



Independent Evaluation of the Laos Australia NGO Cooperation Agreements (LANGOCA) Program
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

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Through: *RD 1/8/11*
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Approved by: Mark Palu, Acting Minister Counsellor Mekong *Mark Palu*

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Aid Activity Summary

Aid Activity Name			
AidWorks initiative number	ING310		
Commencement date	25 October 2005	Completion date	31 December 2014*
Total Australian \$	\$14 million		
Implementing Partners	Oxfam, CARE, World Vision and Save the Children		
Country/Region	Laos, Mekong Region		
Primary Sector	Rural development		

The Laos Australia Non-Government Organisation Cooperation Agreement (LANGOCA) is an AusAID initiative in Laos comprising partnerships with four Australian Non-Government Organisations (NGOs): CARE, Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision. LANGOCA supports both long-term activities (LTAs) and short-term activities (STAs) in five provinces (Khammouan, Saravan, Sayabouli, Sekong and Vientiane). According to the design document, the inclusion of both long and short term activities enables LANGOCA to build on lessons learned, improve the quality and effectiveness of implementation, build sustainability, as well as respond flexibly to emerging priorities in the disaster management and UXO sectors, throughout the life of the Program.

By 30 April 2011, AusAID had funded twelve activities under the LANGOCA program: 5 LTAs and 7 STAs with a combined value of \$12,093,099. All LTAs and STAs have signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Government of Laos. AusAID aims to keep LANGOCA as a flexible funding mechanism and not all funds have been committed to date.

Aid Activity Objective: The LANGOCA Program was designed based on the analysis that the vulnerability of the poor in Laos is more effectively reduced by integrating poverty reduction and crosscutting issues with disaster management and UXO approaches. LANGOCA works towards a common goal of reducing the impact of natural & man-made disasters and impact of UXO.

**In order to take into account the delays with the start up of implementation, the LANGOCA program end date will be extended from 2012 to 2014. This is to ensure that all NGOs are assured of a full 5 year implementation period.*

Its program objectives are to:

1. reduce the impact of natural & man-made disasters through focus on improved coordination, capacity building and best practice,
2. reduce the impact of UXO through focus on improved coordination, capacity building and best practice,
3. build & promote program capacity to enhance the quality, effectiveness, sustainability & impact of the individual activities, and
4. manage the program effectively.

Independent Evaluation Summary

The evaluation adhered to AusAID's standard evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, gender, monitoring & evaluation (M&E) and learning. The methodologies involved qualitative methods: document reviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations. While the Mid-Term Review (MTR) was for the most part a performance audit at the program and activity levels, the process also emphasised lessons that have been developed.

Evaluation Objective: As per the Terms of Reference (TOR), the specific objectives of the review were to:

1. Assess the overall performance of LANGOCA through two levels of analysis: (a) at the level of the Program's overall objectives; and (b) at the level of the specific objectives of the funded activities;
2. Recommend actions necessary to improve the performance of LANGOCA up to its due completion date; and
3. Provide insights and lessons learned from the LANGOCA experience for consideration of future programming with NGOs, including options to strengthen the role of NGOs in the Australian development assistance program in Laos.

For this mid-term review, AusAID decided to undertake a parallel gender assessment process. NGO partners have consistently identified the need to strengthen the gender components of their programming but do not know where to begin. Since gender equality is an overarching principle of the Australian aid program, it was deemed important to assess whether the LANGOCA adequately identified, addressed, monitored and reported on gender equity issues. The outcomes of the gender assessment are captured by the Independent Progress Report (IPR) submitted by the review team.

Evaluation Date: This MTR may have occurred at mid-term in the life of the program but in some cases was early in the life of NGO implementation work. The review formally commenced with Australia-based consultations from 2 to 3 May and followed by a two-week mission in Laos from 16 to 27 May 2011. A debriefing on preliminary findings was held 27 May with the LANGOCA NGOs, government partners and AusAID. The final version of the IPR was received 20 July 2011 by AusAID.

