

For Norwegian Church Aid

*Empowerment of Ethnic Minorities for Livelihood and
Community Development in North Western Laos*

(Long District, Luang Namtha Province and Pha Oudom District, Bokeo Province)

Final evaluation report (final version)



March 2015

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Acronyms

CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of the Discriminations Against Women
CoC	Code of Conduct
CRC	UN Committee on the Right of the Child
DAFO	District Agriculture and Forestry Office
DCDC	District Commission on Drug Control and Supervision
DoH	District Health Office
HH	Household
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
KCF	Kadoorie Charitable Foundation
LCDC	Lao National Commission on Drug Control and Supervision
LL	Lessons learnt
LWU	Lao Women Union
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NA	Not available
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NTFP	Non timber forest products
PAFO	Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PRF	Poverty Reduction Fund
PSRP	Participatory Self Review and Planning
PVP	Participatory village planning
RBA	Rights Based Approach
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendants
UNODC	United Nations Organization on Drugs and Crime
VDC	Village Development Committee
VDF	Village Development Fund
VHV	Village Health Volunteers
VVV	Village Veterinary Volunteers
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive summary

NCA has more than 20 years experience supporting ethnic minorities and the development of rural villages in Laos. This mission did perform the final evaluation of the project entitled "Empowerment of ethnic minorities for livelihood and community development in North Western Laos" funded by Kadoorie Charitable Foundation (KCF) in the period 2008-2014. The project area covers 21 villages in Long District (Luang Namtha Province) and 6 villages in Pha Oudom District (Bokeo Province). Amongst the 21 villages in Long, 14 received full package of support and others only received support in health outreach activities and access to education. The area covers the villages as planned, but some villages did merge, which explains the difference in numbers (26 villages in Long and 7 in Pha Oudom mentioned in the project document).

The final evaluation took place in January and February 2015, carried out by a team of external consultants: Mr Khamkone Nanthepha and Mrs Anne Pirotte.

The target villages belong to two distinct areas reflecting different realities, challenges and opportunities:

- In Long District as well as in Luang Namtha Province in general, rubber plantations are present, that attract and will require more and more labour in the coming years. The remotest villages have the easiest access to forests, that still play a major role in the family diet and income (leaves, roots, NTFP). Almost all villages supported belong to the Akha ethnic group unless two (Ai Seng, Lahu) and Donejai (Thai Doi). Few villagers are fluent in Lao language.
- In Pha Oudom District (POD), all supported villages are Khmu and located along the road. Women have a basic understanding of Lao but have difficulties to express themselves in Lao language.

In both Districts, most target villages were resettled about 10 years ago. Banana plantations develop quickly in the lowlands and attract labour from the project area (uplands), contributing to fuel rural migrations.

Identified **best practices** include:

- *The multi-sectorial strategy, initiated during the previous phases:*

1. *Building access road and develop mechanisms to ensure their maintenance* was a pre-requisite for target villages to enter the market economy; Both access roads to target villages have been built with SIDA support thanks to NCA lobbying before entering into the new target villages in 2008 in POD and Long. In 2014, the Luang Namtha Provincial Public Works and Transport Department took up responsibility for road maintenance from Long to Jamai village with funding support from the World Bank. In 2013, NCA assisted Pha Oudom Office of Public Works and Transport to mobilize fund from the private sector and the villagers of Think and Deua villages to build a new access road to Think village and expanded the existing road to Deua village. In Pha Oudom, as of the end of the project in 2014, all target villages have access to the grid electricity supply while villages in Long have been supported with renewable energy (solar).
2. *Income generating activities development* (mainly in-farm) with cash crops (job's tears in both Long and POD districts, oil bean, maize and cassava in Long), animal raising (including animal health with the training of Village Veterinary Volunteers VVV and some fodder production), tea production in Long District, but also off-farm income with broom making and food processing (fried banana, preserved bamboo) in POD;

3. *Natural resource management*, with Land Use Planning and Land Allocation (LUPLA), plantations of cardamom, agar wood, galanga and also tea under the forest cover and sustainable collection of NTFP (peuak meuak);
 4. *Decreasing wastes of time and energy*, with improved access to water supply (previous phase), better health as a result of improved hygiene practices, sanitation, vaccination, basic drug supply (medicine box, distribution of deworming tablets and vitamins), mother and child health and more balanced nutrition.
 5. *Improving village management*, setting up clear responsibilities for the Village Development Committee (VDC) members and kumban management committee.
 6. Snow bowl effect of revolving funds, pass-on-the-gift and village credit funds (VCF), which include a saving component in POD.
- A **highly participatory approach** all along the project cycle, from planning to implementation and M&E.
 - A **high gender sensitivity**, with women empowerment and promoting gender equity.
 - A **rights-based approach**, focusing on women and children's rights.

Conclusions and recommendations. Based on a qualitative assessment of the 5 evaluation criteria, the project has been found satisfactory, with a special mention for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. Quantitative indicators related to rice and cash crops indicate the boom of cash crops in terms of area planted and production: job's tears in POD and various crops in Long (job's tears, cassava, vegetables, sesame and oil bean), while maize production decreased very much. Upland rice productivity increased by 8 and 11% in Long and POD respectively, while paddy rice productivity increased by 26% (in Long only and on a limited area). Thanks to the cash crops, HH increased their income much: +83% in Long and +548% in POD.

The main conclusions and corresponding recommendations are presented in the table below:

General conclusions - Strategy	Recommendations
<p>Paradox when remote villages enter a market economy: they should produce enough to attract traders, while need to diversify HH risks (risk of failing to produce linked to the weather, soil and pests; and risk linked to price variation). The strategy to offer various income opportunities (objective to introduce 2-5 crops per village) was needed to reinforce communities' resilience in a context of major prices and demand variations. Farmers demonstrated resilience in the case of black rice, first grown as a cash crop and finally self-consumed because the market prices dropped dramatically down.</p>	<p>a- Cash crops were only promoted for sale. In some cases (job's tears and oil bean), farmers don't know how to cook them. More resilience could thus also come from knowing when a crop can be eaten by humans (job's tears, oil bean) or animals (cassava, maize) and those crops could be promoted as such. This illustrates the advantage of a flexible strategy where cash crops can become food crops, at least to some extent. b- After harvesting, discussions with the farmers could take place to review the risks to specialize too much and on how to increase their resilience to changes.</p>
<p>Sustainable land use at risk: erosion control and soil fertility management is needed, especially on slopes for crops that don't cover the soil much.</p>	<p>Study the possibility to promote mixed cropping with legumes and other farming practices, instead of industrial cropping strictly.</p>
<p>Substitution to opium cultivation (on the rise again) is still challenging in Long District where opium cultivation seems on</p>	<p>Investigate opportunities for high value for weight products.</p>

<p>the rise again. Fields are far away from access roads, opium is easily sold and prices perceived by the farmers as higher than for other crops.</p>	
<p>Nutrition and agriculture production strategies could have been more linked for enhancing project impacts.</p>	<p>Promotion of existing agricultural production such as peanuts or « superfood » (soybeans, oil beans) for self-consumption and information about their nutritional value to balance family nutrition usually lacking proteins and fats.</p>
<p>Marketing through contract farming. A minimum price is « negotiated » and market guaranteed, but farmers remain dependent for seeds supply and the price offered might be below market price.</p>	<p>a- Sharpen farmers' negotiation skills and give them the opportunity to practice: consult villagers before price negotiation with trader, make sure farmers are present or represented when price negotiations take place between the trader and District authorities (this last point improved much at the end of the project). b- Facilitate other opportunities for marketing: linking farmers to more than one trader and facilitate the development of a self-managed price information system. c- Need for self seeds supply.</p>
<p>Importance of village leaders for boosting the community dynamics and obeying set rules. In some villages, they are several leaders, culturally accepted whose the village chief delegated some tasks. By supporting village organization, the project helped (1) the village chief to understand that he is not in charge of it all, (2) to organize the delegation and to determine individual responsibilities in practice.</p> <p>In Akha villages, the situation is often more complicated than in Khmu villages. The number of adults speaking Lao is limited. The young generation who attended school is more skilled in Lao language than the older generation. According to Government criteria, the village chief should speak Lao. So, in practice, the village chief is often quite young and might face difficulties to be obeyed.</p>	<p>Try not to overload the village head if they are other potential leaders in the village.</p> <p>Possibly facilitate a discussion between the villagers and District authorities, on how the old and young generations can work as a team, as village leader and deputy, to have both advantages of communication skills and respect. Teaming up this way should facilitate the respect of rules in the village (inside the groups, but also for the common infrastructures maintenance, sustainable NTFP collection, etc.)</p>

Conclusions strategy and methods	Recommendations
<p>Rights-based approach</p>	<p>Opportunity to increase transparency of contract farming process, with a copy of contract available at village level.</p>
<p>Groups versus Community Based Organisations (CBO)</p> <p>Project beneficiaries were organized in groups. In case of agriculture for example, the group members are mainly services recipients: they receive seeds and extension services. In case of animal raising, the group is more active: a group member gathers needs for vaccination in the village and informs the DAFO which will organize carry the vaccines.</p>	<p>Community Based Organizations are well known for presenting potential interesting dynamics for the communities to drive their own development in the long term. For example for finding markets or for being informed on market prices. However, create sustainable CBO corresponds to a long and challenging process for capacity building. This opportunity is adequate and realistic only IF the group sustainability is suitable - which is not the case for all activities- and IF adequate HR are available to facilitate the process.</p>
<p>Participatory planning. Some agricultural activities failed either technically or marketing (cassava).</p>	<p>a- Include more elements on local potential.</p> <p>b- Integrate a more vertical approach, including market concerns from the start.</p>
<p>Awareness raising – Extension (agriculture, nutrition). Some community feedback mentions much theory and few/no practice and no participative evaluation, especially in Long.</p>	<p>a- Systematically integrate practice whenever possible: around a cooking pot and in the field.</p> <p>b- Systematic participative evaluation needed.</p>
<p>Selection of participating families. It is not clear to which extent standard criteria-guidelines came from the project regarding the selection. VDC have been in charge to select project beneficiaries. Sometimes the objective of selecting "good families to ensure that demonstrations will be successful" if highlighted, sometimes very relevant criteria were applied, like previous experience in animal raising, sometimes criteria are unclear.</p>	<p>More project guidance to avoid the risk of insufficient inclusion of poor families.</p>
<p>Partnership and Code of Conduct (CoC). NCA introduced a CoC to NCA staff and Government staff involved in the project implementation. All of them are aware of the CoC content. This had very positive</p>	<p>Partnership assessment or, more broadly, staff assessment could take place every 6 months or annually, based on managers' feedback gathered with villagers during their field visits. This feedback</p>

<p>effects on Government staff behaviour in the villages: they restrain to have sex with villagers, understand better and respect the value of villagers' time, they bring some food when visiting a village instead totally relying on villagers for their meals. They also understand that villagers are poor. The feedback from villagers was very positive for NCA staff and for Government staff in POD. However, in Long, villagers complain that while Gov staff improved their behaviour, bringing some eggs and canned food, they still rely on them for providing rice.</p>	<p>could be shared by NCA team with Government staff. More communication would indeed probably allow a better understanding of villagers' expectations. We understood from the Government staff in Long that they felt having improved much -which is actually the case- and are proud of it. They probably don't realize that it is not sufficient yet. Example of possible discussions content include: (1) not taking too much villagers' time does not mean to rush for delivering extension activities; (2) bring food means being autonomous and includes coming with rice; (3) why do some staff systematically sleep in the villages while some sub-centres have been built to facilitate access to the field?</p>
<p>Planning and budgeting process. Complaints by Gov partners about slow process, leading to delay activities start. NB In 2014, NCA introduced a new procurement policy. Field offices have to submit their annual procurement plan resulting in the delay in the implementation of the activities that required compliance with the new procurement policy of NCA.</p>	<p>Make sure in the future that the planning calendar takes into account the time needed to comply with procurement policy and questions and answers on Government proposals, which are likely to be discussed.</p>
<p>M&E – Reporting. No systematic participative M&E reported. 2012 annual report does not provide sufficient info (accountability and for drawing lessons learnt). Meaningful improvements are noted in 2013-14.</p>	<p>a- Systematic M&E. b- Build a culture of learning at all levels: NCA staff, partners and communities. Individual <i>and</i> institutions need to grow based on LL.</p>
<p>Finally, because NCA is now in the process of phasing out of Laos, which was not foreseen when the evaluation ToR have been drafted, some recommendations are also provided on the possibility for the government to take over some of the responsibilities and hand over what NCA has done so far. Those recommendations target priorities related to the project effects sustainability and are hopefully not too ambitious, because time is now very limited.</p>	<p>It is recommended that a final workshop is organized in both provinces for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reviewing the project good practices and challenges met, as requested by the local authorities who attended the debriefing after the field mission in POD and Bokeo Province. – Brainstorming on how vaccination and road maintenance can be sustained. Finalize villagers, groups, village chief as well as Government responsibilities. The private companies are another type of relevant stakeholder, especially for road maintenance.

Other (more detailed) conclusions and recommendations appear in the text below and annex 1, based on an indept analysis of the project process and achievements.

1. Introduction and background

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) works with people and organizations around the world in their struggle to eradicate poverty and injustice. NCA provides emergency assistance in disasters and works for long-term development in local communities. In Laos, NCA has been supporting development projects since 1989.

Description of the context of the programme

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) Laos has more than 20 years of experience in participatory rural community development in the Northern provinces of Lao PDR. NCA's projects build on the rights based approach, group formation and participation for empowering poor people and challenging duty bearers. The strategies towards improving livelihoods include: improving food security, sustainable agriculture, assurance of quality education (supported by other donors, PCF and HEI), health services and rural infrastructures (schools, health centres, village water supply, bridges, roads maintenances and others); increasing household incomes; environmental management; and building capacities of partners and villagers for sustainable development.

The programme strategy and results framework

Since the 1st February 2008, NCA has been implementing a livelihood and community development intervention in the areas of Long (Luang Namtha province) and Pha Oudom (Bokeo province). 2011 was used as a gap year for the development of the last phase of the project (2012-2014) aimed at granting sustainability after ending support to the current project villages. From the period of February 2008 to January 2010, the livelihood project was implemented in 33 villages. 26 of these villages are located in Long district and 7 of them in Pha Oudom district. The last phase project (2012-2014) was implemented in 21 and 6 villages of Long and Pha Oudom districts respectively.

Overall, this livelihood intervention aims at improving the quality of life of the target population while preserving the environment and ensuring a sustainable use of natural resources.

The objectives of the last project phase (2012 – 2014) have been:

- **Increase food security and livelihood opportunities** – including the promotion of upland farming, seedling production and raising livestock, small-scale non-timber product businesses, village savings and credit fund.
- **Improve environmental management** – including the setting-up of natural resource management committees and training them in reforestation, agro-forestry and non timber forest product management.
- **Empower the right holders through relevant and quality education (applied only in Long District for the last period)** – establishment of cluster schools, teacher upgrading, support after class hours activities, set up parents association and support adult literacy class
- **Strengthen community based health care and improve access to health services, water supply and sanitation (Only in Long District for the last period)**, provision of essential drugs, building water supply systems and latrines, providing health education on sanitation, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS and village hygiene.
- **Strengthen the capacity of government and community partners** – provision of training in community management for community leaders, project cycle management and village participatory planning to project staff and district government counterparts.
- **Empower women and promote gender equity in the targeted communities.**

In addition to the objectives above, the initial phase of the project (2008-2010) also aimed at:

- **Empower the right holders through relevant and quality education in both districts** – establishment of cluster schools, teacher upgrading, support after class hours activities, set up parents association and support adult literacy class
- **Strengthen community and district services for drug demand prevention** – awareness campaigns for drug abuse prevention, detoxification of opium addicts, rehabilitation and health check up for ex-addicts, training of partners in human trafficking, CRC and CEDAW.
- **Improve access to social services** – Support building of foot paths and access roads to project area, rehabilitation of school buildings, improve project sub-centers.

