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Feasibility of Various Responses and Interventions to Build Capacity of Local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the Lao PDR

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Education Development Center
(Health and Human Development Division),
based in Bangkok**

**on behalf of
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The analysis and recommendations in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation – SDC. This is an independent publication prepared for SDC and reflects views of its authors.

ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CBI	Capacity Building Initiative
CECEM	Center for Community-based Empowerment
CIDSE	Cooperation International pour la Developpment et la Solidarité
CSO	Civil society organizations
DED	Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst
EC	European Commission
EDC	Education Development Center
GAA	German Agro Action
GDG	Gender Development Group
INGO	International non-governmental organization
Lao Front	Lao Patriotic Front for Reconstruction
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LUSEA	Lao Union of Science and Engineering Associations
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGOTP	Non-Governmental Organization Training Project
NPA	Non-profit Association
NSEDP	National Development Socio-Economic Plan
PACSA	Public Administration and Civil Service Authority
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SNV	Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
VBK	Vicheasthan BandosbondalNeakropkrong Kangea
VFI	Village Focus International
WFP	World Food Program

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I. Executive Summary

Background and Methodology

This report provides an overview of the civil society sector in Lao PDR, including the current legislative framework for civil society organizations (CSOs), a description of past and current interventions made in support of civil society by the international community, and an outline of recommendations for further support to the sector.

Given the paucity of written information on civil society in Lao PDR, the collection of data for the study relied particularly on oral interviews and discussions with donors, international organizations, international NGOs (INGOs), and non-profit associations (NPAs) in Lao PDR. A two-day workshop for local and international NGOs was also held as a means of further collecting data, in addition to a desk review of relevant documents and a multi-stakeholder workshop to present and validate the findings.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A range of perspectives exists on what is currently included in the civil society sector in Lao PDR, including mass organizations, local associations, for-profit or commodity-focused farmers' cooperatives, producer groups, foundations, as well as small informal networks or groups which are not even organizations. These range from organizations with formal ties to government, such as mass organizations, to those formed through connections and networks with government agencies, sometimes formed by ex-government officials, to those which have been supported and fostered by INGOs and UN agencies in relation to development programs and objectives.

There are 219 non-profit membership associations (NPAs) known to be currently registered with the Lao Patriotic Front for Reconstruction (Lao Front) and the Lao Union of Science and Engineering Associations (LUSEA), of which 30 to 40 focus on development and social change. Almost all based in Vientiane Capital, they focus on service delivery and are involved in such activities as conducting research, delivering peer education, health and microfinance projects, as well as implementing awareness-raising types of activities.

The April 2009 signing of the Decree on Associations, which provides a legal framework for NPA management, has resulted in a wave of interest and anticipation. As the Lao Government's Public Administration and Civil Service Authority (PACSA) disseminates the Decree to government offices and prepares for assuming their new duties in registering, monitoring and auditing NPAs, most NPAs plan to register as a means of gaining more legitimacy within the development sector. It is expected that more NPAs will form and register in the coming years.

Yet the anticipation around the Decree involves a level of uncertainty, as PACSA aims to put together and train a network of government officials involving multiple players country-wide, and tries to raise awareness among government officials about NPAs and their role in the development process. NPAs, on the other hand, expressed an interest in developing further their identity as a sector, and during the workshop discussed concepts relating to self-reliance, and representation.

Many types of interventions have been made by some major players, including Concern Worldwide, Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers (SNV), Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst (DED), and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in the following areas: (1) support to the Lao Government in the development of a regulatory framework; (2) capacity strengthening at various levels and to varying degrees for selected NPAs; (3) support to project implementation, including “hosting” of NPAs and in some cases providing grants; and (4) establishment of networks and joint initiatives.

Although the programs are still young and have not been formally evaluated, there were a number of lessons learned and conveyed through discussions with respondents. Overall there was the sense among NPAs that a partnership type of relationship between NPA and INGO which enables on-going mentoring and assistance are most effective. Sub-contractual types of partnerships were deemed to be less effective and not facilitative of NPA objectives. In-house and long-term technical assistance was identified by many NPAs as very beneficial. Access to funding is a major issue for NPAs, particularly funding that covers operating costs. The type of assistance provided to PACSA was deemed successful in that the level of government ownership over the Decree was high.

The extent to which civil society will develop as a robust sector in Lao PDR is likely to be affected by how donors, government, international organizations and NPAs/CSOs themselves shape the opportunities that are emerging and manage the risks. The assessment team identifies various factors that will shape this outcome:

- *Local organizations’ access to funds:* A need for easily accessible funding that is relatively free of bureaucratic requirements that enables organizations to experiment and learn-by-doing.
- *Capacity building as a critical element to strengthen civil society in Lao PDR:* Both individual professional development and organizational capacity building is necessary for furthering the human resource capacity of the local organizations.
- *Support from Lao Government to NPAs:* Implementation of the Decree and how PACSA can provide an enabling environment for NPAs will require continued assistance to PACSA.
- *Increased learning by INGOs and donors on how to support CSOs:* As Lao civil society is rapidly evolving and nascent, the international community supporting their growth do not have substantial experience in understanding how to best support Lao CSOs. Greater consciousness about the types and quality of intervention are required at the national and local levels, as well as increased capacities of national staff of international organizations in working with CSOs in the area of partner relations, financial management, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation of partnership projects.
- *NPA’s aspiration for self-reliance and self-determination:* While a strong and collaborative partnership is needed by NPAs vis-à-vis Government, INGOs, and donors, care must be taken in determining control over resources in such partnerships, where decision-making power lies, and thus how agendas are shaped.

- *Building legitimacy and credibility for the sector:* Service provision through implementation of poverty reduction and other social well-being projects in underserved, remote and minority areas, with or without support from international organizations is an essential step in building credibility. Over time, and with increased legitimacy, NPA and Government relations will develop and possibilities for NPAs to expand beyond solely a service delivery role will be more possible.

Examples from the region, including the NGO Training Project (NGOTP), now Center for Community-based Empowerment (CECEM) in Vietnam, the Capacity Building Initiative (CBI) and Paung Ku, both in Myanmar, and VBNK in Cambodia offer relevant points of interest in how they are administered. All involved in strengthening capacities of individuals and organizations in development practice, international organizations that have supported and engaged their efforts have been very inclusive, and project management has been autonomous, not linked to any single institution, and in service to the whole development community.

The assessment team recommends a comprehensive approach that illustrates the spirit of these initiatives. The interventions themselves are not unknown or innovative; rather the means by which they are implemented, in the view of the team, make them particularly successful in nurturing a flourishing and vibrant civil society sector.

- *Component 1:* Capacity building initiative for Lao development professionals and Laotian organizations in participatory, pro-poor development program practices.
- *Component 2:* Establishment of a small grants facility, which will enable local organizations to access small sums of money with relative ease and with the flexibility to implement projects at the community level.
- *Component 3:* Strengthening the regulatory framework and its implementation, which implies the need for simultaneous building capacity of government agencies, especially PACSA.
- *Component 4:* Strengthening the networks of local organizations where there is no organized structure/entity that facilitates communication, knowledge sharing, and coordination of development initiatives among local organizations.

As the civil society sector grows, mechanisms for coordination will be critical. The purpose of such coordination is best served as a means to share lessons learned and ensure there is cohesiveness in approach. The coordination should be “light-touch”, rather than an attempt to map out in great detail who is doing what and to match needs with projects. Such an approach – different from education and health sectors, for example -- fosters the desired outcome of a more organic and spontaneous growth of civil society.

II. BACKGROUND

The Lao PDR Government focuses on human resource development as a means of addressing poverty alleviation within its National Development Socio-Economic Plan (NSEDP) 2006-2010. In support of its Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of reducing the proportion of people below the poverty line by half by 2015, there is a commitment expressed in the NSEDP to enlarge economic opportunities, provide basic social and essential economic services, and ensure security and facilitate the participation and empowerment of the poor in economic, social, political and other arenas to reduce poverty on a sustainable basis.¹

As a means of addressing poverty alleviation, the Lao Government has relied on its ministerial policies and programs as well as mass organizations such as the Lao Patriotic Front for Reconstruction, the Lao Women's Union and the Lao Youth Union. There also currently exist over 220 known indigenous associations or civil society organizations (CSOs) in Laos, some of which focus on social development issues in rural areas. They are registered through various bodies, including the Lao Union of Science and Engineering Associations (LUCEA), located within the Prime Minister's Office; and the Lao Patriotic Front for Reconstruction (Lao Front). These vary greatly in terms of their capacity, effectiveness, and, for those 30 to 40 focused on development activities, their dedication to poverty alleviation.

The Lao Government has taken significant steps in recent years to further enable growth of the civil society sector. The Government drafted a Decree on Associations in 2006, effectively providing an overall legal framework for their management, which was approved in April 2009 by the Prime Minister.

