens’ concerns
 | * Assessment of NA public engagement tools
* Assessment/review of hotline and petitions
* Media briefing on petitions and complaints
* Review/updating/amendment of Law on Petitions and review of petition process in general
* Training of NA staff on hotline & petitions
* Organisation of NPA/NGO “market place” during NA inter-session work
* Activities aimed at enhancing NA knowledge and understanding of NPAs and CSOs
 |
| * 1. Increased capacities of women/men from stakeholders and NA committees to engage on substantive issues through provision of technical expertise and flexible funding modalities.
 | * No activities to date\*
 |

NB: \* As far as can be understood, activities for sub-output 3.5. in year 1 have not been programmed by the project because of the need to conduct other activities and because there has been some degree of uncertainty about the continuation of the project beyond year 1. Given this, the project has understandably been reluctant to embark on developing flexible funding mechanisms at this stage in NASSP implementation.

Source: NASSP work plans and reports

The intent of output 3 is clear: increased interaction and dialogue between the NA and citizens (as a way of bringing the latter into decision-making processes). What NASSP is expected to deliver, then, are effective mechanisms through which the National Assembly and citizens can communicate, with a particular focus on enabling citizen “voice” to be “heard and listened to” by the NA. The intent therefore goes beyond citizen “voice” alone – and implies that, through the NA, citizen “voice has teeth” and is thus able to genuinely inform public debates and decision-making processes. Unlike a “demand-side” governance support programme, the focus of NASSP should therefore be on strengthening the ability of the NA to hear (and listen to) citizens and on expanding the opportunities for “voice” to be heard and listened to.

That said, the project’s activities appear to be largely on track. NASSP activities under this output have been articulated around building up and strengthening the mechanisms through which citizens are able to engage with the NA – through petitions, the NA hotline, by meeting NA committee members, by interacting with NA Constituency Offices (NACOs) in the provinces etc. All of this helps citizens engage with their NA and provides opportunities for NA members and staff to hear what citizens have to say on a range of issues. However, the lack of agreed output level indicators and targets makes it difficult to assess the extent to which NASSP is on track in delivering output 3. There are, of course, external factors which might dissuade citizens from voicing themselves and from communicating with the NA or which might make NA members and staff unwilling to “listen”– these, however, are risks which are beyond the control of NASSP.

Although NASSP output 3 activities do seem to be on track, they are programmed within a somewhat confusing framework of sub-outputs. It is not easy to understand why some activities appear under one sub-output rather than another sub-output. This is simply a question of clarity and of making intent more obvious, and can be attributed to the initial RRF itself, which provides inadequate guidance for the selection of activities.

However, there is a key preliminary activity that the project has not focused enough on: explaining to citizens how and with whom they can communicate. While many citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) are aware of the NA, know who NA members are and have a reasonable understanding of the NA’s role, this is by no means universal. Moreover, some citizens and CSOs are unsure of how they might be able to bring issues to the attention of the NA – international and national NGOs/NPAs, for example, do not know exactly to whom (which NA Committee? which NA members or offices?) they should or could address their concerns and issues in the NA in Vientiane. This point was clearly raised during the course of the evaluation by representatives from national and international NGOs/NPAs. In short, there are good grounds for arguing that there is still an informational deficit (about the NA, its functions and how to engage with it) among the general public.

NASSP activities aimed at improving citizen access to or communications with the NA – through the NA Hotline, through the submission of petitions – would appear to be positive. For example, making the NA Hotline more accessible and encouraging citizens to use it more often is extremely important. But there is an added value in the use of the NA Hotline and the submission of petitions that has not been accrued through project support: no activities have systematically targeted information management, such that NA members and staff are provided with aggregated data on the kinds of issues (land tenure? education? etc.) that are raised in Hotline enquiries or through petitions. Processing aggregated information about Hotline use and petitions would help NA members know more about what concerns the general public (or, at the very least, those who do use the Hotline or submit petitions).

The project has begun to focus activities on NACOs as a key “window” for citizens. An assessment of NACOs in four provinces has been undertaken and the findings of this assessment have been incorporated into the NA’s draft (and yet to be approved) capacity development plan. This is encouraging and needs to be actively followed up on by NASSP. Anecdotal evidence indicates that NACOs (and the opportunity they offer for face-to-face interaction by citizens with the NA) are especially appropriate entry-points for less well-off and less well-educated citizens to engage with the NA. Indeed, strengthening the NACOs as a point of contact between citizens and the NA is likely to be one of the most effective ways of delivering on this output.