The overall goal of the project during both periods has been to achieve a sustainable community development and sustainable natural resource management by active participation of the ethnic minorities as the rights holders and government as duty bearers.

Brief stakeholder information

The “Empowerment of Ethnic Minorities for Livelihood and Community Development in North-Western Laos” project is carried out in partnership with the Lao National Commission for Drugs Control & Supervision in Luang Namtha Province and with the Provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry in Bokeo Province. The project is implemented by NCA staff together with government seconded staff from the Ministry of Planning and Investment, Agriculture and Forestry and Ministry of Health at the district level and in cooperation with District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO), District Drugs Control and Supervision Office (in Long only), District Office of Home Affairs, District Lao Women’s Union and Village Development Committees (VDCs).

Right holders are farmers and community members and duty bearers are district authorities and members of VDCs.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation

The objective of the evaluation was to get an independent and external assessment of achievements from the 6 year project supported by KCF from 2008 to 2014. In particular, the objective of the evaluation was to examine to what extent the project has brought meaningful results for the rights holders related to their needs and challenges. The evaluation also sought to provide practical recommendations for the expansion or future interventions in the area of livelihoods by NCA.

In sum, the evaluation is meant to serve as an assessment of the effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the project. In addition, the evaluation also makes an analysis of the strategies and methods used by the project to achieve its goals with particular focus on the different approaches applied (RBA, PLA, PVP); as well as on the projects’ structural set up and cooperation with local government counterparts.

The intended use of the evaluation for the different stakeholders

The recommendations from the evaluation are meant to guide NCA (or others working in the same area) in the continuation/extension of the project or future interventions aimed at empowering rights holders for sustainable livelihoods and community development. This includes project management, implementation methods as well as stakeholder involvement. Provincial and district agriculture and health offices benefit from the evaluation as assisting in identifying best practices and lessons learned for food security and agricultural development. Other government stakeholders (District Lao Women’s Union, District Home Affairs Office and District Rural Development Office) also benefit from findings of this evaluation for future planning of rural development projects.

2. Methodology and limitations

Evaluation design including data collection

The consultant team for the external project evaluation has gathered information through the following means:

- Desk review of relevant documents: project document (2008-2010, 2012-2014), project database, baseline survey (2011), project annual work plans (2008-2010, 2012-2014), annual narrative reports (2008-2010, 2012-2013), semi-annual narrative reports (2008-2010, 2012-2014), external monitoring reports (2013-2014) for Pha Oudom, field visit reports, activity reports, 2008-2010 phase evaluation report (2011), Audited Financial Statements (2008-2010, 2012-2013). The year 2011 was the bridging year (planning process) for development of the new project proposal to the donor.
- Individual interviews and focus group discussions of different stakeholders:
 - Rights holders: community members (focus group discussions were carried out and grouped according to gender – focus groups enabled a larger respondent size and discussions to generate interesting information), representatives of village authorities (Village Development Committee),
 - Village tour and informal discussions.
 - Duty bearers: project staff, District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO), District Health Office (DoH), VDC members, Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs), Village Veterinary Workers (VJV) and Village Health Volunteers (VHVs).

Delegation of responsibilities:

- Representatives from the MoAF, MOFA and (Lao Commission for Drug Control) LCDC were members of the evaluation team as stated in the project MoU.
- NCA staff has provided documents needed for the evaluation team to conduct the desk research, including baseline/endline data, annual reports, project documentation, arranging the meetings with concerned parties, accompanying the evaluation team to the project area and providing clarification during the evaluation and the debriefing. NCA staff also have arranged a workshop in Long and PhaOudom for the presentation of the final findings.
- The District/Provincial Agriculture and Health Offices and member of the project coordinating committee have been available for the interviews with the evaluation team and for attending the debriefing of findings from the field visit, except health staff and half of DAFO staff who were not present in the two sub-centres in Long.
- Members of the Village Development Committees and production groups were available for the interviews with the evaluation team as well as for the debriefing on findings from the field visit.

Responsibilities of the evaluators / evaluation team:

- Development of the appropriate evaluation tools. Questionnaires for the interviews have been developed by the consultant / team and shared and agreed with NCA prior to data collection.
- Data collection.
- Analysis and writing of the evaluation report.
- Sharing the preliminary findings with stakeholders in the field.
- Facilitation of a meeting with NCA in Vientiane for the presentation of the draft report and to receive feedback.
- The team has followed the gender and protection policy as well as CoC of ACT Alliance of the NCA Lao Country Program.

The programme and project evaluations quantitative analysis is based on a comparison between the baseline survey and endline survey data. The baseline survey has been replicated at the project end, using the same methodology, the data was supposed to be collected at the same season.

Some limitations faced by the evaluation team include:

- Only one Government field staff could be met in Long District, who had less than one year of collaboration with the project. The other 3 DAFO staff did not come to the appointments. Similarly, the two government health staff did not show up. This means that their perspectives are missing in the analysis;
- The need for a double translation (Akha-Lao-English), was time consuming and possibly have generated some imprecision. However, inaccuracies have been limited thanks to a good Akha translator and double check procedures;
- The results of the endline survey are partly available, which means that a quantitative evaluation can hardly be performed.

The **village sampling method** was discussed and agreed with NCA and is designed to be as representative of the villages as possible. The selected villages are representative of implemented activities, while covering contrasted situations corresponding to different realities, challenges and opportunities:

- Villages correspond to the different project areas, around the two sub-centres in Long District as well as in Pha Oudom;
- Sampled villages include a balanced panel of more active and less active villages.

The following villages have been selected and visited:

- 7 villages in Long: Houaytoumai, Jamai, Sameuang, Houaytoukao, Ai Seng, Jakhamleu, Sompankao. All of them are Akha villages apart from Ai Seng (Lahu).
- 4 villages in Pha Oudom: Kang, Kalom, Thin, Phouvieng. For all of them, the population belong to the Khmu ethnic group.

The field visit agenda (see annex 1) was agreed with NCA according to the above criteria and with the objective to provide a large overview of the project activities, project results and impacts.

3. Results, analysis and discussion along the 5 evaluation criteria and 2 cross cutting issues

This chapter discusses the 5 evaluation criteria typically used for a project evaluation: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability. This is followed by two thematic discussions, around NCA added value and cross-cutting issues.

3.1. Relevance

The relevance analysis aims at assessing whether the project has contributed to the higher level objective of the programme: “*Achieve a sustainable community development and sustainable natural resource management by active participation of the ethnic minorities as the rights holders and government as duty bearers*”.

Following the ToR, the relevance assessment to the contextual needs and realities on the ground is addressed through the three following questions.

1- To what extent are the project implementation methods, activities and strategies relevant to achieve the intended results for the target group?

The field discussions highlighted the **multisectorial, well thought and effective strategy**:

1. Rural infrastructures improvement as a first phase (previous project phase), enhancing then the sustainability by building up the local capacity for management and maintenance (major objective during phase 2) or as a result of advocacy (road construction and maintenance, connection to the grid).
2. Support agriculture and animal raising intensification and diversification.
3. Income generating (mainly in-farm, but not only) activities development, in the context of opium cultivation alternatives in Long.
4. Promoting a sustainable use of natural resources (land and forest products).
5. Decreasing wastes of time and energy, with improved access to drinking water (previous phase mainly) and better health mainly as a result of improved hygiene and sanitation.
6. Education was also part of the strategy, but has been evaluated separately.

Women equity, women empowerment and, larger, villagers and village/kumban authorities empowerment are part of the change process.

Such an ambitious strategy that would have been totally unrealistic for a 3 years project was **part of a long term process**, since NCA has worked for more than 10 years in most villages.

The strategy to select a *multi-disciplinary approach*, including health, education, agriculture, natural resource management and gender empowerment was very appropriate to address sustainable community development, as multidisciplinary issues interact on each other. Some examples: without a better hygiene, the household labour force is not fully available to contribute making a living. Water supply availability in the village and a better workload share decreases women workload, providing time for them to catch other opportunities.

The project *participative planning and implementation methods* (PLA, PVP, participative monitoring) lead to increase the ownership by the target group, which is an essential condition for their active participation in the activities and supports sustainability. In practice, farmers could not have ideas on new opportunities they do not know. Therefore, the study tours were appropriate eye openers methods to provide examples of options.

Rice remains the communities' number one priority. Therefore, introducing new rice varieties was very appropriate and in line with the villagers strategy.

The *strategy to promote various crops is crucial in a context where prices and opportunities vary quickly*: the best opportunity today is possibly not worth it next year. As an example: many producers decided to engage in black rice production in 2014 because of the high market price (7000 kip/kg) observed the year before. However, the year after, because of the local production boom, the price fell down to 3000 kip/kg and some farmers decided to eat the rice instead of selling it.

This example shows that farmers need to diversify their income generation activities in order to minimize the risks of failure, also possibly linked to the weather or pests. Choices at village level can be challenging for remote villages, since a specific production should be sufficient to attract traders, while avoiding the risk to specialize too much and suffer from important variations of the same commodity prices. Promoting crops that can be either food crops and cash crops like rice, allows flexibility in the HH strategy and increases their resilience to market changes.

Facilitating contract farming with private companies has the advantage of providing new market opportunities and minimum guaranteed price. However, the farmers' representatives should develop a transparent consultation system of the villagers and sharpen their negotiation skills, while the District authorities should further support such a process. Currently, two village representatives attend the meeting at the District level where the price is set. In some cases, it sounds still more like an information session provided by the company than a real price negotiation, while in some other cases real negotiations take place. In any case, villagers are not consulted by their peers beforehand.

If the price set is lower than market price, farmers will be tempted to sell part of the production to other traders who offer higher prices. For job's tears, farmers remain dependent on the contract farming company for seeds supply, which are probably hybrid seeds. Some farmers that we met would like to split the risk: part of the production through contract farming and part to be sold by themselves. If a few traders are present for the same commodity, linking farmers to a few traders and support them for setting up a self-managed price information system could support them in this direction. This would request that farmers can manage their seeds supply, which is not the case for job's tears.

The *sustainable use of natural resources* was also a relevant strategic choice, because the natural resources are under high pressure in most cases: forest in general and NTFP. The main NTFP income in the project area comes from a vine called *peuak muak*. Unsustainable collection techniques can easily be corrected (not collect the vine roots in order to let the plant grow again) and because additional production opportunities exist under the forest cover to improve livelihoods.

The general *choice of "quite easy to promote" activities* for phase 2 was appropriate too, given the partnership arrangement and leading role of Government partners for the project implementation. This set up had the objective and advantage to gradually hand over activities to the Government staff. Another type of partnership where NCA would have kept an active role in implementation would probably have allowed to go further, for example to build up CBOs, but would possibly have hampered the strengthening of Government staff.

2- What is the relevance and connection between this project in comparison to interventions by other organisations and the government in the target area?

Good complementarities should be mentioned between organizations:

- In Long, NCA has facilitated the contact and coordinated its interventions with other organisations like PRF (Poverty Reduction Fund) and WFP in the target villages. PRF has funded community infrastructures such as water supply, while WFP provided food in schools and occasionally for work for the road maintenance.

However, PRF new water supply system allowed in one target village villagers not to take care of the maintenance of the leaking "NCA" water pipes.

- In Pha Oudom, Plan International took over the activities related to education from phase 2.

As a conclusion, no competition or overlapping was noticed. As mentioned above, complementarities with other interventions are to be highlighted thanks to NCA advocacy (connection to the grid, provision of solar panels, road construction). No mixed messages from different organisations to target groups were found.

3- Are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with the intended impacts, overall goal and the planned outcomes?

The logical framework of NCA project has been found very relevant: the logic between different levels of the logframe makes sense, works and corresponds to the population needs, as well as to national development priorities.

The expected "sustainable community development and natural resource management by active participation of the ethnic communities as the right holders and Government as duty bearers" (project goal) was achieved thanks to the project approach and selection of activities:

- The **participative approach** leading to the participation of ethnic minorities who decided which activities they want to implement;
- The **project set up** to involve the Government as duty bearers, but also village and kumban authorities as drivers and managers of local development (with activity monthly planning at village level) and for ensuring the community maintenance of the new infrastructures in the long run;
- The **right-based approach** for the communities to become actors of their own development, including the strengthening of the community role in contract farming management (some farmers take part in agreements and start to negotiate prices instead of being informed on the prices agreed between the District authorities and traders).
- The **gender approach** to mobilize the community as a whole, including women balanced the household responsibilities, decreasing fights inside HH when the women are overloaded with work. This was also an eye opener highlighting that women have valuable opinions and ideas to contribute in the village development;
- The **choice of activities** for supporting the community development:
 - (1) Development of income generation activities (cash crops, animal raising and broom making), including technical aspects, contract farming and credit funds. Given the remoteness of the project area, it would not have been possible without facilitating access to market by building new roads;
 - (2) Enhanced sustainability of natural resources management for ensuring long term food supply and income generation, although this is still challenging in the local context where natural resources are under high pressure. This strategy was for example supported by (a) by setting up rules for peuk meuk collection in the forest, (b) allocating forest plots for family management which enhanced the sense of ownership, (c) planting tea under the forest cover (c) Setting up LUPLA corresponds to an attempt to regulate land use and protect the remaining forests;
 - (3) Better basic health, based on a better access to water supply, hygiene and nutrition, as well as enhanced access to mother and child health. This decreased occurrence of diseases, but also loss of time and energy;
 - (4) Better education (not within the scope of this evaluation).

As a conclusion, the above choices corresponded to setting up a organisational, regulatory and human environment supportive to the development of economic activities and community development.

3.2. Effectiveness

The effectiveness assessment aims at evaluating to what extent the project has achieved its intended objectives, in relation either to outcomes and/or impacts.

The ToR ask the consultant to analyse on "What were the major factors (planned /unplanned) influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives; including what risks and assumptions materialised or not? Were these factors addressed and integrated during the project implementation?"

The major factors which actually influenced the achievement of the objectives were all identified as risks in the logframe:

- *Landslides blocking access to market* occurred on a yearly basis on the access roads, both in Long and Pha Oudom. Responsibilities for the road maintenance have been well clarified. As a result, the villagers cleaned the small landslides inside the village area. The project funded the work to clear major landslides¹. Private companies also have been contributing to the road maintenance, thanks to NCA advocacy work.
- *Pests* attacked the new rice varieties introduced, which were ready before the traditional varieties. The project reacted by supporting the acquisition mice traps by farmers. The damages were controlled and judged as acceptable by farmers. An unexpected side effect: mices are eaten, providing regular proteins for the family meals.



Picture 1: Trapped mices



Picture 2: Cooking the mices

¹ Estimated 1 to 2 weeks machine work per year in Pha Oudom.