In the past, international agencies and donors have used a range of approaches to supporting civil society. INGOs have "hosted" organizations, including local spin-offs of their own programs, networks, and local organizations. They have supported a few organizations in registering with the Lao Front, other mass organizations or LUSEA. They have, simultaneously, worked on the regulatory framework and on organizational development of existing organizations. With the approval of the Decree on Associations, and the upcoming decrees on cooperatives and foundations, there is presently the potential to expand and modify the types of support to the sector.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has contracted Education Development Center (EDC) to conduct an assessment of civil society in Lao PDR to identify future initiatives. This report presents the findings and recommendations from that assessment.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to assess the evolving context in which the civil society sector in the Lao PDR operates, review past interventions and areas of success and challenge, and analyze the current response, including identification of needs and gaps. Based on such

¹ Lao PDR Government, *National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010*, page 5.

analysis, examine ways to strengthen and assess ways and possibilities for SDC to support the civil society sector in Lao PDR.²

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Methods

The following methods were used to gather and analyze data, as well as to develop recommendations and models for the future:³

- 1. Desk Review of Documents:** The team reviewed all documents made available that provided insight into the state of civil society in Lao, its development, and the effectiveness of ongoing initiatives. This included the official translation of the decree, documents written on Lao civil society, as well as a few evaluations, assessments and program reports prepared for NGOs/UN agencies operating in Lao.
- 2. In-depth interviews with local organizations and international organizations:** Representatives of some ten NPAs and five INGOs were interviewed using an open-ended, semi-structured questionnaire developed on the lines of inquiry as per the TORs.
- 3. Interviews with government officials:** Government officials were interviewed (by agency, individually) using an open-ended, semi-structured questionnaire developed on the lines of inquiry as per the TORs. Three officials each representing three different government agencies were interviewed, and one via written questionnaire.
- 4. Interviews with donor representatives:** Six representatives from four donor agencies were interviewed face-to-face if based in Vientiane or by telephone if based outside also using an open-ended, semi-structured questionnaire developed on the lines of inquiry as per the TORs.
- 5. Two-day workshop with NPA and INGO representatives:** A two-day workshop to generate richer and more in-depth, as well as open information was held with 20 participants representing 15 NPAs and 6 INGOs in Vientiane who have worked together on civil society programs. The workshop focused on determining what has worked well, what has not and why, identifying future challenges and opportunities, what a practical vision for civil society in Lao PDR might look like given the recently-signed decree, and what strategies might be employed to achieve such a vision. The workshop was heavily participatory and received very well by NPAs in particular, who found the space to discuss their experiences and think about the future to be valuable and productive.
- 6. A multi-stakeholder workshop:** All who participated in interviews and the workshop were invited to attend a presentation of the first draft to validate, challenge and modify the analysis of the consultants, as well as to refine and enhance recommendations. The workshop consisted of presentation and feedback through small group discussion and presentation.

In total, 45 representatives of 27 organizations and four representatives from four Lao Government agencies participated in the study. The 27 organizations included 17 NPAs, one Lao for-profit training consultancy company, six INGOs and four international organizations.

² See Annex 1: Terms of Reference for the Study

³ See Annex 2 for Questionnaire and Annex 3 for List of Individuals Consulted (both interviewees and workshop participants).

B. Justification for the proposed methodology

The team developed the proposed methodology in order to ensure that data are:

Valid: The rigorous approach to triangulation -- interviewing different groups of stakeholders with similar questions that are comprehensive, reviewing documents, and analyzing small group feedback at the NPA/INGO workshop -- ensured that the data are valid, as well as nuanced. In addition, the process of checking and validating the data with both SDC and multi-stakeholders during the second workshop ensured a higher degree of validity to the data.

Rich in detail and specificity: Given the paucity of documents on civil society in Lao PDR, much of the detail and nuance lies in verbal conversations. The team aimed to gather much of this richness through in-depth interviews and workshops. The workshop provided an opportunity for individuals working under similar circumstances on similar initiatives to reflect together, share opinions and perspectives and challenge each other's ideas—which yielded considerably more nuanced data than interviews. Facilitating the workshop solely for representatives of NPAs and INGOs in Lao language was intentional as a means of creating an enabling environment for free expression of ideas for this solo participant group.

Building self-reflection and ownership of ideas: The team feels strongly that data collection and analysis processes which are solely extractive are no longer the norm, nor even the wisest use of resources. Questions were designed and asked in a manner to encourage reflection and analysis—so that the interviewees also feel that they have taken away something valuable from the process. In particular the workshop was designed to ensure that the representatives of NPAs themselves benefited from the data collection as added value through gleaning insight and learning useful to their own work.

C. Limitations

While every attempt was made to minimize traditional limitations in any assessment through triangulation and multiple stakeholder engagement, there are some limitations to this assessment. First, the team relied heavily on interviews and conversations as sources of data given the scarcity of written information on the civil society sector in Lao PDR. Many programs are relatively new, or are mainstreamed with other development programming, and hence there are, as yet, few evaluations. Observations of NPA managed projects or of international organization-supported interventions were also not possible given the scope of the study. Further, while considerable efforts were made by both EDC and SDC to include a high degree of participation from PACSA, they were busy with disseminating the decree to government agencies, and unable to meet with the team, although they did provide some responses in writing to a set of questions. PACSA's participation would have yielded valuable additional perspective and nuance.

Second, the team members are not of Lao nationality. While highly experienced interpreters were available to the team throughout the data collection process, some of the nuance was likely lost in translation.

Third, the team is not based in Lao PDR, but based in Bangkok. One team member had significant in-country experience, and the other had very limited experience in Lao PDR, but significant experience in the region. While there was acknowledgement by participants in the

study and SDC of the advantage the Bangkok-based team could bring in terms of fresh insight and perspectives from other countries in the region, the process of rapid data collection and analysis may have resulted in the loss of some of the greater detail, nuance and completeness.

Fourth, EDC as an agency had submitted a concept note to the SDC in 2008 to undertake support to the civil society sector in Lao PDR. There was some confusion on the part of representatives of INGOs and UNDP participating in the study as to whether this assessment was a true assessment, or in fact more of a starting point of engagement and program appraisal. The team was very clear with all stakeholders that the SDC had contracted EDC for an assessment/scoping study on the sector, and that any program appraisal was in fact out of EDC's specific TORs.

And finally, a thorough analysis of the evolving civil society context in Lao PDR would involve a much larger undertaking than the rapid assessment outlined in the TORs. While some analysis is provided, based on desk review and verbal discussions, the team acknowledges the need for a more thorough investigation and analysis to capture the full complexity of civil society in Lao PDR.

V. FINDINGS

A. *Current state of civil society*

For the purposes of this assessment, the team used the London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society's working definition⁴:

“Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organizations, community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.”

Since 1975 when the Lao PDR was established, civil society has not been clearly distinct from state, market and family actors. The new government's rise to power took place within the context of war and an overturning of a US Government-supported provisional government that was viewed as imperialistic and non-representational. With the change of government a shift in the relationships between civil society, state and market occurred. Although small businesses were not nationalized, medium and large enterprises did become state-owned. Twenty-one NPAs and mass organizations, including the Lao Front, the Federation of Trade Unions, Youth Union and Women's Union, were initially formed following the establishment of the new government. (Boupha, 2003, pages 95-96) Highly politicized, in support of solidifying the new government's grasp on power, they constituted a

⁴ http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm

social movement in garnering support among its members, largely consisting of farmers and other villagers with low levels of education in an agricultural-based economy.

Further shifts occurred in the relationships between the state, market and civil society in the 1980s, when, due to the failure of the government's attempts to radically improve the economy through agricultural collectivization, market-style reforms were introduced. Additional relaxation of state control occurred in the 1990s, although there was still firm control over political activity and mass media. (Evans, 2002, page 176) Until now, a single political party system is maintained, albeit with increasing space for market and civil society activity.

There are a range of perspectives on what is currently included in the civil society sector in Lao PDR—mass organizations, all local associations, those associations focused on development, for-profit or commodity-focused farmers' cooperatives, producer groups, charitable foundations and other types of organizations, as well as small informal networks or groups which are not even organizations. These range from organizations that have formal ties with government, such as mass organizations, to those formed through connections and networks with government agencies, sometimes formed by ex-government workers, to those which have been supported and fostered by INGOs and UN agencies in relation to development programs and objectives.

Many respondents, including those representing INGOs and NPAs, primarily distinguished between four different kinds of CSOs:

- **Non-Profit Associations (NPAs):** These include larger civil society organizations formed through membership, which have offices, a few staff, and might work in more than one geographical area. They may, in the future, also include smaller associations. While currently the term NPA is used for all the larger, registered organizations, in fact, not all of them comprise traditional membership associations.
- **Local Groups/Groups:** These are smaller community-based organizations, which are typically run by volunteers, and based in one geographical location. These include for instance community-based micro-credit groups, or youth networks, or HIV+ networks. Many of these are not “visible” and known outside their areas of operation.
- **Foundations:** Throughout the history of the country, as part of Buddhist culture, individuals (especially wealthy individuals) have been able to set up social welfare and development programs, targeting local communities. Charitable foundations are thus quite familiar and charitable giving is well integrated in Buddhist societies as it is associated with merit making.
- **Cooperatives:** These are groups of people who organize around a common issue or commodity, and who come together to try and address issues of power in markets. Such cooperatives may exist already, but are small scale and may even be focused on things such as sharing a rice mill or self-help groups for handicrafts.

Those CSOs that are currently affiliated or registered with government bodies number 219. The Lao Front identifies 192 NPAs registered with their office, and the remaining 27 are affiliated with the Lao Union of Science and Engineering Associations (LUSEA) located within the Prime Minister's Office. Affiliated with ASEAN through a science and

technology network, these LUSEA members enjoy more recognition than other CSOs. A significant increase from 21 CSOs (including mass organizations) in 1975, it is estimated that of the 220, 30-40 are “development-focused” while others are professional associations, and other types of organizations. The Lao Front believes many other organizations exist in Lao PDR of which they are unaware. Some of these may be affiliated with line ministries or their provincial departments, or may not have any formal affiliation with government at all.

