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Executive Summary

Evaluation. This report presents the findings of the evaluation of World Food Programme's (WFP) portfolio in Laos. The evaluation was conducted in the first half of 2009 and covered the portfolio that was implemented between 2000 and 2008. The evaluation focused on three main areas of inquiry: the strategic alignment and position of WFP in the country context, the driving forces behind the choices made in putting together the portfolio as it is, and the performance and results of the portfolio. The evaluation supports the WFP Country Office in developing its country strategy and its future portfolio.

Context. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is one of the least developed countries, landlocked in the Southeast Asian region. The economy, while transforming rapidly, is still largely subsistence-based, with a large proportion of the population living in rural areas. Recent policies and investments to develop the economy have had an impact on rural communities, providing them with opportunities but also creating challenges to their traditional livelihood systems. Economic and in particular agriculture growth contributed to increasing gross food production, and thus reducing overall food insecurity, but access to and utilization of food are uneven. Underweight rates are as high as 38 percent, and stunting rates have been 40 percent, without improvement between 2000 and 2006. Over the same period, wasting rates dropped from over 15 percent to around 7 percent. The overall diet diversity seems reasonable, but the frequency of intake of fats, proteins, and fruits is low.

WFP Portfolio. WFP has assisted Laos since 1975 with an expansion of the programme since the opening of the Country Office in 2000. Relatively speaking, the portfolio is considered small by WFP standards, and included eight operations between 2000 and 2008. Currently, three operations are ongoing: two development projects and one protracted relief and recovery operation. The main programme activities are food for relief, food for work, and school feeding. In addition, several smaller programme activities have taken place, such as support to people living with HIV and AIDS.

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

The evaluation found the WFP portfolio generally well aligned with national policies, systems and processes. This alignment was particularly visible in the case of the education sector, where school feeding is fully integrated into the national education sector development framework. WFP's food for work activities align with two of the four priorities of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, but could be also designed and implemented in support of a third area, namely the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources. In nutrition, WFP played an instrumental role – through its analytical and advocacy work – in raising awareness and contributing to a process that led to the formulation of a national nutrition policy. Geographically, the WFP portfolio is fully aligned with corporate priorities, while not matching perfectly the priority districts of the Government.

Ownership of the programmes seems strongest at higher levels in government, for instance of school feeding through its integration into the national framework, and at community level whenever programmes, especially food for work, were planned with strong participation of community members. The choice of partner agency plays an important role to ensure ownership and needs to be adjusted depending on the objective that the programme activity aims to achieve. For instance, activities to support rural development or rural transport were implemented with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, which would be reasonable if

these were “make-work” programmes as part of a social safety net. However, since these programmes aimed to develop assets, partnerships with the respective ministries are essential to ensure alignment, strategic use of WFP-supported programmes and ownership.

The evaluation also found that the portfolio was well aligned with WFP’s corporate priorities, as expressed in its strategic objectives, and that the Country Office undertook efforts to test and implement new programming tools, in spite of limited resources.

Making Choices

The Country Office undertook a surprising amount of analytical work, which was a clear indication of a desire to learn about the operational context, to explore possibilities to implement new initiatives, and inform decision-makers, both within WFP and among partners. The comprehensive food security and vulnerability analysis is the strongest example where such analytical work, combined with effective advocacy, contributed to the awareness of stakeholders in government and partners of nutritional issues. However, the analytical work showed limited use for resolving systemic problems or for strategic decision-making, which is partly due to the absence of a country strategy up to now. Such strategy could, potentially, serve to define the strategic role that WFP intends to play in the country, determined on the basis of the contributions that the Programme can most effectively and efficiently make to addressing Laos’ hunger and malnutrition challenges. At present, operations are planned in a rather pragmatic “bottom up” approach, considering what programme activities can do and whether they will be funded. It corresponds to the operating model, resulting from funding arrangements, that separates operations even when they implement similar programme activities. Monitoring systems are not designed or working to inform decision making or strategic choices.

Portfolio Performance and Results

The portfolio performed well in that it reached between 75-100 percent of intended beneficiaries, including on average an equal number of men and women. The age distribution of the beneficiaries shows that the programme is primarily targeted towards the adult population. It does not prioritize groups found to be vulnerable in the comprehensive food security and vulnerability analysis, namely pregnant and lactating women and infants in the age group up to 2 years.

The programme activities were generally relevant and appropriate to needs and when implemented in collaboration with others and through participatory methods increased their relevance and positive synergies. It was not possible for the evaluation to determine the relevance of the portfolio as a whole in the absence of a clear, unifying goal that WFP aims to contribute towards in Laos. If such goal were to reduce the observed high rates of chronic malnutrition, a change in programme design would be needed to place greater emphasis on the most vulnerable groups in this respect.

The efficiency of the portfolio was hampered by low population densities and relatively high transport cost in relation to the quantities of food distributed, procedures of checks-and-balances that aim to ensure proper use of resources but are time consuming, and costs per unit delivered that are high in comparison with other providers (for food for work roads) and with WFP averages (for school feeding).

The effectiveness of the programme activities varied, by activity and the objectives they aimed to attain. School feeding contributed to achieving education outcomes, even though other investments in the education sector took place in parallel and contributed to these achievements as well. The effectiveness of food for work in creating productive assets and their economic spin-offs showed mixed results. Successes and failures observed by the

evaluation pointed to the importance of participation and local ownership, the technical viability of food for work schemes, and the need for technical advice to ensure assets are operated and generate returns. The effectiveness of programme activities – food for relief and food for work – in addressing short-term hunger was less pronounced, given the range of coping mechanisms available to communities and its members, which meant food relief was provided and appreciated as a resource transfer, but often arrived after alternative coping mechanisms had been engaged.

The sustainability of assets created through food for work schemes depends highly on local ownership and capacity to main the assets. The sustainability of school feeding is supported through the inclusion of school feeding in the Government's policy framework, but will require commensurate capacity development and financial allocations.

The evaluation recommended:

- 1: the Country Office should continue to undertake analytical work that informs the choice of “hunger solutions” which are most relevant to Laos.
- 2: in developing its country strategy, the Country Office should define clearly a unifying goal for its portfolio in Laos.
- 3: the Country Office, its partners and other stakeholders should determine ways to improve participation and increase local ownership.
- 4: at the corporate level, the discussions of WFP's funding model should take into account how WFP's comparative advantage is affected by high-tonnage choices to generate funding.
- 5: the Country Office, with the support of the Regional Bureau and/or Headquarters, should design a monitoring system that informs decision-making at various levels.

This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation of WFP's country portfolio in Laos. The evaluation was requested by the WFP Country Office and conducted between January and May of 2009. The report is structure to present an introduction, the evaluation findings, and its conclusions and recommendations.

1. Introduction

1. This chapter of the evaluation report provides information about the Lao context in as much as it is relevant to WFP's mandate and portfolio to give an understanding of the issues that the portfolio does or should be addressing. Documents used in the evaluation are listed in Annex 1. It then provides an overview of the portfolio as the subject of the evaluation in section 1.B. Finally, this chapter provides an overview of this evaluation, its objectives, scope and method.

1.1. Country Context

Current Situation

2. **Diversity.** Ethnic and biological diversity are defining characteristics of Laos. The ethnic groups fall into four ethno linguistic families, with ethnic Lao making up approximately 30 percent of the total population. Tai-Thai groups (related to Lao) comprise about 36 percent, Mon-Khmer 23 percent, Hmong-Mien 8 percent, and Sino-Tibetan 3 percent. Over two hundred ethnic groups have been identified,¹ and virtually every province in the country borders on at least one of the five neighbouring countries. While geographical space between groups may be short, the social and historical space between the same groups, in terms of cultural typology, may be vast. Lao and the Tai-Thai peoples are traditionally wet-rice paddy cultivators, whereas the other three groups are mostly upland swidden farmers. Social and biological diversity have combined over the last four thousand years to form a multitude of unique agro-ecosystems. Laos is then a country both of great complexity and of great richness.