- *Traditional beliefs* (not mentioned as risks in the logframe) led Akha not to adopt a new rice variety, which is characterized by a shorter cycle than traditional varieties. Indeed, a special ceremony should be performed before the communities can start harvesting and the calendar for this ceremony set it too late. Therefore, Akha consider the new variety as not suitable for them, while on the contrary Khmu appreciate having rice to eat in a period of rice shortage. In other cases, the project was able to find compromises through discussions and overcome some Akha traditional beliefs, like killing newborn twins.
- *Land concessions*. There are most probably some issues, but they were not raised during our field visits.
- *Partnership: high turnover of government counterparts and lack of Government commitment*. The situation regarding this crucial factor for the project achievements vary in the time and depending on the District. In any case, the Government staff have been assigned full time for the project, which was good. In Pha Oudom, very young staff (volunteers) started working with the project and were more stable than in Long where the turnover was particularly high. NCA reports also mention major variations of staff number during phase 2. In practice, that means that regular training are needed and that time might be short for the staff to become fully operational. For example, Government staff participate in the participatory planning process but is unable to implement it alone. Experience shows that although discussions can take place with District authorities and even if formal agreement made for more stability, this is a recurring issue in most development projects.
- *Finding qualified NCA staff agreeing to live in remote locations* (not mentioned in the logframe) was challenging too and led to a high turnover, especially in POD, but not only. This situation remained, even after NCA reacted by improving the staff living conditions in the field (housing). In Long, some positions could not be filled to finish the project (health). After a few changes in POD, the choice was made to hire as coordinator a finance/administrative profile staff mainly based in POD and complement with the technical skills of an external monitor, whose expertise and proposals were very valuable.
- These last two elements have slowed down the project implementation and affected the staff effectiveness and efficiency. Indeed, much time has been spent for the new staff to gain a good understanding of the project and training. This probably also has affected the staff ability to draw lessons learnt and turn the findings into practical adjustments of the project methods and support, thus the project results.

Were lessons learned and recommendations from the 2011 evaluation (Evaluation of NCA's Livelihoods and Community Development Projects in North-Western Laos) integrated in plans and implementation during this project phase?

The evaluation of phase 1 did propose a very long list of lessons learned and recommendations. All of them were taken into account except/apart from the following:

- Risks are still not explicitly discussed in project proposal. This can be explained because while risks appear in the logframe, risk assessment is not integrated in the donor funding request standard format. There is also no risk assessment section in NCA annual report format.
- Indicators are still not systematically SMART. Indicators for assessing efficiency and effectiveness of capacity building are still not available.

- The recommendation to address sustainability vaccination, still provided for free at the end of the project in Long.
- The idea to prioritize farmers' training on environmentally sound cultivation techniques has partly been taken into account: training on the use of pesticides have been delivered (including to encourage farmers to protect themselves), but techniques promoted for industrial cropping on sloping land do not include erosion control practices.
- Processing agricultural production locally for an increased added value: the transformed products are mainly self-consumed. Villagers mention few marketing opportunities for this type of products, expect for preserved bamboo and fried banana.

Training on labour migration and human trafficking was integrated in the child protection activities of the education project supported by other donors, PCF and HEI.

To what extent are the management mechanisms in the project conducive to achieve the objectives of the project?

NCA staff is in charge of planning and M&E. A budget is made available as well as technical support. NCA relies on seconded staff from the district Government for implementation, while NCA projects coordinators and managers technical advice in activity implementation. However this was mentioned as a risk in the project document, no "risk assessment" was performed when drafting the project design. Given the possible impacts of the project management mechanisms on the project effectiveness, it should have been assessed. If found as a high risk, alternatives should have been investigated, according to a classical risk analysis. The reality indicates that the risk mainly depends on the District offices staff management/stability and personal staff commitment. The staff turnover is discussed earlier. Feedback from villagers indicates various experiences of the Government staff degree of commitment (see efficiency for more information). However, we should remain careful in analysing that whether they are those working full time with NCA or are those government staff from different district offices who monitor government services.

Based on the available indicators, objectives are mostly well or even overachieved. Some land cultivated in rice has probably been allocated to cash crops. The range of income generation activities/cash crops is much broader in Long (6) than in POD (only job's tears).

Table 1: Project effectiveness and impact: set objectives and achievements

Objectives	Achievements																																											
Overall goal: To achieve a sustainable community development and sustainable natural resource management by active participation of the ethnic minorities as the right holders and government as duty bearers.																																												
Specific objective A: Communities are mobilized for improved food security and livelihoods opportunities																																												
Expected result 1.1. : Ethnic communities rice production for increased food security are improved																																												
<p>20% upland and 10% paddy land increase in average yield (ton/Ha/per target area)</p> <p>30% upland and 10% paddy land increase in rice production (ton/per target area)</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Long</th> <th>Pha Oudom</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>% increase of yield (upland rice)</td> <td>11%</td> <td>10%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>% increase of production (upland rice)</td> <td>-1%</td> <td>18%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>% increase of yield (lowland rice)</td> <td>20%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>% increase of production (lowland rice)</td> <td>33%</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Long	Pha Oudom	% increase of yield (upland rice)	11%	10%	% increase of production (upland rice)	-1%	18%	% increase of yield (lowland rice)	20%		% increase of production (lowland rice)	33%																													
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Expected result 1.2. : HH's food production base is increased.																																												
<p>30% increase in production area over 3 years</p> <p>60% of households planting new crops</p> <p>Average 2-5 new crop varieties introduced per village</p> <p>50 % increase in income from sales of cash crop per household</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Long</th> <th>Pha Oudom</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>% increase in area planting job's tear</td> <td>-77%</td> <td>1040%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>% increase in area planting corn</td> <td>-99%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>% increase in area planting cassava</td> <td>6320%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>% increase in area planting sesame</td> <td>427%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>% increase in area planting oil bean</td> <td>15158%</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Long</th> <th>Pha Oudom</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>% of increase in household # planting job's tear</td> <td>-69%</td> <td>275%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>% of increase in household # planting corn</td> <td>-93%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>% of increase in household # planting cassava</td> <td>1367%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>% of increase in household # planting sesame</td> <td>50%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>% of increase in household # planting oil bean</td> <td>533%</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>1 cash crop present in POD. 6 new crops present in Long.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Long</th> <th>Pha Oudom</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>% increase in income from cash crops</td> <td>83%</td> <td>548%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Long	Pha Oudom	% increase in area planting job's tear	-77%	1040%	% increase in area planting corn	-99%		% increase in area planting cassava	6320%		% increase in area planting sesame	427%		% increase in area planting oil bean	15158%			Long	Pha Oudom	% of increase in household # planting job's tear	-69%	275%	% of increase in household # planting corn	-93%		% of increase in household # planting cassava	1367%		% of increase in household # planting sesame	50%		% of increase in household # planting oil bean	533%			Long	Pha Oudom	% increase in income from cash crops	83%	548%	
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Expected result 1.3. : Farmers access to markets are improved and value is added to their agricultural produce			
Household income			
Long:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 100% of households can access to market. - 35 % of households in 12 target villages in value added production increased. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 100% HH can access market in both districts. - No added value to agricultural products in both districts. 	
POD:		The project introduced processing of banana, pineapples, bamboo shoots in Pha Oudom but only for minor supplementary income for the women.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 100% of households can access to market. - 20 % of number households in 6 villages in value added production increased. 			
Expected result 1.4. : Livestock production groups self management capabilities are strengthen and the group membership are increased			
Long:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 90% of household have completed handing over gifts - 80% of the group membership are increased 			
POD:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 90% of household have completed handing over gifts - 27% increase in group membership 			
		Long	Pha Oudom
		Number of HH passed on the cows	488%
		Number of HH passed on the goats	104%
		Number of HH passed on the pigs	51%
		Number of HH passed on the chickens	24%
		Group membership	488%
			30%
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In Long cow revolving fund started in 2002. In Pha Oudom, it started in 2008. - Goat revolving fund started in 2008 in both Long and Pha Oudom - Chicken revolving fund started in 2013 in both districts. 	
Expected result 1.5 Communities ability to manage their own natural resources is improved			
15% increased in forest cover		Satellite image on forest cover is not available at neither DAFO and PAFO level. The project tried to maintain the same level community forest area in both Pha Oudom and Long project areas by introduction of natural tea planting and cardamom planting under the forest. The total planted area in Pha Oudom was 54 ha and in Long was 108 ha.	
Expected result 3.1 Maternal health services in the targeted communities are improved. (Only applied for Long District)			
50% increased in pre and post natal regular check up		Pre natal check up increase by 62%. Post natal check up by 5%.	

Expected result 3.2: Nutrition status of children under 5 is improved. (Only applied for Long District)				
Number of malnourished children decreased by 25% compared by baseline		2012	2014	% of decrease
	Malnourished children Under 6 years of age	14%	1%	13%
	The target set in the baseline was higher than the actual rate of malnourished children in 2012			
Ethnic women and girls are empowered to make their voices heard				
At least 50% of female participation in meetings			Long	Pha Oudom
At least 25% of female participation in production groups and decision making body at the village level	Women participation in meetings		37%	35%
	Women representation in decision making body		26%	12%

3.3. Efficiency

The efficiency analysis' objective is to assess whether the project was managed to get value from money from input of funds, staff and other resources. In this regard, the following questions will be reviewed:

Were the project resources appropriate (staff, budget, commitment, support and time frame) to achieve the planned results?

Inside the NCA team, the ratio technical and field staff/admin staff is quite low. Indeed:

(1) Government staff is in charge of implementation. Villagers' feedback on their commitment varies: a better feedback has been provided for POD than for Long ("*Gov staff is not as committed as NCA staff*", "*they come and want to finish everything very quickly, while NCA makes sure that we have understood everything*").

(2) Because of the staff turnover and difficulty to find appropriate staff who stay long term in the project area, NCA has regularly hired consultants for specific key tasks, like PLA, monitoring (external monitor for POD only), gender (an NPA was hired in POD), commodity chain development. Hopefully, the budget did allow it. The money was better spent this way than training new low level staff all the time, because quality work was delivered and the project objectives could be reached.

Lessons learnt: the budget for such a multisectorial project settled in remote areas should allow to extensively hire external staff for short term specialised inputs.

The timeframe was appropriate.

Were the resources used efficiently? Including activities, monitoring? Documentation and project follow up.

2012 reports are poor: (a) activities are presented but the reports don't document sufficiently outputs or outcome; (b) more precisions would have been expected on capacity building activities (not only the number of trainees, but more on training topics); (c) the section on lessons learnt and adjustments is very short and poor. The addition of the quality assurance

officer was much needed and led to substantial improvements regarding the reports quality and accountability towards the donor. A culture of learning was present within the NCA team, in the Vientiane team at least. It was great to hear a young DAFO staff from POD daring to propose some lessons learnt (study the context more before designing the VDP).

Lessons learnt: Build a culture of learning is essential for individual capacity building and for capitalizing experience at the organization level. It is usually hard to stimulate this type of dynamic for the Government partners (they most of the time feel ashamed to admitting failures), but it is worth it.

Annual reports show the evidence of a close follow up on gender issues.

Field monitoring and evaluation was reported difficult during the rainy season because of access difficulties and therefore not systematic.

To what extent have project working approaches and methods (PLA, PVP, PSRP, Passing on the Gift and Village Revolving Fund) had effect on achievements of the project objectives?

The participative methods (PLA, PVP, PSRP) gave the occasion to the villagers to inform the project on their realities (health, education, gender...), current livelihood sources and preferences. This means that activities planned are selected by the villagers themselves and ownership increased, which of course have very positive effects on their participation during implementation and on the project achievements.

There is an obvious snowball effect resulting from the methods, as intended: pass-on-the-gift, revolving funds and credit funds.

To what extent has the management and coordination structure of the project had effects on achievements of project objectives? Outline of strengths and weaknesses.

The strengths and weaknesses of the current management and coordination structure are perceived as follow by the different stakeholders:

1- Strengths

- *Government partners* are happy to receive a financial support to work and go to the field, as well as benefit from capacity building.
- *NCA*: Ownership by partners' office. Government staff are assigned full time for supporting the project.
- *Communities* are comfortable with the visits of civil servants. They underline that the Government staff develop strong links with the head of village.

2- Weaknesses

- *NCA*: Less follow up from NCA project manager, community participate in planning and do not have opportunity to participate in budgeting, farmer groups do not have capacity to manage the group, lack ownership from NCA project manager and also from community (NCA report on Long project organisation structure).
- *Communities*: Various feedback on service quality, "quick visits/training", Government staff less committed than NCA staff, improvement of Government behaviour but they still eat some villagers food (in Long), Government staff have less contact than NCA staff with the communities.
- *MAF, MoFA, LCDC*: In principle, reports from the different ministries are aggregated by the Department of Planning at District level and should be sent

to upper levels, but this was apparently not done: "Reports do not arrive at national level, we are not informed on what is going on".

- *Consultant:* This set up influences the activity quantity and nature (simple). NCA has limited control on Government staff availability, selection (abilities, commitment) and management. Institutional set up ensures capacity building but not the service sustainability: most activities implemented by Government staff will stop with NCA funding as reported by all District offices in Long, unless another funding is made available, by the Government or another external funding.

The organisational structure inside NCA is quite vertical, probably a bit too much, with few field staff, a District Manager, a coordinator for both Districts (senior programme officer, based in Vientiane), a PMER/quality assurance officer and a country programme manager, both based in Vientiane too. One could ask if this leads to a clear perception and allows setting limits between individual responsibilities. For example, some important findings and recommendations by the external monitor for Pha Oudom were very relevant and could have been useful for Long (for example on credit funds, vaccination and animal revolving funds). Unfortunately, they were not taken into account as lessons learnt for Long, although systematic exchanges of lessons learnt have taken place during quarterly meetings where both project managers participated in.

As a conclusion, the project efficiency can be considered as satisfactory given the difficult working conditions: NCA has chosen to assist poor remote villages, in a context where it is difficult to attract and retain staff, where Government staff present with limited knowledge. However, it could be improved in the future using more comprehensive context analysis for agriculture and a value chain approach.

3.4. Impact

The impact analysis targets, where feasible, to assess whether the project produced positive or negative changes (directly or indirectly, intended or unintended).

The available quantitative indicators indicate a major project impact on income, with a wider income generation sources in Long (6 cash crops, +83% income) than in POD (, +548% income, but related to 1 cash crop only). A qualitative analysis follows, based on the interviews and FGD performed during the field visits.

What real difference has the intervention made to:

a) Individuals (Rights holders)?

For individuals: better hygiene and health, HIV awareness, children and women rights, better gender balance (workload, decision making in HH, contribution to village meetings), new products, increased access to health services and market. This have generated increased income (job's tears & brooms in POD, oil bean/cassava in Long, animals in both Districts), which were used for a better housing, buying motorbikes, improve nutrition (meat, seasoning) and paying for health care.

To continue managing this dynamic, some HH realized that they need for an enhanced capacity to adjust to external changes, making the right choices for cash crops and diversifying their activities, thus the associated risks.