Output 3 has included a wide range of activities – support for NA committee outreach missions to the provinces, assessments and engagement with NACOs, developing public consultation guidelines, reviewing mechanisms for NA public engagement with citizens, etc. Although all of these have contributed (or will eventually contribute) towards strengthening dialogue between the NA and citizens, some may be less efficient and sustainable than others. In particular, project support for NA committee outreach missions might need to be subjected to greater scrutiny in terms of “value-for-money” and sustainability. NA outreach missions have helped NA members to intensify their interactions with citizens outside of Vientiane and appear to have convinced NA participants of the benefits of doing so. There is little doubt that NA members themselves place a good deal of value on outreach missions as a way of inter-acting with citizens, visiting remote areas and getting first hand knowledge of problems well outside of Vientiane. The contribution of outreach missions to NA engagement with citizens is not in doubt here: however, such outreach missions are relatively costly and, in order to be sustained, would eventually need to be integrated into the NA’s regular operating budget. It is unclear as to whether outreach missions (relative to other activities aimed at strengthening NA-citizen dialogue) are “value-for-money” or whether their costs can be realistically taken up in the NA’s annual operations budget. More thought needs to be done on this kind of issue – if outreach missions are supported by the project, an explicit exit strategy is needed, spelling out how and when the NA will itself be able to bear the costs of financing the outreach activities (which are so valued by NA members).

* 1. **GENDER & SOCIAL INCLUSION ISSUES**

In addition to assessing the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and sustainability of the project and its activities, the evaluation also looked at ways in which NASSP incorporates gender and social inclusion issues in a cross-cutting manner. The evaluation team’s comments on this are as follows.

* + 1. **Output 1: NA law making**

Through output 1 activities, NASSP’s principal contribution to gender and social inclusion issues has been through the development of its “Quick Reference Briefs”, which are in the process of being reviewed and finalized. These are intended to help NA members and Committees to undertake an analysis of legislation in terms of gender and social inclusion – although issues such as ethnic minority status are not explicitly treated in the Briefs and some of the analytical guidance is often generic rather than specific to gender or social inclusion issues. Given that these have yet to be finalized, it is difficult to assess the extent to which they have contributed to mainstreaming of gender and social inclusion issues into the NA’s legislative and other work.

* + 1. **Output 2: NA capacity building**

NASSP’s support for assessing NA needs and capacities and for the formulation of an NA Capacity Development Strategy has included an analysis of gender issues – both in terms of the NA’s own ability to focus on women’s issues and in terms of the need more gender-sensitive law-making, oversight and representative functions. The draft capacity development plan, drawn up on the basis of the NA needs assessment, includes provision for strengthening the role of women parliamentarians in NA functions. It is to be hoped that the final NA capacity development plan will maintain this commitment.

The NA needs assessment and NA capacity development plan, however, are less explicitly focused on wider social inclusion issues – particularly with respect to ethnic diversity and ethnic minorities. Whilst there is some discussion of “marginalized” groups and multi-ethnicity and the role of the Ethnic Affairs Committee, the needs analysis and subsequent draft capacity development plan do not place a great deal of emphasis on how ethnic diversity concerns have been (or are) factored into NA work or on how the NA’s capacity to do so might be strengthened.

* + 1. **Output 3: NA dialogue with citizens**

The various activities (support for NA Hotline, petitions, NACO and NA outreach, etc.) undertaken to deliver output 3 have been broadly targeted at Lao citizens as a “homogeneous” category. There is little evidence that NASSP has tailored these various citizen-NA mechanisms for dialogue and engagement to the specific needs of women or marginalized groups (such as ethnic minorities). However, this does not mean that such citizens or groups have been excluded – and, indeed, mechanisms such as the Hotline and petitions have been designed and can be used by all categories of citizen.

Nonetheless, the project does not appear to be systematically tracking the extent to which women and citizens from ethnic (or other) minorities are able to or actually do use such opportunities to voice themselves to the NA. Hotline use and petitions, for example, are not tracked to determine if women and minority groups are (proportionate to their demographic weight) able to take advantage of such mechanisms. Similarly, it is not known whether NACOs are able to promote dialogue with all citizens, irrespective of their gender or minority status – or whether citizen interactions with or through NACOs are skewed towards males and ethnic majorities. Without this kind of information, it is difficult for the project to know whether output 3 activities are gender-sensitive or of benefit to ethnic minorities – and thus difficult for NASSP to take remedial measures.

* 1. **CONSTRAINTS AND BOTTLENECKS IN NASSP DELIVERY**

Overall, there have been a number of major external and internal constraints and bottlenecks that have slowed down project implementation (or reduced the extent to which the project has been able to meet its targets).

