

Annual Report 2009

Laos Australia NGO
Cooperation Agreement
(LANGOCA) Program

Prepared by: Mr David
Farrow and Ms Suzie
Albone

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LANGOCA ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT

This report documents work undertaken and achievements made by the LANGOCA Program in 2008 to 2009. It also chronicles the initial implementation of the annual evaluation component of the LANGOCA Program-level Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADPC	Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre
AEW	Annual Evaluation Workshop
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
APAR	Annual Program Assessment Report
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CBDRM	Community Based Disaster Risk Management
DMC	Disaster Management Committee
DDMC	District Disaster Management Committee
DLL	Double loop learning
DM	Disaster Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FSD	Fondation Suisse de Deminage
GoA	Government of Australia
GoL	Government of Lao PDR
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KBP	Kum Ban Pattana (village cluster)
KSW	Knowledge Sharing Workshop
LANGOCA	Laos–Australia NGO Cooperation Agreement
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LEW	LANGOCA Evaluation Workshop
LTA	Long-term activity
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEF	Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
MLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRE	Mine Risk Education
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NRA	National Regulatory Authority
PCC	Program Coordination Committee

PDMC	Provincial Disaster Management Committee
PEW	Project Evaluation Workshop
PIC	Program Implementation Committee
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SCA	Save the Children Australia
STA	Short-term activity
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VDMC	Village Disaster Management Committee
VDP	Village Development Plan
WV	World Vision

Summary

The LANGOCA Program consists of five long-term projects (LTAs) and a small but increasing number of related short-term activities (STAs). The LTAs and their associated STAs are being implemented by World Vision (two projects); Save the Children (SCA); Oxfam and Care. The projects are active in five of the eighteen provinces in Laos: Sayaboury (Xieng Hone and Sayaboury Districts - SCA); Vientiane (Met District - Oxfam); Saravan (Ta Oy District - Oxfam); Sekong (Lamarm and Dak Cheung Districts - Care, Kalum District - Oxfam); Khammouane (Mahaxay and Ngommalath Districts - World Vision, commenced late 2009).

The Program formally commenced in July 2007 although delays affecting component project inception were experienced, to varying degrees, by most of the projects. The Program will continue until 2014. Three of the five LTAs are working to integrate disaster management, especially disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster preparedness, with community development and strengthening of sustainable livelihoods. The remaining two LTAs are linking UXO clearance activities with community development and sustainable livelihoods planning. All of the projects also integrate into their activities work on gender and the cross-cutting issues of disability, HIV and environment.

The monitoring and evaluation process for the LANGOCA Program is described in the Program's current Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF). It includes an annual cycle of linked evaluation processes at component project level and at Program level. The first cycle of the LANGOCA evaluation process was conducted in an abbreviated form during February 2010. While some important components of the full process were not included¹ due to scheduling considerations, the activities provided a good test of the process and resulted in recommendations related to both the implementation of the LANGOCA projects and to the design and future implementation of the evaluation process.

The activities included: a two day workshop with the LANGOCA NGOs to review the new LANGOCA Monitoring and Evaluation Framework; a three day project evaluation process conducted by each of the NGOs to analyze progress, outcomes and lessons from the implementation to date of their long-term and short-term LANGOCA activities; the first two day LANGOCA "Annual Evaluation Workshop" involving NGO staff; district, provincial and national government staff associated with LANGOCA; and representatives of other organisations (particularly UXO clearance organisations) providing support for LANGOCA activities.

Three of the five LANGOCA LTAs have been in progress for more than a year and, despite challenging operating environments (mainly due to ethnic diversity, remoteness, and seasonally constrained access to many communities) each reported good progress in implementation and a variety of promising outcomes from this relatively short period of implementation.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that change will be slow due to these and other inhibiting factors. Further details are included in Section 2 of this report. The two remaining LTAs only commenced implementation in late 2009 and reported on their inception process and commencement of baseline studies.

¹ These components were: preparation of a Landscape Review defining the context and providing an analysis of data relevant to the LANGOCA Program; and the beneficiary consultations to be conducted by each of the LANGOCA projects.

Recommendations resulting from this first implementation of the LANGOCA evaluation process are as follows:

Program and project implementation

General Considerations

1. At this stage, it would appear fruitful for the following topics to be considered for inclusion in the Mid-term Review:
 - In order to formulate realistic expectations about implementation progress and progress towards original project design outcomes, what has been the specific impact of ethnic diversity, remote sites and seasonal access limitations on project implementation?
 - What progress has been made in strengthening project implementation in relation to gender and people marginalised within their communities?
 - How has the notion of “integration” of DM and UXO activities with community development approaches and sustainable livelihoods development been interpreted and implemented by each of the component projects and what results can be identified?
 - What, if any, are the effects of the differences in perspective between AusAID and the LANGOCA NGOs on the “program” nature of LANGOCA. What can be learnt from this for future program design?
2. The function of the PIC should be reviewed to determine whether it can be used more effectively as an opportunity for sharing knowledge, skills and experience about common aspects of the projects (e.g. gender; crosscutting issues; working with a diversity of ethnic groups; working with marginalised people) and include participation by activity implementation managers from the field.

Gender

3. With appropriate technical assistance from AusAID as necessary, LANGOCA NGOs to develop project-specific and realistic gender analysis frameworks to be applied in their work and used to review and report on progress in both process and outcomes.
4. Appropriate training and support be provided to project staff to assist them in applying the gender analysis frameworks.
5. A “knowledge sharing” workshop on the gender analysis frameworks and gender process and outcomes in the LANGOCA projects to be included in the 2010 AEW.

Working in ethnically diverse settings

6. A “knowledge sharing” workshop on facilitating project implementation in ethnically diverse settings to be included in the 2010 AEW.

Working effectively with people marginalised within their communities

7. A “knowledge sharing” workshop on effective approaches to engaging with marginalised community members to be included in the 2010 AEW.