Aside from the alleviation of workload for water collection, indirect impacts include the need for more work at HH level, which is accepted by HH to some extent. Indeed, (1) households are more busy during the dry season (e.g. broom making, vegetable gardening), that was traditionally dedicated to house repair, traditional ceremonies, hunting and fishing; (2) during the rainy season, HHs should take care of different crops that keep them more busy than rice. This might explain why the intensification of livestock raising is hard to implement: livestock intensification means fodder or crop production or collection and possibly transportation to the animal pens, providing water to animals, fencing, guarding animals instead of free ranging animals, etc. Most HH thus prefer extensive practices that require less inputs in terms of labor. These facts do not only involve NCA target villages; labour management/shortage is recognised as a usual constraint to change in Laos in general.

b) Communities/society (Rights holders)?

For communities-society (right holders): women are taking more part in development, training opportunities and community meetings, and are consulted. The access to credit is much facilitated and generates social and economic impacts: better access to health care, improved housing, increase in animal raising... The project led to a more sustainable Natural Resources Management (NTFP and forest).

c) Institutional (governing structures at the district, sub-district and village levels)?

Institutional (governing structures at District, sub-district and village level): participative methods were introduced (including for planning and M&E) at all levels, District staff capacities were built up, 2 DAFO sub-centres established in Long and 1 in POD allowing a closer contact between DAFO staff and farmers, a global village planning system was set up (POD-Long) which facilitated the village management by its leaders, a frame for land management (LUPLA) set up for a better protection of forests, also including the development of community grasslands and shared supervision of grazing animal (POD). Government staff are now more aware of the advantages of participatory approaches, but few of them are able to fully implement them on their own. It has impacted the sustainability of village development processes.

Indirect impacts include that village heads (naiban and VDC) are quite busy managing and following up activities.

3.5. Sustainability

This section assesses whether the activity appropriately addresses sustainability so that the profits of the activity will continue after funding has ceased, with due account to Government counterparts, stakeholder ownership and project exit strategies.

To what extent will the benefits of the project continue after the termination of the project?

Each project supported activity is mentioned in one of the following categories of expected sustainability, based on interviews' and FGD findings. The analysis below is organized around factors that have been found to affect - positively or negatively - the activities' sustainability. The sustainability is easy to ensure in the first cases, more and more difficult in the next ones:

- **High sustainability if HH do not need external inputs to sustain changes. True for:**
 - ☞ Health: hygiene, HIV AIDS/STI awareness.
 - ☞ Sanitation, if the HH know how to handle it when the tank is full.
 - ☞ Gender
 - ☞ New techniques: when they have been applied during the project, they are understood and will be applied in the future, fodder production, seeds (without seeds renewal). Exception: unless for cattle raising in POD, intensification of animal raising was not well adopted.

- **High sustainability, but depending on few individuals inside the community (villagers). This is true for:**
 - ☞ Medicine box (VHV).
 - ☞ Birth support (TBA).
 - ☞ Vaccination depends on VVV but not only, see below animal vaccination.
 - ☞ Small businesses. No analysis possible since the small business owners could not be met.

- ✓ *Good practices include clarifying the exact role of the villagers involved and the provision of sufficient incentives to motivate the person in charge to continue in the long term. This exists for VHV, TBA and VVV, which are good basis for the future. VHV masters the logistics for medicine supply, which is perfect too.*

- **Sustainability more difficult to achieve in case of community management or when common funds are involved. This is true for:**
 - ☞ **LUPLA** should be sustainable in most cases. However, continue respecting rules in the long term might be challenging for the very few villages that face or will face limited land availability resulting from population migrations and villages' resettlement. The annual organisation of land use will depend on the village head.
 - ☞ **NRM** sustainability will mainly depend on the rules enforcement and their control by the village and District authorities.
 - ☞ **Credit funds** sustainability is hard to assess. It will depend on internal and external management control. Internal management is still assessed as difficult by committee members in POD, while Government funds will be necessary to ensure regular field visits and follow up. Requests should be made to line agencies, which are not sure to be (fully) satisfied.
 - ☞ **Groups** should not always been sustainable. In some cases it is not relevant. For example, (1) after everyone in the village benefited from a revolving fund once or twice, this function of the group can and will stop; (2) same when the group had the function to facilitate learning/extension, seeds or equipment distribution.
On the contrary, when group members have a long term shared objective that can better be achieved if they are organised as a group, the group sustainability makes much sense. It is for example relevant that cattle raisers sustain their group managing cattle and grass land, maintaining fences and planting grass. Given the observed dynamics, it is most likely that this type of group will sustain.
 - ☞ **Water supply** maintenance is the key for its sustainability and mainly depends on users' financial contributions in case of technical issues. Different systems were reported for financial management: a monthly HH financial contribution or fund raising when repair is needed (both solutions present pros and cons). From a human point of view, responsibilities have been well determined and rewards are possible in case of regular HH contribution. The availability of spare parts should not hopefully be a difficulty. When another

project is likely to support fixing the water system or build a new one, it is of course tempting for the community not to use their own resources.

☞ **Meeting halls** whose maintenance will depend on the village leader mainly.

Good practices and lessons learnt:

- ✓ *The role of leaders in sustainability is essential, their effectiveness is driven by motivation and possibly direct or indirect benefits.*
- ✓ *For common infrastructures, individual responsibilities have been set up, which is essential for the maintenance and for the infrastructures sustainability.*
- ✓ *In the future, more could be done on CBOs (Community Based Organisations) strengthening for further projects IF group sustainability suitable and adequate HR available. CBOs could for example support marketing the products, through a price information system.*
- ✓ *Some villagers explained a very clear tasks allocation per HH for the maintenance of common infrastructures, which helps everyone to contribute and avoid some to have the feeling that they do more than others, which decreases their motivation to participate.*

- **Sustainability is at risk when external inputs are requested:**

- **Animal vaccination** sustainability depends on cost (financial sustainability) and logistics. Vaccinations are paid in POD, but still free in Long at the end of the project, which is not encouraging for the sustainability of animal vaccination there. DAFO staff and VVV are both involved in logistics: VVV collects the needs and DAFO staff carries the vaccines to the village.

Lessons learnt:

- ✓ *It is of major importance to support a brainstorm with the District and possibly provincial agriculture offices in order to check whether the current pricing is sufficient to cover the costs and to discuss logistics and responsibilities in the future.*

- **Sustainability related to other activities**

- **Sustainability of sub-centres.** It is planned that the centres will be handed over to the District before the project official closure in April.
 - **Outreach clinic, human vaccination and distribution of other drugs** (vitamins, deworming). Regular visits from health services in the villages will depend on available funding for travelling in the future. Government funds are most likely to be too limited to allow continuing the activities. UNICEF will continue funding vaccines and other drugs but plans to decrease the budget.
 - **Roads:** As mentioned in the first semester 2014 report, NCA underlines the necessity to cooperate closely with District Public Work and Transport to discuss road sustainability, with the possible involvement of the Poverty Reduction Fund and Chinese investors in Long to ensure budgeting for the maintenance of roads to access target villages after the rainy season. In 2014, the Luang Namtha Provincial Public Works and Transport Department took up responsibility for road maintenance from Long to Jamai village with funding support from the World Bank.
- ✓ *Lessons learnt: Finalize an open discussion about possible involvement of different types of stakeholders. The new gold mine in Pha Oudom could be another stakeholder supporting road maintenance.*

- *Sustainability is at risk if the income generation activities are highly sensitive to market fluctuations and likely to be affected by the contract farming process transparency.*
 - The sustainability of **cash crops production currently marketed through contract farming** is hard to predict at this stage. Indeed, the price variations to be expected for cassava, job's tears or oil bean are currently unknown. Some cash crops like rubber or cardamom provide evidence of major price variations driven by the world market. Farmers might give up some cash crops if the prices are considered too low by them, as it is currently the case for some rubber plantations being converted into banana plantations.

Lessons learnt and good practices

- ✓ *Diversify income generation activities and cash crops.*
- ✓ *Consider cash crops that can also be, at least to some extent, turned into animal or human food crops.*

- Prices - thus cash crop production sustainability - will be also influenced by contract farming processes and farmers' negotiations skills.

Lessons learnt and good practices:

- ✓ *Like it was advised by the external monitor in POD, enhance the contract farming process transparency and ensure farmers consultation. This lesson learnt would be important to share with the project stakeholders before the project official closure.*

In summary, the following key elements directly contribute to the project sustainability:

- Activities were targeting and reached the population level, who received the required technical and management supports, enabling them to continue their activity after the project completion.
- Ownership. All families decided to involve in one or more activities after a participatory process and on a voluntary basis. In case of common assets, the responsibilities have been clearly understood, committees responsible for management were trained and are taking care of their tasks.
- Marketed products reach the market and answer the market demand. The access road built was a prerequisite set by KCF to fund the project, but also a pre-requisite for trade development. Collectors now easily access the villages and villagers also travel to the District towns to trade their products.
Established linkages with private enterprises buying agricultural products directly from farmers are expected to remain after project life contributing to its positive long-term effects.
- Looking for snowball effects. The project provides support for free but the family engage to diffuse to others, through "pass-on-the gift" procedures or animal revolving funds. At this stage, it is risky to speculate how far it will continue working in the future (interviewed villagers ambitions range between one and two rounds), but the snowball effect has been very positive already.
- Capacity building programme and the involvement of District staff who will continue their official positions within their respective line agencies after the completion of the project. Local government structures gained more capacities and insights into villager's agendas. However, without financial project support, the amount of field visits is likely to remain very limited.
- Finally, the project activities appear to be socially and environmentally friendly and sustainable.

Are there components of the project that should be replicated or scaled up in similar areas / conditions?

Given the last news announcing the withdraw of NCA's program in Laos, this section is not much relevant anymore for NCA but could be for NGOs/CBOs wishing to continue or do similar work in the future. Here are some comments:

- All project activities were found useful by the evaluation team.
- Additional activity: still some opium addicts live in the project area (up to one addict in about 1/3 HH) whose relatives suffer much, socially and economically. They need support to fight addiction. This activity proposed during phase 1 was unfortunately suppressed for phase 2. Some Chinese companies offer support, but for a limited amount of people only. UNODC has also stopped its support in this regard since the country was declared "opium free".
- All activities that alleviate workload and sustainably improve health have a dramatic impact on the population daily life. While the villagers perceive the direct effects of water supply, they might take some time to realize how useful hygiene and other health improvements can be.
- A current population high priority: quick income generation opportunities. This means that when a delay is expected for income generation (trees, fruit trees...), the activity is less easily accepted, but it still OK at small scale.

3.6. NCA added value

What has been NCA's contribution to government parties?

- The Government partners perceive the financial support as an essential NCA contribution and appreciate capacity building provided.
- The consultant wishes to underline the multisectorial dimension and overall development strategy, as well as the valuable working methods and tools.

Identify the added value of NCA in achieving the results within the target group.

- As mentioned up, the participatory approach enhanced ownership, thus population involvement and expected sustainability.
- NCA also brought gender sensitivity and empowerment, valuing and enhancing the participation of women. It means they had opportunities to learn, had and will have more opportunities to participate in community and family affairs. Finally, the family organization evolved for more equity, including regarding women workload.

3.7. Cross cutting issues

Gender mainstreaming

- a) **To what extent has gender sensitivity and empowerment been integrated into the project mechanisms?**
- b) **To what extent has the project encouraged and supported the participation of women at all stages of the project implementation?**

Gender sensitivity and empowerment has been integrated all along the project cycle, from planning to implementation and M&E.

Workshops on gender equality have been organised in all villages to discuss the respective roles of men and women inside the family. The tasks repartition has been reviewed within the families and women were empowered regarding decision making in the family and in the community.

- ✓ Good practices include a special attention on women participation, consultation and making sure that they benefit from the project. Indicators are disaggregated by gender for the project follow up.

Environmental protection - To what extent has the project followed governmental goals and policies on environmental protection?

- ✓ The project has been found in full compliance with Government goals and policies: LUPLA, income generation in protected forests (NTFP, tea), NR sustainable management.

Participation and complaints handling

- a) To what extent does the project staff know about NCA's accountability policy, including signed Code of Conduct (CoC)?**

NCA staff and partners all know the CoC content well. The population feedback indicates that changes were needed related to Government staff behaviour in the villages: having sex with villagers and eating their food were widespread practices. The staff behaviour is now considered "very correct" in POD and "still to be improved" in Long (specially eating villagers food).

- b) To what extent has project involved participation of the rights holders in project planning, implementation and monitoring?**

They fully participate (village authorities versus villagers), but as mentioned earlier there has been no systematic participative M&E. This ambition has suffered from road access difficulties, most particularly during the rainy season.

- c) To what extent have the right holders (farmers and community members) and duty bearers (district authorities, members of VDCs) been able and aware of the possibility of handling complaints associated with NCA and the project?**

We did not gather so many stories corresponding to opportunities for complaints handling. Here are the examples provided, showing that in 2 cases on 3, the populations did actually report complaints and action was taken to remedy:

(1) The training on VDF management by District officers was not understood by the credit committees' managers in POD. After they mentioned it to Government officers and NCA, the same training was reorganised by provincial staff and it became clear for the participants;

(2) The works for a micro-hydropower plan was not satisfactory, because it did not work properly. It was redone.

(3) There have been misunderstanding on contract farming prices and the farmers did get the impression (true or false) that the pricing was not transparent. The different perspectives and information provided are as follow:

- A few farmers in different villages in Long report that, coming to buy for unprocessed dried oil beans for the second time, the Chinese businessmen explained that the District did not allow him pay 12 000 kip/kg anymore, but 10 000 kip only. The farmers concluded that the 2 000 kip difference was remaining at district level as "administrative cost".
- The project annual report indicates that a Chinese businessman offered 12 000 kip/kg, thus more than agreed for the first harvest in order to encourage people to plant oil beans, before pushing the price down to 10 000 kip/kg.
- During the debriefing in Long, the DAFO head explained that young inexperienced staff went to explain pricing in the villages, who were not clear enough and/or that villagers possibly did not understand well.

The farmers did not complain to DAFO staff because they thought they were involved in some unclear business and said they did not know that they could report to NCA.

4. Lessons learnt and good practices

Many lessons learnt have been discussed during the mission and good practices identified, including the following:

– **Regarding the strategy for empowering ethnic communities for livelihood and community development**

The high relevance of a multisectorial strategy, including health, education, agriculture and other income sources, natural resources management, education, capacity building and management skills at different levels and gender aspects.

The long term support of NCA in the same target villages was essential to allow behaviour changes and for impacting more people in the community (pilot testing).

The construction of **access roads** was a key element for initiating local development and will ensure the sustainability of on-going dynamics. This was the first example of **advocacy** work that NCA has implemented to offer a comprehensive development environment to target villages. In the same spirit, all POD target villages were connected to the grid mid 2014.

Diversify income generation activities, which corresponds in practice mainly to agriculture diversification, in order to limit the risk of income variation and subsequent food insecurity. Farmers notice that the prices of cash crops vary up and down. Some variations follow an annual cycle; some others are quite unexpected, like the recent dramatic fall of rubber price. A few farmers came themselves with the conclusion that (1) they put their energy in the cash crop offering the best opportunity at a given time and that (2) they should avoid specialising too much.

→ **If farmers enter the market economy, their capacity to quickly react and adapt to demand or price changes should increase since these types changes (as well as environmental changes, climate change...) are likely to affect them much more than before. Some donors now underline the necessity to increase the villagers resilience to changes.** This is a dimension to discuss with the population in any project of this kind.

→ Need for a **value chain approach** for commodity development.