* + 1. **External constraints**

External constraints are issues that are beyond the control of the project. NASSP has been faced by a number of such constraints, including:

* NA members and staff have busy (and sometimes unpredictable) schedules and NA members, in particular, are often fully engaged in regular parliamentary activities. This has meant that they have not always been able to participate in scheduled NASSP activities, which have then had to be either re-scheduled or postponed.
* NASSP output 1 was designed on the assumption that the Law-Making Manual (itself a deliverable by the Support Project for Implementation of the Legal Sector Master Plan or SPLSMP) would be available early on to guide NA legislative activities. Unfortunately, the finalization and approval of this Manual has been delayed, due to circumstances beyond the control of NASSP. This has, in turn, delayed some NASSP activities.
* Although the NA has its own operating budget[[17]](#footnote-18), this is insufficient to cover all the needs and priorities as identified by all NA committees and departments. Understandably, NA members and departments look towards NASSP to provide financial support for activities and priorities that cannot be met out of the NA’s regular annual budget. Some of these activities, however, may not entirely correspond to NASSP outputs – but are accommodated by the project through a degree of compromise. This “flexible” approach is understandable – but does mean that some activities (whilst a real NA priority) may not be fully consistent with NASSP’s results framework.
* NASSP itself has a relatively small and limited budget – and this does constrain the project’s ability to undertake some activities or to deploy the resources needed to fully address implementation challenges.
	+ 1. **Internal constraints and bottlenecks**

A number of major “internal” factors have probably meant that the project has been less effective and efficient than might otherwise have been the case. These include:

* A lack of clarity about the intent of NASSP’s outputs. The wording and articulation of project deliverables have made it difficult to have a clear sense of purpose and intent when planning and undertaking activities. This has made it relatively easy for the project to “lose sight of the forest because of the trees” and led to sub-optimal prioritization of activities.
* A complex RRF has been made more difficult to follow in the absence of agreed output-level indicators – which would have provided the project with a much clearer sense of direction than has been the case.
* Work plans and budgets have been finalized and approved after considerable delays, resulting in further implementation delays and a “rush” to undertake activities at the end of every quarter, which has not helped the quality of delivery.
* Project payments appear to have been delayed – and thus slowed down implementation – due to the inexperience of the NASSP team with robust and rigorous procurement, and budget & financial procedures. This is understandable at this early stage in the project’s life – but needs to be addressed in the future.
1. **WAYS FORWARD**

This section of the evaluation report is concerned with a presentation and discussion of the ways forward for NASSP. These amount to the recommendations of the evaluation mission, grouped into four sub-sections:

* NASSP continuation;
* Processes and project management;
* Actions and suggestions for broad sets of activities and issues;
* Issues related to effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.
	1. **NASSP CONTINUATION**

In the light of its findings and observations, the evaluation mission strongly recommends that the project continue (as intended) for the next 2.5 years. This recommendation is based on a number of considerations:

* NASSP is very much “owned” by the National Assembly. NA members and officials are involved in the project and see it as making an important contribution to their work. By all accounts, this distinguishes NASSP from its precursor (SELNA), which was weakly appropriated by the NA and seen as an “external” intervention. The discontinuation of NASSP would be seen as a considerable opportunity lost to the NA, its members and its staff. Given the considerable extent to which the NA “owns” NASSP, there is every likelihood that the project will be fully implemented over its remaining shelf-life.
* Project management is very clearly in the hands of ICPMS. ICPMS is in the driving seat and has unequivocally assumed responsibility for NASSP implementation. This is further evidence of NA ownership. It is also cost-effective for UNDP and SDC in that the NA and ICPMS bear many of the overhead costs related to project implementation. ICPMS’s leadership also holds out the promise of effective coordination of NASSP and other DP-funded support for the National Assembly.
* Although NASSP has only been in operation for a little under a year, it is “up-and-running”, has undertaken a considerable number of activities, and is generally going in the right direction. Project management is in place and there is a functioning project office, housed inside the NA’s premises. There is a momentum and this needs and deserves to be built on. Discontinuing NASSP would be wasteful; continuation will provide opportunities to provide the NA with the assistance it needs to strengthen itself as a law-making, oversight and representative body.
* While there are a number of ways in which NASSP can improve on its effectiveness, efficiency and the sustainability of its activities, there is a decent foundation on which to do so. There are also very few reasons why NASSP should not be able to “do better” in the future.
* The international advisors who provide NASSP with high quality technical and managerial support are now well-established and trusted. This is an important achievement and bodes well for the future of the project. The same can be said of UNDP management and project support – both of which appear to be trusted by the NA and ICPMS.
* Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the project’s objectives are highly relevant in the current context and, if achieved, will be instrumental in enabling the National Assembly to carry out its crucial legislative, oversight and representative functions.

That said, the evaluation mission’s recommendation that NASSP continue should be viewed as subject to re-visiting and rethinking a number of key issues.

* 1. **PROCESS AND MANAGEMENT: RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the findings and observations of the evaluation mission, a key set of recommendations concerns the way in which the project is managed and the ways in which its activities are planned and undertaken. These are as follows:

1. Make a clear distinction between the National Assembly and NASSP

It is extremely important that all project stakeholders understand and make the distinction between the National Assembly and NASSP. The NA, a permanent State institution, has legislative and representational functions (as defined in the constitution) and undertakes a wide range of activities associated with fulfilling those functions. All of these activities are aligned to the role, responsibilities and powers assigned to the NA by the constitution. The project, on the other hand, is designed to provide the NA with support aimed at achieving specific objectives jointly agreed upon by the NA and the project’s external donors (SDC and UNDP), spelt out in the project document. NASSP’s objectives and its mandate are obviously much more circumscribed than those of the National Assembly itself. While the project’s specific objectives and activities should be (and are) consistent with the NA’s overall objectives and functions, the latter go well beyond the scope of NASSP and require a much more diversified range of activities than the project is intended or able to support. This distinction is operationally important and needs to be borne in mind as the project moves forward – unless the project hones its focus, it is unlikely to achieve its agreed objectives.