While the LUSEA NPAs are largely Vientiane-based, the majority of those CSOs affiliated with the Lao Front is provincial-based in Attapeu, Xayaboury, Bokeo, Houaphanh, Xiengkhouang, and elsewhere, and include a number of professional organizations involved in a range of sectors from transportation to market vendor associations to handicraft groups and parent-teacher groups. Yet of the total 192 Lao Front-affiliated NPAs, a greater concentration of NPAs are found in the capital as compared to the provinces, with 43 in Vientiane as compared to eleven in Xiengkhouang and seven in Sayaboury. Those Vientiane Capital-based associations include similar types of professional organizations as those found in the provinces, in addition to the ten development-focused organizations and those focused on cultural areas, such as photography.

This assessment focused much more on the types of activities and objectives of those 30 to 40 NPAs/organizations that are focused on development and social change. Of these organizations, those better-known ones that are Vientiane-based have only been established over the past four to five years, and very few are even ten years old. They have engaged in small-scale activities at the grassroots level to promote development. These include conducting research, delivering peer education, health, and microfinance projects as well as providing training, implementing awareness-raising types of activities, or providing other types of services to other organizations/communities. Some were initially set up by international organizations that gave considerable support and technical assistance to them from the outset, and may continue to support them.

Most NPAs are focused on service delivery, and as yet, with a few exceptions, very few organizations have ventured into communicating the interests and needs of poor communities to government as a form of advocacy. One NPA interviewed relayed their experience advocating for government provision of information on STDs to commercial sex workers during a regularly scheduled government and NPA meeting at the provincial level. Another NPA spoke of their frustration in addressing social issues and stigma associated with HIV+ persons. Without the ability to register as an independent organization, the government dismissed their advocacy efforts. These represent some examples of one-off engagement, or the attempt to discourse and advocate on the part of NPA, but Lao PDR is still in the very early stages of institutionalizing such engagement.

B. Legislative frameworks for CSOs

Those 30 to 40 NPAs focused on development activities have existed and operated largely under unclear government policy. Their capacity to work thus far has been based on the Lao Constitution, which allows formation of associations; their interest in conducting poverty alleviation activities falling under the eight priority MDG programs of the Government; as well as through support from key actors within the Government (either LUSEA, Lao Front, or other line ministries).

The development of the recently signed Decree on Associations (No. 115/PM, dated 29 April 2009), took longer than anticipated to finally be approved by the Prime Minister. While there was concerted international pressure, and the example of Vietnam's development of a legislative framework for NPAs, internally, there was need for a great deal of comfort and confidence as well as consensus building before going ahead. Some respondents felt that the Government, while concerned about a decree permitting the formation of associations, also recognized over time the potential that such associations can play in national development, particularly in more remote and ethnic minority areas where government officials cannot easily go. There was recognition that such a role could be complementary to that of government.

Furthermore, according to some respondents, the government has always felt that development in Lao PDR should be Lao-led, and having more development initiatives managed and run by Lao organizations and by Laotians is in keeping with this drive, with a sense that such regulation will also provide opportunity to Laotian organizations to obtain funding for development projects currently accessed by international organizations. Yet while there was some level of expectation government officials that NPAs will receive funds from the international community, there is reportedly some fear among government officials that NPAs may attract development funding away from government.

The Public Administration and Civil Service Authority (PACSA), the government agency charged with registering, monitoring and auditing the NPAs, indicated in written response to the team's questions that the rationale for the decree was to promote transparency among NPAs, to provide order to the sector through identification of appropriate line ministries NPAs should be cooperating with, and to ensure NPAs were following Lao law and Lao traditions. PACSA also conveyed in their written response that some NPAs currently in existence may not be altruistic in their motives, and the Decree enables the Government to grant registration to those NPAs determined to be genuinely interested in assisting others and alleviating poverty and to reject the applications of those not operating altruistically.

Overall all respondents, including INGO, NPA and Government, were enthusiastic about the new Decree, although there was trepidation – mostly by NPA – about how it may be implemented, both with regard to government capacity to register, monitor and audit NPAs and how that might take shape.⁵ PACSA described in their written remarks the proposed development of a network of government officials to be trained to monitor and audit NPAs. These officials will be from line ministries and provincial government administrative bodies. PACSA did also express concern about the bias they observe some government officials have toward NPAs and the possibility there will not be good cooperation granted to enable the NPAs to work effectively.

Most NPAs interviewed, however, were looking forward to registering once the Decree is implemented and welcomed the opportunity to become more “legitimate” and official as an organization. There was some concern expressed, however, among at least one NPA about the implication of registering. For those NPAs that have a relationship with a parent organization, the potential loss of that relationship and thus the regular but limited funding provided by that parent organization was of concern, especially as they recognized that they would be operating in an environment with unclear sources for funding. Yet there was the

⁵ The official Decree in Lao language was released, as was the official English version, during the course of this assessment.

general belief among respondents that the passing of the Decree will lead to more NPAs forming in the future.

The Decree identifies associations as “non-profit civil organizations set up on a voluntary basis and operating on a permanent basis to protect the rights and legitimate interest of the association, its members or communities”. (page 1) The types of associations referred to include economic, professional, technical and creative, and social welfare types of organizations operating at various levels, including in Vientiane, at the provincial capital level, or at the district and village level, with a minimum of 25 members at the national level and 10 members at the district or village level. Such organizations, it is assumed, will include professional associations that may or may not undertake development efforts as well as some membership bodies specifically focused on development efforts.

In addition to the Decree on Associations, there are three pieces of legislation being worked on: farmer’s cooperatives, INGO operations, and foundations. Farmer’s cooperatives legislation will regulate those “associations/producer groups” which are focused on profits/power in markets of a certain commodity. These have considerable potential for grassroots-level civil society. INGOs have been in operation in Lao PDR for many years, and the new decree is anticipated to provide further clarity on their operations. Since several INGOs work with local organizations and are mandated to work with local organizations, this decree may have ramifications for civil society. The decree on foundations will regulate those non-profit, development focused organizations that are non-membership, likely to include some of the INGO-hosted local organizations. Several respondents stated that the decree on foundations would likely be passed next April.

C. Interventions to date to strengthen civil society

International organizations, including INGOs such as Concern Worldwide (Concern), SNV, DED, GAA, Helvetas and Village Focus International, the UN system, and donor agencies have provided some support to strengthen the sector. While this assessment has not obtained a full picture, the major interventions are described below:

1. Regulatory framework

UNDP, Concern and others have been working closely with PACSA on regulatory frameworks. The recently passed decree on associations entailed a considerable amount of support from government agencies as well as international organizations. There appears to have been a high level of consultation and orientation on the decree within government agencies. Vietnam and Vietnamese laws are often used as reference points when developing laws in Lao PDR. Most respondents stated that the decree took longer than anticipated to get approval, but the in-depth consultation with a range of stakeholders in Lao PDR has added a greater degree of ownership and contextual relevance in the final decree. UNDP and Concern Worldwide will continue to support PACSA on further regulatory work.

PACSA has recently been established as the umbrella organization under which NPAs/local organizations will be regulated. PACSA is also responsible for the regulatory framework for cooperatives and foundations. In the past, organizations such as the Lao Front, LUSEA, line ministries and other mass organizations also registered some organizations.

2. Capacity Strengthening

There have been several initiatives to strengthen capacity of local organizations. These include training, coaching and mentoring efforts, as well as partnership-type relationships where an international organization works with local organizations on shared objectives. In terms of organizational development, Concern and DED have provided training and coaching in areas such as strategic planning, organizational management, project cycle management, report writing, and participatory monitoring and evaluation. DED has been working with 15 NPAs focused on environment and social issues, while Concern has been working with 6-8 NPAs on more in-depth support but also more broadly with the NPA community. SNV has provided leadership training and coaching, as well as general organizational development support to NPAs working in their five priority sectors for Lao PDR.

Technical capacity strengthening by international agencies has also been carried out in many sectors. Information shared with the assessment team highlighted support for the health sector (particularly areas such as HIV/AIDS and peer education), the environment, natural resource management, agriculture, and land issues, but the team believes that there is likely more work that has been undertaken. Among INGOs, German Agro Action (GAA), DED, SNV, Village Focus International (VFI), and Helvetas are providing considerable support to local organizations in technical areas. The UN system, through UNEP, UNICEF, and WFP, among others, is also providing technical support to local organizations. The INGO Civil Society Working Group, with SNV's support, has prepared a list of on-going and planned interventions to strengthen capacity undertaken by most of their member INGOs active in the sector.⁶

There have also been some efforts to strengthen government capacity and understanding of the role of civil society. As part of the support to PACSA, both UNDP and Concern, among others, have provided coaching, exposure visits, and training to government officials. This support will also continue over the next few years.

3. Project Implementation

Several organizations, including VFI, GAA, and Cooperation International pour la Developpment et la Solidarité (CIDSE) have helped to “host” local organizations by offering space, project support and technical assistance. In some cases, these local organizations are also registered under the “umbrella” of an international organization. These local organizations often have implemented development projects in close association with the international organization and have evolved over time, into independent NPAs/local organizations.

SNV, which has a different working approach, has helped with the formation of several NPAs/cooperatives/producer groups in the provinces where they operate and their priority sectors. These entities have implemented projects (although not with SNV grant support) in these sectors, and SNV has provided capacity and leadership strengthening support. In addition to supporting PACSA, Concern has provided office space, coaching, project support and technical assistance to three NPAs. They also operate a small grants program, begun in July 2009. Other agencies implementing small grants programs for NPAs include the World Bank, the EC, and DED, which provide funds for project implementation. The UN Environment Program plans to offer small grants in their sector for project implementation.