3. **Poverty.** Lao PDR is one of the least developed countries in the world. "The economy is largely subsistence based, with 85 percent of Lao PDR's 5.6 million inhabitants living in rural areas, and significant parts of the country inaccessible by road."² Non-farm income generating opportunities are limited in rural areas, increasing rural households' dependence on agriculture.³ Recent growth in the agriculture sector is one of the contributing factors to the reduction of poverty, which dropped from 48 percent in 1990 to 33 percent in 2003.⁴ In more recent years, continued high economic growth rates resulted in a further drop of the average poverty incidence to 22 percent (2008). While these improvements are reflected in the Human Development Index – Laos moved from being ranked 141st of 173 countries in 1993 to 135th in 2003 – poverty still continues to be twice as high in rural areas as compared to urban areas⁵ and varies considerably among ethnic groups, whereby the Lao-Thai groups show a poverty incidence of 25 percent compared to that of the Mon-Khmer of 54 percent.⁶

¹ Chamberlain, J.R. 1996. *Indigenous Peoples Profile: Lao Peoples Democratic Republic*. CARE/ World Bank.

² WFP, Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA), 2006.

³ World Bank, Public Expenditure Review, 2007.

⁴ Asian Development Bank, Country Assistance Program Evaluation, 2006.

⁵ UNDP, *Meeting the Millennium Development Goals in Lao PDR*, downloaded on 4 November 2008 from <http://www.undplao.org/mdgs/index.php>.

⁶ Government of Lao PDR and Asian Development Bank, Participatory Poverty Assessment, 2006, quoting a study by Richter, van der Weide and Souksaveth.

The designated poor districts⁷ are mainly rural and sparsely populated with Mon-Khmers forming a major portion of the population.

4. **Rural Transformation.** The traditional life of rural communities has been exposed to a number of factors that is changing their environment to which they react, in part, through relocation voluntarily or otherwise. Resettlement towards roads can improve access and affects coping mechanisms. These changes often result from policies or the realities of development. To give just one example: increased access to remote areas may result in deforestation and replacement of natural forests with rubber plantations, which reduces the availability of food sources from forests that are traditionally part of the diets of rural communities. These factors, in addition to such as concession farming, the impacts of financial and economic shocks (food and fuel prices), the lack of market integration, investments in hydropower and subsequent effects on livelihood systems, etc., play an important role in the transformation of rural communities and the rural economy, which is in the process of converting from subsistence farming to a cash-based society. The effects of these different factors on the future food security and nutrition status of people in rural communities are not yet well researched and understood.

5. **Food Security.** Over the past years, agriculture growth contributed to increasing food security in terms of gross food availability, in particular measured in rice self-sufficiency. Access to food and its utilization, however, is not secured as demonstrated in the nutrition data. Understanding food insecurity in Laos and identifying its social and geographical locations would require understanding a complex mix of factors, such as (i) the positive and negative effects of government policies, involving both the extent to which communities are affected by policies and not reached by government services; (ii) the extent to which communities adopt coping strategies around the policy and development context in which they find themselves, sometimes *living in a gap* that is left between policies and practices, declared aspirations and realities; (iii) the invisibility of such a gap, which makes it harder to identify affected communities and develop measures to close it; and (iv) social constraints on production. For example, among lowland ethnic groups, households who are in a position to produce more, do not overproduce except on occasions to create wealth to exchange for prestige (for example, making merit in the Buddhist sense), so as not to violate community norms. Among the more egalitarian upland groups, however, overproduction is a *threat to balanced reciprocity*. Households that overproduce would give away too much and over-obligate other households to a point where debts could not be repaid, thus destroying the social equilibrium. Targeting to improve well-being is thus easier to do and to demonstrate than targeting to alleviate poverty or food insecurity. These complexities are generally not well understood and documented due to a general lack of reliable data that would shed light on these issues.

6. **Gross Under nutrition.** The National Health Survey⁸ reported in 2000 that stunting (40%) and wasting (15.4 percent) among children under five were very high, one of the highest among South East-Asian countries. WFP's Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) and UNICEF's Multiple Cluster Survey,⁹ both conducted in 2006, document that there was no improvement in stunting, which remains at about 40 percent, and underweight at 38 percent. Wasting reduced to only around 7 percent, indicating that acute malnutrition may be of less concern. Both surveys also showed that the prevalence of stunting increases dramatically in the second half of infancy: by around 18-24 months,

⁷ The Government identified 47 poorest districts where development assistance should be concentrated.

⁸ National Health Survey, Laos, 2000.

⁹ Multiple Cluster Survey 3, Laos PDRs, UNICEF, 2006.

stunting rates were at 40-50 percent and remain at the level throughout the rest of the preschool years. Little is known about the nutritional status by anthropometry among school-aged children, as this age group has never been included in any national survey. This data suggests that chronic under nutrition might begin in the second half of infancy and what is observed beyond the first two years may be the results of cumulative deficits from early infancy. The CFSVA also showed that the prevalence of stunting and wasting was higher in the northern highlands (58 percent and 6.5 percent), central and southern highlands (55.3 percent and 9.3 percent) than that in the Vientiane plain (34.6 percent and 4.6 percent). In addition, stunting was highest among Sino-Tibetan (61.9 percent) ethnic group. In contrast, the prevalence of anaemia was higher in the central regions (46.3 percent) than that in the north.¹⁰

7. **Household Food Consumption.** The household food consumption index (based on dietary diversity of food items or food groups) was developed as an indicator for measuring household food insecurity.¹¹ Based on the CFSVA, staple food and vegetable consumption forms the basis of diets. The overall diversity of diets seems reasonable, but the frequency of intake of fats, animal proteins and fruits is low ranging between 0 and 2 days per week. The high rates of chronic malnutrition, especially in rural areas, may be attributable to the low dietary diversity, resulting in inadequate intake of energy (low caloric density due to very low fat), animal protein sources and micronutrients. Since high stunting rates were observed from the second half of infancy, and predominant breast feeding is still commonly practiced, it is critical to evaluate the nutrient quality/density of complementary foods and foods for young children. In school-aged children, a survey of nutrition situation would be needed to provide more definitive data on the nutrient gaps and design appropriate interventions.

8. **Education.** The *Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment 2008*¹² points to significant progress in education over the past decade. Enrolment rates in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels increased significantly. However, the increases in enrolment hide disparities between boys and girls, among ethnic groups, and between regions and provinces. For example, between 1991 and 2001, the net enrolment rate increased from 58 percent to 80 percent. It is over 95 percent in Vientiane municipality and Vientiane province, but in Phongsaly and Attapeu provinces, it was just 56 percent. In more recent years, the enrolment rates were much better, as discussed in section 2.3 below. The provinces with the lowest rates tend to have higher ethnic diversity, and are among the poorest and food insecure population in the country.