1. Coordinate NASSP actions with other support to the NA

NASSP activities should be seen as fitting into a wider range of actions aimed at strengthening the NA – actions funded both by the NA itself (out of its own budget) as well as by other partners (such as GIZ, other UN organizations, other parliaments). Given this, it would seem important for NASSP to be fully coordinated with other such activities – to ensure that best use is made of each source of finance and to keep a sense of the “bigger picture”. ICPMS is clearly best-placed to ensure this coordination – but to do so effectively, ICPMS may need to operate on the basis of a wider and more comprehensive work plan of NA support activities (covering all funding sources), of which NASSP activities would be a sub-set. Viewed in this way, ICPMS would first draw up an overall work plan of activities for providing support to the NA, which would then be used as the basis for NASSP and other (e.g. GIZ) work plans. This would ensure that all activities (including those of NASSP) are fully harmonized and coordinated (thus avoiding overlap and maximizing synergies)\_ – and that development partner support is used appropriately.

1. Review and re-interpret the NASSP Results & Resources Framework (RRF)

One of the main findings of the evaluation has been that the NASSP RRF is not easy to understand, makes it difficult to focus on the intent/purpose of its deliverables, and currently lacks output-level indicators. These RRF issues mean that the project’s work plans and activities are sometimes less effective than they could be and sometimes appear to be “off-target” in terms of their intent.

The problems associated with the current RRF need to be addressed urgently. The evaluation team therefore strongly recommends that ICPMS and NASSP organize a one to two day internal workshop, with full participation from ICPMS, NASSP, SDC and UNDP, aimed at:

* Clarifying the intent/direction of each of the three project outputs. There is no need or value in reformulating the RRF’s outputs[[18]](#footnote-19) - but there is a need to spell out in very clear language what the output deliverables amount to. Clarification of these will require that all major NASSP stakeholders discuss and agree on what exactly is expected of the project.
* Once the intent of each NASSP output is clarified and agreed upon, the next step will be to review sub-outputs – to make sure that they are consistent with outputs and to ensure that they are clear results statements (and not activities). If necessary, existing sub-outputs can be modified so as to make their operationalization easier[[19]](#footnote-20).
* After agreeing on a clear and common understanding of NASSP outputs and sub-outputs, the next step will be to determine appropriate indicators and targets for each output and sub-output, with priority accorded to output-level indicators and targets. Any such indicators should be SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound). Where appropriate interim (or annual) targets should be specified. Where indicators and targets will rely on quantitative changes, baselines will need to be identified (and, where necessary, established retrospectively). As far as possible, indicators need to provide a very clear sense of direction for work-planning and enable NASSP to link its activities to desired results. Indicators will also be the basis upon which NASSP monitors and evaluates its own progress against agreed deliverables.
* The key result for the workshop will be a clear RRF, in which the intent of outputs and sub-outputs is agreed and unambiguous and which includes a set of output and sub-output level indicators. This RRF, once endorsed and approved by the NA and the Project Board, will then be the basis upon which NASSP operates for the remaining 2.5 years of the project. The revised/updated RRF will need to take into account that SDC funding will draw to a close at the end of 2016.
1. NASSP work planning

Following clarification of, and agreement, on the project’s RRF, the evaluation team strongly recommends that subsequent NASSP work planning takes place in the following manner:

* Firstly, in order to avoid delays, the NASSP team should begin its quarterly work planning process at least 1-2 weeks before the end of the active quarter[[20]](#footnote-21). The final draft of the quarterly work plan and budget should then be submitted to UNDP before the end of the active quarter – thus providing time for verification, review and any adjustments without this leading to late final approval of the work plan by UNDP. In principle, this should enable timely and full implementation of planned activities.
* NASSP quarterly work planning sessions should begin with a “reminder” about the RRF – what are project deliverables (outputs and sub-outputs)? This “reminder” is extremely important as it will allow the NASSP team to focus on the “big picture” and thus avoid the common pitfall of reviewing or planning activities and inputs without reference to the project’s rationale.
* The next step in NASSP work planning should consist of a review of activities undertaken in the past 2-3 months. This review should focus on whether the activities took place and how far they were consistent with the NASSP RRF. Implementation problems or bottlenecks should be discussed and remedial measures identified where necessary.
* After reviewing activities undertaken in the past 2-3 months, the work planning process should then lead to a discussion of activities to be undertaken in the next quarter. Of fundamental importance here is to ensure that planned activities are fully aligned with the NASSP RRF – that activities will be guided by the intent of outputs and sub-outputs and will contribute as directly as possible to delivering agreed results. Inevitably, there will be a need to prioritize activities – NASSP does not have the resources to do everything and must therefore make sometimes difficult choices about which activities can or cannot be planned given budget constraints. Prioritization of activities should be done on the basis of a number of criteria – most importantly, the extent to which activities contribute directly to delivering agreed results. In addition, prioritization of activities should also take into account concerns about efficiency[[21]](#footnote-22) and sustainability. Emerging priority activities or urgent requests for support should be appraised in the same way as ‘regular” NASSP activities – i.e. against agreed deliverables and in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.
1. NASSP operations