4. Current networks and joint initiatives

⁶ See Annex 4.

There are several small-scale knowledge management and resource sharing initiatives in Lao PDR that engage with NPAs. Of note is Laofab (English) and Laolink (Lao), two web-based discussion groups on agriculture issues in which international NGOs, local organizations and government participate. Even sensitive issues of a more political nature have been raised in these discussions. Lao44 is a resource and document sharing internet-based group. Rights Link, managed by VFI, is a knowledge management project (with a small grants facility) focused on land rights. Concern Worldwide is operating an “incubator”, which is a physical space with computers and other resources that can be accessed by local organizations. Concern is also facilitating a group of six to eight local organizations through processes of organizational development.

There is also an INGO civil society working group, which meets periodically to share information and lessons learned. There is no local NGO resource centre or network of Laotian organizations. There are currently no consortia projects, although a three-INGO consortium concept note has been developed.

The Gender Development Group (GDG) is an interesting example of a network in Lao PDR. It started out as a network of development professionals from organizations working on gender, and was established as a more formal network after the Beijing Conference in 1995. A number of international organizations have “hosted” GDG, however, it maintains its own bank account, raises funds for activities, and manages such activities. It is a membership organization, with 21 international and local organizations. These members and their counterpart implementing agencies receive training and use of a resource center on gender and development, and also can attend meetings. In addition, GDG also receives funds to conduct research, exchanges/networking with agencies in the region, and some women’s empowerment activities in a few villages. Currently, its main donor is Oxfam Novib, and its host organization is Concern Worldwide.

D. Reflections and lessons learned based on past experiences

1. Regulatory framework

Although the decree on associations took longer than anticipated, the end result has considerable government ownership. Some respondents feel that the process of developing the decree contributed to this sense of ownership. First, the organizations working with government have helped the Lao government agencies establish links with their Vietnamese equivalents, and have ensured that Vietnamese laws, frameworks and guidelines have been made available to the Lao government. Exchanges and exposure visits to Vietnam have also helped.

Second, the process of coaching, gradual capacity building and discussion, with relatively little short-term international technical assistance ensured that PACSA had the space and time to develop a very Lao-context specific decree. Third, government held many internal consultations and discussions on the decree, and hence the final decree was passed after several different agencies had been exposed to it and had developed an understanding on what it would mean.

There are concerns that PACSA will be overwhelmed by the registration of several new organizations, and that procedures and requirements will be too complicated to register—and hence support on how the decree is operationalized is critical at this juncture. International organizations that have supported PACSA on this decree and more generally feel that

continued exposure and capacity strengthening of PACSA and affiliated government agencies is as important, if not more so, than that of local organizations itself.

2. Capacity Strengthening

The NPAs consulted during the assessment described a number of types of assistance they had found beneficial. These include a partnership type of relationship between NPA and INGO that enables on-going mentoring and assistance. Others mentioned coaching and facilitation in strategic planning and community development. These were described as more effective than one-off trainings with little follow-up and support by both NPAs and INGOs. It appears that most of the capacity strengthening of local organizations has taken place under programs of other sectors—it is really only in the past few years that there have been attempts to strengthen the sector as a whole, and to build local organizations through organizational development.

As a result, there have, as yet, been few evaluations of capacity strengthening activities. An evaluation done for the joint-Oxfams in 2003 revealed the need for greater coordination of capacity building activities, as well as the need for a longer-term outlook on individual and organizational strengthening. Local organizations have also expressed the need to have in-house technical assistance and coaching, as they see such support as helping with their long-term development.

3. Project Implementation

Local organizations have only been able to engage in small-scale activities at the local level. They have faced challenges as well as successes with these small projects. Local capacity issues in project implementation were mentioned as a barrier. Further, short-term funding meant that staff were not employed on the ground for very long periods of time, and that led to challenges in continuity and long-term impact.

There was reflection over the various kinds of relationships that have developed between INGOs and NPAs as either a working relationship to co-implement a project, a sub-contracting type of relationship between the two parties, or a relationship by capacity building of the NPA by the INGO as the main objective. Although all types were seen as beneficial by NPAs, there was a particular reference to the co-implementing type of partnership between NPA and INGO, where roles are well defined and the process of working alongside each other becomes a mutually beneficial and therefore empowering experience.

One INGO representative wanted to encourage the international community to move away from the type of sub-contracting of NPAs often found in Lao PDR into what he viewed as a more genuine effort to support civil society, that of identifying an idea or a concern and encouraging organization around that concern. Areas of economic interest and concern are more easily organized around, such as the experience of the coffee plantations in the south.

4. Current networks and joint initiatives

The two web-based agriculture networks appear to be working very well, especially the one in Lao language—one respondent stated that even senior government officials read and commented on some of the discussions, and that it had fed into government thinking. The international working groups appear to function well in terms of sharing information and lessons learned.

E. Aspirations for civil society growth and anticipated roles in national development

The two-day workshop and interviews with NPAs as well as interviews with other stakeholders surfaced a diverse set of aspirations and anticipated functions for civil society organizations.

NPAs interviewed by the assessment team presented a relatively clearly articulated vision as to what civil society organizations would look like. They stressed the qualities of self-reliance and independence, while also working closely with government to contribute to socio-economic development. They aspired to a strongly-networked and empowered body of civil society organizations, working collaboratively with each other under their own strong umbrella. They also hoped to have a representative in the National Assembly. They were concerned about competition for resources and more generally on resource mobilization. In an exercise on terms associated with civil society in Lao, several participants mentioned the words “independent” and “self-reliant”. A lively discussion ensued on the interpretation of this word—and NPAs expressed their desire for space in this context to carve out and define for themselves what their contributions to development will look like and how they can fulfill their roles.

Donors and international organizations (UN agencies and INGOs) had a range of perspectives on the anticipated roles of civil society. They agreed that the sector, as a whole, was embryonic, and that capacity building of both government agencies and local NPAs was an essential element (but not the only one) in strengthening the sector overall. Deepening the understanding on the role that civil society could play in a country or a community was seen as equally important—for government, communities and civil society organizations. While some agencies stressed on the importance of local organizations engaging in project implementation at the grassroots to meet basic needs, others felt that a gradual progress into engagement with government on policy formulation and implementation and socio-economic planning was both possible and desirable. Donors and international organizations both generally have commitments to supporting civil society organizations in the countries where they work and are keen to expand work in this sector in Lao PDR.

Many INGOs stressed that their role had been facilitative and supportive, and that efforts undertaken by the INGO community should be built on—as there had been successes in many areas. One agency emphasized that any development of the sector needed to be Lao-led, in other words, needs and priorities had to come from the local organizations, which certainly echoes what local organizations feel. Others had undertaken work that had been more deliberate in fostering the growth and development of local organizations in particular directions that matched their own strategic objectives, and felt that such approaches had worked well and would continue to be useful.

Government agencies have stated very openly that they expect local organizations to implement public development projects in support of government policy. It is not clear that government will allocate funds to local organizations to implement such development projects, but there certainly appears to be the expectation by government that local organizations will be recipients of international development assistance targeting poverty reduction and social welfare in the country.

In a country where poverty is still widespread, and access to basic services still poor for a significant proportion of the population, certainly, programs that address basic needs

undertaken by Lao organizations would be welcomed. At the same time, civil society can play a powerful part in helping government understand the needs and interests of marginalized groups, and can help shape and formulate pro-poor policy and development plans. This assessment team found a sufficient number of individuals, both Laotian and international, interested and committed to deepening the role of civil society and local organizations in Lao beyond service provision, while acknowledging that it may be a gradual process.

V. DISCUSSION

The current legislation signals that some space is opening up for CSOs to play a role in development efforts, and it is quite possible that many more associations will register, especially focused on community development/poverty eradication efforts. The extent to which civil society will develop as a robust sector in Lao PDR is likely to be affected by how donors, government, international organizations and NPAs/CSOs themselves shape the opportunities that are emerging and manage the risks. The assessment team presents the following factors that affect how civil society in Lao PDR will develop and evolve in the next five years and has based its recommendations on these conclusions.

A. Local organizations need access to funds

Lao PDR does have international donor assistance, but compared with neighbors Vietnam and Cambodia, it is considerably lower. Most international development assistance does get channeled through government. The small grants facilities that are available to local organizations are relatively limited. NPAs emphasized the need for funds that were easily accessible, relatively free of bureaucratic requirements and that allowed flexibility and freedom to experiment in order to strengthen civil society but also to overcome poverty. The experience of trying to obtain EC funding had been disappointing for several of them, and many NPAs felt that donor requirements for obtaining funds were unrealistic in the Lao context. In particular, NPAs requested that guidelines for proposal submission be made available in Lao and that proposals be accepted in Lao. The team notes that less formal entities at the grassroots level will require even greater flexibility and loosening of requirements to access funds if they are to be fostered.

NPAs also stressed their need for funds for operating costs and were unable to understand, for example, why donors provided INGOs with administrative costs/core support, but not local organizations. They also hoped that they would be in partnership with INGOs for resources, rather than competing. Indeed, INGOs that formed part of this assessment seemed interested in closely collaborating and fostering local organizations, not competing with them. Yet it was also noted there was concern expressed about the facilitation of these funds, both with regard to low absorption capacity among NPAs as well as determination of priorities for development and how money will be used.

B. Capacity building as a critical element to strengthen civil society in Lao PDR

The team agrees with stakeholder perceptions that capacities of local organizations are still low in all areas of development programming, as well as in areas of organizational effectiveness. Trainings are not going to be effective unless accompanied by coaching,

mentoring and other follow-up activities. NPAs mentioned approaches such as learning by doing, accompaniment, and on-the-job learning as being most effective.