Evaluation process implementation

Landscape Review

8. The Landscape Review process should begin with a scoping study to determine the contribution that the Landscape Review can make to the project and Program evaluation processes and the

optimum frequency of preparation. In particular, the study should include an assessment of the availability and quality of required data.

Technical assistance to support MEF implementation

9. NGOs will need technical assistance for conducting the beneficiary consultations and analysis of the data. A Lao-language Field Guide is also required to support the consultations, data analyses and biennial project evaluation process in future years.

Annual Evaluation Workshops (AEW)

10. The full LANGOCA evaluation process (beneficiary consultations; project evaluation workshops; and Annual Evaluation Workshop) will take place biennially i.e. in 2011 and 2013. The biennial AEW will be approximately 2 days duration with three objectives to be addressed:
 - *Reporting project outcomes, lessons and elements of effective approaches to the wider LANGOCA “community”*

This first day would be open to a wide audience – similar to that of the recent first AEW. It would include some time for discussion between implementers and other stakeholders.
 - *Examining the effectiveness of integrated UXO, DM and community development interventions – sharing technical approaches, and related outcomes and insights with relevant partners of the UXO projects and the DM projects and exploring ways to extend effective approaches to other districts and provinces*

This would involve two separate and concurrent workshops targeted to people interested in the more technical aspects of implementing integrated UXO or DM activities.
 - *Synthesising program-level outcomes and knowledge/LANGOCA Evaluation Workshop summary*

A draft synthesis of these Program-level results would be compiled by the workshop facilitators based mainly on the Day 1 presentations/discussion and, where possible, incorporating material from the UXO/DM workshops. The draft synthesis would be presented to the Day 2 participants (i.e. those attending the second day for the UXO/DM workshops) for discussion and revision. Additional comments on the draft synthesis could also be submitted for some time after the workshop.
11. In November 2010 and 2012, the AEW would take the form of “Knowledge Sharing Workshops” (KSW, possibly in conjunction with the PIC) primarily for NGO implementers and their technical partners to share experiences, lessons and ideas. Workshop agendas will be developed in consultation with the NGOs. The 2010 AEW will focus on results of the initial beneficiary consultations and sharing of experiences and lessons learned in 2010.

Part 1. Introduction

This report documents work undertaken in February 2010 in development and initial implementation of the annual evaluation component of the LANGOCA Program-level Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. The work was facilitated by a LANGOCA M&E support team² and included:

- A two-day MEF review workshop with LANGOCA NGOs and technical implementing partners
- Support for NGO project staff while undertaking a desk-evaluation process to identify outcomes and learning in the five LANGOCA component projects for presentation to a program-level workshop
- The first LANGOCA program-level Annual Evaluation Workshop in the form of a limited implementation of the approved process
- A review of these three activities and formulation of recommendations to strengthen the value of the process to the implementing NGOs, AusAID and other LANGOCA stakeholders and to support the implementation of some of its technical aspects.

1.1 LANGOCA structure and implementation responsibilities

Figure 1 shows the current components and partner organizations of LANGOCA. The goal and objectives of the Program as set out in the Program Design Document are:

Goal:

To reduce the vulnerability of the poor by integrating poverty reduction and crosscutting issues with disaster management and UXO approaches in Laos

Component objectives:

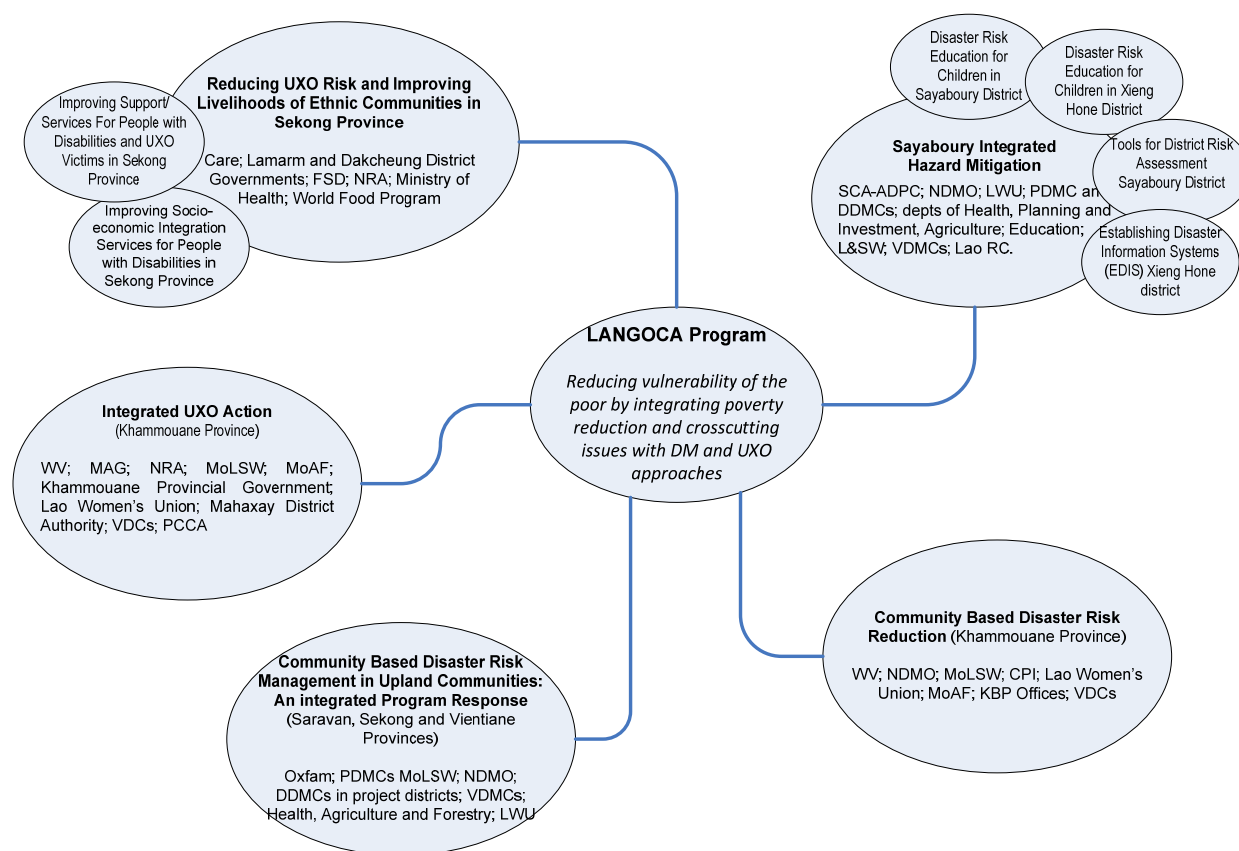
1. *To reduce the impact of natural and man-made disasters.*
2. *To reduce the impact of unexploded ordnance.*
3. *To build and promote Program capacity.*
4. *To manage the Program effectively*