9. **Natural Disasters.** Over the last 20 years, Laos has been periodically affected by floods, storms and droughts. The most recent floods in August 2008 were estimated to have affected a total of 350,000 people in 865 villages in northern and central provinces,¹³ some of which have also shown the highest concentration of food insecure households. Food security, already feared compromised by high food prices, was expected to further be affected by the loss of livelihood assets due to the August 2008 floods. In addition to these major natural disasters, the country faces frequent occurrences of (flash) floods, droughts, forest fires and landslides on a smaller scale, and relatively frequent infestations of rodents that affect crops and thus food security. Concerns exist that the occurrence of these, especially flash floods and land slides, are increasing due to deforestation in upland areas.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ruel, 2002; Arimond and Ruel, 2007

¹² Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment, October 2008, Government of Lao PDR.

¹³ Government of Lao PDR and Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Rapid Assessment of Impact and Needs arising from the August 2008 Floods*, September 2008.

Government Strategy

10. **Addressing Food Insecurity.** Food insecurity is embedded in the Government's definition of poverty: "Poverty is the lack of ability to fulfil basic human needs such as not having enough food, lacking adequate clothing, not having permanent housing and lacking access to health, education and transportation services."¹⁴ The Government's National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES)¹⁵ combined strategies for growth and poverty reduction with the aim to exit the group of least developed countries by 2020. Food security was central to the Government's priorities in this plan, which balanced growth-based and social approaches to poverty reduction. The subsequent 6th National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010 (NESDP)¹⁶ aims to achieve poverty reduction, but places greater emphasis on growth strategies and restructuring of the economy. For poverty reduction, the NESDP expects that tasks begun under earlier plans would be completed, and sets numerical targets such as reducing the number of poor households below 15%. The strategy emphasises job creation rather than achieving food security, as was the case in the NGPES, and the three national poverty-focused programmes centre around drug control, dealing with unexploded ordnances and HIV and AIDS.

11. **Agriculture and Rural Development.** The agriculture sector, previously recognized as the backbone of the economy and vital for food security, is projected in the current NSEDP to provide 36 percent of the Gross Domestic Product, to grow by around 3 percent annually and to provide around 75 percent of total employment. The NESDP focuses on transforming the agriculture sector and rural areas to integrated it into a modern, diversified economy. Public expenditure (investments and recurrent costs) tended to focus on low-land irrigation, at least during the period 2000-2004.¹⁷ For the rural areas, the NSEDP aims to reduce disparities between rural and urban areas and "intended to address the essential development constraints." Food security is seen in this context as a pre-requisite for people in rural areas to participate in the transformation of the rural economy and suggests this problem be addressed through the district development planning system. In the section on poverty reduction (which is separate from that for rural development), the NSEDP recognizes the risk of food insecurity, in the sense of availability of rice, as a significant concern for the poorest households, affected by distribution, population pressure and natural disasters. The strategy to address these issues included resettlement and village consolidation and eradication of opium cultivation and of swidden agriculture, which a number of sources determined to have had adverse effects on poverty in the broadest definition of livelihoods, including economic, human and social capital and traditional coping strategies. More recently, the reality of concessions for rubber plantations and plans to invest in hydropower plants affect the livelihoods of rural communities. Related to these factors is the more contentious issue of access to land, including secured land titles for households in local communities, which the Participatory Poverty Assessment¹⁸ indicated as central to poverty and its reduction. It is, however, not included in the current rural development or poverty reduction strategies.

12. **Education.** The Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF), the major education sector plan of Laos, draws upon a number of key policy documents.¹⁹ The Ministry

¹⁴ Instruction No 010/PM, June 25, 2001.

¹⁵ Government of Lao PDR, National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy, 2004.

¹⁶ Government of Lao PDR, National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2006-2011), 2006.

¹⁷ World Bank, Lao PDR Public Expenditure Review and Integrated Fiduciary Assessment, 2007 in cooperation with IMF, ADB, and EC.

¹⁸ Government of Lao PDR and Asian Development Bank, Participatory Poverty Assessment, 2006.

¹⁹ These include the new *Education Law of 2007*, the National Education Sector Reform Strategy 2006-2015, the National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010, the Education for All National Plan of Action

of Education and the development partners endorsed the ESDF as the action plan for the National Education System Reform Strategy 2006-2015. The framework proposes measures for better harmonisation of external assistance to the sector and a shared commitment to mobilise necessary resources for reducing funding gaps. The ESDF provides detailed targets and continues to reinforce the three ‘pillars’ of education development in Lao: (i) equity and access; (ii) quality and relevance; and (iii) strengthened administration and management. It foresees developing a policy and a range of strategies on inclusive education and will draw attention on promoting relevance of curricula to the local and cultural contexts. The 47 Government’s priority districts are targeted to benefit from ESDF. A medium-term expenditure framework, to accompany the ESDF, is under preparation.

13. **Nutrition.** Efforts to reduce malnutrition have been constrained by several factors: a lack of policy and investments in nutrition programming; limited capacity and institutions responsible for nutrition; a lack of mainstreaming nutrition into various sectors; ethnic/cultural diversity; and a narrow concept on food security and nutrition with a focus on improving staple food intake instead of diversity of foods.²⁰ The Government adopted the National Nutrition Policy (NNP) in December 2008. It was developed through several expert consultations and workshops in which relevant government agencies, the UN and other development partners participated. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is the lead agency in this sector, in collaboration with other UN agencies including WFP. The NNP aims to accelerate efforts to reduce malnutrition. It is expected that it will serve as a reference framework for developing the national plan of action, inter-sectoral coordination for nutrition improvement and attracting national and international financial supports.

International Assistance

14. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)²¹ Laos is heavily dependent on official development assistance (ODA), which accounts for 85 percent of public investments and 38 percent of total public expenditure. Total commitments (grants and loans) for the fiscal year 2005-2006 amounted to US\$420 million, of which US\$350 million was disbursed. Figures from the OECD/DAC²² indicate that in 2006 Laos received US\$364 million in ODA. The three main providers of funding were the Asian Development Bank (ADB) from its soft-loan window Asian Development Fund, the Government of Japan and the World Bank also from its soft-loan window (IDA). In comparison, net private flows for the same year were US\$1,032 million. The largest proportion of ODA was spent on economic infrastructure and programme assistance. Humanitarian assistance is a small proportion of the total. Between 2000 and 2008, Laos received US\$20.6 million in humanitarian assistance from 16 donors with Germany, the European Commission (ECHO) providing more than US\$7 million each, followed by Canada (US\$2 million) and the Netherlands (US\$1 million).²³ Laos’ key partners in food security were the European Commission, FAO, Japan, Luxemburg, New Zealand, Norway, UNODC and WFP.²⁴ In the education sector, the main partners are the Asian Development Bank, the European Commission, World Bank, the Governments of Australia, Germany, and Japan, and key United Nations agencies UNICEF and WFP.

2003-2015, the Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment (2008) and Vientiane Declaration of Aid Effectiveness (2006).

²⁰ Government of the Lao PDR, National Nutrition Policy, 2008

²¹ IMF, *Lao People’s Democratic Republic: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper—Annual Progress Report*, 2008.

²² OECD/DAC, *Foreign Aid to Lao PDR*, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/62/60/1878247.gif>

²³ OCHA, *Total Humanitarian Assistance per Donor*, <http://www.reliefweb.int/fts> (table ref R24)

²⁴ UN Resident Coordinator, *Donor and Development Partner Profiles*, 2006.

1.2. WFP Portfolio in Lao PDR

15. **Overview.** WFP operations started in Laos in 1975. Since then, a total of 44 operations have taken place for a total value of US\$ 104 million (in current prices), excluding the value of 11 bilateral projects for which there is no information on the dollar value. Of these amounts US\$75 million were in food cost (68 percent of total). The majority of these operations were responses to emergency situations or follow-up thereto, which explains the relative infrequent approval of projects especially in the early years.