The team noted the commitment and dedication of the staff of local organizations that participated in the workshop. However, many of these organizations are small and have comparatively limited experience in development work, especially in rural areas. The team was not able to undertake a comprehensive assessment of all the capacity building strategies that have been used in Lao PDR. Based on information gathered, however, local organizations would definitely benefit from increased exposure and capacity strengthening efforts that go beyond conventional organizational development and technical skills development efforts, although those are also needed. Such efforts should also include exposure to other organizations in countries in the region, networking, and learning-by-doing.

Approaches where senior staff mentor junior staff from local organizations have had limited success due to the time commitment that mentoring requires. Instead, hands-on experience of coaching and accompaniment are likely to be more successful. The team also feels that relative to other countries, less attention appears to have been placed on individual capacity building, as compared with organizational capacity building. In Lao PDR, similar to Cambodia, Vietnam and other countries in the region, district and lower-level counterparts, including those in mass organizations, play a significant role in development projects. Capacity building of individuals in local organizations as well as informal networks and groups would strengthen not just leadership skills, but also ensure that individuals consider formulating civil society actions that are not just limited through local organizations.

C. Support from government to further strengthen civil society

Having an appointed national agency, in this case PACSA, to oversee and regulate the civil society organizations is a positive step. Many agencies expressed that PACSA and other agencies are keen to learn and keen to get exposure to other ideas and other concepts. Concepts around what civil society can do still quite limited, and so there is considerable opportunity to help create a deeper understanding of what can be done through civil society. It appears that the support provided under the current decree has been successful, and that the combination of a UN agency and INGOs providing support has worked. As Concern Worldwide phases out, this support will need to be taken over by another agency.

The approval of the decree on associations has led to a considerable amount of positive energy and hopefulness among the local organizations, as well as the international community. At the moment, there is a momentum building up toward strengthening the sector, and government will need to be able to respond to this positive energy and engage with it fruitfully. PACSA staff are committed and fully engaged in this process, but at the same time, are also dealing with capacity and resource constraints. They have a formidable task ahead—to communicate the spirit and contents of the decree to various government agencies and their counterparts at different levels of administration, to prepare a process for application for registration, and to gear up to receive, process and approve applications. In addition, they will need to develop their monitoring system to oversee the work being undertaken by the registered associations. It is this next phase of actual implementation of the decree that will be crucial—and will shape the actual picture of civil society in the next five years. For that reason, intensive support to PACSA and related bodies is needed in the next few years.

Government support to local organizations also will be significant in carrying out development programs, particularly in rural areas, and in minority populations in remote geographic areas. Partnerships at the district levels will require that district and provincial authorities have the capacity and will to engage with local organizations. This sort of support will require that district authorities and agencies and local organizations develop a shared purpose and complementary approach to delivering programs. In most districts in Lao PDR, district staff are also relatively underexposed and unfamiliar with working in partnership with local organizations, and their capacity to deliver programs themselves, as well as to monitor others in program delivery is weak.

D. NPAs' aspirations for self-reliance and self-determination

During the workshop there was great debate over the meaning and type of independence sought by NPAs. The assessment team notes that the word "independence" may not be applicable; instead, the term "identity", as one INGO staff participating in the workshop recommended, appears more appropriate. The assessment team maintains that such an identity, as per discussions with NPAs and confirmed in the multi-stakeholder workshop, does include a close and strong collaborative relationship with government, and partnerships with INGOs and donors. Yet to develop this partnership while supporting NPAs in their desire to further develop their identities would, the team believes, require a different type of grantee relationship that are often characteristic between INGOs and local organizations in developing countries. While NPAs' capacities may not be strong, and, as a result, there may be a strong urge to over-facilitate, albeit with the best of interests, care must be taken to avoid dampening the spirit of self-reliance and self-identity. It is the team's assessment that care must be taken in determining control over resources in such partnerships, where decision-making power lies, and thus how agendas are shaped. How resources are allocated to the sector has implications for autonomy, control and authentic partnership relations.

NPAs themselves are keen to have opportunities to network with each other, learn from each other, and even embark on joint initiatives. They expressed a great deal of positive feeling around the two-day workshop that was part of the assessment, and saw it as an essential preliminary step in fostering connections and sharing perspectives. Any type of engagement with government on planning and policy implementation would benefit as well from a strengthened network of local organizations. NPAs and other local organizations in Lao PDR could learn from civil society groups in other countries about the roles and functions played in a range of contexts, and ways to ensure that space for civil society is protected. Vietnamese CSOs in particular could provide some insight on the challenges and opportunities to do development work in what is a similar regulatory framework that they have been operating under for over 10 years.

E. INGO and donor learning curve in developing civil society in Lao PDR

Civil society development is a rapidly evolving and nascent sector in Lao PDR. International organizations and donors do have some experience in supporting local organizations, however, to date, only a few organizations have done so. The sector already does, to a limited extent, and will continue to, include entities that are less formal. International organizations are keen to expand their experience with both organizational development as well as support to these less formal entities. There needs to be full recognition that this is a learning phase for international organizations and donors as well, and that approaches that include innovation and experimentation, reflection and self-assessment (of international organizations), and

greater consciousness about the types and quality of intervention are required at the national level and local levels.

National staff from international organizations also need to develop capacities in working with local organizations, including skills in partner relations, financial management, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation of partnership projects.

F. Building legitimacy and credibility for the sector

For the civil society sector to make a deeper contribution to poverty reduction, and well-being of marginalized, excluded and vulnerable communities, it must increasingly play the dual role of service provision and dialogue with government at all levels. Lao PDR does have a small number of organizations, mostly Vientiane-based, that are relatively well-connected with government, and even the international development community. There are also smaller, grassroots level networks and groups, but these have limited voice, and may not even be acknowledged outside their immediate areas of operation. Linking these two types of organizations can yield several benefits. First, it will increase the understanding and awareness of the Vientiane-based organizations about the real issues in the communities, and enable them to communicate such issues and needs to government in a more credible way, using actual experience and data. Second, it will surface those organizations working at the grassroots level, strengthen them, and build their capacities to deliver programs, but also communicate as intermediaries between people and government, especially at the local level. Third, it will forge partnerships between national level, better-connected and elite-captured organizations and grassroots level efforts, strengthening the sector as a whole, and ensuring that Lao organizations shape the sector more powerfully.

NPAs and other local organizations will need to be credible, legitimate organizations in the eyes of government, donors, and international organizations, as well as the community. Service provision through implementation of poverty reduction and other social well-being projects in underserved, remote and minority areas, with or without support from international organizations is an essential step in building this legitimacy in Lao PDR. Government has expressed their expectations that local organizations will in fact, carry out this function. Community trust and regard for local organizations will be dependent on how effectively they will carry out these functions, and issues of capacity and funds raised earlier are also interlinked with effective implementation. The role of service provision is a limited one, and civil society organizations in many countries have expanded beyond this.

Local organizations, as “policy enforcers” can play a significant intermediary role between policy developers and communities, and in many countries in the region, this is the case. Space for growing such an intermediary role is tentative at the moment, but there is certainly potential and interest. Legitimacy of civil society organizations can grow considerably if such an intermediary role is carried out with integrity and commitment (note that experience from other countries does reveal that the assumption that civil society will be an effective voice for poor communities may not hold in all cases). Further, government and NPAs/local organizations will need time to develop and deepen their relationships in order to consider such a role. The team strongly feels that in the Lao PDR context, the space for playing this intermediary role needs to be supported, nurtured and grown.

G. Civil society strengthening efforts in the region

The team offers four examples from neighboring countries that are pertinent to the Lao context. These initiatives share many similar features. All of them were set up by a group of international organizations interested in strengthening capacities of individuals and organizations in development practice. International organizations engaged in these efforts have been very inclusive, and project management has been autonomous, not linked to any single institution, and servicing the whole development community.

Funding for these initiatives has varied from a single-donor to multiple donors, either in the form of pooled-donor funds, or as individual projects, however, each of them received multiple-year core funding. The international organizations engaged in these initiatives approached them with the tenet that their own learning and capacity building were integral to the process, and that their staff and counterparts collaboratively engage in efforts.

For two of these, the project director is national (with an expatriate adviser), while the other two have/had an expatriate project director. Local ownership is higher with a national project director, and projects with an expatriate have had national staff in senior positions to ensure that local ownership is maintained. Further, national staff of local organizations and international organizations engaged in management of those joint-initiatives in Myanmar, further strengthening both ownership and local capacity.

The NGO Training Project (NGOTP), now Center for Community-based Empowerment (CECEM), was set up in 1995 to develop human resource capacity in development programming in Vietnam with European Commission Funds. Several INGOs participated in the project as members, and their national staff as well as counterparts received training, coaching and facilitation support over the project period. Initially, NGOTP was very much focused on individual capacity strengthening. Over the project period, NGOTP cultivated other clients and offered fee-based services such as training in participatory development practice, facilitation, and even limited research, and evolved from purely individual capacity building to a management/organizational development consultancy service. It then developed into an independent local organization (CECEM) that is self-sufficient through its fee-based services to the development community.

The Capacity Building Initiative (CBI) was set up in 2000 by a number of international NGOs, to develop human resources in Myanmar. Initially most participants in trainings provided by CBI consisted of national staff of international NGO. However, in the last two years, there has been a significant increase in participation by staff from local NGOs. Training courses at CBI are designed and initiated after consultation with international and local NGOs, and include project planning and implementation, participatory monitoring and evaluation, financial management, community mobilization, report writing, proposal writing etc. CBI also hosts regular coordination meeting of local NGOs and of international NGOs, as well as the joint coordination meeting between local and international NGOs. However, CBI mainly focuses on building individual capacity of national staff on project management issues rather than on building organizational capacity of civil society as a whole.