Evaluation Team: The review team was composed of mainly independent consultants with one AusAID officer from Canberra participating. The team leader was Mr. Paul Crawford and he was responsible for directing, coordinating and managing the assignment, including the submission of the IPR to AusAID. The MTR team members were:

- Mr. Paul Crawford, Team Leader
- Ms. Philippa Sackett, Australian Council for International Development (ACFID)
- Ms. Sophie Davies, AusAID, Performance, Policy and Systems Section
- Ms. Belinda Mericourt, Lead Gender Specialist
- Ms. Somsisouk Sihachakr, Assistant Gender Specialist

During the various events of the MTR, the team was joined by representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and AusAID Vientiane.

Management Response

Overall, the IPR was comprehensive and provides a critical look at program performance. AusAID agreed with almost all of the recommendations made. AusAID partially agreed with the recommendation on changes to the reporting and governance (recommendation 32) after consulting with the NGOs who prefer to simplify

the report formats rather than cancel a reporting cycle. The recommendations and AusAID management responses are laid out in the following section.

Recommendation One

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should ensure appropriate representation of Australian Government support, including improved local language signage at project sites and consistent broader narrative concerning program origins.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will share with the NGOs the most recent guidance on visibility for the aid program. The next monitoring visits by AusAID officers will look into the implementation of this recommendation.

Recommendation Two

Recommendation: AusAID should ensure that future NGO program designs articulate objectives that describe substantive beneficiary changes rather than framing objectives as sector-based funding schemes.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID Vientiane will coordinate and seek advice from the Food Security and Rural Development Thematic Group on future program designs so that the latter are not only consistent with the aid program's priorities but also articulate impact on domains of change including quality of life of beneficiaries.

Recommendation Three

Recommendation: For the remainder of LANGOCA, AusAID and the partner NGOs should persist with the focus and arrangements outlined in the MEF and associated documents, since these should create the possibility of accruing program-level achievements.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will assess the technical assistance requirements of the MEF implementation. If necessary, additional resources will be allocated to the MEF implementation so that the program-level achievements are sustained.

Recommendation Four

Recommendation: AusAID should ensure that future NGO program designs mitigate the dissipation of impact by requiring NGO activities to focus more narrowly within a coherent theory of change.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will develop its Rural Development Delivery Strategy from September to December 2011 and it will articulate a clear theory of change and program logic for the entire pillar. For future initiatives, especially the AusAID-led designs, AusAID will check on consistency with the overall program logic and will require a clear articulation of the project-level theory of change in the design documents.

Recommendation Five

Recommendation: NGO partners should negotiate with AusAID to reduce the breadth of activities to only those that have demonstrated substantive and complementary results.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will review NGO requests on a case-to-case basis.

Recommendation Six

Recommendation: AusAID should consider investing any unspent funds to support provincial government's replication of VDMCs in high risk districts.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consider requests on a case-to-case basis. In some cases, the VDMC model is still in its infancy and thus too early to expand to other districts.

Recommendation Seven

Recommendation: AusAID and the partner NGOs should analyse the relative merits of an institutional strengthening approach to DRM vis-à-vis a livelihoods approach.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will include this particular agenda for discussion during the development of the Rural Development delivery strategy. The remaining period for implementation will not be adequate for a redirection or reorientation of NGO interventions but AusAID can conduct further analysis so that future programming can be guided by lessons from LANGOCA.

Recommendation Eight

Recommendation: Where UXO clearance is a source of program delays, partner NGOs should work with AusAID to explore the use of unspent funds to pay for the services of private clearing agencies.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consider requests on a case-to-case basis.

Recommendation Nine

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should ensure that all community education messages (such as MRE) are narrowly targeted at the relevant audience.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will seek clarification from NGOs on communication targeting and report on efforts undertaken to make the process effective.

Recommendation Ten

Recommendation: AusAID should continue to support the PEW and AEW processes as one practical way of fostering program-level coherence.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will assess the technical assistance requirements of the PEW and AEW processes and provide relevant and adequate resources whenever necessary.