16. **Portfolio since 2000.** Since opening the Country Office in 2000, 8 projects have been approved with a total tonnage of 84,175 metric tons for school feeding, food-for-work (FFW), and general food distribution or food-for-relief (FFR) (see Table 1). The table does not show smaller activities, such as food-for-training or providing food assistance to people living with HIV and AIDS, because the amounts of food used for these activities is very small.

Table 1: Types of Activities by Operation 2000-2008
(metric tons of food, as per design documents)

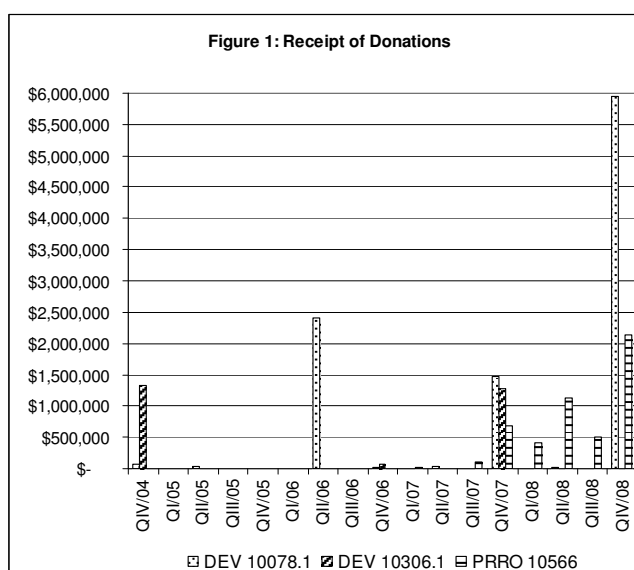
Operation Category and Number		Approval	Completion	Total	Food-for-Relief	Food-for-Work	School Feeding
DEV	5874.0	2001	2003	6,634		6,634	
EMOP	6311.0	2000	2003	6,960	6,960		
DEV	10078.0	2002	2005	6,850			6,850
DEV	10306.0	2004	2009	11,855		11,855	
PRRO	10319.0	2004	2007	10,000		10,000	
DEV	10078.1	2005	2010	26,854			26,854
PRRO	10566.0	2007	2009	14,441	6,836	7,605	
EMOP	10770.0	2008	2008	581	581		
Total				84,175	21,011	29,460	33,704

Source: WFP Country Office Laos and project documentation.

EMOP: emergency operation; DEV: development project; PRRO: protracted relief and recovery operation.

17. **Objectives.** The operations, which were approved during this period, state objectives that can be grouped as follows: (i) FFR: to address emergency needs in times of mostly natural disasters and livelihood transitions. These operations have the objective to provide immediate assistance to those facing severe food shortages to secure sufficient food for consumption and prevent people from negative coping strategies such as depleting livelihood assets; (ii) FFW: to improve the livelihood or reduce long-term food insecurity of food-insecure people, households, and communities. These operations have dual objectives of meeting immediate food needs while at the same time aiming to help in the recovery of livelihood assets and to achieve longer-term objectives such as strengthening livelihood assets and improved use of existing resources; and (iii) school feeding: to contribute to the improvement of school enrolment and attendance rates in primary schools. However, there is no collective logical framework or common goal at the country level that the operations pursue. Annex 2 provides goals and objectives for each operation.

18. **Resource Flows.** The receipt of donations for the currently ongoing three operations is illustrated in Figure 1. It shows (a) the rather infrequent flow of funds, with implications for cash-flow and stock management, and (b) an increase in donations over the last year in particular for the PRRO 10566.0.



19. **Geographical Focus.** The operations taking place between 2000 and 2008 have a broad geographic coverage as illustrated in Table 2: most of them cover five provinces or more. The operations have different timelines, so that some operations are successive, while others operate in parallel. Some concentration of activities can be seen around Luang Namtha in the north and the central and southern provinces of Khammuane, Savannakhet, Saravane and Attapeu. Generally, operations did not target entire provinces, but within each province districts were identified based on their food insecurity and other targeting criteria (for instance enrolment rates for school feeding).

Table 2: Geographic Focus by Operation and Province

	Total Number of Provinces	Phongsaly	Luang Namtha	Bokeo	Oudomxay	Sayabouly	Luang Prabang	Houaphanh	Xiang Khuang	Vientiane Province	Vientiane (Capital)	Bolikhamxay	Khammuane	Savannakhet	Saravane	Sekong	Champasak	Attapeu
DEV 5874	6		X						X				X	X		X		X
EMOP 6311	7									X		X	X	X	X		X	X
DEV 10078	3	X	X		X													
DEV 10306	5	X	X	X	X		X											
PRRO 10319	7									X		X	X	X	X		X	X
DEV 10078.1	6	X	X		X										X	X		X
PRRO 10566	11	X					X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
EMOP 10770	10		X	X			X			X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Total		4	5	2	3	0	3	1	2	4	1	3	5	5	5	3	4	5

Source: WFP project documentation, compile by the Evaluation.

20. **Other Activities.** In addition to the traditional portfolio, WFP has undertaken a number of other activities. Most significantly, WFP's CFSVA (see footnote 2) provided an analysis of food insecurity in the country that raised awareness of all stakeholders – Government and other partners alike – of malnutrition issues in the country and contributed to the articulation

of a nutrition policy. To complement the findings of the CFSVA (that give indications on levels of food insecurity at provincial level) and to facilitate geographical targeting of districts for programming purposes the WFP is conducting an update of the 2005 district level analysis. The purpose of the district level analysis is to support geographical targeting of districts within the provinces. In addition, WFP conducted a number of qualitative assessments on transitions in livelihoods to inform programme design (opium assessment and resettlement), which are further discussed in section 2.2 of this report. The *Feeding the Future* initiative, originally supported by Australian bilateral aid (AusAID), focuses on developing nutrition education materials for ethnic groups. The initiative has piloted the materials, but awaits further funding before rolling out the training in more villages. Under the *Ending Child Hunger* (REACH) initiative, WFP in particular is funding a 1-year consultancy and providing operational support to map out the various activities undertaken by UN and other agencies in the nutrition sector.

21. **Commodities Procured in Laos.** Between 2006 and 2008 local procurement increased from almost nothing to 75 percent of the commodities distributed in Laos (see Table 3). Over the same period, almost 95 percent of commodities procured by the Country Office were sourced within the country. The commodities include rice (71 percent of total goods procured), corn-soya blend (CSB), and salt. Rice purchases are a fraction of total production in Laos.²⁵ Local procurement had the advantage that the preferred glutinous rice could be procured, but quality standards (moisture content and infestations) were typical problems especially in the start-up phase. Nonetheless, business opportunities with WFP require traders and wholesalers to match international quality standards and specifications of fumigation and moisture, thus requiring them to improve their operations. Sugar and oil, the other two commodities in the ration, were procured by the Country Office from a local company in Laos, which imports from Thailand. The sourcing of goods are dynamic, for instance, CSB is now procured by the Regional Bureau rather than locally.

Table 3: Commodities Procured by the Country Office (2006-2008)
(in metric tons)

Province (source)	Rice	Corn-Soya Blend	Salt	Total
Vientiane	1,873	-	105	1,978
Luangnamtha	199	-	83	282
Khammouane	1,189	-	-	1,189
Champasak	3,413	-	-	3,413
Oudomxay	1,185	-	-	1,185
Bokeo	-	1,795	-	1,795
TOTAL	7,859	1,795	188	9,842

Source: WFP Country Office Laos.