The first three objectives incorporate the major beneficiary outcomes of the work of the implementing NGOs. The third objective is to be assessed on the following criteria: effective models are developed for integration of crosscutting issues in disaster management and UXO activities; effective approaches are applied within LANGOCA on integration of crosscutting issues in disaster management and UXO activities; effective coordination is developed between LANGOCA NGOs and key stakeholders in the disaster management and UXO sectors; and effective strategic planning and policy options for the disaster management and UXO sectors is highlighted and promoted.

Figure 1 shows basic details of the LANGOCA long- and short-term component activities, the NGO with project implementation responsibility in each case and the partner organisations for the long-term activities.

² The team was David Farrow, who had designed the new M&E approach for LANGOCA, and Suzie Albone, an experienced NGO and UN project manager who had worked in Laos for 13 years and has strong Lao language skills.

Figure 1: LANGOCA component activities – LTAs and STAs [small ‘eggs’] – and partner organisations



1.2 LANGOCA Evaluation process

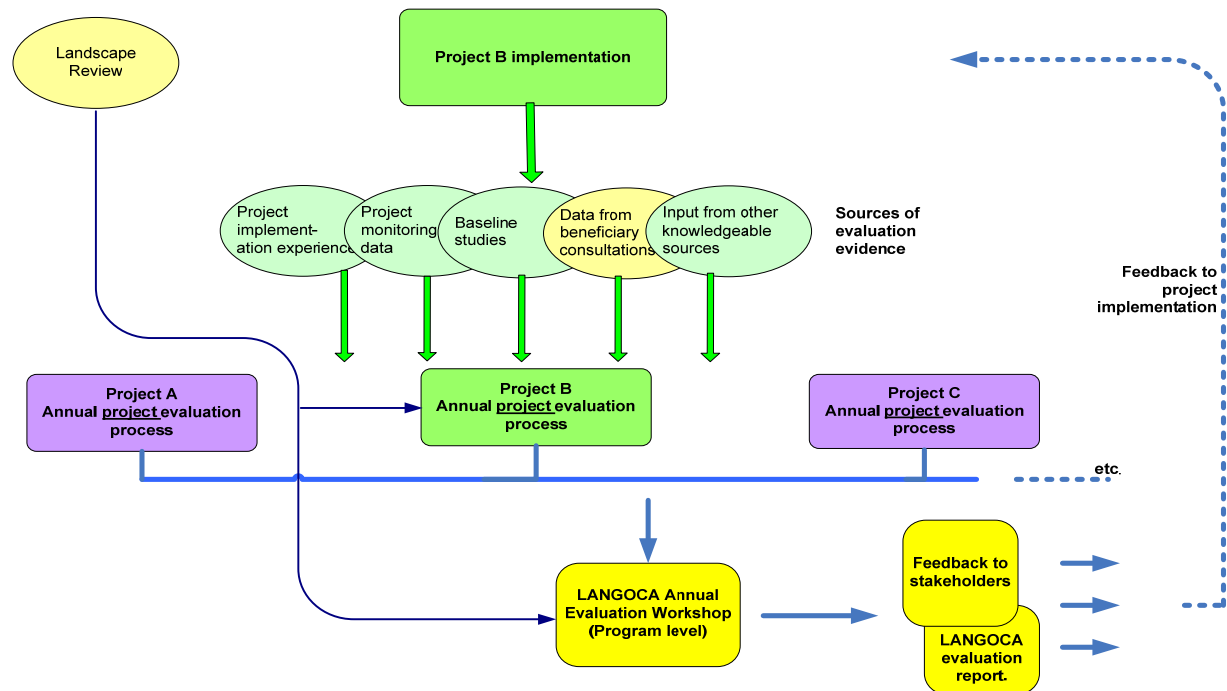
The LANGOCA M&E approach provides an annual reflection and synthesising process at project and program levels. It does this through providing opportunities for sharing experiences and learning across all of the five LTAs and with other interested organisations and individuals – particularly those working in livelihoods development, disaster management, and all aspects of UXO work – culminating each year in an Annual Evaluation Workshop (AEW).

The overall purpose of the M&E process is to:

1. Structure a systematic exploration of what is working well in the Lao PDR context in reducing vulnerability to natural or human-induced disasters and reducing the impact of UXOs while strengthening livelihoods;
2. Summarising the main components of evolving effective approaches and lessons learned in community development in Lao PDR – especially in relation to Disaster Management and Disaster Risk Reduction (including the effects of UXOs) and their relationship to poverty; and
3. Provide practical, usable information that can support adaptation and adoption of effective approaches by government agencies, communities and donors.

Figure 2 illustrates the components of the LANGOCA evaluation process which is described in the LANGOCA Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF).

