

FINAL EVALUATION

VIE/025

Strengthening the expanded Programme of
Immunisation Cold Chain

PROJECT SUMMARY DATA

Country	Vietnam
Long project title	Strengthening the cold Chain in the Framework of the Expanded Programme for Immunisation (EPI)
Short project title	Strengthening the EPI Cold Chain
LuxDev Code	VIE/025
Version of the report	April 2013

RATING OF THE PROJECT BY THE EVALUATION MISSION

Global rating (Effectiveness)	2 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 by design 2 by execution Efficiency: 2 by execution Sustainability: 4 by execution

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The final evaluation reviewed the “Strengthening the Cold Chain in the Framework of EPI” (project VIE/025) within the Ministry of Health national strategy for the EPI and linking the project to the Vietnam Development Goals by analysing: results and specific objectives reached compared with those anticipated in the project document. The evaluation was undertaken in terms of capacity development ; management and monitoring, using the Development Assistance Committee evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability with consideration for the cross-cutting aspects of governance for development, gender equality and environment and climate change ; as well as specific questions (e.g. macro issues of national policy interpretation, alignment and improving quality issues plus counterpart contribution status). Two main components of the project were (i) the EPI network adequately equipped and maintained and (ii) the EPI structure has improved capacities in management and operation.

The expert team comprised of Mr Wayne Murray, a primary health care expert with 25 years of experience in public health service delivery, including EPI, and Dr Viet Hoa Cao, a medical doctor who has more than 33 years of continuous *in country* work in preventive health and health management and has extensive experience in public and preventive health and research.

The methodology of the evaluation was to study related documents, listen to stakeholder’s responses to specific question lines and to compare what was observed to the team’s expert knowledge base. Through this method a triangulation of information was achieved for most points of interest. Inherent in this methodology was the analysis of the objectively verifiable indicators, which should have indicated whether activities had been completed and had achieved a positive outcome¹. This proved difficult as the indicators did not easily align with or cover all activities.

The VIE/025 project provided additional support to the successful programme for immunisation undertaken in Vietnam for over 20 years. It was a continuation of previous support for the EPI by Luxembourg, which had already provided support for the immunisation cold chain (VIE/018) and the blood cold chain (VIE/024). Additional support included research into the medical equipment management. With this background LuxDev commenced the support for the Ministry of Health, the national Institute for Hygiene and Epidemiology and the national EPI in completing the cold chain with emphasis on provinces and district equipment. Additional cold chain equipment was later supplied to commune level health centres.

The project was expansive as the national EPI cold chain network covered the 63 provinces in north, central, highlands and southern regions. Direct beneficiaries are the 6.3 million children and women immunised through the routine EPI activities plus a significant number of others covered in immunisation campaigns for rubella, Japanese encephalitis and other priority vaccine preventable diseases.

The object of the mission was to undertake the VIE/025 final evaluation and analyse the results and specific objectives reached at the time of the evaluation compared to what had been anticipated in the project document. The evaluation mission was carried out between 25 February 2013 and 8 March 2013.

Findings

The results achieved reflect the success and challenges in the two aspects of the project: the cold chain equipment strengthening and capacity development. Overall, all equipment procurement activities were completed with the bulk of refrigeration units now providing reliable service in their fifth year. There is now a very strong and substantial cold chain equipment network in use. The capacity development results in terms of positive outcomes have taken longer to achieve although for the most part the activities of the *Logframe* have been completed. The evaluation observed a high level of awareness of the importance of a sound cold chain asset management system, primarily in the need for preventative, periodic and breakdown maintenance. There was evidence of the start of a comprehensive maintenance system that today enhances the usability of the cold chain equipment and contributes to the extended life of the cold chain network. This heightened awareness and focus on the equipment maintenance can be further enhanced. More specifically the evaluation team found for the key results areas:

¹The project indicators were difficult to align with activities and had limitations when using the S.M.A.R.T. approach – Specific, Measurable, Attainable/Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. In VIE/025 the indicators had no baseline recorded and therefore were difficult to measure (changes in vaccine coverage and destroyed stocks), were not always achievable (the decommissioning process will take longer than the project duration with decisions made outside the EPI framework) or time-bound in the sense of annual activity plans. The on-going project management monitoring was also restricted because of this.