Food security was not confused with rice security. Many additional small scale production at HH level have directly supported food security (vegetable gardens, fruit trees, pineapple...), contributing to a HH balanced diet.

Opportunities for quality products, easier to market and local added value. Although brooms were produced in some POD target villages, it was for self-consumption mainly. Introducing improved techniques for enhancing the brooms quality and nice designs allowed the products to be sold. This is also an example of activity generating employment and income at a moment in the year when women have time available.

A nice example for **consolidating farmers marketing skills** is based on the observation that traders scales are often not accurate and underweight the products. To support fair trade, NCA gave a common scale to some villages but, as often for common equipment, it broke and was not replaced. Teaching a technique on how to check the scales' accuracy with something whose weight is known much helped farmers to get a fair price.

The promotion of a model enhancing the sustainable management of natural resources, locally adding value on NTFP provides an attractive model where the forest would sustainably continue to provide both food and income.

Gender empowerment and gender equity are valuable contributions to the overall strategy.

Communication. Half of DAFO staff in POD are Khmu, thus communicate in Khmu. For the other half, communication in Lao is easy enough since most Khmu understand Lao language. However, (1) their understanding is not always very accurate, so a translation - usually by another villager (the young generation that attended school is much more comfortable in Lao) - is needed and has been organised when a precise understanding is needed. Khmu women face difficulties to express themselves and need support in this regard. Similar actions have helped them to communicate better. In Akha communities, the understanding and ability to speak Lao language is much lower. District officers and NCA staff could communicate, possibly in another common language, but again when it comes to a precise information or exchange, a translator is needed. It was good that the project could rely on Akha volunteer translators therefore.

Regarding opportunities

For the most remote villages, the transportation cost is high. Therefore, **high value for weight products** are worth to be produced for sale out of the village. The project supported cardamom and oil bean production which can both considered as high value for weight products.

Intensification of animal raising is only possible if the mortality rate decreases, because farmers are not willing to invest money and time in animals that are most likely to die. Some farmers understood the advantage of vaccination. However, almost all farmers let animal run around freely instead of keeping them in pens. This leads to spread animal diseases and negatively affects the village hygiene. Their explanation is the insufficient amount of food available. The need for more labour is probably another reason they did not express. Farmers tend to underestimate the importance of feeding animals well for decreasing the mortality rate.

Regarding methods

Participatory methods correspond to excellent principles for increasing ownership, but are not sufficient to identify "real needs" or opportunities to be distinguished from perceived needs. Therefore, NCA has supported beneficiaries to identify opportunities through study tours and farmers to farmers exchanges, before participatory planning.

Revolving funds - Pass-on-the-Gift (animal revolving funds, seeds, credit funds) have multiplied the project impacts (snowball effect) during the project duration and beyond, thus enhancing the project efficiency. One village leader raised a very relevant question related to revolving funds: *"How to pass on knowledge when the first gift has been given with associated training?"*

Regarding organisational structures

LCDC was not the perfect main partner for Long (too specialized given the broad range of activities). The MoU would rather have been signed with Rural Development Office there. Because of the activities' nature, MAF was an adequate partner for POD. The multisectorial project nature involves collaborating with a broad range of partners and NCA paid the necessary attention to coordinate this by hiring a project manager coordinator per District.

For phase 2, the choice was made that Government staff is in charge of implementation while NCA has the role of backstopping. This has enhanced ownership by the Government. Unfortunately, a quick staff turnover (both Government and NCA staff in Long; mainly NCA in POD, but not only) implies continuous capacity building and limited capacities. This has impacted the project content (easy to promote activities) and affected its efficiency and effectiveness, while sustainability of Government service is not ensured when NCA budget is over.

Regarding staff management. On top of a difficult context, NCA's efforts have been hampered by staff concerns, with difficulties to recruit and retain staff, with an important staff rotation, both for NCA and Government staff. The idea to try hiring NCA staff locally instead of looking for Vientiane residents helps, as well as investing for improving the staff living conditions, e.g. in the sub-centres. In this context, it was necessary to a sufficient budget for hiring consulting for short term inputs.

5. Conclusions

The project aimed at **empowering ethnic minorities for livelihood and community development**, improving living conditions in remote villages. It actually also corresponds to provide to the populations alternatives to the current important migrations from remote upland villages to lowlands, where HH labour become landless farmers, generally turning into daily labourers in banana or rubber plantations, which brings a additional social dimension to the project.

Poor and remote target villages. Access was difficult before NCA intervention. During a previous phase, NCA advocated to build an access road. In the most remote villages, access to forest is easy and forest products of major importance, contributing to family diet and to income (pak meuak, cardamom, tea, bamboo worms...). The pressure on agricultural lands varies and tends to increase, e.g. in case of village relocation, but with the exception of few villages where an important migration took place.

Village livelihood and community development strategy. Managing to get different funding, NCA supports villages, building a long term relationship and trust with the villagers. Rain fed rice is the major staple food. It might sufficient for some years, not for others.

Besides avoiding loss of energy and time (better sharing the workload inside the family, better health through hygiene), the project strategy consists of producing more for self-consumption (animal raising to a certain extent, improved seeds, kitchen garden during previous phases), but also of starting or extending income generation activities (oil beans, job's tears, cassava, maize, cardamom, broomgrass/broom making, animal raising), sustaining NTFP collection, planting tea or trees. The access road has facilitated the arrival of traders and collectors buying agricultural products, animals and NTFP. This entrance into the market economy is coming along with a growing need for income, for buying food, for health care now accessible in Long and POD towns, for animal and human vaccination, for motorbikes facilitating travelling and trade.

Inputs during the last three years have mainly been awareness raising (health, villagers and women empowerment), technical advises and limited in-kind subsidised inputs (seeds or animals to set up revolving funds).

Amongst the **main challenges** the project and population are facing:

- Beneficiaries note **price fluctuations** for cash crops with unexpected ups and downs, mainly linked to offer/demand fluctuations. The project has facilitated the establishment of contract farming presenting the advantage to offer a minimum guaranteed price.
- **Animal raising face a challenging environment**, with high mortality rates due to regular outbreaks, unreliable cold chains. The project reacted by training VVV and organising vaccination in collaboration with DAFO staff. However the attempt to raise animals in pens did not succeed for small animals (chicken, pigs), the development of grazing lands combined with LUPLA and vaccination in POD are leading livestock raisers on the way to intensification.
- The **road maintenance** in mountainous area can be quite demanding and beyond the capacity of villagers and Government. Therefore, other partnerships have and will be developed, with private companies or other external funding.

The project achievements have been assessed from a qualitative and quantitative points of view. They include higher income, better gender balance, improved health, enhanced capacity to manage village and kumban and human resource development in general for both Government staff and development workers.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed for future projects:

For all

Community Based Organisations (CBOs): investigate on how to further develop groups or women groups' sustainable dynamics.

- For groups organised around value chains, develop a *value chain approach* and investigate how they can facilitate long term input supply and marketing, in case it is found relevant. Develop *marketing networks and price information systems*, allowing farmers to commercialize at higher prices, as alternative marketing opportunities to contract farming. This corresponds to an easy and cheap system for selling at the highest price.
- For women groups, possibly setting up women groups that deal with various activities, in order to develop multisectorial links between activities and further facilitate gender sensitive dynamics, providing additional opportunities for women to talk and exchange on gender, nutrition, hygiene, etc.

Enhancing the pro-poor approach: noticing that the poor remains the more difficult to target: having a pro-active strategy similar than what was done with women: making sure to include them in consultation, have opportunity to participate and express themselves. Study the possibility to develop specific subsidies for HH recognised as poor.

Strategy

Think the sustainability of benefits from the start; design the support and possibly the evolution of its modalities accordingly. Organize the sustainability of benefits at HH level as far as possible, although it is not possible for all types of activities (e.g. common infrastructure).

The *necessity of erosion control and sustainable soil fertility management*, possibly combined with the need for producing extra animal food offer opportunities that are worth being investigating:

- promoting suitable *techniques* that limit erosion and enhance soil fertility;
- promoting animal or human food *crops* such as legumes. Cassava could also have been promoted, not only as cash crops but also for pig consumption.

Other opportunities

- to save time include improved cooking stoves which save wood and thus work for wood collection.
- for easily improving hygiene and health include the promotion of kitchen cabinets to safely store food.

Before the project official closure, organize a final workshop to discuss good practices, lessons learnt and sustainability issues. This answers a clearly request by PAFO in Bokeo. Discussions and decision making are needed on how to ensure the sustainability of impacts for vaccination, road maintenance and credit funds (see details in the activities description section).

For NCA in particular

Systematically develop a **risk assessment** in project document, even if not requested by the donor and adjust the project design, possibly considering additional activities when the risk is considered too high.

Balance **organisational set up** to ensure sufficient technical inputs as close to the field as possible versus admin/finance staff. Avoid multiplication of higher level staff "layers" and make sure their individual responsibilities are clear.

For Government partners in particular

– Regarding staff management

Stabilize staff as much as possible when they are involved in a project in order to build their capacities sufficiently, gain confidence and experience in applying what they have learnt. This will increase all projects' effectiveness and efficiency. It means not promoting and re-assigning the staff too quickly.

Encourage a culture of learning, in order to share difficulties met, best practices and lessons learnt. In practice, it can be by including a specific chapter in reporting format, encouraging all staff to participate in meetings with this type of thinking.

– Regarding the sub-centres in Long and POD

Since the sub-centres provides opportunity for proximity services to the remote target villages and will be transferred to the District, a brainstorm would be valuable on how to continue using them, if staff can be allocated there, for which purpose (vaccination only or more?) and how to sustain them.

– Health

Some other drugs could be included for sale in the medicine box such as deworming, especially in the context where UNICEF plans to decrease their assistance.

7. References

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- Annexe C: Project logical framework 2012-2015 16 pp.

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- MoU Long 2010-2012

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8. Annexes

Annex 1: Main comments, good practices and recommendations on activities

The project logical framework is attached in annex 6.

The activities corresponding to each objective are summarized in tables below. In this chapter, comments are provided, good practices highlighted (what the project has done well) and proposals for recommendations made (what could be improved), per type of activity.

Specific objective A

Activities under specific objective A are summarized in the table below:

Table 2: Summary of activities - Specific objective A

<p>Specific objective A: Communities are mobilized for improved food security and livelihood opportunities</p> <p>Upland rice, maize, soy beans: seeds trials.</p> <p>New rice production techniques: limit the number of seeds per hole, seeds selection and introduction of harvesting tools.</p> <p>Introduction of new crops: facilitation of contract farming with Chinese companies providing inputs and market, while the project provides technical advises through extension (job's tear, oil bean-<i>Plukenetia volubilis</i>); provision of cassava seedlings and maize seeds and technical advises for industrial production.</p> <p>Access to market and agricultural production added value: maintenance of access roads, linking farmers with traders (broom making), strengthen farmers negotiation skills, provision of existing IEC material developed by NAFRI, NAFES</p> <p>Animal raising (poultry, goats and pigs, fish farming): Follow up for livestock raising (animals distributed into revolving funds during a previous project phases, unless some chicken and fishes), extension on livestock raising, animal health care, animal feeding and fodder production. Training Village Veterinary Workers.</p>
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Road

☐ **Comments**

- The road construction, implemented with SIDA funding more than 8 years ago - as a result of NCA lobbying - had a huge impact on village life: it allowed villagers to enter the market economy, marketing and buying goods, and accessing health care much easier.
- The road construction was clearly the start of a dynamic. Its maintenance will be necessary to sustain it.

☐ **Good practices**

- Responsibilities were well clarified per village regarding the maintenance.
- Contacts were taken with other actors active in road maintenance: WFP, provincial/district offices of Public Works and Transport, villagers, Poverty Reduction Fund, World Bank, private companies.

☐ **Recommendations**

- The workload for maintenance remains acceptable for clearing sides and small landslides, but villagers can hardly handle more and the maintenance of such tracks in hilly area can be quite demanding. Synergies between private companies and

government funds have to be found for long term maintenance. This topic can be discussed and opportunities clarified before the project closure with local authorities and private companies.

Rice cultivation

▣ Comments

- Rice remains the priority crops for farmers who want to achieve rice sufficiency. Rice sufficiency should not be confused with food security. Indeed, given the high level of malnutrition in Laos, the development community now agrees that rice sufficiency is not sufficient for achieving food security. Even if sufficient quantities of rice are produced, important nutrients are still lacking, such as fat, proteins and some vitamins/minerals.
- New rice varieties were tested. One variety (Khao Nok) was not adopted in Long because of cultural barriers, but some (at least 3, Thadorkham, Hinsung and Homesavanh) were well appreciated in both Long and POD where the farmers comment « *We have more choice now* ». In Akha culture, a special ceremony should take place before harvesting. Because the Khao Nok variety has a much shorter cycle (around 3 months) than traditional varieties, they are ready before the date when this ceremony should take place. Since the Akha find unacceptable to organize ceremony earlier, and to harvest rice before the ceremony takes place, the rice is not harvested in time.
- The new varieties were planted before the traditional varieties. This means that they could be eaten during the period of rice shortage, which was most welcome. However, some pest management was needed since these plots of rice are attractive for rodents.

▣ Good practices

- Farmers were trained on seeds selection, which enhances the project impacts sustainability at HH level.
- When the issue of rodents was identified, the project reacted by providing subsidized mice traps.
- Producing rice allows a flexible livelihood strategy for farmers who can decide to eat or sell their production.
- Farmers were trained on risks linked to pesticide use and protection. Some families rely on herbicides to get rid of weeds, which multiply when the rotation is getting shorter and also if the HH labour is limited.

▣ Recommendations

- If possible for NCA or Gov partners, develop more dialogue with Akha communities about the traditional ceremony and discuss how to find compromises to conciliate tradition and new rice varieties.

Job's tears

▣ Comments

- Job's tears became the **main cash crop in POD**, which bring additional income and secures farmers' livelihoods. Depending on village 20 to 100% HH are involved in this crop.
- **Contract farming**
 - A "master contract" was signed for 5 years between the District and the Chinese company in 2008, the farmers were not present.
 - Farmers totally depend on company for seeds supply, which are apparently hybrid seeds.

- Because farmers know that the price paid by the company in Pha Oudom in 2014 was below the market price (2500 against 3000 kip/kg), some are tempted to diversify marketing chains, planting some job's tear under contract farming and some not. The trader indicates that contract farming agreements offer a market at minimum price and that the risk he takes justifies sometimes a price offered lower than market price.

▣ **Good practices**

- Training on the planting calendar, crop management. Well mastered; qualified as easy by farmers and similar to rice.
- Build up farmers' negotiation skills.
- Linking farmers to market.

▣ **Recommendations**

- Contract farming: all recommendations on contract farming are presented under the "oil bean section". Facilitate access to seeds (networking).
- Provide info on how to prepare job's tear as food (people don't know) would increase the farmers' strategy flexibility.
- Introduce easy techniques for erosion control and soil fertility management.