Recommendation Eleven

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should clearly articulate a 'theory of change' with staff that links activities to the overall project and program goals.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will request NGOs to include the implementation of this recommendation in the progress report.

Recommendation Twelve

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should urgently discuss any extension requirements with AusAID within the current financial planning period. Delays already experienced to date could be compounded by late negotiations with AusAID and GoL and AusAID will need to re-program unspent funds.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will meet with each NGO to discuss the overall LANGOCA extension and inquire about potential programming considerations and resource requirements. Negotiation with GoL on extension of the Memorandum on Subsidiary Arrangement will reflect NGOs' updated programming needs. AusAID however will require each NGO for exit strategies and reassurance that all activities will come to a close on December 2013. The Independent Completion Review will commence shortly after the activities have stopped.

Recommendation Thirteen

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should accommodate known externalities into detailed implementation planning.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will ask the NGOs to discuss this in their progress reports.

Recommendation Fourteen

Recommendation: AusAID should ensure that any future NGO program designs explicitly define the role and value to be provided by ANGO affiliates.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will integrate this as a consideration in future NGO programming processes.

Recommendation Fifteen

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should better utilise existing resources (both in country and in Australia) to strengthen programming, particularly in the areas of gender and inclusion, and impact and learning.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will follow up with NGOs on their plans to meet this recommendation.

Recommendation Sixteen

Recommendation: Future AusAID NGO programs should explicitly design and resource strategies to support policy dialogue rather than assume this can occur spontaneously.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will integrate this as a consideration in future programming processes. The forthcoming work on the delivery strategy will also include policy dialogue and the resources needed to see this through.

Recommendation Seventeen

Recommendation: During the remainder of LANGOCA, partner NGOs should consider drawing on STA funds to resource dedicated 'policy dialogue' projects. This could involve individual NGOs seeking to scale-up aspects of their work, or multiple partners working together to advocate for policy changes based on their shared experience

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consider NGO requests on a case-to-case basis. Some of the NGOs have already informed AusAID that it will pursue policy dialogue initiatives from its own resources and not rely on new STAs.

Recommendation Eighteen

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should systematically report changes in village participatory/inclusive planning capacity.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will follow up in NGOs' future progress reports.

Recommendation Nineteen

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should follow through on addressing site-specific technical/quality issues raised during the review.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consult with each NGO on its proposed plans to address technical/quality issues and follow up on these in NGOs' future progress reports.

Recommendation Twenty

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should consider adopting a strengths-based approach to community engagement and planning.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will also integrate this as a consideration in future programming processes.

Recommendation Twenty One

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should precisely define the criteria for who will benefit from each intervention since it is well established that broadly defined beneficiaries lead to diffused or misplaced impact.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will also integrate this as a consideration in future programming processes.

Recommendation Twenty Two

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should ensure that activity selection is accompanied by a strategy to communicate the individual and community benefits that are expected to arise from successful implementation.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consult with each NGO on its proposed plan to address this recommendation and follow up on these in NGOs' future progress reports. AusAID will also integrate this as a consideration in future programming processes.

Recommendation Twenty Three

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should develop more sophisticated frameworks for capacity building than simply providing training.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consult with each NGO on its proposed plan to address this recommendation and follow up on these in NGOs' future progress reports. AusAID will also integrate this as a consideration in future programming processes.

Recommendation Twenty Four

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should develop and communicate strategies for how each LANGOCA activity will be supported towards sustainability by program completion.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consult with each NGO on its proposed plan to address this recommendation and follow up on these in NGOs' future progress reports. AusAID will also integrate this as a consideration in future programming processes.

Recommendation Twenty Five

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should work with GoL counterparts to precisely define the ongoing resource requirements of program interventions that the government is expected to carry forward.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consult with each NGO on its proposed plan to address this recommendation and follow up on these in NGOs' future progress reports.

Recommendation Twenty Six

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should ensure that there is supply chain integrity for activities that will require villagers to source externally available inputs.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consult with each NGO on its proposed plan to address this recommendation and follow up on these in NGOs' future progress reports.