1.3. Purpose and Objective of the Evaluation

22. **Rationale and Objective.** The *rationale* for country portfolio evaluations in general is to provide accountability and learning at the country level, including an understanding of WFP's position within a country, the strategy pursued and the collective results achieved (including synergies, where they exist). The rationale for this evaluation in Laos is to provide evaluative evidence on the portfolio as a whole to the Country Office, as it will be designing a number of new operations in 2009-10 and developing its country strategy in 2010. The evaluation has the dual *objectives* of (i) accountability: assessing and reporting on the performance and results of WFP's portfolio in the context of its mandate and in response to

²⁵ According to the National Statistics Center, Lao PDR, the country produced some 2.2 million tons of season rice in 2006 (see website <http://www.nsc.gov.la/Statistics/Selected%20Statistics/Agriculture/Rice.htm>).

humanitarian and development challenges that the country faces; and (ii) learning: generating evidence-based analysis and insights that will inform the Country Office in making choices about positioning itself vis-à-vis partners, and the design and implementation of future operations.

23. **Users of the Evaluation.** The main users of the evaluation will be the WFP Country Office and its partners in Government, the international community, and possibly non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The evaluation expects to inform: (i) WFP about decisions regarding strategically positioning its operations in the future and adjusting programmes to the extent necessary. It thereby will be informing the preparation of the new project phases including the new PRRO and of the country strategy; (ii) Government about ownership, harmonization and alignment in the spirit of the Vientiane (and Paris) Declarations, and possibly in its formulation of its next five-year national plan; (iii) international partners (bilaterals and multilaterals) about the performance and results of its activities including school feeding and food-for-work, which can help determine whether and how these programmes may complement education and rural development strategies; and (iv) the UN Country Team, if it decides to undertake a mid-term review of the UNDAF.

24. The evaluation focuses on the following three **evaluation questions**:

- **Strategic Alignment and Positioning.** How well has WFP's portfolio been aligned with strategic plans of the Government and its partners and how well, or strategically has WFP positioned itself in this context?
- **Making Choices.** What have been the underlying factors that drove WFP's choices – strategic or otherwise – and what can be learned from this for the development of the country strategy?
- **Performance and Results.** How have the current programmes performed and what have they achieved, using evaluation criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability? How can the insights from performance and results be used in making strategic choices?

25. **Scope.** The scope of the evaluation included all of WFP's work taking place between 2000 and 2008, although analytical work such as the CFSVA was not assessed for content and smaller programmes such as the food-for-training or assistance to persons affected by HIV and AIDS were not covered. Fieldwork and discussions also tended to focus on currently ongoing operations, although evaluation findings tend to apply to work carried on from previous operations, especially school feeding or FFW that has continued along the same lines across operations. The site visits were limited to two Provinces. They were selected to reflect to some degree the ethnic diversity of the Laotian rural communities, which forms an important aspect of the country context, and a cross-section of operational programmes, including FFR, FFW under the development project and under the PRRO, and school feeding. This selection criteria resulted in selecting districts in the Northern Province of Luang Namtha and in the Southern province of Attapeu.

26. **Method.** The evaluation design was developed in detailed terms of reference (Annex 3) and included a preparatory mission (12-19 January 2009) after which an evaluation matrix was prepared (Annex 4). The evaluation undertook desk reviews of secondary documentation, including policies and strategies of the Government, partner agencies and WFP, design and operational documents and monitoring data of WFP operations, and other relevant secondary data sources. The fieldwork included key informant interviews at central, provincial, and district level in Laos, and a site visit of the international team members to Luang Namtha, and consultations with WFP's Regional Bureau in Bangkok. A list of names

of people met and locations visited is given in Annex 5. The Laotian team members undertook the focus group discussions in villages and a small-scale survey with households in villages. The findings from these conversations with stakeholders and from the various sources were triangulated to corroborate common issue and identify differences. To understand outcomes, the evaluation used the baseline survey undertaken earlier by the Country Office,²⁶ the Participatory Poverty Assessment,²⁷ or other secondary data. When neither sources were available the evaluation team used recall methods to generate an understanding of the situation before assistance was provided. The fieldwork took place from 15 April to 15 May 2009 for the Laos-based team, with the international team members being in the country from 15-30 April 2009.

27. **Limitations.** The main limitation of the evaluation is that the site visits are not representative. They serve as illustrations and provide an opportunity to reflect the views of those who participate in or benefit from the programmes. However, the ethnic diversity and diverse conditions and resultant food security situations throughout Laos would have required a considerably larger sample size to be representative. Such sample size was not attainable as time and financial requirements would have gone beyond reasonable levels. The evaluation tried to compensate for this shortcoming by using whatever secondary data was available and appeared credible. The second limitation is that, while the overall timeframe covered by the evaluation is 2000-2008, the older programmes could be considered only in terms of the trends of activities undertaken, but not in terms of follow-up on how they were received or what impacts they have had, except for school feeding.

28. **Quality Assurance.** The evaluation followed the Evaluation Quality Assurance System of WFP, applying the principles developed for the other types of evaluations conducted by the Office of Evaluation. It involved presenting initial findings at debriefings to stakeholders from WFP, the Government and the donor community, the review of the report by the same stakeholders and by two external reviewers who have extensive experience in Lao PDR and research or evaluation. The field research team subjected its data to verification and checks when entering the data and before compiling it.

2. Evaluation Findings

2.1. Alignment and Strategic Positioning

29. The evaluation set out to analyse and understand in how far WFP:

- positioned itself strategically in the Lao context to determine whether its resources are making the best possible contribution to the country's hunger needs and explore strategic opportunities within WFP's mandate;
- whether WFP's operations are aligned with Government policies and strategies and whether this has led to greater ownership in line with the Paris Declaration, the corresponding Vientiane Declaration, and the Accra Agenda for Action; and
- are harmonized with or complementary to the assistance provided by other partners to ensure value added.

²⁶ WFP, Asset Creation Impact Assessment – Baseline Survey Report of WFP Food-for-Work under PRRO 10319 and Development Project 10306, (survey work conducted in 2005), 2008.

²⁷ Government of Lao PDR and Asian Development Bank, Participatory Poverty Assessment, 2006.

*Alignment with Government Policies*²⁸

30. **Aid Coordination.** The Government of Lao PDR has systematically held round table meetings for aid coordination and established sector working groups in a number of areas that provide support and continuity to the coordination process. Following the Paris Declaration, the Government and its partners also adopted the principles of ownership, harmonization and alignment to the Lao context in the Vientiane Declaration for Aid Effectiveness.²⁹ It indicated, among other things, that the NSEDP would be the policy framework to which partners were expected to align their programmes. WFP's participation in and contributions to the aid coordination processes are discussed further in paragraphs 44 and 45 below).

31. **Poverty Reduction.** WFP's mandate to assist the poorest, in the sense of most food insecure and vulnerable, is aligned with the Government's declared concern with poverty reduction. The NGPES places poverty reduction at the centre of the medium-term strategy. The NSEDP 2006-2010 also aims at reducing poverty, but has a far stronger focus on growth targets with the rationale that growth is necessary for poverty reduction. The poverty reduction strategies in this five-year plan emphasise, among others, agricultural productivity and employment creation. In line with WFP's mandate, programming activities are not primarily designed to increase agricultural productivity or create employment (other than short-term for employment through FFW), so that alignment with the NSEDP weakened with the shift in government policies. However, survey data and research shows (see bibliography in Annex 1 for select number of sources) for that food insecurity and vulnerability in rural areas have increased especially in rural upland areas, so that WFP's mandate seems well aligned with – and relevant to – the needs of these communities, which is further discussed in section 2.3 below.