Paung Ku ('Bridge') was set up by a number of INGOs based in Myanmar that actively work with civil society organizations. *Paung Ku* is a small grants fund that aims to build capacity of civil society organizations to analyze, learn and adapt; to be accountable; to implement projects efficiently; to manage themselves appropriately (organizational development); to network, collaborate and advocate (institutional development); and to continue to exist and

operate. Apart from being a small grants fund, *Paung Ku* provides mentors who establish a relationship with local organizations to facilitate these goals. *Paung Ku* focuses more on building organizational capacity through learning-by-doing, but it is a comparatively small initiative in terms of number of local NGOs and CBOs it can work with. It also does not offer organizational development coaches, staff or facilitators itself.

Vicheasthan BandosbondalNeakropkrong Kangea (VBNK) is a training and capacity building institute in Cambodia. It offers public trainings, fee-based organizational development services and houses resources for development professionals. It also undertakes donor-funded projects, for example, on women's leadership, coaching and facilitation at the commune level on decentralization-related reforms, and other similar projects. It does not provide small grants. Initially begun as an independent project supported by a consortia of INGOs, VBNK developed into an independent local NGO.

There are also several local NGO networks in neighboring countries. In some countries, INGO and local NGO coordinating bodies/resource centers are the same, with linkages to government agencies. In others, local organizations have come together of their own accord and formed a network that is unfunded. There are other examples of networks where local NGO resource centers provide meeting space and serve as a resource library. In the Lao context, it would be optimal to have a resource center dedicated to local organizations, managed by a Lao national (with expatriate support if needed for technical advice) that with time, is mandated to build linkages with government.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Justification for Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, four component concepts/initiatives are described that could then be developed further into several projects or even one inter-linked larger effort. These initiatives are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor do they need to be designed as separate initiatives, nor is one more important than the other. Rather, they represent a comprehensive approach to strengthen civil society addressing many of the factors that have been highlighted above. They are listed in order of priority, although the first three components could start at around the same time. These could well be housed under a combined civil society program, with possibly an Umbrella Steering Committee/Board consisting of select donor representatives, international agency representatives, independent experts, and local organization representatives to review the developments of the sector as a whole, assess the progress of the various components, and set strategic direction.

Roles of different types of stakeholders need to be discussed and thought through. The team feels that local organizations in Lao PDR need to, first and foremost, gain greater experience in project implementation at the grassroots level, not simply because basic needs are uppermost on the list of priorities in Lao PDR, but because this is an important element of strengthening the sector's capacity and legitimacy in carrying out advocacy. Such experience is best gained through small grants and accompaniment with INGOs, although there may be some scope for partnerships with UN technical agencies under special initiatives.

At the same time, government capacity strengthening is best undertaken by agencies like UNDP and the World Bank, which have historical relationships with government, and can

exert influence over higher-level government authorities in less public settings. INGO support is definitely needed, and multilaterals need to ensure that they bring it in. Finally, local organizations need to be able to shape the sector in spaces that they control, manage and feel comfortable in. Such spaces need to have limited influence and management from external agencies, and hence, networking and other types of activities need to be funded by external agencies, but managed and controlled by local agencies. It is primarily to strengthen these roles of various stakeholders that distinct components have been recommended.

The ToRs ask for options to be developed based on different scenarios that may emerge with the sector. However, the ToRs were developed at a time when the Decree on Associations was not yet approved and there was greater uncertainty about both the time frame and nature of development of the legal framework. At the moment, while there is some lingering uncertainty about the implementation of the Decree on Associations and timing of approval around the other decrees, the team's assessment is that this will affect pace and sequencing, rather than actual selection of strategies. Further, the team favors a comprehensive approach, with distinct components that may be taken up by different stakeholders that are then networked and linked together.

Until recently, the sector has been relatively small. As a result, coordination among the different international agencies, through the INGO Civil Society Working Group, and with UNDP, appears to be working quite well. However, with an infusion of funds into the sector, as well as a larger number of local and international players engaging more actively and openly, mechanisms for coordination are critical. In neighboring countries, there have been several donor-government-INGO-LNGO coordination efforts, particularly for the HIV/AIDS sector, where this is important. In Vietnam, there is a joint UN-INGO-Government Policy Group, and there used to be a LNGO-INGO technical working group for HIV/AIDS.

In the case of Lao PDR, the purpose of such coordination is much more to share lessons learned and ensure that, especially initially, there is cohesiveness in approach that are complementary in nature. In other words, the coordination should be "light-touch" rather than an attempt to map out in great detail who is doing what and to match needs with projects. If the above-mentioned components are adapted and implemented, then such a coordination effort would require that Project Directors/Coordinators and Senior Advisers of these components meet periodically to share experiences and update each other on progress, and that it be clear that these distinct initiatives were designed under a comprehensive approach. In addition, there would be need for representatives of local organizations, INGOs, donors and government to meet to discuss challenges and solutions to strengthening the sector more broadly.

B. Components in a comprehensive approach

Component 1: Capacity Strengthening Initiative for Lao development professionals and Laotian organizations

Rationale and Objectives

The direct objectives of this initiative would be to strengthen capacity of Lao development professionals and Lao development organizations in participatory, pro-poor development program practices. Such capacity would ultimately contribute to more effective development programs that have a deeper and more lasting impact. A secondary objective is to build local capacity building expertise in Lao PDR.

Indirectly, this initiative would build a community of practice among Laotian professionals, as well as a strong network of organizations committed to capacity development. Over time, given that there are already a number of local organizations interested in becoming capacity building institutions, this initiative could merge or become part of these organizations, or vice versa.

Description of strategies

Such a project would focus both on individual capacity building as well as organizational development in a wide range of areas including participatory community development, project management, proposal writing, strategic planning, leadership among others. This project would offer training, but more important, would also provide coaching, mentoring and other types of facilitated capacity building services. It is recommended that it focus on national staff of international organizations as well as staff of local organizations, particularly if such staff are jointly engaged in project implementation. Longer-term capacity plans would be developed rather than one-off trainings to enable deeper reflection and learning. It is also recommended that local organizations interested in becoming local capacity building institutions be invited to participate in such a project. Such participation can entail sitting on the management or advisory board (see below), or seconding staff to the initiative for periods of time so that they can learn on the job.

It is possible to include a small grants program in this initiative, through which local organizations can request support for organizational development, such as financial management, strategic planning, and other organizational effectiveness approaches. However, such funds would need to be monitored to assess whether these processes were applied with a degree of quality, and whether they led to desired organizational changes.

Institutional Arrangements

A project that many international and local organizations jointly implement on capacity strengthening is recommended in Lao PDR. Capacity building projects such as these would be best led by INGOs in the current Lao context, as they have experience in this area, with local organizations as partners as well, similar to the GDG model. While for audit and financial management reasons, an international NGO may well be responsible for contracting of staff, legal processes and financial reporting, the team recommends that such a project appoint a separate Project Director, who could be Laotian, in which case an expatriate technical adviser would be needed. The project needs to be housed in its own space independent of any one organization, and would also employ core national staff who would over time, become the main trainers and facilitators. A Steering Committee of local and international organizations currently engaged in capacity building would oversee such a project (with rotating chairs), with periodic checks on progress, strategic direction and impact. Either single or multiple donors could fund such an initiative, however, pooled funds would increase effectiveness considerably. Over time, if the project is evolving into a local organization, donor contracts for specific capacity building projects may be sought.

Component 2: Small grants facility

Rationale and Objectives:

Given that access to funds is a major issue for local NPAs, this team strongly recommends that a small grants facility be established. Such a project would enable first and foremost, local organizations, especially smaller ones to access small sums of money with relative ease

to implement projects in communities. Experience with project implementation at the community level is essential for three reasons: first it links Vientiane-based organizations with grassroots efforts; second, it ensures that local organizations focus their efforts on and are driven by actual community development, and third, it provides legitimacy and credibility for such organizations to engage in dialogue with government and international agencies. Having small grants available to local organizations also minimizes the risks that they become purely subcontractors on larger international development programs. This initiative would also contribute to the learning among international organizations on more effective grant making and support to local organizations.

Description of strategies:

There are some specific features that could be incorporated to make them more effective. First, such a facility should offer grants for innovation and experimentation, recognizing that funds may not always yield results. In other words, there must be a high-risk tolerance in terms of impact and effectiveness, with the recognition that the small proportion that will yield results will be a powerful driver for change. Second, the funds need to be provided based on brief concepts/proposals written in Lao, and guidelines for access to funds need to be widely disseminated throughout the country. Funds should be relatively small in amount, and should be allocated for program implementation, rather than organizational development, although administrative costs and core support costs should be allowed.

Institutional Arrangements:

Such an initiative need not be funded by one donor, and need not be managed by one or two organizations. Instead, a Steering Committee comprised of individuals of international organizations and donors who had contributed to the small grants facility would oversee such a project. This Steering Committee would not only perform the usual functions of such a Committee but also engage in the learning about what was working well and what was being learned about providing such grants, working with local organizations, and then monitoring them, thereby improving the grant craft of international organizations. If this is a joint initiative, a Project Director (preferably Laotian) with an expatriate adviser and some staff would actually review the proposals and administer and monitor the grants. If possible, this should be set-up as in independent initiative/organization, as there should be no plan to develop this facility into a local organization, unlike components 1 and 4.

