

MID-TERM EVALUATION

LAO/023

Strengthening the Rule of Law through
Legal University Education

PROJECT SUMMARY DATA

Country	Lao PDR
Long project title	Strengthening the Rule of Law through Legal University Education
Short project title	University Studies in Law
LuxDev Code	LAO/023
Version of the Report	November 2013

RATING OF THE PROJECT BY THE EVALUATION MISSION

Global rating (Effectiveness)	3 On a scale of 1 (excellent results, significantly better than expected) to 6 (the project was unsuccessful, or the situation has deteriorated on balance).
Rating using other evaluation criteria	Relevance: 2 Efficiency: 2 Sustainability: 3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Framework of the evaluation mission

The legal system in Laos has several specificities and it is not successfully completed from a general point of view. In fact, several parallel forms of Justice coexist in the Lao People's Democratic Republic producing somehow a hybrid model, combining customary law and formal justice (justice of the courts). In addition, the number of lawyers registered within the Lao Bar Association (150) remains extremely weak compared to the whole population of the country (6 500 000): there is only one registered lawyer for more than 43 000 inhabitants. Considering these lacks, the legal system in the Lao People's Democratic Republic has been considered as having a scope for improvement.

With the aim of improving the legal system and to strengthen the rule of law in Laos, the Government of Luxembourg signed a bilateral agreement with the Lao People's Democratic Republic on 12 February 2000. In order to materialise this policy objective, a 4 year project, entitled LAO/023 - Strengthening the Rule of Law through Legal University Education project, was launched in June 2010 with a budget of 5 000 000 EUR. The project has been following another project, called "Strengthening of Legal Education at the Faculty of Law and Political Science" and led by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, which aimed at improving the quality of graduate students, enhancing the staff capacity building and increasing the global legal skills and proficiency in foreign languages (mainly English).

The pillar of the project and its primary beneficiary is the Faculty of Law and Political Science, which has been part of the National University of Laos since 1997. The number of students within the Faculty of Law and Political Science has significantly increased during the last years and they can follow five different programmes: Criminal, Civil and Business Law, International Relations and Political Sciences.

The project has been implemented with a clear project management structure, comprising - among others - a project steering committee, a technical coordination committee and in collaboration with a national project director. The actors involved in the project are many and varied. The direct beneficiaries are academics (teachers, lecturers, professors), students and administrative staff at the Faculty of Law and Political Science, whereas the indirect beneficiaries are the National University of Laos, associations (e.g. Lao Bar Association) or political structures (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Justice).

Objectives of the mission and results achieved

The evaluation team has been commissioned by LuxDev to carry out the mid-term evaluation of the on-going project, with the objective to evaluate the results achieved by the project so far, to document lessons learnt and to provide conclusions and recommendations, to be applied during the remaining part of the project. The mission was performed by a joint team composed of PwC (Mr Christophe Mazand, as the evaluation team leader) and the Faculty of Law, Economics and Finance of Luxembourg: Dr Stefan Braum, Dean of the Faculty, and Ms Anne Marie Vesdrevanis, International Relations & Communication Coordinator.

The overall objective of the project is the following one: "To contribute towards strengthening the rule of law and fostering Good Governance in Laos through legal university education", the specific objective being "to improve the quality of higher education at the Faculty of Law and Political Science". This specific objective is divided into two results: "To improve the quality of higher education at the Faculty of Law and Political Science" (R1) and "To strengthen the physical and institutional capacity of the Faculty of Law and Political Science" (R2). Both these two results have been divided into tasks and analysed into details.

Generally, the results achieved so far in the project have been perceived as concrete by almost all the stakeholders we could interview. The two main results of the project are outlined in detail as follows:

- R1: The quality of teaching has improved, providing the students with an enhanced and practical knowledge, in coherence with labour market needs ;
- R2: The physical and institutional capacity of the Faculty of Law and Political Science has strengthened in the areas of management, effectiveness and sustainability through institutional strengthening and the building of new dormitories as well as other equipment.