To ensure that project activities are implemented according to plan and on time, the evaluation team recommends that UNDP and the M&RS work closely with ICPMS/NASSP staff to ensure that the latter are fully aware of required (NIM/SOP) procedures. Importantly, ICPMS/NASSP staff should be made fully responsible for carrying out all procedures; they should be discouraged from expecting the M&RS to actually undertake procedural work. Equally importantly, ICPMS/NASSP administrative and finance staff need to understand that approved WPBs are the basis for all transactions and activities – and that WPBs are their principal point of reference when requesting payments or imprest replenishments.

1. NASSP dissemination of reports and documents

As pointed out in section 2.3.3. (b), NASSP has produced a considerable number of documents (about NA procedures, about good international parliamentary practice, about the rationale and importance of public hearings, etc.), which are not broadly disseminated in Vientiane (among Government institutions, among development partners, to the press, etc.). These could be made more widely available or accessible – either through a “mailing list” or by being posted on the NA website.

* 1. **OUTPUTS AND ACTIVITIES: FOCUS AREAS**

The evaluation team’s most important recommendations concern the way in which NASSP plans its activities. However, the evaluation team also has a number of recommendations concerning the project’s substantive areas of work.

* + 1. **Output 1: strengthening the NA’s law-making functions**

With respect to NASSP’s output 1 focus areas, the evaluation team recommends the following:

1. Annual State Budget approval and budget oversight

In most countries, one of the most important functions of national parliaments is to scrutinize and approve the annual national or state budget submitted by the Government. The national budget amounts to a concrete expression of the priority accorded by Government to the different public goods and services (security, education, health, infrastructure, etc.) for which it is responsible. The NA is expected to review annual budget submissions and, after analyzing them and – if need be – requesting modifications, approve the following year’s budget. Scrutiny of the annual budget submission also requires that the NA reviews previous Government revenue and spending performance. Scrutiny can be generalized (across sectors or areas) as well as focused on specific sectors (e.g. primary education, defence, etc.). All NA committees can be involved in budget scrutiny – although primary responsibility lies with the NA’s Economic, Planning and Finance Committee (EPFC).

Given the importance of budget scrutiny and approval, the evaluation recommends that NASSP explore ways in which it can provide meaningful support to the EPFC and other NA committees so as to strengthen their law-making and oversight functions with respect to the national budget. In doing so, NASSP and ICPMS will need to take into account what other partners (such as GIZ) are doing or plan to do. GIZ[[22]](#footnote-23), for example, has agreed to provide support to the NA’s Economic, Planning and Finance Committee (EPFC) so as to strengthen its oversight of the annual State Budget. NASSP could usefully supplement this by supporting oversight/scrutiny of the education and health sector budgets by the NA’s Social and Cultural Affairs Committee or oversight of State Budget gender-sensitivity by the Women’s Caucus.

1. Implementation of existing laws

As part of their law-making activities, NA committees clearly do consider the ways in which existing laws are (or are not) implemented. However, it is recommended that NASSP explore ways to support NA committees to carry out systematic reviews of legal implementation – with a view towards identifying bottlenecks and constraints that may be addressed in new or revised legislation. Examples of this could include reviews of the implementation of current laws on land, on water resources and the like – focusing especially on subsidiary implementation regulations (such as decrees) – to better understand how they have been applied by the Government. This would be a useful input to law-making as a whole and to the review of any amendments, in particular.

1. Law-Making Manual

As soon as the much delayed Law-Making Manual is finalized and approved, it is recommended that NASSP provides support so as to disseminate it within the NA. Dissemination of the Law-Making Manual should be accompanied by a range of other activities, aimed at providing NA members and staff with a full and comprehensive understanding of the NA’s role (as prescribed in the Law-Making Manual). If necessary, workshops and seminars should be organized with Ministries (such as, but not limited to, the Ministry of Justice) and other national institutions that are expected to play a role in law-making in Lao PDR. The Law-Making Manual is extremely important for the NA – both as an instrument for clearly defining which institutions are responsible for what aspects of the legislative process and as guidance for the steps that each stakeholder institution will be expected to follow in effectively fulfilling its role in the national law-making process.