Oil bean (*Plukenetia volubilis* – Sacha Inchi)

▣ **Comments**

- A bilateral agreement between Laos and China aims at reducing opium cultivation and provide alternative crops. Because private Chinese companies received support from their government in this context, they are quite active in Long. It is therefore sometimes hard to assess to which extent the observed changes were induced by Chinese companies or by the project. The general principle has been that the company provides inputs and market; while the project supports extension.
- Oil bean is a new crop for farmers, introduced during this project phase in target villages and becoming an important cash crop in Long district and supporting livelihoods, while piloting oil bean has started in POD in 2013 only (no harvest yet). A value chain consultant is currently (January to March 2015) working on linking farmers to market there and plans to facilitate contract farming there.
- Long term contract farming agreements in Long were discussed and signed at high level in the context of bilateral agreements. The contract terms have been introduced orally in all villages by DAFO staff. Now, farmers asked for a yearly price update.
- Potential production almost all year round if the plants are watered.

▣ **Good practices**

- Training on production and drying techniques.
- Linking farmers to market.

▣ **Recommendations**

- Contract farming: ensure to facilitate the process with as much transparency as possible to avoid misunderstanding and frustrations, thanks to the following measures (1) the information provided to villagers is clear; (2) representatives of villagers continue to participate in meeting when contract agreements are discussed; (3) farmers are consulted by their representatives before this annual contract agreement meeting; (4) a copy of contract is available at village level as a reference.
Linking farmers with more than one trader would probably allow to develop some competition between traders to buy agricultural products, hopefully push the prices up and avoid marketing below the market price. Obstacles to this might be that (1) traders know each other and agree on prices and that (2) the offer of agricultural

products increases locally and becomes higher than the demand, which would push the prices down.

- Oil beans offer opportunities for added value, because the fruit can be peeled. In practice, the farmer has 3 options to sell the product: simply dried, roughly peeled or peeled until the final bean is separate. Different prices are offered by the company (respectively 10 000, 12 500 and 16 000 kip/kg). It would be interesting to check the time needed for processing and whether the price offered is an attractive enough for the farmers to add value locally, assessing how far the labour is rewarded. It would be good to share the results with all producers, in order for them to make the best choice regarding labour allocation, based on other income opportunities and labour availability.
- Research shows that oil beans are "superfoods", rich in good oils and vitamins: info on nutrition properties and how to eat it (farmers don't currently know).
- Introduce easy techniques for erosion control and soil fertility management.

Other seeds/seedling introduced: soybeans, maize, peanuts, cassava

☐ Comments

- Feedback of farmers' disappointment on production (maize, soybeans): *"We lost time, our land was not productive and the project wasted money"*.
- Cassava is growing well in Long.
- Peanuts seeds were distributed in the previous phase. There is a good potential thanks to suitable soils in some places. Now farmers use the previous seed provided by the project or local seeds. However, peanut production is not massive production compared to job's tear. Villagers grow peanuts for their household consumption and they sell the surplus at the local market.
- What is recognised as the more profitable crop today might not be easily sold or well paid during the next season, so there is not "good" or "bad" crops.
- In Sompankao (Long), the farmers understood that the company involved in contract farming wanted to decrease the negotiated minimum price at the farm gate from 700 kip/kg cassava down to 500 kip/kg, because the village is remote. Those farmers consider the price too low and plan to stop growing cassava.

☐ Good practices

- All those crops were other great opportunities for crop diversification to improve livelihood and income. Since the market is quite volatile, it is important that farmers continue to diversify the agricultural production.

☐ Recommendations

- Better investigate local conditions and suitability before introducing crops and base the planning on identified local technical opportunities.
- Develop a more vertical approach, including marketing concerns from the start.
- Government at District level ensures that the contract minimum price is respected.
- Link agriculture and nutrition, mentioning that soybeans are a source of proteins and peanuts a source of fat.
- Cassava and maize: study the introduction of erosion control and soil sustainable fertility management. Possibility to promote mixed cropping.

Animal raising

☐ Comments

- Animal raising correspond to an important source of income.
- There is a high demand for meat. Marketing animals is easy.
- Small animals (chickens) either self-consumed or sold.
- Big animals (cattle and goats) are eaten for ceremonies or sold.

- Revolving funds are characterized by different systems/rules: rotating adult animal or passing on offspring (calves, piglets etc). Common financial funds exist too (contribution to be a member of the group).
 - Tables distributed by DAFO to farmers for data collection are not always understood (POD), thus data reliability questionable.
 - Insufficient animal fodder is used to justify why pens are not built (chicken, pigs). This extensive animal raising is also a way to minimize labour inputs as explained in the main text.
 - Because of free ranging animals, some animals are quite wild. Catching them for vaccination is difficult. This has nothing to do with fencing.
 - High mortality rates after distribution mentioned in some cases had led to indebtedness.
- **Good practices**
- Good dynamics in POD: cattle raising intensification with fenced grasslands + fodder plantations + vaccination paid by farmers.
 - Vaccination to decrease risk of mortality, with the training of VVV - who now feel comfortable -, including women for chicken vaccination.
 - Prepare pen or pond before receiving animals. However, this works for the first HH receiving the gift (this of course refers to "passing on the gift"), because it was not applied as a criteria to receive animals from the second round.
 - Fish raising is not accessible to all HHs because a suitable land is needed, but it provides proteins for family diet and income as fishes are also sold in the local market.
- **Recommendations**
- Dialogue before project closure try to sustain vaccination, investigating (1) if the current price is sufficient to cover real costs (vaccines supply + staff per diem) and possibly calculating on how to adjust it and (2) how logistics can be sustainably organized at an affordable cost.
 - Revolving fund: prefer the rotation of adult cattle (usually the case but not everywhere) otherwise the rotation takes too long.
 - Take the time needed to explain data collection and practice together with the farmers if it is new to them, making sure they understand the objectives and exercise well.
 - Opportunities of mixed cropping could be studied in order to address the issue of too little fodder for animals.
 - For enhancing the sustainability of fish raising, some training about fish breeding and selection and specific training for the best farmers on fingerling production.

Specific objective B

Activities under specific objective B are summarized in the table below:

Table 3: Summary of activities - Specific objective B

Specific objective B: Communities natural resources are sustainably managed
Strengthening and training of village natural resource management committees.
Improving land use planning and allocation systems.
Increased reforestation, promote agro-forestry (hard wood, fast growing wood, incense trees, mulberry bark, grass for making brooms, rattan).
We have also seen tee plantation and cardamom under the forest cover.

NTEP – Agro-forestry

▣ **Comments**

- NTPF are an important source of income for some families, especially pak meuak. Comments like "*we should go further and further to collect it*" or "*it is getting extinct*" indeed suggest an unsustainable collection and a real need for better practices, such as not taking roots out.
- Rules related to natural resources management are better applied in villages with a strong leadership.
- Cardamom planted in 1998 doesn't produce in Long. It takes 3 year for the cardamom to produce seeds. Thus the cardamom planted in 2012-2014 will produce partly in 2014 and so on. NCA provided 2 varieties of cardamom (Kuang Tung and Paksong varieties). These days, NCA has introduced Pakson varieties that produce well. But the price is lower than the Louang Tung variety that produces well along the valley.

▣ **Good practices**

- The project has provided training in "easy to apply" practices and rules for sustainable collection and creation of a natural resource management committee in charge of ensuring that the rules are respected.
- Allocation of some forest plots by the Forestry Department in collaboration with the project to HH (maintenance and collection) for an enhanced ownership and better management. This is apparently not legally possible in communal forests.
- Plantation of tea, rattan and cardamom under the forest cover. This is a great way to increase the forest value and indirectly protect the forest.

▣ **Recommendations**

- Pay a special attention to key elements of success highlighted by the evaluation team: village leadership and teenagers' management. These elements were mentioned as challenges met in some villages to implement the set rules. The evaluation team does not know how the project has managed (or not) these challenges.
- Introduce planting material from the region if possible, and adapted to the local climate.
- Farmers are more reluctant to plant species that take time before producing. Therefore, tree planting in general can be integrated in project activities but to a limited extend only.

Land use planning and land allocation

▣ **Comments**

- Each family has land use rights on 3 blocks of land for shifting cultivation.
- The rotation period depends on village, from 4-5 years to 15 years, reflecting various situations regarding human pressure on land and land scarcity.

▣ **Good practices**

- Land allocation has led to forest being protected from continuous expansion of farmlands and controlling slash and burn of remaining forest areas.
- Another positive impact resulting from land blocks allocation per HH mentioned by villagers: HH do not fight each other for land anymore.

▣ **Recommendations**

- A follow up by local authorities will be needed, especially where the land availability is limited and the respect of set rules might becomes difficult. Indeed, because land are scarce, HH tend to clear forest land outside of the blocks and planned rotation, which normally could not be.

Broom making (POD)

▣ Comments

- Although broom making is not the main family income, it is a most welcome complement to other HH income. This activity is mainly undertaken by the women during the dry season and considered as a « free time activity ».
- Easy marketing is reported, with traders coming to the villages to collect brooms. Children have also been seen selling them in Pha Oudom. Some villages sell all brooms at the same price, whatever the quantity, some others differentiate retail price (10 000 kip) and wholesale price (7 000) kip.
- Request for a common room for broom making has been asked by broom makers groups and already built in some villages. It seems mostly used when visitors are coming in the village. Most women like to work at home, while supervising children or the cooking pot. Sometimes, a few of them gather under a house, work together and chat. They like exchanging ideas on how to work faster or on new designs.

▣ Good practices

- Study tour, training of trainers for introduction of a new product suitable for Khmu who are good basket makers.
- Linking producers to market. The producers are now totally independent to market their production.

▣ Recommendations

- One limit of a participative need assessment is that expressed needs do not always correspond to real needs. It would be good to limit the project funded common infrastructures to what is also found really relevant based on an independent NCA assessment.
- Let the producers manage price depending on production capacity. If they can sell all their brooms at high price, great for them.

NB Some sessions have been organised to preserve local handicrafts/knowledge like the Akha traditional weaved basket. The young generation was trained in Long.

Specific objective D

Activities under specific objective D are summarized in the table below.

Because the Government field staff did not come to the planned meeting, less information could be gathered on this specific objective.

NB Specific objective C (education) is not part of this evaluation.

Table 4: Summary of activities - Specific objective D

Specific objective D: Ethnic minorities access to health services, nutritional education, water supply and sanitation are improved (Long District only)

Maternal health services: mother and child care training for health officers, training of VHV and TBA in primary health care management and management of village drug kits, official recognition of "healthy villages", health baseline report and health survey report in year 3. Nutrition education of mother and child: promote outreach clinics: health check up, provision of vitamins A, deworming pills, STI/HIV/AIDS, hygiene education) Upgrade water supply and sanitation, provision of equipment and medicine at dispensary, development of IEC material.

Basic health - Outreach clinics - Nutrition

▣ Comments

- Awareness was raised on the « 3 cleans » (sam saat: drink clean, eat clean, stay clean), HIV-AIDS and STI. An anthropologist met in the field indicates that "NCA villages" in Long can be recognised easily: they demonstrate a much better hygiene compared to other Akha villages in the same area (there is currently not report available). Many HH realize the dramatic impact of hygiene on health. Villagers found the sessions on sexually transmitted infections informative and useful too.
- Malnutrition for the children under five years has been followed up in the villages.
- Nutrition: information was provided on balanced nutrition, for children and adults. Villagers indicate some difficulties to apply, specially to eat meat regularly, because they should buy it and they face financial limitations.
- Pregnant women are encouraged to perform regular health checks. In practice, they face difficult access to health centre in rainy season and hesitate to travel on bumpy roads after a few months pregnancy.
- Medicine boxes have been set up in each village and Village Health Volunteers (VHV) trained. Regular use (almost daily) of medicine boxes has been reported. Some were well filled, while some should be refilled. The change of responsible person in charge of the medicine box was also reported.
- Medicines provided with the financial support of UNICEF, such as deworming pills, cannot be found in the medicine box. This means that if UNICEF funding stops, the use of those medicines is much likely to stop.
- 11 villages have been recognized as healthy villages after and because of NCA support, following the official mechanism (whose the evaluation team does not know all details). The Government developed a range of awards of this kind to encourage villagers to progress in various areas: drug and crime free village, cultural village, developed village, etc.

▣ Good practices

- Nutrition: practical demonstrations have been delivered in POD, but awareness apparently much more based on talks and posters in Long.
- Medicine box: (1) initial training and refreshment training have been delivered for the VHV; (2) the price medicines paid by villagers is high enough to cover the travelling cost for renewing the supply.
- Mother and child health: questions are asked related to medical follow up before and after delivery, separately to husbands and wives and double checked.
- Information about STI in a context of increasing trade, migrations and human trafficking. No data is available to assess whether this had an impact on reducing STIs.

▣ Recommendations

- Hygiene: develop regular HH visits with the use of simple visual indicators, easy and quick to collect for monitoring purpose, such as using safe water for drinking (check if water is boiled and water storage practices), storage of food appropriate, yard look clean, house look clean, adults or children look clean, latrine available, latrine look used, animals free in the yard/house...
- More communication would have been useful to identify and explain why the consumption of some products helps balancing the diet, relying on existing sources - of proteins and fat for example - which are accessible without major financial constraints. For example demonstrating the preparation of fermented soybeans was great, but HH eat few of it; they don't know that soybeans provide proteins and, in the same spirit, that peanuts that are grown in the project area contain oil.

- Link more agriculture and nutrition.
- Based on the villagers feedback, "Feeding for the future" WFP principles as presented in internet for Laos (interactive methods relying on cooking sessions, role plays) seem not fully applied in Long.
- Medicine box: make sure that the training documents that are consulted very regularly by the VHV are provided as materials that can survive frequent use. (plasticized for example).

Water and sanitation

☐ Comments

- Water supply is always very much appreciated for the work alleviation and gain of time it provides.
- Sanitation: the success/use depends on each village. Some villagers did build latrines and not all of them use them, although it was done upon their request and they participated in the construction. As a result, NCA decided to decrease the number of latrines built per village, promoting a "demonstration approach" first before expanding the activity. The main beneficiaries of those demonstrations belong to the VDC. The adverse effect: now that the funding is over, the wealthiest HH benefited from the project while the others who want to follow do not have the chance to do so. Possibly because the existence of the project, no HH has been found up to now that wants to build a latrine on its own. It is difficult to guess what type of dynamics will be observed in the future when NCA withdraws.
- Broken pipes may mean major water losses.
- Sometimes it is tempting for villagers to get a new system rather than fixing existing problems and maintaining the water supply system. For example, in Sompankao, a pipe between the water tank and the village is leaking, which means that water is lost on the way and the remaining available quantity was insufficient to satisfy the villagers needs. This pipe has not been fixed, but another tank and two more water stands have been built, supported by PRF. The old system could have been fixed but is now out of use.

☐ Good practices

- Water supply and sanitation have major impacts on villagers' lives: it alleviates work load, leads to better health.
- Individual responsibilities have been clearly set regarding the system cleaning and follow up (intake, tank, pipes, water stand). Monthly financial contributions have been mentioned by villagers and financial retributions to the persons in charge.

☐ Recommendations

- Maintenance and sustainability is the most challenging aspect related to water supply. Make sure the above good practices are systematically implemented and promote regular elections of the water supply committee.

Specific objective E

Activities under specific objective E are summarized in the table below.

Table 5: Summary of activities - Specific objective E

Specific objective E: Women empowerment and gender equity are promoted in the target communities

Women empowerment and equity: women participate in the project planning, implementation and monitoring, women entrepreneurship skills improved and support to small shops operation, development of strategy to promote equitable participation of women in leadership (planning, implementation, M&E, institution), training on gender issues at kumban and community levels (work load share between men and women, women participation in decision making, women and children rights).