32. **Geographic Targeting.** The Government adopted a policy to focus assistance on 47 priority districts. WFP used targeting methods which are based on food insecurity, as identified in the district vulnerability analysis and other sources, as primary selection criterion, which did not automatically result in assisting the 47 priority districts of the Government, but met WFP corporate priorities of reaching the most food insecure. Specifically,

- FFR is provided to villages with a minimum duration of rice insufficiency of two months following a shock (natural disaster, rodent infestation, etc.).
- FFW/PRRO uses a number of criteria that are indicative of food insecurity (relocation, lack of access to roads, former opium cultivation, and poverty levels) as targeting criteria and indicated in the project design document that the Government's 47 priority districts featured prominently in the target areas for the PRRO for this programme activity.
- FFW/DEV (10306) was linked to agreements with implementing partners but specified that village poverty and food insecurity were to be included. In addition, villages affected by opium eradication and relocation policies were to be prioritized as well.

²⁸ The evaluation, while subscribing to the principles of the Paris Declaration, does not assume that a high degree of alignment is, in itself, an indicator for success. Alignment can be high to the priorities or needs of one stakeholder, but not automatically lead to playing a strategic role or meeting the needs of WFP's priority target groups. Nonetheless, it is important to understand the degree of alignment and harmonization with the Government's plans and strategies.

²⁹ Government of Lao PDR, Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, 2006.

- School feeding is targeted on communities that meet a combination of food security and vulnerable indicators and educational performance indicators. All primary schools in a district, except those in district towns unless compelling reasons exist for including them, are eligible to receive school feeding as long as they have adequate classrooms, appropriate food storage, and a School Feeding Committee with balanced participation of women.

33. **Education.** School feeding has become fully integrated into the ESDF, which aims to expand school feeding and nutrition programmes to 39 districts. This is a key strategy of the framework to reduce dropout rates of children in lower primary grades from disadvantaged communities and ethnic populations. In addition, pre-school feeding for 5 and 6 year olds is expected to help in building school-readiness among these new entrants in the formal school system.

34. **Nutrition.** The 6th NSEDP (2006-2010) does not include an explicit nutrition programme, given that the NNP was approved only in December 2008. Equally, the current WFP programme was not reviewed for its alignment to the NPP, given this timeframe. Yet, WFP's contribution to triggering the development of the NPP was commonly recognised among partners in Vientiane: the CFSVA provided new insights into nutrition issues³⁰ and the Country Office used the report effectively to raise awareness of the importance the problem. This advocacy work and the buy-in of other partners³¹ placed nutrition on the agenda or the round table process. For instance the round table meeting in 2007 only took note of the negative consequences of food insecurity, but by 2008 the process highlighted the significance of nutrition, its crosscutting nature and that no single sector could effectively address nutrition issues alone. Another step in this process was the mid-term review of the 6th Plan (2006-10)³² which concluded that the 7th Plan would aim for, among others, reducing child malnutrition. The development of the national nutrition strategy and action plan is underway and provides an opportunity to streamline nutrition into various development programmes, both of the Governments and development partners. In terms of content, WFP's *Feeding the Future* programme could benefit from greater alignment with the nutrition education messages of the Ministry of Health.

35. **Food Security, Agriculture and Rural Development.** Food security is embedded in the NGPES and, to a lesser extent, in the NSEDP. It is the first of the four goals of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF)'s agriculture development strategy, in addition to export promotion (cash crops development), eradication of rotational swidden agriculture practices, and sustainability natural resource management. The MAF sees WFP to have a role in food security and eradication of *pioneering swidden* (hay leuan loy in Laotian language) agriculture practices with the food transfers the Programme provides. This perception corresponds to the nature of WFP's contributions – a resource transfer to the food insecure and vulnerable – and the choice of WFP's main counterpart. Working through the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) for the PRRO (FFW and FFR) and through NGOs (FFW/DEV), the role of FFW in supporting rural development by rehabilitating lost assets after shocks or in expanding community assets may not be well recognized by MAF. Nor

³⁰ Malnutrition levels were known since the National Health Survey in 2000, but the CFSVA documented the lack of change over time and highlighted the ethnic dimension of the issues. The importance lies in its providing the basis for effective advocacy, as in itself it might not have made the contributions it did.

³¹ Such buy-in included, among others, UNDP, who helps the Government with the round table process, and UNICEF who also supported advocacy and social mobilization for nutrition (including reduction of protein-energy malnutrition, sustainable universal salt iodization, supply and management of vitamin A supplementation).

³² Ministry of Planning and Investment, 18 November 2008

seems the potential to be seen – by MAF or WFP – of using FFW to support community activities for sustainable natural resource management.

36. **Resettlement and Opium Eradication.** Policies to resettle communities from remote to more accessible areas, to consolidate communities across ethnic groups, and to eradicate opium production adversely affected the livelihoods of affected communities. Both criteria – resettlement and opium eradication – play a role in WFP’s targeting strategy, as many of the affected communities have become food insecure, at least in the short term. Thus support is provided to them in times of need. The challenge lies in balancing the need for alignment with policies and meeting needs of communities without generating momentum of processes that may leave communities more food insecure rather than less. Including villages due for resettlement in the selection of those receiving FFW (see paragraph 32 above) to develop basic accessibility aimed at preventing such resettlement and preservation of existing livelihoods.

37. **Rural Transport.** The Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MPWT) policy for road sector development includes rural roads and basic access.³³ Based on a participatory rural transport planning process communities participate – through the contribution of labour – to the development of rural or basic access roads. FFW under both the PRRO and DEV projects include similar activities and thus are aligned with government policy, even though they have come to the attention of the MPWT (Vientiane) only recently. They are implemented under the purview of the MLSW (for the PRRO) and in cooperation with NGOs (for the DEV) without much cooperation with MPWT. At the district level, however, cooperation exists between the district officers of the MLSW and those of the MPWT who provide technical support. In early 2009, MPWT (Local Roads Division) and WFP signed a memorandum of understanding about the collaboration between the Lao-Swedish Road Sector Project on the one hand and the WFP PRRO on the other. In this agreement, opportunities were recognized to use FFW for the construction of feeder connections to the basic access component of the Lao-Swedish project. A compromise was found to safeguard the requirement of the Lao-Swedish project under which villagers provide voluntary unpaid contributions of labour as a means to ensure ownership, and WFP’s FFW component that focuses on food insecure communities and actually pays for the contribution of labour, otherwise demanded as a voluntary contribution. The agreed geographical focus of the collaboration is on the poorest districts in the 8 Northern provinces.

38. **Emergency Preparedness and Response.** The Laotian people experience frequent natural disasters, but generally on a relatively small scale in terms of number of people affected and often localised. NGPES and NSEDP include references to the need for an ability to respond to emergency situations, but there is no policy framework, national contingency plan or preparedness and response strategy as such. This situation can be explained by the relatively infrequent occurrence of large natural disasters that affected a significant number of people, as indicated in Table 4. The alignment of WFP’s assessment and response capacity, discussed further in chapter 2.3, is more with the experienced needs than the absent policy framework. Assistance will be provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to develop a national policy and implementation strategy for disaster management.

³³ Basic accessibility is the term used by MPWT for those roads that by design are not all-weather roads and can or should not be used by larger vehicles. They include footpaths and paths useable by hand-tractors.