* + 1. **Output 2: strengthening the capacity of “central” NA support services**

With respect to NASSP’s output 2 focus areas, the evaluation team recommends the following:

1. Finalization and approval of the NA Capacity Development Plan (or Strategy)

NASSP has already provided invaluable and solid support for the assessment of NA capacities and for drafting the NA CD plan (or strategy). This work should be continued in order to finalize the NA’s CD plan and to submit it to NA decision-makers for full approval. This is important in itself – the NA CD plan will provide NA members and staff with a clear strategy through which to strengthen the NA as a whole. For NASSP, the NA CD plan is equally important, simply because it will provide the project with a roadmap for its own future activities. At the moment, NASSP does not have a systematic and clear framework into which its activities “fit”; however, once the NA CD plan is approved, the project will be able to position itself within a wider NA strategic plan.

1. Implementation of the NA Capacity Development Plan

Once the NA CD plan has been approved, NASSP should (within the limits of its own RRF and agreed set of deliverables) aim to assist in the actual implementation of the CD plan. It is important to note that NASSP is not intended to support implementation of all the activities that will figure in the NA CD plan – the latter will be much more wide-ranging than NASSP’s scope. Nonetheless, the NA CD plan will give NASSP a better sense of the NA’s strategic CD priorities.

1. Legislative studies

NASSP has provided support to the NA in terms of scoping out the need for and possibilities of developing an independent capacity to undertake legislative studies. In the long term (and subject to the availability of budgetary resources) this may lead to the creation of an Institute of Legislative Studies (ILS). Although NASSP will not be in a position to finance the establishment of any such ILS, it can usefully provide support for the overall concept by “simulating” the potential value of ILS functions. This might, for example, be done through assisting one or more NA committees in carrying out in-depth reviews of flagship legislation – by engaging consultants, academics and Lao national think tanks to carry out independent research on behalf of the NA and in bringing the results of that research into the deliberations of the NA and/or its committees. This would provide a “real-time” pilot of the kinds of work that would eventually be done by a future ILS, explore some of the substantive challenges that would probably be encountered and demonstrate the value of this kind of work to NA members.

* + 1. **Output 3: strengthening dialogue between the NA and citizens**

With respect to NASSP’s output 3 focus areas, the evaluation team recommends the following:

1. Refining the focus of sub-outputs

The evaluation team recommends that NASSP partly “re-structure” its sub-outputs around specific mechanisms (e.g. Hotline, petitions, NACOs) through which the NA and citizens can engage in dialogue. By focusing activities on specific interfaces, NASSP should be able to fully explore ways of strengthening dialogue and making the most of communications options. A specific focus on, for example, improved petitions management would enable NASSP to look at all the steps in the petitions process and support ways of improving upon them. In the case of output 3, then, sub-outputs might, for example, be restructured around the **specific** mechanisms through which dialogue and information exchange take place between citizens and the NA;

* Information about NA law-making, oversight and representation made available to the general public;
* NA Hotline provides effective mechanism for expressing and learning about concerns and priorities;
* NA Petitions are used by the public to raise issues with the NA;
* NACOs operate in ways that enable citizens to engage with the NA ;
* NACOs operate in ways that provide the NA with better information about public concerns and issues;
* Etc.
1. Informing the general public

It is strongly recommended that NASSP provide support for communicating information to the general public about how citizens can engage with the NA. This will entail greater dissemination of information about the various mechanisms through which citizens can engage with the NA. For NGOs and NPAs, this would also include providing them with information about who they can contact in the NA for specific issues. Ways of doing so could include: expanding the circulation of the NA’s weekly newsletter; developing a more useful[[23]](#footnote-24) “Contact Us” section on the NA’s website, providing citizens and others with information on who to contact in the NA with respect to given issues or queries; providing NA “contact” cards which explain who to contact with respect to particular issues; establishing a visitor-friendly front desk to help citizens “navigate” the NA buildings and offices.

1. Making use of existing information about citizens’ concerns

The NA Hotline and petitions system potentially provide invaluable information about the kinds of issues that pre-occupy citizens. Why are citizens using the NA Hotline? What issues are citizens submitting petitions about? Providing NA members with information about this should be a good way of keeping them up to date on the types of issue that concern citizens. To do this, however, will require working on improvements to the management of Hotline and petition data – and then working to ensure that such information is made available to NA members.

1. Working intensively to strengthen NA Constituency Offices

The evaluation team strongly recommends that NASSP intensifies its activities at the level of NACOs. NACOs are the NA’s “frontline” agencies – ideal for face-to-face engagement by and with citizens, as close to constituencies and voters as possible, and well placed to gauge local or sub-national concerns and pre-occupations. Now that NASSP has carried out a full assessment of four NACOs, the project should rapidly develop a pilot strategy of support for these NACOs[[24]](#footnote-25).