Gender

▣ **Comments**

- Women's participation has increased in trainings, village meetings as well in the HH. Leaders have a major role as meeting facilitators and can make the difference for women participation in community affairs.
- Tangible progress is noticed on gender, but this does not mean that equality is reached yet.
- Achievements in terms of behaviour change depend on the villages and HH. Obviously, some individuals are more open to change than others. The question of gender inside the HH seems to have been monitored by some village leaders who could further support the changes.

▣ **Good practices**

- Regarding gender changes in the HH, meetings are first organized with women, then with men, then with both of them in order to reach agreements on workload share.
- Monitoring data and reporting are gender disaggregated.

▣ **Recommendations**

- Message to leaders: encourage women participation in meetings, not for « women activities » only.

Children rights

▣ **Comments**

- There is an increased awareness on the right to go to school (high impact mentioned for phase 1), to play, against children violence associated to a positive education spirit. Villagers report: « *Now only few people hit and it is not serious* ».

▣ **Good practices**

- Nice IEC materials have been elaborated, displaying a relevant context where villagers can recognize themselves.

▣ **Recommendations**

- None.

Products transformation

▣ Comments

- Women trained on fried banana, drying and packing bamboo shoots, making noodles, chilli sauce, vegetables salad, eggplant sauce...
- Product transformation contributed to improved nutrition and income opportunities: packed bamboo and fried banana are sold at school (seen in POD).

▣ Good practices

- Practical ideas for balanced nutrition have been introduced.
- Live demonstrations took place (POD, but not/less in Long).

▣ Recommendations

- Keep it simple and low cost. Avoid costly ingredients like for the pickled bamboo or complicated recipes.

Specific objective F

Activities under specific objective F are summarized in the table below.

Table 6: Summary of activities - Specific objective F

<p>Specific objective F: Government partners / community leaders and project staff abilities to assume responsibilities and perform duties with transparency and accountability are strengthened</p> <p>Capacity building of VDC in leadership and participatory village planning Capacity building of VDF Strengthen Kumban management (participatory planning, implementation, data collection, M&E, project cycle management, NCA CoC) Capacity building of District staff and project staff Participatory Village Planning and Evaluation Project evaluation We have also noticed farmers to farmers exchanges.</p>
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Credit (+saving in POD) funds

▣ Comments

- Multiple donors have contributed to credit and saving funds (in POD only). It has led to the necessity of complex calculations.
- In one village, all HH are members of the credit fund, except from the very new HH who did not apply yet.
- Women seem to have difficulties to have ideas on opportunities to develop businesses.
- Total fund as of January 2015 of the 6 target villages was 169,359,000 Lao Kip of which 104,332,500 Lao KIP was kept in the cash box of each village, 23,272,500 Lao Kip is kept in the bank and 41,754,000 Lao Kip was the loan to the villagers. The summary of the fund is in the annex.
- Reimbursement rate as of January 2015 was 75%.

▣ Good practices

- Regular follow up and on-the-job explanations have been provided by the Department of Rural Development.
- A village committee of 5 persons have been elected in each village. These need for regular training.

☐ **Recommendations**

- It would have been necessary to set up rules in Long too: at least on the interest rates, on the proportion of the fund available for social use and on loan amount ceiling.
- Identify and provide ideas to women on opportunities for income generation activities.
- Possibility of developing solidarity groups to facilitate access to poor and maximize reimbursement rate.
- A Government budget currently exists for following up 2/6 target villages in POD.
- Keep a reasonable interest rate.
- Avoid the usual pitfall to ignore delayed payments in the calculations of the reimbursement rate.
- Work on internal control procedures to enhance sustainability of those funds.

Strengthening of village and kumban management

☐ **Comments**

- Village and kumban leaders have been trained on village planning gender and child protection issues, PLA, management of village fund, management of natural resources, community leadership training. In addition, inter villages meetings and exchange visits have been organized by the project.

☐ **Good practices**

- A Village Development Committee (VDC) has been set up in each village in order to follow up project supported activities. Each member has been assigned a specific task and trained to understand it. This is a great improvement, because before the village head was feeling in charge of everything and it was too much for him to handle.
- Management at community level is often forgotten in projects and provide an extra useful dimension and dynamics to community development.

☐ **Recommendations**

- None.

Capacity building of District staff and project staff

☐ **Comments**

- The high staff rotation in Government staff (especially in Long) is linked to regular promotions resulting from the capacity building provided by the project.
- NCA staff rotation, especially high in POD, is mainly linked to the difficulty to hire qualified staff willing to live in remote conditions in the long term.

☐ **Good practices**

- Regular trainings have been organized.
- Government staff whose capacities have been built enhance the capacities of District offices in the long term.

☐ **Recommendations**

- If the Government staff rotation is too high, they will be aware of practices and learnt principles such as the participatory approach. However, they will not be able to independently fully apply what they have learned. It would be good to highlight and debate this with District partners and try to limit the staff rotation.

Other activities

Drug production control and awareness (in Long only)

☐ Comments

- According to the texts, LCDC focuses its activities around opium cultivation and consumption. However, the risk of consuming drugs in general has been mentioned.
- After a phase of information and awareness raising on the ban of drug cultivation and on the risks linked to drug consumption, DCDC focused inputs on warning the farmers on the necessity of law enforcement.
- There was no willingness to involve the project in control and field destruction, which is fully understandable given the potential risks for the staff and because it is the state responsibility.
- Opium production seems on the rise again. The price offered for opium is indeed very attractive, it grows well, marketing very easy and it is a light product that can be easily transported from far-away fields. Therefore, finding competitive alternatives is unfortunately hard and some villages not very willing to change what can be in some cases their main income source (Jakhamleu and possibly Sompankao).

☐ Good practices

- Information has been provided on drug dangers and addiction explained. This is really useful in a context where drug (opium) is still present in some target villages and offer/consumption of amphetamines develops quickly.
- Provide opportunities for growing alternative crops to opium cultivation was indeed much needed. There is no available data to assess the effect NCA's work on opium cultivation.

☐ Recommendations

- High value for weight products are attractive alternatives, especially in the case of remote fields accessible by foot only.
- As long as opium consumption is present, it is useful to support the addicts for stopping consuming drugs. Unfortunately, this type of support stopped in 2010.

Annex 2: Jamai village case study
(Luang Namtha Province, Long District)

Village characteristics in a glance

Village name	Jamai village
Province	Luang Namtha
District	Long
Ethnic group	Akha
Type of economy	Entering market economy
Income generation activities	Rice is produced for self consumption and for sale. The village just started planting cassava and oil bean last year. No harvest yet.
Access to land	Was decreasing, but increasing again.
Access to forests	Stable. Harvest of NTFP: cardamom, white tea*, broom grass, bamboo, stripped grass, bark* (pak meuak), galanga seeds. * become more difficult to find than 5 years ago, although, but they cut alot already.
Access to market	All products are easy to sell: good road, high demand by Chinese businessmen who come to buy.
Other background information	Village involved in NVA activities from 2003. Community work increased since some HH have left.

Testimonies - General evolution in the village.

Out-migrations *"Half HH left the village since 2002. They are attracted by paid labour opportunities (banana and sugar cane plantations) in lowland area. They become labour, but have no land anymore. The result for us is that more land become available, but less labour for community work. We prefer to stay here and having our own land".*

Sustainable management of natural resources. *"DAFO introduced sustainable collection of pak meuak since 2007, with a reminder every year, but we cut a lot of young trees and cut the roots already, so it has become more difficult to find. Now, we only harvest old trees that are few and take the bark only".*

Participatory approach/Sustainability/Food security. *"We asked for seeds of green vegetables because you cannot find them in Long. We cultivate them for consumption. Now, we produce the seeds ourselves for next year."*

Seeds. *"We appreciate the sticky rice seeds much (Dokfai 5 & 11), which provide higher yields than traditional varieties. I have consumed 3T and sold 2T".*

"We also received very good garlic seeds".

"We asked for corn seeds 3 months before the season. They came too late, so the yields are low."

Land use planning. *"Since land use planning in 2012, we have less land to cultivate. I will inform villagers after the January ceremonies that they are not allowed to cut the trees in the protected forest area and inform them about crop rotation. Rotation duration here is of about 10 years nowadays".*

Health. *"Health activities are good but the villagers cannot follow: more than 10 HH use latrines provided in 2003, but 20 HH don't".*

"I was told about hygiene and the "3 clean" (drink clean, eat clean, be clean). I had never taken a bath in my life before, now I take one regularly". (a young lady).

Women equality.

"Before, the women did work a lot. I can see major changes in this village. Now, men and women share the work. They don't say this is women or men's work, but help each other. For example, the women is cooking while the men takes care of the children. Women are happy now ". (a young lady)

Training.

"VCD was trained on (a) planning; (b) traditions that are not good and (c) production calendar for the village. I will continue applying planning, e.g. for asking villagers to fix the fence around the school if needed" (village head).

Highlights

Behaviour changes, as latrine use takes time. Regarding hygiene (3 cleans), there is no coming back after the behaviour changed, providing that water is available.

Some HH prefer to stay in their villages instead of migrating to town and become landless labourers, but they should find ways to develop income generation activities.

An appropriate village leadership can impulse and support the local dynamic, encouraging changes and sustaining them, controlling if the rules are applied at community level.

Annex 3: Houaytoumai village case study

(Luang Namtha Province, Long District)

Village characteristics in a glance

Village name	Houaytoumai village
Province	Luang Namtha
District	Long
Ethnic group	Akha
Type of economy	Switched from self-sufficiency to market economy
Income generation activities	Collection of red mushrooms, wild cardamom, broom grass, "stripped grass", cassava, oil bean, tea
Access to market	Improved alot since the road was built. Marketing is very easy, demand much higher than the offer.
Access to land	Accessible but far (1 hour walk)
Access to forest	Easy. Rely on NTFP for (food and?) sale
Other background information	Working with NCA for 13 years. Rotation duration is about 7-8 years. Soil fertility: crops still grow well.

Testimonies - General evolution in the village.

Migrations *"Young go to study in town. After finishing school, they find a job and don't want to come back living in the village. The available labour in the village decreases."*

Rice cropping. *"Before there was no extension. Rice was cultivated for rice consumption only. Now, we produce and have market. The demand for crops increases and the agricultural land is further away."*

"Rice seeds are not suitable for this area. Their cycle is too short, yield lower than traditional varieties and should be harvested before ceremony time in January, which is not possible. They also have short stems and we prefer long stems that we come to harvest later in the season, when other works are completed."

Hygiene. *"Now we have a better hygiene, before we were too dirty".*

Women empowerment and workload share. *"Before women were forced to do things. Now husband and wives discuss inside the family."*

"Before, if a wife did ask her husband to clean the dishes, there was a big argument. Now, they discuss."

"Before, women carried rice bags from the fields. Now only men do it".

"Before the women carries firewood to the house. Now the men do it. It is not much work because they use tok tok."

Drug addiction. *"Since men stopped to smoke opium, women are more relax. They had to do everything before. The village is now a drug free village."*

Income. *"New income are used for mostly for household purpose: buying clothes, seats and face other expenses for children. We don't need to buy rice. We discuss in the HH what are the priorities for spending the money. That was the case in some families before the project, but not all."*

Highlights

Traditional believes exclude the adoption of new rice varieties.

Farmers appreciate rice for the flexible strategy it allows. It is grown as food crop and cash crop.

Because of out-migrations, labour shortage is more and more a constraint in villages, but it also has the advantage to free some lands.



Picture 3: Preservation of local handicrafts. The education part of the project supported training on local knowledge for the young generation (here production of Akha basket).

Annex 4: Jakhamleu village case study

(Luang Namtha Province, Long District)

Village characteristics in a glance

Village name	Jakhamleu village
Province	Luang Namtha
District	Long
Ethnic group	Akha
Type of economy	Mostly rely on opium production
Income generation activities	Mainly opium (43 HH on a total of 55). It provides about 10 million kip income per family per year. Oil bean was introduced last year buy a Chinese company. Some cassava has just been planted, taken from relatives in Sompankao, not harvested yet. Animals: cows, buffaloes, chicken and pigs.
Access to market	Quite remote village. Collectors come from the village. No trader comes here unless for oil bean since last year.
Access to land	1 ha of land was allocated per labour. Rotation duration is about 9-10 years per family labour.
Access to forest	Far and few NTFP are available (bark, pak meuak, few wild cardamom).
Other background information	Amongst the 55 HH in the village, there are 17 opium addicts. Local authorities came to destroy opium fields for the second year (on-going). The area is estimated 150 ha. The population is increasing but not because of migrations. The Government plans to relocate the village. Working with NCA for more than 10 years. A Chinese company came to ask villagers to prepare the soil for planting tea but they never came back.

Testimonies - General evolution in the village.

Opportunities for other income generation activities than opium production. *"Some people started to plant cassava, but I didn't because nobody is buying it"*

"We did plant ginger during phase 1. It grows very well here, each HH can produce easily 300 bags, but there is no market."

"There are many opportunities for cash crops if we produce enough to attract traders".

Opium addiction. *"My father is addicted to opium and consumes it 4 to 6 times a day. Since the fields were destroyed we should buy opium for it. It costs 240 000 to 360 000 kip per day. My father taught me how to make traditional Akha hats. I can make 3 per day and earn 300 000 kip for each. I have to work hard to pay opium. I don't feel good when I go to the market or to house for selling the hats, because the people refer to the addiction of my father and I am ashamed. He tried to stop 2 times but it*

did not work. He does not want to go elsewhere for a treatment." (young girl, 19 years old).

Farmers' strategies for the future. *"We will plant oil bean and job's tears but we have to find a market for the latest."*

Contract farming. *"A contract was signed for oil bean between the District (or kumban?) with the Chinese company. The kumban responsible came to read it to us. The price agreed was 12 500 kip per kilo. We received this amount the first time they came, but then they offered only 10 000 kip. A farmer can earn 50 000 to 60 000 kip per day."*

Gender. *"The workload for homework between men and women is better shared now. There is no way for the new generation of women to accept our husbands to behave like kings again" (a young lady not married yet)*

Sustainability of cattle revolving fund. *"We have received 7 animals in 2003. Some died, but not all. We are finishing the first round. Some animal that we have received was too old at some point, so we did sell it and bought another one. If the baby dies, the family wait for the next new born before rotating the cattle."*

Latrines. *"12 HH of village representatives received latrines as pilots in 2013. More will come later for other HH". NB Visited latrines were used and clean.*

Project impacts *"What we appreciate most in the project is the school, teaching material, meeting room and road". (a men)*

"The major effect of this project is about gender." (a women)

"I never attended awareness raising meetings, but about 10 years ago, my mother started to boil drinking water for good health. I had to clean my hand to receive food and she told me to wash myself every day".

Highlights

Opium production probably had a major impact on the collaboration of this not (very active) village with the project:

- People asked few regarding income generation activities in this village during the participatory planning. They focus on infrastructures. They probably were happy with the opium income.

Developing markets, contract farming and risk management. Remote villages feel they should produce enough to attract traders to come and buy. But on the other

side, they know that markets prices unstable and contract farming agreements not always respected.

Understanding of vaccination advantage is mixed. One guy understands the advantage of vaccination and is ready to pay 5 000 kip per animal for it (whatever animal). A young lady does not see any difference in the mortality rate with or without vaccination.