Component 3: Strengthening the regulatory framework and its implementation

Rationale and Objectives: The assessment clearly points to the need for simultaneous capacity development of government agencies, particularly PACSA. The objectives of activities under this component would be to strengthen PACSA's management, regulation and oversight of the sector on behalf of government, as well as to gradually expand the understanding among government agencies about the positive roles and functions of a civil society in the Lao context.

Description of Strategies: UNDP and Concern (as well as others) work on the regulatory framework and its implementation, with related capacity building and strengthening of government institutions needs to continue. Such support is already being provided in a coordinated fashion by Concern and UNDP, who now share a common work plan. Support for capacity building, exposure visits, learning and reflection as well as continued efforts on regulatory work will be needed, and is best done by in-country Laotian and expatriate staff, rather than short-term TA. The Lao PDR government has, thus far, adopted a relatively

cautious approach in opening up the space for civil society, and is still tentative about expansion beyond service provision linked to government policies and plans. Linking the role of civil society with economic development in Lao PDR (which is a priority for the government), and with achieving the objective of no longer being listed as a Least Developed Country by 2020 is important in a gradual expansion of space, as are comparisons and linkages with neighboring countries.

Institutional Arrangements: Currently, UNDP and Concern have the strongest relationships with PACSA, and have considerable experience in working with them. The combination of UN and INGO support seems to have worked well. As Concern transitions out of Lao, other international organizations may step in to carry out this technical support. However, as this is a period of transition, it is recommended that UNDP lead on the work with government, especially as government is their historical national counterpart anyway. UNDP must ensure that INGOs continue to engage with the process, as they have expertise and experience to offer. UNDP may consider appointing an in-house long-term adviser, who liaises with INGOs as well as other donor agencies, and channels international assistance and support to PACSA and related government agencies.

Component 4: Strengthening the networks of local organizations

Rationale and Objectives:

Local organizations would benefit from a physical space where resources and materials are available for their use. The resource center could liaise with PACSA, and over time, could become an intermediary between local organizations and government, and possibly serve as a space to develop position papers and advocacy points.

Description of Strategies:

The resource center for local organizations would hold monthly meetings, set up sectoral groups, have a repository of materials and documents, or coordinate activities. A local resource center with a library, a meeting room, and a Coordinator (Laotian) who can ensure that a range of networking, sharing and coordination functions is carried out is recommended. Such a resource center could also build on Concern's "incubator" and provide additional facilities (IT, computers) and services (requests for coaching, training, etc). Information about the regulatory framework for local organizations and any developments in socio-economic planning could also be communicated through such a center.

Institutional Arrangements

The resource center could form part of the capacity strengthening initiative, sharing physical space and staff. However, it is not recommended that the resource center be managed under INGOs, as local ownership and learning of local organizations in coordination and networking is crucial. This is very different from the capacity strengthening initiative, which needs considerable support and linkages with INGOs. For this reason, institutionally, the set-up needs to ensure that there is greater autonomy and local ownership of the resource center, if indeed they are merged. Although it is recommended that an expatriate advisor assist in the design and early implementation stage of such a resource center.

C. Additional ideas that could be incorporated in these initiatives

These strategies could be, over the next five years, incorporated as entry points in nurturing a more sophisticated evolution in the sector.

- Support for Social Enterprises

Many of the NPAs in the workshop expressed interest in either engaging in social/development enterprises (by marketing products and services offered by members of an association) or in other forms of income generation to provide funds for development activities. Both ideas are worth exploring further, and examples from the region and possibly in Lao PDR as well may be examined. In many countries in the region, local organizations do offer training, coaching and facilitation services for fees, which are then used to cover operating costs. Others may have producer groups selling goods or products in fair trade or other markets, or linked with exporters. Still others have hotels, resorts and shops, operating as a for-profit arm, with profits going to the non-profit, development arm.

- Impact Planning and Improvement

Facilitation, coaching and training, and other forms of capacity building could go beyond the traditional project management and training of trainers approaches to incorporate newer approaches on impact planning and improvement, which rely on developing theories of change and identifying ways to work within the existing context, often with greater awareness of the roles of other players. They also focus more on program practices, not just on intervention design. Small grants facilities can also be assessed for impact based on program practices.

- Collaboration with the private sector

The private sector in Lao PDR may also be interested in corporate social responsibility/philanthropy, especially around natural resource management and tourism issues. Civil society groups could look at natural linkages, for example through producer groups, fisheries groups and forestry groups, in particular.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

In the Lao context, a civil society independent from the state is an unfamiliar concept and not well recognized. However, given the recently approved Decree on Associations, the sector is rapidly evolving, but is still at a nascent stage with considerable heterogeneity in the type of entity that is defined as civil society.

The future development of the civil society sector in Lao PDR will depend on how donors, government, international organizations and NPAs/CSOs themselves react to and shape the opportunities that are emerging and manage the risks involved. The team has identified the following factors that will likely affect the development of Lao civil society in the next five years:

- Local Organizations need access to funds that are easily accessible, relatively free of bureaucratic requirements and flexible in terms of providing freedom to experiment and to learn-by-doing.
- Capacity building is a critical element of strengthening civil society in Lao PDR, especially training and coaching that goes beyond the conventional organizational development and technical skills development.

- Considerable support from government is needed to further strengthen civil society, especially government support to PACSA in building the organization's and its staff capacities.
- NPAs are keen to carve out their own space, be self-reliant and be free from undue external pressures in determining how and what they can contribute to the development of Lao PDR.
- International organizations and donors working in Laos also need to learn and develop capacities in supporting the sector.
- Building legitimacy and credibility for local NPAs/CSOs in the eyes of donors and the government is essential for sound development of the sector and for their role as the government's "policy enforcers".
- Efforts in other countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam, have focused on longer-term joint initiatives and consortia-managed projects, and can be referenced within the Lao context as useful examples to support civil society in Lao PDR.

Due to the complexity and extent of the issue, a comprehensive approach is recommended, consisting of four strategic components – capacity strengthening initiative for Lao development professionals and organizations; small grants facility; strengthening the regulatory framework and its implementation; and strengthening the networks of local organizations. These four components can be designed to function jointly but they can also be implemented separately as different projects within a larger development umbrella. Moreover, additional areas of focus that may be considered include support for social entrepreneurs, impact planning and improvement, and collaboration with the private sector especially in the tourism sector and the energy/hydro-electric sector.

The newly approved 2009 Decree on Associations represents an opportunity for growth of a civil society sector that can contribute toward the development of the country. How this sector develops will depend largely on the coordination efforts and support it receives from international donors, the government and, how the CSOs themselves seize this opportunity and harness available resources.

Annex 1: Questionnaire for interviews

1. On the current situation with associations:

We would like to gain more insight into the current situation with NPAs in Lao PDR. We also want to understand what types of efforts have worked well, which ones have not, and why

How many associations exist at the moment in Lao PDR? What sort of work do they do? What are their sources for funding?

What are the challenges that they have encountered in carrying out their work?

Have you been involved in approving or supporting any initiatives in the past with civil society? If yes, could you briefly describe these? Which ones have been most successful in the Lao context? What were the measures of that success? Which ones were less successful? What made them less successful?

With regards to other initiatives that you may be aware of—could you briefly describe these? Which ones have been most successful in the Lao context? What were the measures of that success? Which ones were less successful? What made them less successful?

2. On the roles of civil society in poverty reduction, community development, social accountability and participation in policy making

Around the world, NPAs perform a number of different functions for public betterment and development. We would like to understand what you think the roles of NPAs in Lao PDR are currently, and how these may change in the coming years, What are the types of functions that you think they should do?

What are the current and anticipated roles of NPAs in Lao PDR? What are their current and anticipated roles with regards to:

- a) Provision of services to poor or marginalized communities,
- b) Understanding and communicating to policy makers and programmers on the needs of Laotian people, especially poor people,
- c) Becoming organized citizen action groups that can represent citizen interests in government policy formulation
- d) Being partners in government development planning and policy making and
- e) Serving as a citizen-led “monitor” of government action and ensuring accountability of government policies and programs to citizens
- f) Other roles

What is your opinion in terms of CSOs strengths in areas such as leadership, networking, lobbying, service delivery, evidence-based policy engagement, representation of marginalized communities, monitoring of government plans and policies, etc? What are their capacities and competencies in organizational effectiveness—strategic planning, financial management, fundraising, HR, program design, M&E, and training?

3. On the legal operating environment for NPAs.

There has been a recent decree passed on associations in Lao PDR. We would like to explore what your thoughts are on the implications of this decree—particularly in relation what may happen with the roles, responsibilities and functions of NPAs and the extent to which the decree will facilitate their work?

What was the impetus and rationale for the decree on associations? What does the government hope to see as a result of the new decree? What are the expected duties, responsibilities and rights of these associations? What has changed in the operating environment as a result of this decree—probe on improved versus constraints?

How many new NPAs will be formed in the coming years? What sorts of functions will they perform? What do you anticipate they will do? Where in Lao PDR will they work--mostly provincial/national/technical or scientific?

4. Other Challenges and Opportunities for NPAs

We want to examine what some of the constraints and enablers, as well as entry points, are likely to exist for NPAs to fulfill the roles and functions that you described earlier. This is in addition to the issues related to the legal environment

What types of activities in the areas of social development and community development can be undertaken as a result of this decree? Does the government anticipate that these associations will play any role in policy dialogue, gathering and using evidence to inform policy or participating in consultations on government plans and policies, or is this not the intent?