In drawing up this pilot support strategy, NASSP should take into account the following:

* The need to identify NACO support activities that are likely to be sustainable in the long term or which lead to up-front investments that can be built on or maintained in the future.
* The need to identify activities that maximize citizen access to NACOs.
* The need to carefully monitor pilot activities in order to be able to determine their impact and effectiveness in terms of facilitating NA-citizen dialogue. This may entail developing a monitoring & evaluation system that tracks activities in NACOs where support from NASSP is being provided and compares these to NACOs where no support is being provided. It is crucial for NASSP to be able to identify which pilot activities have the biggest impact in terms of NA-citizen dialogue.
* The need to keep NACO functions distinct in terms of national and sub-national responsibilities. In the event that the new provincial or local councils/assemblies are established, and NACO staff are involved in supporting such councils[[25]](#footnote-26), NASSP will want to help clarify NACO responsibilities so as to avoid confusion and overlap[[26]](#footnote-27). As and when the role of NACOs with respect to local councils or assemblies becomes clearer in national policy, NASSP should develop an appropriate strategy of support.
	+ 1. **Cross-cutting gender equality and social inclusion issues**

In terms of mainstreaming or properly taking into account gender and social inclusion issues, the evaluation team’s main recommendations are as follows:

1. Law-making

NASSP should consider providing support to NA committees in order to ensure consistency between national laws and the State’s obligations based on international conventions, ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AIHCR) norms and other international policies. Part of this will mean strengthening the collaboration between the NA Women’s Caucus, the Lao National Commission for the Advancement of Women and the Foreign Affairs Committee of NA – on issues related but not limited to: the rectification of new international conventions or reserved protocols, the legislative review of selected laws to ensure that domestic laws are consonant with international and regional practices and standards[[27]](#footnote-28).

1. Oversight and scrutiny

NASSP should consider the introduction of gender responsive budgeting (GRB) to strengthen the NA’s budget approval and oversight functions. This could be a practical and viable option because GRB (or gender in general) is perceived as relatively apolitical or neutral subject (compared to anti-corruption). Also, for practical reasons, GRB is not a new concept for the NA Women’s Caucus because it has been introduced in earlier projects (such as SELNA).

1. Capacity building

As mentioned earlier, NASSP support for capacity building for women parliamentarians should go beyond “routine” or generic subjects (such as report-writing, leadership, etc.) and become more focused on gender-sensitive analysis and how legislation in general can become more genderized and gender-responsive.

Based on experience from previous elections, NA staff expect that there will be a high (60%) turnover rate of new MPs in next year’s elections The NA Women’s Caucus therefore plans to organize various “generic” capacity building activities for new women parliamentarians, such as: leadership skills, public speaking skills, report writing skills etc. These skills are necessary for MPs at an individual level. But considering the limited resources, the need to maximize “value-for-money” and the objective of being responsive to the current socio-economic issues faced by the members of public, the focus of training or contents of training should be on how women MPs can improve their skills in analyzing data and identifying key concerns of society or the general public, rather than focussing on, for example, report writing or speaking skills.

Providing women MPs with the skills needed to be able to analyze, understand, and apply knowledge when they are performing their parliamentary roles (making laws, oversight, representation) is more strategic than providing training on operational skills (leadership, speech, writing). There are a number of existing current issues that could be targeted as a starting point for training women parliamentarians (see recommendations).

Diversity and inclusion are two different concepts. Currently, 25% of NA members are women, which is the highest rate within ASEAN. For the next election in 2016, the Women’s Caucus hopes to reach a 30% target. Having an equal number of women parliamentarians in the NA is important for the purposes of ensuring diversity and representation. It serves a basic requirement in terms of providing a “temporary special measure” (TSM) as recommended by CEDAW. However, at this stage in time and with the highest proportion of women MPs, the focus should be on further enhancing the quality of participation on the part of women parliamentarians. The focus should be placed on promoting the quality of inputs made by women parliamentarians into each NA process (e.g. during the inter-session or the bi-annual regular sessions of NA) and on the quality of the women parliamentarians’ performance within their core roles and responsibilities (namely, law-making, oversight and scrutiny, and representing constituents). Women parliamentarian inputs or contributions to the NA and its committees should be responsive and reflect realities and the concerns of members of the public. Women MPs should be encouraged to focus on mainstreaming gender into all sectors under the NA’s jurisdiction. Gender mainstreaming could be adopted for performing this task.

1. Wider social inclusion issues

Whilst the project has taken on gender concerns in a number of positive and pro-active ways (which can be strengthened), it has been less focused on wider social inclusion issues, particularly with respect to ethnic minorities and cultural diversity. Given the NA’s mandated role as representative of the multi-ethnic Lao people, more attention needs to be given by NASSP to ethnic diversity and minority rights. To strengthen the NA’s capacity to factor in ethnic issues, the project could support the following types of activities (among others):