Figure 2: Diagrammatic representation of the LANGOCA Evaluation Process



Project-level evaluation

Prior to the AEW, each NGO project undertakes a project level evaluation designed to provide a formal opportunity for reflection and learning with a focus on project outcomes rather than outputs – a ‘sense making’ process which draws on a variety of evidence sources to articulate what has been learned about effective approaches and what has changed for beneficiaries in three defined “domains of change”. The formal output of this process is a project evaluation presentation to the LANGOCA Evaluation Workshop.

The AEW Structure

The AEW was divided into two separate parts, the project presentations on the first day and the discussion of program level focus questions on the second day. The AEW Agenda is included in Annex 2.

Program-level “focus” questions

The following focus questions were discussed in facilitated small-group meetings with a plenary discussion following each round of the small-group discussions.

1. What are the essential elements (success factors) of effective approaches to integrated disaster management; UXO management and livelihoods development? How are these affected by the main differences across rural communities?

2. What lessons have been learned about implementing effective, integrated approaches to disaster management; UXO management; and livelihoods development? How are these affected by the main differences across rural communities?
3. To what extent is the Program successfully addressing issues of gender?
4. How is the Program able to work with and affect the most vulnerable and marginalised community members?
5. Within existing program/project resources, are there ways in which the program/projects could be strengthened?

This first AEW implementation was in the nature of an early trial of the process and, as a result, two of the data sources that will provide important input into subsequent implementations were not yet available – namely, the data from LANGOCA beneficiary consultations and the Landscape Review. These are shaded pink in the diagram above.

Part 2. LANGOCA Annual Evaluation Outcomes

LANGOCA projects are active in five of the eighteen provinces: Sayaboury (Xieng Hone and Sayaboury Districts - SCA); Vientiane (Met District - Oxfam); Saravan (Ta Oy District - Oxfam); Sekong (Lamarm and Dak Cheung Districts - Care, Kalum District - Oxfam); Khammouane (Mahaxay and Ngommalath Districts - World Vision, commenced late 2009).

There are difficulties in establishing specific conclusions about the LANGOCA Program performance from the first evaluation workshop. In addition, the three LANGOCA projects that have been underway for at least 12 months represent diverse approaches to the integration of UXO and DM with basic community development and livelihoods strengthening work and are still at relatively early stages of implementation. The Care project in Sekong is linking UXO clearance (roving and pre-planned) to village priorities for livelihood development and, in Saravan, Sekong and Vientiane Provinces, Oxfam is also implementing a community-driven process linking livelihoods support and DM activities. In contrast, the SCA project is working primarily through provincial and district authorities to strengthen Disaster Management Committees at both levels as well as implementing DM education activities for school teachers and students.

The remainder of this section presents a summary of the work of the three projects based on the project presentations and subsequent discussion at the LANGOCA Workshop.

2.1 Unexploded Ordnances Component

In Sekong, Care is approaching the mitigation of UXO problems in four ways:

- A community-driven process for reporting UXO sightings and arranging for their removal
- A village development planning process that incorporates community agreement on land to be cleared of UXOs based on the proposed uses of the land and related reasons
- Determining the extent and nature of scrap metal collection activity in target villages and providing this information to the national Mine Risk Education (MRE) working group to inform discussion on forthcoming changes to laws relating to scrap-metal collection
- MRE included where appropriate in all project activities

UXO work in the project villages is due for completion during 2010 whereupon future project activities will concentrate almost solely on livelihood development. Since commencement in 2008, roving UXO clearance work in six villages in response to reported sightings has resulted in the removal of 135 UXOs. In addition, 61 livelihood-related UXO clearance requests have been completed which has resulted in access to additional land for 257 households.

The community development focus of Care's work has also resulted in:

- Water supply being identified, particularly by women, as the priority in several Village Development Plans (VDP). Work has commenced to design and install appropriate systems and two have been completed

- Completion of the VDP process in 19 villages in cooperation with government partners and communities. Subsequently, this led to increased capacity of communities to deliberate and decide on development needs following Tropical Storm Ketsana
- Improved peanut farming results in three villages following project technical assistance
- Increased understanding of village-to-market linkages in three villages following introduction of “market mapping” involving community members and government staff.

In the Oxfam DM-focused project, MRE has also been included in the work with the 30 target villages in Ta Oy District and no UXO-related accidents have been reported since the start of the project. With only limited data however, it is impossible to assess the contribution of the project to this result at this stage.

The World Vision UXO project only commenced implementation in Mahaxay District in late 2009. It is similar in concept to the Care project in that it will work with village development committees to strengthen integration between village development priorities and UXO clearance and education as well as assisting the strengthening and diversification of livelihood options for village families.

During the workshop discussion, representatives of UXO clearance organisations supported the increased effectiveness of UXO work in better meeting the needs of villagers for access to safe productive land when it is integrated with village development planning processes. They also commented on the improved effectiveness of MRE when integrated with longer-term development work rather than when presented as a component of “stand-alone” UXO clearance work which has only a short-term presence in a village. Finally, they also noted the fact that women and men often express different priorities for UXO clearance and then have different levels of power to influence decisions. Integration of clearance decisions with village development planning has improved decision-making but the clear inference was that bad decisions can still be made at times as a result of this situation.

2.2 Disaster Management Component

The three LANGOCA projects with a disaster management focus utilise different approaches. In Sayaboury Province, SCA is working initially to strengthen the PDMC and the Xieng Hone and Sayaboury District Disaster Management Committees and then, in conjunction with the DDMCs, to establish and support Village DMCs and community Disaster Risk Assessment processes in 12 villages in each district.

In parallel with this, the project is working with teachers and students – including the innovative use of “children’s clubs” and drop-in centres – to increase awareness and practical approaches to disaster preparedness. It is also establishing a database of disaster events (which currently has 242 events logged) that, eventually, may have a useful role in disaster analysis and sharing information with other Laos and international agencies.