Teaching methods focus on theory: they consist of showing pictures. No demonstration was implemented regarding the construction of pig pens. The villagers never applied.

NCA staff versus Gov staff. The villagers don't see difference in the service provided, but appreciate more NCA staff who are more focused and bring their own food. They work with farmers. Gov staff asks to kill chicken, are quicker and rather work with villagers representatives.

Monitoring-evaluation.

The monitoring for health is implemented every 3 months. Men and women are divided in 2 groups, asking the same question to husbands and wives. Answers are cross checked:

- If the wife pregnant, do you go for a regular check up?
- Similar questioning is done regarding gender issues and workload share.

Health staff visit some HH yards to see if it is clean, but they don't visit the latrine or come inside the house for checking water storage (water boiled or not).

There is no annual evaluation.

For the staff in charge of Natural Resources monitoring focuses on checking whether the forest use is respected, according to the land use planning and if there is no slash and burn in forest area.



Picture 4: Akha hat maker, daughter of a drug addict



Picture 5: Cattle

Annex 5: Ai Seng village case study

(Luang Namtha Province, Long District)

Village characteristics in a glance

Village name	Ai Seng village
Province	Luang Namtha
District	Long
Ethnic group	Akha
Type of economy	Entered market economy
Income generation activities	Broom grass Animal raising
Access to market	Very remote village. Access road has been built by the project.
Access to land	
Access to forest	
Other background information	31 HH (25-27 HH 10 years ago)

The village was cleaned on purpose for our visit.

Testimonies

Seeds received. *"Job's tears produced small grains, rice did not grow well, corn produced the first 2-3 years then get extinct."*

Tea production. *"A Chinese company came and asked us to prepare the soil for planting tea, which Ban Ai Seng did, but other villages around were not interested. Therefore the company said they could not consider trading for only one village because the production would be insufficient to cover travelling costs".*

Animal revolving fund (since 2003) and vaccination. *"We received first 4 animals, then 5 more. The criteria for receiving an animal was to have labour and not to smoke opium. The fund has revolved one time. Nobody wishes it now. all families raise cattle, only new created ones don't do it yet. There is not mortality now since we vaccinate our animals. We have received vaccination for free, have no idea of its cost. The VVV has collected needs, informed DAFO staff who come with the vaccines. VVV now knows how to vaccinate for 2 years and does it. Fodder production (2 types of grass) has been introduced. The animals ate it all, but the roots are still there and it will grow again when the rainy season comes."*

Income generation activities. *"Animals provide the more important income. Oil bean plantation has been supported by a Chinese company. Alternative crops can provide 4-5 to more than 40 million kip per year. "*

"Snowbowl effect". *"We have seen that job's tears were growing well in another village, went there, bought some and it did work well here too."*

Opium production and drug awareness. *"DCDC staff have been coming for awareness on drug production and consumption - bad effects of drugs (opium and amphetamines). When you smoke opium, you only sleep and are weak. People who take amphetamines cannot sleep and are sometimes out of control. DCDC collects information on how many addicts live in the village and how much opium is planted. They focus now on law enforcement. Only one old guy is still addicted to opium."*

Road maintenance. *"The road is repaired twice a year. Each time, it takes 1 day and 1 person from each HH contributes. The grass on the sides is cut three times a year. One person contributes per HH. The villagers fix small landslides. There are no big ones."*

Preferred activities. *"We prefer cattle, because it produces every year." (men)
"We prefer the blanket* and mosquito nets (supported by the project?)." *NB A personal gift of one visitor.*

Activities not well appreciated. *"Rice seeds which did not grow well, ginger which do not grow well in the area". NB There is no agreement on the assessment of sesame, some appreciate it and gain income, some don't.*

Highlights

Animal revolving fund does not need to continue forever. It can stop if all HH have benefited from it in the village.

Efforts provided by the villages to ensure road maintenance are regular and their responsibilities clear. Having set up the practice of planning village activities will help to sustain the maintenance.

Each village and even each HH make different choices regarding income generation activities, favouring what suits their environment, skills and expectations best.

Annex 6 - Field mission schedule

Day	Date	Time	People met and evaluation methods	Project Activities	People met	Place
Day 1	Mo: 19/01	8-9:00	Briefing evaluation team members (LCDC, MoAF, MoFA) in VTE		Evaluation team	NCA office
		9:00-12:00	Interview of NCA team in VTE (moved to 15/01, same time)	All	NCA staff: Minavanh, Bouaphet, Phanpanom, Bouaphanh and Sithonh	NCA office
		2:30-3:25	Flight to Luang Namtha			
		3:30-6:30	Travel to Long district by car		Anne, Khamphone, representative from MoFA and LCDC	Office compound
Day 2	Tu: 20/01	8:00 - 10:00	Interview LWU, DSubCAW, DoHA, DoH, DCDC	LWU (Saving/credit, women empowerment, no broomgrass making, small income generation activities, ...), DoHA , LWU, DSUBCAW (women empowerment, child protection, capacity development of local authorities), DoH (primary health care, hygiene, mother and child health, nutrition, DCDC (activities with drug prevention).	District Officers of these concerned offices	Long
		10:00-12:00	Interview DAFO, DoIC, DoNRE	Agriculture, livestock, forestry, land use planning, protection of natural resources, reforestation, product marketing and trade, contract farming	Officers from concerned district offices	Long
		1:30-2:00	Travelling from Long to Ban Houaytoumai			

Night stay	02:00-3:00	Houytoumai: Interview with VDC (7 people), elderly, village walk	water supply, drug revolving fund, animal raising, income generating activities, women activities, cash crop plantation	VCD, villagers	Ban Huaytoumai (A)
	03-04:30	VHV, TBA, VVV	Mother and Child health, vaccination, sanitation/hygiene		
	4:30-5:30	Travelling from Houaytoumai to Jamai			
	6:30- 7:30	Dinner			Jamai sub centre
	7:30-9:00	Jamai village: Interview with VDC (7 people), VHV, TBA, VVV, the elderly and village walk	water supply, drug revolving fund, animal raising, income generating activities, women activities, cash crop plantation	VCD, villagers	Jamai village
					Jamai NCA centre
Day We: 21/01 3	8:00-9:30	Village 1: FGD with men	All, included village development fund, agric (jobstear, corn, upland rice variety seeds, cardamom), livestock (vaccination, animal revolving fund - cow, chicken), health and gender, VDC strengthening.	Men	Ban Huaythumai (A)
	9:30-10:30	Interview of VHV and HH visits	Hygiene-outreach clinic, sanitation, nutrition awareness, medicine bag	VHV, villagers	
	10:30-12:00	FGD with NRM committee and field visit forest (tea and cardamom plantation, NTFP management)	Natural resource committee (Chinese provide natural tea seedlings)	NRM committee	
	12:00-13:00	Lunch			

Night stay	1-3:00	FGD with women and field visit (women empowerment, child protection, animal raising and/or agriculture activity)	All, included village development fund, child protection committee set up and training/drama, agric planting group (corn, upland rice, job's tear), animal group (Cow, chicken).	Women	
	3:00-4:00	FGD with WATSAN committee, visit of gravity water point (nam linh)	water supply, women workload	WATSAN committee	
	4:00-5:00	Back to centre			
	> 05:00	Interview of agriculture staff while waiting for dinner		3 full time staff: 2 DAFO agriculture staff, 1 District health coordinator DHO	Jamai sub-center
Day 4 Th: 22/01	7:00-8:00	Breakfast			Jamai sub-center
	8:00-9:00	Travelling to Sameuang village			Sameuang village (A)
	9:00-11:00	Interview VDC, VHV, TBA, VVV	All	members of these committee	Sameuang village
	11:00-12:00	Village walk			Sameuang village
	12:00-1:00	Lunch (Prepared from Jamai subcenter)			Sameuang village
	1:00-2:30	FGD women	All (same Houaytoumai)	Women	Sameuang village
	2:30-3:30	FGD VDF committee and members	VDF	VDF committee and members	Sameuang village
	3:30-5:00	FGD with Natural resource committee and members, field visit (reforestation)	Natural resource management, tea and cardamom plantation	NRM committee	Sameuang village
	5:00-6:00	Back to Jamai sub-centre			Jamai sub-center
Night stay	> 7:00	Dinner and night stay			Jamai sub-center
	Day 5 Fr: 23/01	7:00-8:00	Breakfast		Jamai sub-center

	8:00-9:00	Travel to Houaytoukao	All		Houaytoukao (A)
	9:00-10:00	FGD with women entrepreneurs, visit small shops	VDF for Women entrepreneurship promotion and negotiation skills, marketing system	Women entrepreneurs	
	10:00-12:00	Interview of VHV, health committee and traditional birth attendants and HH visits	Basic health, hygiene, (HIV prevention?), outreach clinic, health survey, annual meeting in health issues	VHV, health committee, villagers	
	12:00-13:00	Lunch (prepared from Jamai sub center)			Houaytoukao (A)
	1:00-2:00	Travelling to village 3 in Long district			Ban Ai seng (Fair)
	2:00-3:00	VDC, TBA, VVV, VHV	Cattle fund, cash crop production, water supply and latrine, mother and child health, nutrition, drug	VDC	
	3:00-4:00	FGD with farmers involved in contract farming	Contract farming (tea, cassava, oil bean)	Farmers involved in contract farming	
	4:00-5:00	FGD with drug addicts and their family members	Drug prevention	(Ex-)drug addicts and families	
	> 5:00	Interview of staff while waiting for dinner		3 staff: 1 health, 2 agri (1 animal and 1 plantations/crop s)	PhaNgua sub centre
Night stay	7:00-7:30	Breakfast			PhaNgua sub centre
Day Sa: 24/01 6	7:30-8:00	Travelling to Banh Jakhamleu			
	8-9:30	VDC		VCD (head of village, elderly, LWU, vice head) excluded health	Ban Jakhamleu (B)

	9:30-11:30	Interview of VHV, TBA, VVV and HH visits	Basic health, hygiene, outreach clinic, health survey, annual meeting in health issues		
	11:30-12:00	Village walk			
	12:00-1:00	Lunch (Prepared from PhaNgua sub center)			Jakhamleu village
	1-2:00	Water committee and water point	Water construction and maintenance	Water committee	
	2-3:30	FGD with men	All (health, NR management, education)	Villagers (men)	
	3:30-5:00	FGD with committee and members and field visit (forest and land allocation)	Natural resource management, land use planning	NR committee (3 people)	
	5:00-5:30	Back to PhaNgua sub centre			Phangua sub-center
	>5:30	Prepare diner, night stay			Phangua sub-center
Night stay					
Day 7 Su: 25/01	7:00-7:30	Breakfast			Phangua sub-center
	7:30-9:00	Travelling to Sompankao			
	9-10:00	Meeting with VDC		VDC	Ban Sompankao (B)
	10-11:00	Village walk	Cardamom plantation, Community hall	Community hall committee, Villagers	

	11-12:00	Interview of VHV and HH visits	Basic health, hygiene, outreach clinic, health survey, annual meeting in health issues	VHV, villagers	
	12:00-1:00	Lunch			
	1-2:30	FGD with women	All	Women	
	2:30-3:30	FGD with men	All	Men	
	03:30-6:00	Travelling to Long			
	>6:00	Diner at restaurants around Long district and night stay at NCA's compound			Long
Night stay					
Day Mo 26/1 8	8:00-11:00	Discussion with NCA staff		Project manager, finance, admin, community and gender officer	
	2:00-4:00	Debriefing and discussion on preliminary findings	All	All project partners at the District level and NCA staff	NCA meeting room
Night stay	4:00-7:00	Travelling to LNT			Luang Namtha
Day Tu: 9 27/01/14		Travelling to Bokeo and Phaoum			
	3 hours	Travelling from LNT-Bokeo			
	11:00 to 12:00 OR 1:00-2:00	PAFO in Bokeo		PAFO	
Night in					POD District
Day Wed 28/01 10	8:-10:00	Interview of DAFO, DoIC	Agriculture, livestock, forestry, land use planning, product marketing	DAFO, DoIC	NCA Office

Night stay	10:00-12:00	Interview of DoHA, Rural development office, LWU and District sub-CAW	Rural development office (Saving/credit), LWU (training on gender, women empowerment, broomgrass making, women entrepreneurs (shops, loans, training on shop management), food processing (fried banana, sweet, noodle soup)...	officer of concerned offices	NCA Office	
	1:20-2:00	Travel to Ban Kang				
	2:00-2:15	VDC and village walk		Village head & vice head, LWU	Ban Kang (A-C)	
	2:15-3:45	FGD with woman	All	Villagers (women)		
	3:45-5:00	FGD with man	All (Including rattan plantations)	Villagers (men)		
	05:00-5:30	Travelling from Ban Kaan to Ban Mai (15') - Stop to fodder plantation on the way?				
					Centre Ban Mai	
	Day Th: 29/01 11	08-08:15	VDC Kalom		Head of village, vice head of village, LWU	Ban Kalom (A-B)
		8:15-10:30	FGD with Natural resource management committee and members, visit cardamom plantation	Natural resource management: cardamom		In cardamom plantation if possible.
		10:30-12:00	FGD with women	All	Villagers (women)	
	1:00-2:30	FGD with men	All	Villagers (men)		
	2:30-3:30	Village walk, visit of vegetable garden, animal raising, school, meeting room, water supply	Infrastructure construction, livelihood activities	Villagers		
	3:00-4:00	Visit broomgrass group	Broomgrass making and marketing	broomgrass makers		

	4:00 - 5:00	Visit road	Road maintenance	Head of village	
	Travelling to Ban Mai				Centre Ban Mai
Night stay					
Day Fr 30/12	8:00-8:30	Travel to Ban Tinh - See grass plantation on the way and house for broom grass making.			Ban Thin (A-A)
	8:30-9:30	Village walk, visit of vegetable garden mainly for HH consumption, active broomgrass group and house, reforestation, road, water supply, latrine and meeting with VDC		members of VDC	
	9:30 - 11:00	FGD with chicken raisers		Women involved in raising chicken	Next to chicken pen
	11:00-12:30	Travel back to Pha Oudom			
	13:30-15:00	Summary of findings			
	15:00-17:00	Debriefing with the team and gov counterparts			NCA office
Night stay					Pha Oudom
	8-8:30	Travelling to Phouvieng			
Day Sa: 31/0113	8:30-8:45	VDC and village walk		Village head & vice head, LWU	Ban Phouvieng (A-D)
	8:45-10:15	FGD with woman	All	Villagers (women)	
	10:15-12:00	FGD with man	All (Including rattan plantations)	Villagers (men)	
	2 hours	Travelling to Houayxay			
		Additional reading, preparing summary, findings and translation / Collection of additional data with NCA if needed.			

Night stay					Houixay
Day Su 1/2 14	All day	Additional reading, preparing summary, findings and translation			
Day Mo 2/2 15	8:30-9:30	Debriefing and discussion on preliminary findings in Houayxay		PAFO, Foreign Affairs, Planning	PAFO
	9:30-12:30	Travelling to Luangnamtha airport			
	3:55-4:50	Flight to VTE			

Annex 7 – Project logical framework

Annex 8: Discussion guidelines - NCA

Annex 9: Discussion guidelines - Project partners

**Annex 10: Discussion guidelines - Village Development
Committee**

Annex 11: Discussion guidelines - Villagers