Table 4: Major Natural Disasters and Number of Affected People

Type of Disaster	Year	Total Number of People Affected
Flood	2001	453,000
Flood	2000	450,000
Flood	1996	420,000
Flood	1995	391,400
Storm	1995	1,000,000
Storm	1992	268,877
Flood	1991	332,000
Drought	1988	730,000
Total		4,045,277

Source: EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database www.em-dat.net, Université Catholique de Louvain, Brussels, Belgium.

Ownership

39. **Government Ownership.** The Vientiane Declaration emphasises the Government's leadership in the preparation of the NSEDP, its translation into sector strategies and their implementation. The partners are to support the Government in these efforts, in particular through capacity development assistance. Ownership needs to be translated to various levels: from central to provincial and district government and to the communities participating in the programme. It is also dependent on the capacity to take ownership, as recognized in the need for capacity development assistance.

40. **Choice of Partner Agency.** The choice of partner agency can determine the degree of ownership that can be realised. For emergency responses the counterpart responsibility rests clearly in the National Disaster Management Office, which is part of MLSW. A programme of UNDP aims to strengthen the capacities of this office, which plays a coordinating role in the response to emergencies, while WFP manages the delivery of the response, including all logistics, in cooperation with the Lao Red Cross (in the case of the response to the August 2008 floods). The FFW/PRRO is implemented in partnership with the MLSW at central level without involving MAF or until recently MPWT even though FFW activities involve agriculture/rural development or rural transport activities. This partnership arrangement has the advantage of having one clear counterpart ministry and would work well, if FFW was carried out with the primary objective of providing a social safety net through public works. In such case, labour-intensive employment creation would serve as an avenue to provide transfers (food, cash or otherwise). However, the primary objective of FFW, apart from addressing short-term food insecurity, is to create assets in which case it is essential to secure technical inputs from relevant line ministries and coordinate projects with their sector strategies. To a certain degree, such coordination is happening at district level where FFW schemes are implemented with the support of district officers of MLSW and of the relevant technical line agency. In the other sectors, education and nutrition, the situation is different. For school feeding, the Ministry of Education is an unequivocal partner for programme design, management and implementation. However, the evaluation observed that in the early years of the project, planning and targeting were mostly carried out by WFP. This arrangement improved since 2008, particularly, in preparation for the South expansion of the programme. Planning and consultation meetings were held with the central, provincial and district education authorities. For nutrition, the Ministry of Health is the lead agency for the development of the national nutrition strategy and action plan, but multi-sector arrangements need to be put into place that will widen the choice of partner agencies to work with. Mass organizations, such as the Lao Women Union and the Lao Front, and the informal education department of the Ministry of Education also partnered in the *Feeding the Future* initiative.

41. **Decentralization, Participatory Approaches and Parallel Structures.** The NGPES emphasized the importance of developing the capacities of communities for participating in setting priorities and implementing programmes. WFP's intention to implement its programme through participatory processes is fully in line with this policy.³⁴ The NSEDP focuses more on decentralization and improving the division of labour between central, provincial and district levels of government, and sector strategies incorporate participatory processes. However, experience has shown that relevant mechanisms have not been developed except in few districts and in limited ways. A number of agencies supported efforts to develop such mechanisms, but with limited and unsustainable results. The main reasons for the failure of these attempts lie in district level capacity and attitudinal issues that effectively prevent village level participation in the district planning process.³⁵ For instance, village development committees, which are part of the existing structures, make requests and offer suggestions, but these are accepted or rejected by district committees rather than used in a participatory process. The structures required for the management of WFP operations, such as food security or school feeding committees follow the same pattern as others and could be perceived as parallel structures built in addition to existing ones. However, structures are not consistently operational throughout the country, and thus each project or operation makes efforts to develop something for its purposes. For instance, school feeding committees could be perceived as duplicating the earlier established village education committees. Many school feeding committees were found to be weak, especially as women in the committees have little or no schooling (which they would need for record-keeping) and/or have little time for committee work, and thus cannot carry out their tasks well. On the positive side, it has been reported that wherever there is an actively functioning Parents-Teachers' Association, School Feeding Committees also function well.

42. **Local Ownership.** When FFW met a perceived need for the asset it created, such as a road to rice fields, a strong sense of local ownership was observed; in cases where the asset was *suggested* by an outsider, the sense of ownership was weak. Where paddy expansion was undertaken, the sense of ownership was good since villagers are working for their own benefit. Road access was also seen as an essential benefit for the entire community. These observations were especially apparent in Meuang Sing District of Louang Namtha. However, where villages had been advised to dig fishponds (in Attapeu and Louang Namtha), these were found to be unused; the sense ownership was lacking, because the activity had not been chosen by them. What is important: the operations did not have a monitoring system in place that would have enabled WFP or its partner IFAD to correct these choices and ensured greater ownership and eventual use of assets. In the case of school feeding, ownership was directly linked to the teacher and his/her ability to communicate with children and parents. For example, in Ban Done May, a consolidated village of three ethnic groups, Khmou Nyouan and Lamet people exhibited a real sense of ownership, but in the case of the Lahu sector, children were mostly not attending school, despite school feeding, because the teacher could not speak the language of the students or the parents. Conversely, in Meuang Sing

³⁴ For instance, FFW/PRRO requires that communities initiate scheme proposals, or school feeding committees are set up to ensure community participation in decisions about the programme. FFW/DEV is integrated with the planning processes of implementing partners, who if following bottom-up approaches would be equally aligned.

³⁵ The World Bank study "Community-Driven Approaches in Lao PDR – Moving beyond service delivery" (October 2008) made similar observations in the seven projects it reviewed. While advocating community-driven approaches as useful to empowerment and development, the review also was realistic about the challenges of these approaches.

District, in the village of Ban Lau Khau,³⁶ the teacher (a Lue) had learned the local language. As a result, the school has become very popular with both parents and students. Here the sense of ownership was strong and school feeding a success.

43. **Shared Ownership and Mutual Accountability.** School feeding in Laos was initially designed as a joint programme with the Ministry of Education and WFP having mutual accountability for its outcomes. Efforts are continuously being made to increase the role of the Ministry in managing and monitoring of school feeding. However, in 2006 difficulties were observed regarding the Ministry's financial ability fulfil its management and monitoring responsibilities. This created an imbalance in management arrangements with WFP taking more responsibility and reversing the programme's framework of eventual full ownership by the Government. Unless the Government increases its share in the project costs alongside improved management and monitoring capabilities at all levels, asserting its full ownership of the programme will remain a complex undertaking.

Government Processes

44. **Using National Processes and Structures.** In the Vientiane Declaration the Government and partners signed up to use, to the extent possible, national systems for project implementation. In addition, it is expected that systems, regulations (such as for local procurement) and requirements (such as for implementation arrangements, monitoring and reporting requirements, indicators for results-based management and evaluation) would be harmonized to avoid duplication of effort and strains on national systems. Commitments were made – on both sides – to strengthen national systems through capacity development and then use them. WFP, while not setting up project management units, manages its operations closely and through its own sub-offices. The Programme follows its procurement policies and practices, sets out its requirements for planning, implementation and monitoring, and uses indicators aligned with its corporate results framework rather than the national ones (discussed further in section 2.3 below). Recently it reviewed possibilities to use government structures for paying national counterparts who participate in assessment, appraisal and monitoring missions (the results of this review and possible changes were not finalized by the time the evaluation mission was in Laos). The recent memorandum of understanding with MPWT for feeder roads is another example where the collaboration was framed to be in line with the Vientiane Declaration and the desire to work through existing national institutions.