Going forward, what are the major constraints for NPAs in Lao PDR to function effectively?

Where are the key entry points and opportunities? What support do you plan to provide to such associations? Funding/capacity building/other support? What support does government plan to provide? Will government agencies provide them with funding? If their capacity is weak in some areas, what are those areas? How should those areas be strengthened and who should strengthen them?

5. Recommendations for action

What should donors and international organizations be doing and supporting in light of the new decree specifically and to support associations more generally in Lao PDR? What sorts of strategies are likely to be most successful in Lao PDR? Which ones will not be successful and why?

Annex 2: List of Individuals Consulted (participating in either interview or workshop, or both)

Local Non-Profit Associations

Bounby Lasysamay Executive Director Agricultural Research for Development (ARD)	Khampha Keomanichanh President Community Development and Environment Association (CDEA)
Sengphouxay Inthavikham President Community Environmental Promotion and Cultural Association (CEPCA)	Jessy Needham Program Assistant CEPCA
Vahnxay Vang Program Coordinator Community Knowledge Support Association (CKSA)	Ms. Boutsady Khounnouvon Project Coordinator Gender Development Group (GDG)
Vilinthone Sacklokham Program Coordinator Huam Jai Asasamak	Inthasone Phetsiriseng President Lao Community Sustainable Development Promotion Association (LCSDPA)
Khamfone Thenauanehy Executive Director LCSDPA	Somthong Khaikhampithoun Deputy Director LCSDPA
Phouthasak Paikhamvithoune Program Officer LCSDPA	Nouaneta Philavonh Project Manager Laos Disabled People's Association (LDPA)
Somphet Akhavong Media Relations Officer LDPA	Bounchanh Pasouk Media Relations Officer LDPA
Holly Miller Media Relations Officer LDPA	Andrew Bartlett Project Manager Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP)
Phouthasin Phimmachanh Knowledge Management Officer LEAP	Olivier Le Sang Director of Bio-energy Development Lao Organic Products Promotion Association
Kinoy Phongdeth President Lao People Living with HIV (LPN+)	Ms. Bounyang Sithinarongsy Coordinator LPN+

Boualaphet Chounthavong
Director
Our Village

Chantala Boutthaboung
Project Coordinator
Our Village

Khamphoui Saythalert
Head of Action Research
Participatory Development Training Center
(PADECT)

Santi Duangpraseuth
Chairman
The Population Education Development
Association (PEDA)

Tipawan Thamajit
Coordinator
PEDA

Sisavath Chanthalangsy
Management Team Leader
Rural Research and Development Training
Center (RRDTC)

Kongthong Yapua
Program Manager
RRDTC

Souly QuachAngkham
Founder/Director
Social and Economic Developers Association
(SEDA)

For-Profit Consultancy Company

Thipaphone Phetmany
Director
Enterprise and Development Consultants Co., Ltd.

Government Agencies

Sayamang Vongsak
Vice President
Lao Front for National Construction

Mr. Prasith Dethphommathath
Director General of Social Welfare
Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare

Mr. Ampha Simmasone
Public Administration and Civil Service
Authority
PACSA
(via questionnaire)

Mr. Somphone Phanousith
Permanent Secretary of National Science
Council
LUSEA

International Non-Governmental Organizations

Alexandra Mc Lean
Country Director
CARE

Jacqueline Carrier
Country Director
Concern Worldwide

Thingthong Phetsavong
Project Manager

Somyong Boudsaly
Advisor for Local Organisations

CARE

Ruedi Luthi
Country Representative
Helvetas

Rick Reece
Executive Director
Village Focus International
(VFI)

Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (DED)

Rik Delnoye
Governance Advisor
Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers
(SNV)

International Organizations

Hélène Quentrec
Attachée Cooperation
European Union (Delegation of the European
Commission)

Babeth Lefur
Desk Officer for Lao PDR Programme
Oxfam Novib
(via telephone interview)

Helene Carlsson Rex
Senior Gender and Development Specialist
World Bank

Dirk Wagener
Assistant Resident Representative
Head of Governance Unit
United Nations Development Programme
(UNDP)

Sarah Ransom
Programme Officer
UNDP

Syboun Phandanouvong
National Specialist
Social Development Team
World Bank

Annex 3: List of activities of INGO Civil Society Working Group Members Supporting NPAs (compiled by SNV, February 2009)

INGO Organisation	Possible offering in terms of Capacity strengthening of NPAs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - External Training & coaching trajectories - internships - in-company coaching - other 	Outreach (number of participants or number of NPAs etc.) & specific features (social inclusion, gender, sector bonded)	Budget available or still depending on budget availability	Time scale
Concern Worldwide	Organizational self-assessments and development of organizational capacity building plans	Approximately 6-8 NPAs, depending on interest	Yes, budget available	Could start now
Concern Worldwide	Coaching of NPAs on topics identified in self-assessment, both by Concern staff and coaches specifically recruited for this.	6-8 NPAs	Yes budget available	Could start now
Concern Worldwide	Specific training for NPAs based on survey and requests – currently community development, governance, report writing	10-15 NPAs	Yes budget available	Started already with 2 trainings on strategic planning and organizational development
Concern Worldwide	Incubator space, with on site coaching for NPAs in whatever areas are requested	Unlimited	Yes budget available	Will move into new office, with incubator space on April 6 th .
Concern Worldwide	Small grants program, starting June 2009 and again in December 2009, which also offers mentoring to grant recipients	Will fund approximately 3-4 NPAs	Total budget available is \$60,000	Will start June 2009
DED	Training on LogFrame (DED)	15 NPAs working on social and environmental issues	yes	22.-24.04.2009
DED	Training on Participatory Needs Assessment (RRDTC) and coaching in the field	15 NPAs working on social and environmental issues	yes	02.-05.06.2009
DED	Training on Participatory Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (MDF)	15 NPAs working on social and environmental issues	yes	28.09-02.10.2009
DED	Training on Financial Management: Getting the basics right (RRDTC)	15 NPAs working on social and environmental issues	yes	01/2010
DED	Training on Quickbooks for Financial Management (RRDTC)	15 NPAs working on social and environmental issues	yes	02/2010

DED	Individual Workshops on Organizational Assessment and Development (OAD)	10 NPAs working on social and environmental issues	yes	Start after June 2009
DED	On the spot-consultation in project planning and proposal writing	Appr. 5 NPAs working on social and environmental issues	yes	ongoing
DED	Provide small scale funds for implementation of projects	Appr. 10 NPAs working on social and environmental issues	yes	ongoing
SNV	External training/coaching on leadership development 4 modules: - leading yourself (self management) - leading your team (team building) - leading your organization (OD) - leading society (MSP)	Limited number of NPAs (3-5) active in defined SNV sectors	Yes, but limited. Additional budget increases outreach	Could start now
SNV	Increasing technical expertise (value chain development, group formation, access2finance etc.) by on-the-job coaching / co-implementation of projects and joint action research)	Limited number of NPAs (3-5) active in defined SNV sectors	Yes, but limited. Additional budget increases outreach	Partly ongoing (GDG – Sangthong, LDN Houaphanh). Upscaling depending on additional resources.
SNV	OD and in-company coaching including organizational assessments and capacity development plans for newly established NPAs	Limited number of NPAs (3 - 5) active in defined SNV sectors	No, to realize this additional funds have to be raised.	After approval decree & successful RM
SNV	Initiation, formation strengthening new NPAs in Houaphan, Savannaket, Khamouane and VNT. Mostly commercially oriented so no real NPAs.	Around 25 - 30 organisations (primaries) active in especially NTFP & agricultural sector	Yes, through current core funding	2008-2012
SNV	Initiation, formation strengthening new NPAs in Savannaket Province.	Limited number of community based NPAs relating to water & sanitation sector	Yes, through current core funding	2009-2012
SNV (in partnership with VECO)	Initiation, formation strengthening new NPAs in Bokeo Province	3 – 4 NPAs in agricultural sector, ethnicity focused	No, joint proposal in preparation	Planned to start in 2010
Welthungerhilfe / German Agro Action	As of March 2009: external training / coaching / capacity building within GAA's "Small-Scale Project Fund	Two NPAs namely: (i) "Community Development Environment Association" (CDEA)	Budget is limited	<u>CDEA:</u> 01.10.2007 until 31.12.2008 <u>CKSA:</u>

(GAA)	(SSPF)”	and (ii) “ <i>Community Knowledge Support Association</i> ” (CKSA) – currently focusing on Oudomxay Province		01.10.2008 until 30.06.2009
VFI	-Land Rights/LUPLA	Limited number of NPAs with presence at national level and in southern provinces	Yes. Rights-LINK Lao project starting in April and includes capacity building component	2009-2012
VFI	-Conflict Management regarding land and NRM	Limited number of NPAs with presence at national level and in southern provinces	Yes. Rights-LINK Lao project starting in April and includes capacity building component	2009-2012
VFI	-Anti-trafficking and safe migration	Limited number of NPAs with presence at national level and in southern provinces	No. But pending grants will include	2009-2011
GAPE	Financial Management: training / coaching (CEPCA)	CEPCA	Yes, till mid 2010	Funds till mid 2010
GAPE	General capacity building & financial support: research oriented (LBA Xekong)	LBA	Yes, till mid 2010	Funds till mid 2010
Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)	No on-going activities yet. Assessment of need/gap for interventions to develop capacity of Local Civil Society Organizations in Lao PDR	To be determined	Budget available for development and implementation of CSO support program. Feasibility study May/June 09. Program development & implementation 2 nd half of 2009	

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