Result 1: The EPI network is adequately equipped and fully operational at provincial/district levels:

- all the cold chain equipment planned for purchase has been delivered, installed and has been complementing the EPI network for up to five years ;
- the decommissioning exercise has commenced through the identification of the unusable or economically unviable equipment inventory lists for each province ;
- a sustainable maintenance plan framework has been developed with broad input from the equipment managers ;
- the exercise for the outsourcing has been completed, providing service opportunities to all provinces, districts and every commune health centre with benchmarked equipment. There was no hand-over of funding and subsequently no further continuation of this activity.

Result 2: The EPI structure has improved its capacity in management and operations at all levels:

- the EPI management support for the project related management was provided at an adequate level for the life of the project ;
- the recommendations in the mid-term evaluation were partially accepted and implemented ;
- the EPI at all levels has benefitted from the project investments with awareness evident of the importance and the value of developing the maintenance of the EPI cold chain ;
- an anticipated 'in-depth evaluation' of the cold chain management had not been implemented at the time of the evaluation ;
- the project training components were expedited as planned. Further training has been facilitated at the provincial level for the cold chain users by the project-trained trainers and the use of a suitable project supported training material.

Overall, the project has achieved the vast majority of outputs identified in the project document. This is a commendable effort for the project management unit and the project support teams. Hindsight suggests there are activities that would have been in the project's scope but not identified and a number of the activities outputs undertaken have yet to achieve outcomes that will strengthen the EPI management systems, structure and practices in the longer term. The project document's *logframe* did not factor this step into project activities as robustly as it could have. It is this intermediary step between activity outputs and reaching the project objectives that is crucial. The following comments on lessons learned are provided for consideration of future support for cold chain management capacity building :

- overall, the project objectives were a good fit to contribute to the ultimate country need of achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the Vietnam Development Goals, especially maintaining and achieving the EPI goals ;
- the Ministry of Health through the national EPI had full ownership of the value of the project particularly in regard to the strengthening of the cold chain physical network. The lack of an internal champion within the EPI structure reduced the expected outcomes of this key result area of the project ;
- the reliance for many tasks on the gazetted positions of the national equipment manager and the regional equipment managers placed additional burdens on these positions, which already lacked enough dedicated time and had sharing of responsibilities. The monitoring of progress was limited and issues outstanding at the end of the project could and should have been picked up and worked through when the first evidence of an issue was identified ;
- the strategic project management could have been stronger especially in monitoring and evaluation where processes were not evident in reporting and no monitoring and evaluation system was reported to have been developed ;
- likewise the development of a more defined Annual Plan would have contributed to better project oversight and identified linkages between the Annual Work Plan and Budget listed activities and result area outcomes ;

- the hardware related component of the project has achieved most of the expected results although at a cost that will have to be seriously considered for the future replacement by the national EPI ;
- the decommissioning of the unusable or economically unviable equipment sat primarily outside of the control of the EPI structure ;
- almost all repairable cold chain equipment in the many commune health centres with benchmarked equipment have been brought back online and are functioning again because of the outsourcing of the maintenance ;
- the knowledge and awareness of the importance of the cold chain equipment maintenance by the respective health officials/professionals at different levels has increased but this has not translated into a sustainable maintenance planning ;
- the national EPI has the opportunity to carefully analyse all data collected through project activities and use the information as a base for future initiatives to strengthen the cold chain management.

Arising from these observations the following lessons learnt are noted:

- the VIE/025 management design limited the ability to adequately monitor and evaluate the progress substantially enough for the project steering committee and the project management unit to address pending and outstanding issues ;
- the lack of support for a potential project champion to drive the change limited the project outcomes and affected the results ;
- a more robust discussion and recording of decisions to modify or change the project activity rationale would have strengthened the use of the project resources ;
- in particular this applies to the opportunities available in the second year extension that were not taken ;
- the lack of a follow-up on the outcomes of the project activities inhibited full mainstreaming and institutionalisation of the successful innovations ;
- the lack of analysis by the project management lead to lost opportunities to analyse the results of the maintenance outsourcing ;
- the EPI would benefit from a sound medium-term cold chain strategy for all aspects of the asset management both as an internal management and as a marketing tool.

Key recommendations are summed as:

- consideration should be given to the support of a further stage for the project to develop the cold chain asset management strategy and implementation plan ;
- support should be provided to develop a medium term cold chain asset management strategy ;
- support should be provided through a costed implementation plan spread over the life of the strategy for the provincial, regional and national levels ;
- support should be provided to embed a short term technical adviser, through the project management unit to the national, regional and provincial EPI cold chain management on strengthening their strategies and planning.