While also working to strengthen provincial, district and Kum Ban Pattana (KBP, village cluster) disaster response capacities and systems, the focus of the Oxfam and WV projects is more oriented towards working at community level to strengthen village DMCs and community and household resilience in the face of food shortages, health and UXO issues. The Care project, initially focusing on integrating UXO clearance with community development priorities, will also be emphasising the development of sustainable livelihoods in its ongoing work and, to this extent will be contributing to community resilience in disaster events.

Following project inception and the completion of baseline studies and after a little more than 12 months of full project activity implementation, substantial progress has been made by the DM-related projects. In general terms, outcomes reported by projects include:

SCA

- Increased DM and DRR knowledge amongst teachers and students and encouragement of students as family “change agents”. Planning to extend the program and curriculum to more schools.
- Strengthening of DM institutionalisation at province and district levels and production of a Provincial DM Strategy Plan and District Implementation Plans. The DDMC is now better able to respond immediately to emerging events
- Initial development of village implementation plans to reduce impacts of disasters including information exchange and disaster early warning systems; and livelihood strengthening initiatives such as small/medium-scale water and irrigation systems, access to micro-finance, vocational training.

Oxfam

- Improved household and community food security and capital (in livestock and savings) including amongst some of the poorest families
- Increased knowledge of some new agricultural approaches
- Increased knowledge about health, HIV and UXOs and reduced sickness in communities. More trained health workers and midwives
- Capacity of VDMCs and DDMCs increased and evident (eg. DDMC response times reduced) following Tropical Storm Ketsana. Some progress achieved in strengthening women’s roles in VDMCs
- Work commenced in development of the three Provincial DM Strategy Plans.

Care

- While notionally a project integrating UXO work and community development, for the remainder of its implementation it will be focusing on strengthening livelihoods, and among communities affected by Tropical Storm Ketsana. To this extent, the community development planning and outcomes already outlined in section 2.1 will clearly contribute to reduced vulnerability and greater resilience in the face of disasters.

During workshop discussion, the point was strongly made by both NGO and Government representatives that it was imperative for projects to work through the provincial, district and village DMC structures so that achievements are joint ones. However, the widely different perspectives of the development NGOs and the responsible government agencies as well as their differing areas of detailed knowledge affecting a project (e.g. technical development knowledge on the one hand and local community knowledge on the other) mean that patience is needed on both sides to ensure effective and lasting outcomes. The need for often painstaking process needs to be acknowledged and, in implementation scheduling, time allowed for this to take place.

Several contributors emphasised the need for cooperation and sharing of approaches between NGOs. The potential value to other districts and provinces of the DM Strategic Plans and IEC materials produced by the SCA project in Sayaboury was also noted.

The likelihood of poorer households adapting to or experimenting with new ideas and technologies was raised at various times in the Workshop. Examples were presented to support both views – poorer families as unlikely or as enthusiastic innovators. The situation is unclear but caution is necessary in making assumptions about the way in which new ideas are likely to be taken up and by whom. Further discussion of issues related to poor and marginalised people are included in the next sub-section.

2.3 Effects of the LANGOCA projects on different target groups

People with disabilities At present, Care does not target activities to people with disabilities but new STAs include capacity development for agencies working with disabled people and provide specific livelihood development support for disabled people and their families. Some people with disabilities already benefit as indirect beneficiaries through their households. Oxfam also noted the need for specific livelihood development funding to provide support for people with disabilities. The SCA project is also not specific about working with disabled people but says that their location in the community and their needs in relation to DM will be adequately incorporated through the project's participatory DRR process. This requires follow-up and verification. SCA noted that some of the problems in working with disabled people in communities resulted from the difficulties that implementers have in engaging appropriately with them.

It appears that some increased focus may be appropriate in establishing effective approaches for supporting people with disabilities or ensuring that their interests are adequately dealt with through existing or planned community and household related activities and in capacity development activities with government agencies.

Ethnic groups Difficulty in communicating adequately across the many different languages and cultures of project target groups was repeatedly mentioned as one of the major challenges faced by each of the project implementers. Working with groups that are largely illiterate further compounds the issue. The problem has generally been managed by employing or seconding local people into project implementation roles whenever possible. However, this increases the need for NGOs to be able provide continuous cycles of training, follow-up, review and more training for project staff – in particular, training in development issues and approaches relevant to local communities (including gender and disabilities) but also community development skills in facilitating, interviewing, challenging, supporting and so on.

It may well be fruitful for projects to share experiences, approaches and resources in dealing with these situations.

Other poor and marginalised people within communities All projects intended to focus activities to benefit the poorest members of communities. However, a number of barriers to achieving this were noted. Engaging in new livelihoods activity is risky and requires trust. For the poorest people any failure in a livelihood activity may have the direst consequences. The life experiences of the most marginalized may make it difficult for them to develop the necessary trust and confidence. If poor families do decide to participate, they probably have to overcome within themselves well-entrenched social and psychological pressures.

Several commentators also highlighted the ways in which the needs of poorer families can be easily overlooked or pushed into the background by structural or social factors, e.g. as a result of the requests of wealthier or more influential people being given priority. Care noted another example of poor families being unable to provide labour for clearing vegetation from their land prior to the

commencement of UXO clearance work. As this was a necessary initial step in UXO work, these families were less likely to be able to get access to safe land. More generally, it was also noted that some poor families were unable to participate in livelihood development activities when they could not contribute the necessary labour or materials.

Strategies to assist in minimising these and similar problems in engaging poor and marginalised people are needed and project implementers may benefit from sharing their experiences in dealing with the issues involved.