Recommendation Twenty Seven

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should provide support and mentoring to field staff and GoL counterparts to develop practical strategies for gender equality and disability and ethnic inclusion. This may require use of external specialists or engagement of ANGO technical advisers.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consult with each NGO on its proposed plan to address this recommendation and follow up on these in NGOs' future progress reports.

Recommendation Twenty Eight

Recommendation: AusAID should provide technical support to partner NGOs for the development of appropriate disability inclusion strategies that are consistent with AusAID's disability strategy, 'Development for All'.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consult with the Disability Adviser and seek advice on technical support to partner NGOs.

Recommendation Twenty Nine

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should share learning about strategies that have fostered positive impact (e.g. active participation in decision-making) for women (particularly those from small ethnic groups) and people with disabilities

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will support the learning process by including this recommendation in the agenda of forthcoming AEWs.

Recommendation Thirty

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should plan to utilise their baseline data to assess changes. AusAID could facilitate a joint session between the NGOs to encourage cross learning in this area and to explore possible efficiencies from coordination.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will support the cross learning process by including this recommendation in the agenda of forthcoming AEWs.

Recommendation Thirty One

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should implement appropriate methods to assess changes in the capacity of project counterparts.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consult with each NGO on its proposed plan to address this recommendation and follow up on these in NGOs' future progress reports.

Recommendation Thirty Two

Recommendation: AusAID should rationalise reporting requirements by: a) modifying or eliminating the 6 monthly reporting to AusAID; b) using the PIC reports to provide a 6 monthly update; and c) reducing the PCC to an annual meeting

Response: AusAID partially agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: In a meeting with the NGOs, it was agreed that AusAID will simplify the reporting requirements by modifying the first 6 monthly reports which will now just focus on achievements, progress towards objectives, and implementations issues/management actions (if there are any). Only the annual progress reports (aka second 6 monthly reports) will contain an assessment section addressing AusAID's quality criteria and discussing implementation issues. The PCC meetings will remain to be two in a year given that AusAID and the NGOs will be approaching government with MOU extensions and potential additional resources.

Recommendation Thirty Three

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should assess their project level M&E to ensure that it is sufficient to support the program level MEF.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consult with each NGO on its proposed plan to address this recommendation and follow up on these in NGOs' future progress reports, notably in the M&E section.

Recommendation Thirty Four

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should put in place practical mechanisms of mutual accountability to strengthen program-level sharing, learning and adaptation.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consult with each NGO on its proposed plan to address this recommendation and seek advice on further support that can be provided to supplement their initiatives.

Recommendation Thirty Five

Recommendation: Partner NGOs could consider engaging the ANGO affiliates in synthesising relevant thematic reports that can help the NGOs in their understanding of the context.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consult with each NGO on its proposed plan to address this recommendation and follow up on these in NGOs' future progress reports.

Recommendation Thirty Six

Recommendation: AusAID should review with the partner NGOs the value of continuing with the landscape review as a part of the MEF.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: In consultation with the NGOs, AusAID have agreed that the outcomes of the analytical work to be undertaken in relation to the delivery strategy will be fed into the MEF process. By using an existing analysis, the LANGOCA Program will no longer require a separate review of the sector context.

Recommendation Thirty Seven

Recommendation: Partner NGOs should implement systematic risk identification processes that can inform broader reflection and learning about the drivers of success and causes of failure of the various interventions.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will review NGOs' future annual progress reports and assess if these meet the recommendation.

Recommendation Thirty Eight

Recommendation: Partner NGO should compare and contrast the approaches and outcomes from the work by Save the Children and Oxfam in strengthening disaster management structures.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will consider further analytical work on the two models, potentially as a supplementary assessment during the independent completion report process.

Recommendation Thirty Nine

Recommendation: At program completion AusAID and the partner NGOs should critically evaluate the value of trying to foster 'program-level' outcomes beyond those generated by a portfolio of discrete projects.

Response: AusAID agrees with the recommendation.

Actions: AusAID will include this as part of the independent completion report process.