* In much the same way as for gender, factoring in ethnic diversity as an element in legislative analysis and law-making. This might be achieved through the development of a more focused briefing/guidance note on how laws should be examined in terms of their likely or potential impact on ethnic minorities, sponsoring greater NA exposure to some of the specific challenges faced by ethnic minorities in key areas (such as education, land, economic empowerment, etc.) and thus fostering greater sensitivity to ethnic diversity issues.
* Overall, the project should perhaps work more pro-actively with the Ethnic Affairs Committee (in the same way that it works with the Women’s Caucus) to strengthen its ability to mainstream ethnic considerations into the NA’s regular activities.
* In NACOs where ethnic minority people make up an important part of the local constituency, the project should provide special support to NA members and staff on the need to tailor communications and interaction to the specific needs of an ethnically diverse citizenry.
* Tracking the use of the NA Hotline and submission of petitions to the NA to see whether women and minority groups are making use of them to engage with the NA. In the event that this is not the case, the project should explore ways of making the Hotline and petitions system more woman- and minority- “friendly”.
* Facilitating, where possible, greater interaction between the NA and civil society organizations that work closely on ethnic minority issues or that work on issues of particular interest to ethnic minorities (such as land, agricultural policy, education).
1. See: (a) NASSP Evaluation Terms of Reference (included as Annex 1 to this report); and (b) the NASSP *Evaluation Inception Report* (June 2015) for a more detailed description of the objectives, approach and methodology of the evaluation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Mr. Somsouk Sananikone and Mr. Mike Winter. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. See Annex 2 for a schedule of evaluation team meetings. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. One with the NASPP project team, one with UNDP and SDC, and one with ICPMS, the NASSP project team, UNDP and SDC. During all three debriefings, stakeholders were able to make comments and provide feedback on the evaluation summary presentation (included as Annex 3 of this report). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Unfortunately, the other member (international) of the evaluation team was not able to visit Xieng Khuang due to an administrative error in communications with the NA Constituency Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. The Evaluation Inception Report is included as an Annex to this report. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. See Lao PDR (2011*): Strategic Plan – Governance of the Lao PDR to 2020.* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. See UNDP (2012): *Country Programme Document for the Lao People’s Democratic Republic 2012 - 2015* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. This is the viewpoint expressed by members of the ICPMS Advisory Board. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. The ICPMS, as its name implies, is responsible for coordinating any international assistance provided to the NA and for managing specific, externally-funded, activities aimed at strengthening the functions, capacities and actions of the NA. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. See the organogram for ICPMS included as Annex IV to this report; ICPMS also manages other externally funded projects and activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. The organogram for ICPMS is included in Annex 4 to this report. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. The AWPB for 2015 covered only Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2015; this reflected the uncertainty over the continuation of the project, which needed to be clarified by this scheduled evaluation. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. The project, however, has updated and revised its M&E framework with respect to **sub-output** level indicators. This has included a clearer identification of sub-output level baselines and targets. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. “Work streams” refer to generalized clusters of activities, grouped together in terms of their overall direction or subject matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. A list of the documents (notes, briefs, guidelines, presentations, etc.) produced by NASSP is included in Annex 6 to this report. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. The evaluation team was informed by the National Project Director that the NA’s current (2014-15) annual budget amounts to approximately USD 5 million. This is difficult to verify from State Budget statements, which are not readily available. The evaluation team does not know whether the NA’s 2014-15 budget is consistent with previous NA annual budgets. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Indeed, any formal changes to the RRF’s outcome and outputs are best avoided at this stage as these would require an unwarranted overhaul of the project’s ATLAS architecture [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. This is likely to be the case for output 3, for which the existing sub-outputs often appear to overlap. Sub-outputs for output 3 will probably be best reformulated in terms of the various mechanisms through dialogue between citizens and the NA takes place (e.g. NACOs, Hotline, petitions, etc.). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. For example: work planning for the second quarter (Q2: April-June) of the calendar year would therefore start in the second half of the first quarter (Q1: January-March), from around 15 March. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. One of the key questions here being whether the inputs required for activity X might deliver the same or better results if allocated for activity Y. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. See “*New cooperation between National Assembly and Germany*”: <https://www.giz.de/en/downloads_els/MoU_ASEANSAI.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. The current “Contact Us” section of the NA website only provides details of how to contact the NA webmaster. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. The NACOs selected are in the following provinces: Xieng Khuang, Bolikhamxay, Xekong and Champassak. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. At the time of the evaluation, it was unclear what the linkages would be between any future local councils/assemblies and the NA Constituency Offices. Although the general consensus was that NACOs were likely to be the service offices for local councils/assemblies, few details of exactly what this will entail were available. This is unsurprising given that the legal framework for such local representative bodies remains under discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Experience in many countries (e.g. Nepal, Kenya, Bangladesh, Malawi) is that the roles and functions of national parliaments and local councils need to be very strictly separated so as to avoid overlap and confusion. National parliaments have nation-wide responsibilities – which are not to be confused with the much more circumscribed but more “direct” service delivery responsibilities of local councils. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Specific issues here include: (i) the conflict between international and domestic laws: for example the protection of all women (including single women, expatriates, migrants, sex workers, domestic workers) as implied by international laws and the more limited protection offered by national laws; (ii) the conflict between CEDAW and the national domestic law (2004) with respect to the need for mandatory mediation in cases of domestic violence. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)