Children SCA has been proactive in educating children about DM then encouraging them and their schools to act as change agents in the wider community. The results reported seemed encouraging and are congruent with a similar role for children in a recent Health and Disaster Management project in Indonesia³. The education of primary and secondary school students in Xinjiang Province in China about HIV and AIDS and encouragement for them to act as attitude and behavioural change agents in the community is a related example⁴. Other project implementers expressed interest in the approach and there may be value for LANGOCA in facilitating further exploration and dissemination of SCA's work with schools and children.

2.4 Addressing gender issues through the program

All project implementers are required to be proactive in addressing gender issues⁵ and are generally conscientious in trying to do this. As several NGOs commented however, it is always a difficult task given generally patriarchal cultural contexts, field staff who are often relatively inexperienced in dealing with such a complex and sensitive issue (and find it uncomfortable and at times, intimidating) and the rapid turnover of government partner organisation staff.

Several discussions on the difficulties associated with implementing gender-related activities addressed the following points. Gender in development is most often about changing the relationships, and sometimes roles, between women and men. This can often cause deep tension and sometimes aggression. It was noted that a lot of gender-awareness training for staff is useful but not sufficient to enable staff to undertake the work confidently and effectively. They need well-supported experience to do this as well as strong facilitation skills and the ability to conduct activities in local language. These requirements are often difficult to fulfil. Difficulty in recruiting female field staff also impedes progress in gender issues.

NGOs reported a number of actions reflecting targeted support for women's priorities (water supply construction; wheelbarrows) and which had the effect of reducing the workload of women. It was noted however that, in changes of this kind it was also necessary to ensure that positive aspects of women's lives were not inadvertently damaged. Work was continuing on establishing women representatives on

³ Discussions with project staff of the Nabire Health and Disaster Management Project, Nabire, Papua Province, Indonesia, September 2009.

⁴ Final Evaluation Report, Xinjiang HIV and AIDS Prevention and Care Project, AusAID, March 2009.

⁵ In effect contributing, through their work, to the main objectives of AusAID's Gender Policy, namely: To improve women's access to education and health care; To improve women's access to economic resources; To promote women's participation and leadership in decision making at all levels; To promote the human rights of women and assist efforts to eliminate discrimination against women.

VDP committees and VDMCs. However, one commentator noted that simply relying on representation was not necessarily effective and women should have sufficient support and training to ensure that they could and would make effective contributions to community deliberations and decision-making. NGOs were generally able to conduct discussions with separate groups of women and men and in some cases (SCA) bring the groups together to discuss differences and try to get consensus on issues. SCA reported that the women in Sayaboury were very active in project activities whereas, in Sekong, Care and Oxfam reported that it was hard to hear women's views and most don't speak any Lao. It was also noted that a dominant or powerful woman in a group could just as effectively stifle discussion and facilitator's need to be able to recognise and manage this kind of situation.

In summary, one commentator noted that there would be value in the NGOs sharing in more detail their experiences in working with these difficulties and constraints associated with gender and also with other power-related issues.

2.5 Elements of effective approaches

Project evaluation responses to this question were limited. This may reflect inadequate explanation to the project teams (by the M&E support team) of the purpose and intended content of the section. It may also reflect the fact that it is as yet too early in implementation of the projects to clearly identify what are the key elements in doing effective work. Points noted by the project teams that contribute to effective work included:

- The commitment and solidarity of the community and its VDMC
- The quality of the relationships between the district (and provincial) government agencies and the NGO and the village communities along with the effort put in by all parties to establish and maintain the relationships and to cooperatively plan activities. These relationships need slow, long-term, labour-intensive processes and constant maintenance.
- Acknowledgement that situations and community priorities change and must be responded to with flexibility.
- The fact that good quality, community-level "Training of Trainers" (ToT) can result in good outcomes and be cost-effective.

2.6 What has been learned so far?

Learning applicable in a number of projects included:

- Turnover in government staff is high while communities are much more stable. This has implications for relationships, project memory and history and the rate at which implementation can proceed.
- Time must be taken to understand ethnic cultures and to plan the most effective ways to work with people including: the use of local language facilitators whenever possible; appropriate and practical activities; and participatory methods for training and planning that ensure all voices are heard. Implementation needs to be governed by community and local government capacity and resources rather than work plan schedules.
- Appropriate government agencies must be involved at all activity planning stages to ensure that village and district plans are complementary. A distinct side-benefit of this close involvement is that village planning may then influence KBP, district and eventually provincial planning.

- Regular monitoring and review of activities with partner government agencies, project staff and communities, in addition to facilitating understanding, communication and planning, also strengthens the M&E skills of each group
- Long delays in follow-up of training and activity implementation due to wet-season inaccessibility of many villages can lead to loss of knowledge and hinder progress and successful outcomes. Planning and scheduling of activities and follow-up needs to take account of this issue.
- To make effective and efficient use of expensive and highly technical UXO clearance teams, accurate planning, scheduling and coordination is essential.

Part 3. Conclusions and Recommendations

Project outcomes reported by the Care, Oxfam and SCA projects and outlined above indicate successful change occurring in each of the three “domains of change” identified for the overall Program. As expected at this early stage of implementation, the changes are mostly small (or involve a limited number of a project’s identified target communities) but they have been significant in establishing sound procedures to support project implementation over the coming years.

It is noteworthy that the STAs being implemented by SCA and Care are able to provide good complementary support for their respective LTAs. This vindicates the LANGOCA design strategy of setting aside funding for STAs that can fill gaps or respond to opportunities related to the overall Program objectives.

Progress to date has also assisted project teams in identifying difficulties in undertaking some project activities. These have been outlined in section 2 above and a number of recommendations are included here to assist in addressing them.

Domains of change

(1) Household/Community capacity change: What change is evident in the capacity (awareness; knowledge; skills; behaviour) of women, men, boys, girls and youth; and households and communities to take action in relation to DM; UXO and livelihoods?

(2) Government policy, capacity and practice change: What change is evident in the policies, capacities and practices of government agencies with whom the project works

(3) Condition change: Is there evidence that improved household and/or community capacity is affecting changes in the lives of men, women, boys, girls, youth? Is there evidence that livelihoods; disaster management and UXO management are improving?