As a whole, our evaluation has shown that the project remains **relevant** both for the short-term and long-term educational/institutional capacity building of the Faculty of Law and Political Science and the involved stakeholders have appreciated the level of expertise of the project team members.

In terms of **effectiveness**, the project is well on its way to achieving most of its objectives. The definition of Objectively Verifiable Indicators related to the overall project objective should be improved, even though some project results will materialise only in 10 or 15 years (estimated time duration between the updating of a curriculum and the impact on the market). Furthermore no complete baseline report measuring these Objectively Verifiable Indicators was available or done at the project start, which does not facilitate the measurement of the project contribution on the improvement of higher education. One of the challenges related to effectiveness is that some beneficiaries are very busy to run day-to-day operations linked to the project.

Above all, the project has been led with a streamlined project team and in an **efficient** manner, since the activities carried out so far have mostly respected time and budget constraints.

Finally and as a whole, the project has been led on a rather **sustainable** basis, i.e. implementing activities focusing on technical assistance fostering know-how transfer, developing sustainable buildings (dormitories, lecturer hall on-going). The project should reinforce any actions to strengthen the sustainability of the project results related to institutional capacity building.

In relation to the objectives/results stated above, three main crosscutting issues linked to the project achievements were taken into account in the project and therefore in the evaluation. To this purpose, the capacity of the project to address these issues was assessed: Governance for development (Development Assistance Committee marker: 2), Gender equality (Development Assistance Committee marker: 1) and environment and climate change (Development Assistance Committee marker: 0). The project definitely promotes governance for development at institutional level (e.g. improving transparency of internal administrative processes), at legal sector level (e.g. increasing access to legal information to citizen through the Clinical Legal Education) and at country level (by developing awareness and competences of students related to Good Governance).

Some evaluation questions have been addressed in particular during the evaluation. For instance, even though the Faculty of Law and Political Science has a very limited or even no influence on the **student enrolment strategy**, the project has implemented measures to take into account the initial level of competences for students. In terms of meeting the **labour-market needs**, some efforts have been done in terms of curriculum revision, but there is still a significant scope for improvement. We think that the project has indirectly **strengthened the rule of law** in Laos even though no Objectively Verifiable Indicators emphasizes the correlation between the project and this global issue. Overall, the project has an **impact on the quality of legal education** notably through the review of the syllabus, the review/definition of textbooks, the development of law case studies. The sustainability of these results partially depends on the non-resignation of the current teachers. The **knowledge and skills of academic staff** increased, even according to the students' point of view. Furthermore, **partnerships** with other universities have been developed mainly with Thai universities. These partnerships have been formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding in order to reinforce their sustainability. One of the challenges to develop further partnerships with other regional counterparts is the English level of Faculty of Law and Political Science academic staff and students.

Our conclusions and recommendations

Several conclusions can be drawn from the on-going project evaluation. For instance, the quality and level of expertise of the project team is undeniable and has definitely played a role in increasing the impact of the project on the Faculty of Law and Political Science functioning. Besides, the project is well balanced in its scope, and can quite efficiently address educational, institutional or physical capacity building issues thus facilitating concrete benefits. Concerning project monitoring, the involvement of the project's stakeholders is individually confirmed, but the coordination between stakeholders should be reinforced through the project steering committee. This coordination is essential for monitoring the project externalities and the evolution of the Lao legal sector and Lao higher education.

Following the analysis and conclusions, the team could draw a significant list of recommendations. Among others, the team proposes to emphasize teaching discipline, to include more practitioners and to focus on case studies, to update the textbooks on a very regular basis, to increase the number of English teaching hours, to define research priorities to enhance research activities or to finalise and get the formal agreement for the Faculty of Law and Political Science Vision 2020. Besides, the project should at least be extended up to December 2014. Finally, when closing the project, the Faculty of Law and Political Science needs and priorities in terms of capacity building for the next five years should be analysed, mainly concerning research activities, financial resources, institutional capacity building and education.