(a) General Considerations

1. Following the various workshops, feedback opportunities and outcomes of the AEW in February, it would appear fruitful for the following topics to be considered for inclusion in the Mid-term Review:
 - In order to formulate realistic expectations about implementation progress and progress towards original project design outcomes, what has been the specific impact of ethnic diversity, remote sites and seasonal access limitations on project implementation?
 - What progress has been made in strengthening project implementation in relation to gender and people marginalised within their communities?
 - How has the notion of “integration” of DM and UXO activities with community development approaches and sustainable livelihoods development been interpreted and implemented by each of the component projects and what results can be identified?
 - What, if any, are the effects of the differences in perspective between AusAID and the LANGOCA NGOs on the “program” nature of LANGOCA? What can be learnt from this for future program design?
2. The function of the PIC should be reviewed to determine whether it can be used more effectively as an opportunity for sharing knowledge, skills and experience about common aspects of the projects (e.g. gender; crosscutting issues; working with a diversity of ethnic groups; working with marginalised people) and include participation by activity implementation managers from the field.

(b) Gender

As previously noted, work by project staff on gender is always difficult and it was clear from the discussion that there is a wide range of understanding and experience of gender-related issues amongst the NGOs and other LANGOCA stakeholders. While acknowledging the difficulties and constraints encountered by the NGOs in this area, it is apparent that the gender analysis approaches being used as part of project implementation are not strong.

It is recommended that:

3. With appropriate technical assistance from AusAID as necessary, LANGOCA NGOs to develop project-specific and realistic gender analysis frameworks to be applied in their work and used to review and report on progress in both process and outcomes.
4. Appropriate training and support be provided to project staff to assist them in applying the gender analysis frameworks.
5. A “knowledge sharing” workshop on the gender analysis frameworks and gender process and outcomes in the LANGOCA projects to be included in the 2010 AEW. The effectiveness of project implementation around gender-related issues could also be further reviewed during the LANGOCA Mid-term Review.

(b) Working in ethnically diverse settings

LANGOCA projects work with many different ethnic populations in Laos but, as a result, speed of implementation, success of community engagement and relationships with local and provincial governments are affected. There is no simple way of dealing with this reality but it is important that the ways in which it affects project progress and outcomes is recognised by all stakeholders.

6. It is recommended that a “knowledge sharing” workshop on facilitating project implementation in ethnically diverse settings is included in the 2010 AEW.

(c) Working effectively with people marginalised within their communities

Several commentators noted the various ways or reasons why it was often difficult to engage with people who are marginalised within their communities or who were not able to participate in or benefit from project activities. Examples highlighted the situation of poor families or people with disabilities. It is important that these issues and constructive approaches to addressing them are highlighted and shared.

7. It is recommended that a “knowledge sharing” workshop on effective approaches to engaging with marginalised community members is included in the 2010 AEW.

(d) Other factors affecting project success

The importance of establishing effective relationships

The importance of relationship-building and cooperation between NGO project staff; village leaders; and KBP, district and provincial government staff was noted by every project team and cannot be over-estimated. This can often be a painstaking process however – especially when there is rapid turnover in government staff – and affects the rate of implementation and progress in a project. Similarly, developing capacity and ownership amongst project beneficiaries (whether they are community members or government staff) is a time-consuming and uneven process. Because there are so many

external factors beyond the control of a project, there is often only limited correlation between the quality and quantity of inputs and the outcomes achieved⁶.

The demands on NGO staff

Effective rural community development requires the capacity to work successfully with a diverse range of knowledge and skills. In the LANGOCA projects this may include technical livelihood areas, UXO clearance or DM, MRE, ethnic cultural and language considerations, gender and disability, etc along with community facilitation skills under often taxing conditions. It involves some of the most demanding development work and recruiting sufficiently competent, experienced and motivated workers can be a constant challenge, especially when complicated by ethnic language requirements. Consequently, maintaining the technical expertise of field staff is also challenging

⁶ For example, see *Capacity, Performance and Change*, Baser H and Morgan P, ECDPM 2008.

Annex 1**List of Participants: LANGOCA First Annual Evaluation Workshop**
11-12 Feb 2010, Novotel Vientiane**Government of Lao PDR**

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| 1. Mr. Prasith Detphommathet, Director | NDMO |
| 2. Mr. Vilayphong Sisomvang, Senior Technical Officer | NDMO |
| 3. Mr. Saysongkham Phanouvong, Deputy Director of INGO Division,
Department of International Organization | MoFA |
| 4. Mr. Somnuk Vorasarn, Deputy Director | NRA |
| 5. Ms Nouing Thengsombath | LSW Saravan |
| 6. Mr Bounsieng Saphakdee | LSW Khammouan |
| 7. Mr Viengkham Phetlangsy | LSW Sayaboury |
| 8. Mr Kongkham Linthonesy | LSW Sayaboury |
| 9. Mr Sengchanh Kanthavong | LSW Sayaboury |
| 10. Mr Im Bounphavong | LSW Xieng Hone |
| 11. Mr. Bounthan Laosayavong | LSW Sekong |
| 12. Mr. Bounsouk Chomvisane | LSW Vientiane Province |

LANGOCA NGOs

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| 13. Ms Mona Girgis | CARE |
| 14. Ms Rebecca Bradley | CARE |
| 15. Mr. Jakapong Prapanjit | CARE |
| 16. Mr. Abbie Lockwood | CARE |
| 17. Mr. Phomma Vilasing | CARE |
| 18. Mr. Phayvanh Phomvang | CARE |
| 19. Mr. Khamluang Keoka | Oxfam |
| 20. Ms. Manivanh Suyavong | Oxfam |
| 21. Mr. Soutchai Khammibout | Oxfam |
| 22. Mr. Phouvong Thanongsin | Oxfam |
| 23. Mr. Matthew Pickard | SCA |
| 24. Ms Soukmalay Manisaveth | SCA |
| 25. Ms Somphit Sittiphone | SCA |
| 26. Ms Emma Aguinot | SCA |
| 27. Ms Eun-Joo Yi | SCA |
| 28. Mr Sengathit Vangvilachit | SCA |
| 29. Mr. Grant Power | WVA |
| 30. Mr. Kamsone Khamlasy | WVA |
| 31. Mr. Somsack Douangpanya | WVA |
| 32. Ms Sarah Whittaker | WVA |

33. Mr Eddy Sianipar

WVA

AusAID

34. Ms. Raine Dixon

AusAID

35. Mr. Rob McGregor

AusAID

36. Ms. Dulce Simmanivong

AusAID

37. Ms. Sarah Ransom

AusAID

38. Ms. Rakounna Sisaleumsak

AusAID

39. Mr. Mone Sysavath

AusAID

Guests & Observers

40. Mr. Phil Bean

NRA

41. Mr Edwin Faigmane

UXO Lao/UNDP

42. Ms Heuangphachanh Panpadith

UXO Lao

43. Mr Sisira Kumara

ADPC

44. Mr Thanongdeth Insisiengmay

ADPC

45. Ms Stephanie Sparks

FSD

46. Mr Tony Fish

FSD

Consultants

47. Mr David Farrow

Consultant

48. Ms Suzie Albone

Consultant

LANGOCA Secretariat

49. Dr. Somphone Phonh-axa

50. Ms Bounthavy Chounlamany

51. Ms Chanpheng Mingboupha

LANGOCA Annual Evaluation Workshop

11 - 12 February 2010, Novotel, Vientiane

Background on LANGOCA

The Laos Australian NGO Cooperation Agreements (LANGOCA) was designed in 2006 based on an 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 has Cooperation Agreements with four Australian NGOs: Oxfam, CARE, World Vision and Save the Children Australia (SCA). Using an overall program plan as a basis, it consists of 5 long term activities (LTA): 3 on disaster management (DM) and 2 on integrated UXO action.

By 30 Dec 2009, AusAID had funded twelve (12) activities under the LANGOCA program with a combined value of A\$11,792,990. LANGOCA works towards a common goal of reducing the impact of natural & man-made disasters and impact of UXO. 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.

Program Monitoring & Evaluation Approach

The LANGOCA M&E approach provides an annual reflection and synthesising process at project and program levels resulting in comprehensive sharing of experiences and learning across all of the five LTAs and with other interested organisations and individuals – particularly those working in livelihoods development, disaster management, and all aspects of UXO work.

The overall purpose of the M&E processes is to, annually:

1. Structure a systematic exploration of what is working well in the Lao PDR context in reducing vulnerability to natural or human-induced disasters and reducing the impact of UXOs while strengthening livelihoods
2. Produce a succinct summary setting out the main details and highlights of evolving effective approaches to community development in the Lao PDR and lessons learned on the way – especially in relation to Disaster Management and Disaster Risk Reduction (including the effects of UXOs) and their relationship to poverty.
3. Provide practical, usable information that can support adaptation and adoption of effective approaches by government agencies, communities and donors.

The M&E process culminates in an Annual Evaluation Workshop that focuses on identifying and learning from effective approaches in Lao PDR for achieving positive beneficiary outcomes especially in relation to disaster management and UXO risks.

The main objectives of the Evaluation Workshop are to:

1. synthesise and share amongst participants, knowledge and understanding gained from the LANGOCA component projects,
2. use this to strengthen the LANGOCA projects and the related work of other government and non-government agencies, and
3. provide information to AusAID and the Government of Lao PDR to assist in assessing the performance and effectiveness of LANGOCA.

LANGOCA Evaluation Workshop Agenda

Time	Activities
11 February (Thursday): LANGOCA Project Outcomes	
8.15	Registration
8.30	Opening Remarks Ms Raine Dixon, First Secretary, AusAID
8:45	Introductions
8.55	AusAID Performance Management and Evaluation Policy Mr Rob McGregor, Laos Program Manager, AusAID
9.10	Overview of the LANGOCA evaluation process, Evaluation Workshop objectives & agenda Mr David Farrow, M&E Consultant
9.30	Care: <i>Reducing UXO Risk and Improving Livelihoods of Ethnic Communities in Sekong Province</i>
10.10	Morning Tea
10.30	World Vision: <i>Integrated UXO Action and Poverty and Disaster Risk Reduction (Khammouane Province)</i>
11.15	Discussion based on the Care and World Vision presentations
12.00	Lunch
1.00	Oxfam: <i>Drought in Upland Communities: An Integrated Program Response (Saravan, Sekong and Vientiane Provinces)</i>
1.45	Save the Children Australia: <i>Sayaboury Integrated Hazard Mitigation Project (and related short-term activities)</i>
2.30	World Vision: <i>Poverty and Disaster Risk Reduction</i> - Brief Recap
2.45	Afternoon Tea
3.00	Discussion based on Oxfam, SCA and WV presentations
4.00	Concluding discussion

4.30	Close for Day 1
12 February (Friday): Synthesising LANGOCA Outcomes	
8.30	Overview of Day 1 outcomes
8.45	Group discussions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant changes • Effective approaches to integrated disaster management/UXO and livelihoods • Overall lessons learned
9.30	Plenary discussion
10.15	Morning Tea
10.30	Group discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender outcomes in LANGOCA • Cross-cutting issues (disability, environment, HIV) • Implications for LANGOCA program design, implementation and management
11.15	Plenary discussion
12.00	Lunch
1.00	Final Plenary: Evaluation Workshop Conclusions
2.00	Closing Remarks Ms Raine Dixon, First Secretary, AusAID