45. **Coordination Mechanisms.** Laos instituted, with the assistance of UNDP, a round table process in 1983.³⁷ Since then, main meetings are held every three years, with implementation meetings taking place once per year. The purpose of this round table process is to enhance coordination among all partners assisting Laos in its development efforts. Within this framework, 8 sector working groups have been established as forums to discuss and build consensus around sector priorities. Each group is chaired by the responsible Ministry and by one of the development partners. A number of these groups are important to WFP and its work, in particular education and agriculture/rural development. For nutrition, no such working group has been established yet.

- The technical working groups for *education* comprise of key partners in the education sector from the development community. They are tasked to examine various education sub-sectors and develop a list of priorities and actions. With attention to access, equity, quality and effective management, the technical working groups

³⁶ An Akha village also belonging to the Tibeto-Burman group similar to the Lahu. Likewise in the Hmong village of Kok Mouang the former teacher, Lue, also spoke Hmong, and when that teacher departed, the villagers were very disappointed.

³⁷ For details see www.rtm.org.la

developed a framework of strategic directions and targets to support policy goals articulated in key planning documents for the education sector development of Laos.

- The sector working group on *agriculture, rural development and natural resources* is rather large and has formed sub-working groups on irrigation, forestry, agribusiness and upland agriculture. The sector working group is chaired by MAF, even though rural development and natural resources need to address multi-sector issues and thus would benefit from the participation of a cross-section of line ministries. Working group members professed a strong commitment to rural poverty reduction, as they saw the risks (at least in the short-term) of policies that emphasized growth without consideration for resultant vulnerabilities. Members seemed to grapple with a clear understanding of food security, its relationship to nutrition and the effects of rural transformation that Laos was experiencing. WFP, as much as FAO, is an active member in the sector working group, whose contributions have been appreciated.

46. These mechanisms are helping coordination at the policy level. However, in the communities, coordination remains a challenge. A World Bank study (see footnote 35) found that the “current [community-driven development] panorama is scattered and dysfunctional. Project location decisions do not necessarily depend on provinces’ or communities’ needs and poverty status and there is little or no geographical, technical and financial coordination across CDD projects. In choosing where to locate CDD projects, the government and donors rarely consider communities’ needs and poverty statuses, and the type of support communities are already receiving on the ground in a comprehensive manner.”

Alignment with Partners

47. The UN Common Country Assessment³⁸ (CCA) recognised a wide range of issues and incorporated an analysis of issues related to poverty, food security, nutrition, education, health, migration and resettlement among others. The CCA clearly identified the vulnerable and food insecure, especially in rural areas, as a high priority target for sustainable development.³⁹ Nutrition and household food security were identified as one of the key areas under poverty reduction, and integrated maternal and child health is one of the key areas in the social sector. The prominent reflection of these issues in the CCA is indicative of a comprehensive approach to understanding the development challenges of Laos, and shows that the WFP programme is well aligned with the UN system. The CCA is presented as a document to the UN system, thus the contribution of WFP or others cannot be attributed; but the greater importance lies in the CCA forming the basis for coordination, alignment and synergies between UN partners, with WFP’s mandate and assistance being relevant to the main challenges that the UN aims to address.

48. The UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF)⁴⁰ 2007-2011 was developed on the basis of the CCA and a mid-term review of the previous UNDAF, and in full appreciation of the NSEDP (thus aligned with government policies). In the foreword, the UNDAF highlights the significance of this framework for harmonizing the work of UN partners and the commitment of the EXCOM

Box 1: UNDAF 2007-2011 Outcomes

1. By 2011, the livelihoods of poor, vulnerable and food insecure populations are enhanced through sustainable development;
2. By 2011, increased and more equitable access to and utilization of quality and prioritized social services; and
3. By 2011, strengthened capacities of public and private institutions to fulfil their duties and greater people’s participation in governance and advocacy

³⁸ Government of Lao PDR and UN Country Team, Common Country Assessment, 2005.

³⁹ CCA, 2006; UNDAF, 2006

⁴⁰ Government of Lao PDR and UN Country Team, UN Development Assistance Framework, 2006.

Agencies (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP), to prepare country programmes directly based on the UNDAF with a harmonised programming cycle. It defined three outcomes as shown in Box 1.

49. For each of these outcomes, the UNDAF presents a number of more specific country programme outcomes and key issues to be addressed. In both – the outcomes and issues to be addressed – of the first two UNDAF Outcomes, a role for WFP can be found. The UNDAF provides a framework for WFP’s traditional programme activities (such as FFR, FFW and school feeding) to support goals of enhancing livelihoods and improving access to social services, or increasing the awareness of malnutrition issues. The results framework attached to the UNDAF identifies specific areas in which each of the agencies are expected to contribute, fully integrating WFP in this framework, and including references also the International Finance Institutions and their unique role in the development of Laos. The results framework is discussed further in section 2.3 below.

50. These frameworks illustrate the role and objectives of other important partners in the development of the Lao PDR. WFP’s mandate and assistance is in line with and could complement the operations of organisations other than within the UN family, where through the UNDAF positive synergies seem to have been built.

Synergies through Partnerships

51. Laos benefits from the support of a large number of partners, many of whom work in areas that provide opportunities for positive synergies with WFP programme activities. Below, information on the programme activities are listed of the main UN and international finance institutions, as relevant to WFP’s areas of work.

52. **Agriculture and Rural Development.** Among the International Finance Institutions, the ADB is a major partner to Laos. In its current country strategy and programme, it foresees to contribute to key outcomes in, among others, the areas of increased food security and to equal access to quality education.⁴¹ For agriculture and rural development, the strategy recognises the importance of ensuring food security as a pre-requisite for moving towards commercially-oriented agriculture, but places greater emphasis on helping Government in the transformation of the rural economy, complemented with support to rural livelihoods including “enhancing food security, creating income generation opportunities, and building small-scale infrastructure through participatory”.⁴² The World Bank in its country assistance strategy⁴³ recognised at the time (2005) that vulnerability remained high among ethnic minorities and upland communities. The World Bank strategic aims, among others, to support rural development and natural resource management as well as at enhanced social sector outcomes. Within that framework, the World Bank endeavours to strengthen national and provincial capacities to modernise and diversify the agriculture sector as well as make the management of natural resources more sustainable and participatory. The lending portfolio places emphasised investments in the rural development sector (US\$14.5 million).⁴⁴ The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has currently four ongoing projects focused mainly on livelihood development with a total project cost of around US\$100 million, of which some is funded through IFAD loans and grants. These projects are located in the Northern and Southern provinces of Laos, where the project is implemented in

⁴¹ Asian Development Bank, Country Strategy and Programme 2007-2011, 2006.

⁴² Asian Development Bank, Country Strategy and Programme 2007-2011, 2006, paragraph 252.

⁴³ World Bank, Country Assistance Strategy, 2005.

⁴⁴ World Bank, Current Lending, downloaded on 25 may 2008 from

http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/LAOPRDEXTN/0,,I_nnerPagePK:5915610~menuPK:2204358~pagePK:51331374~piPK:2037597~theSitePK:293684,00.html

Box 2: A village in LuangNamtha, Northern Laos

During a site visit, the evaluation team established that a community had benefited at least from the following projects:

- ADB Basic Education for Girls
- ACF Water Supply
- EC Livestock Project
- UNICEF School of Quality
- GTZ/WFP FFW
- WFP FFW (through MLSW)
- WFP School Feeding

It had a basic access road, which means it probably also benefited from a donor-funded road project. At the time of the visit, community members were in the process of selling their maize harvest of 15 tons, down from 20 tons last year. The World Bank study (see footnote 35) indicated that the provinces in the North and in the South benefited from between 3-4 or 5-7 community-driven projects. It also found that these projects and that these projects had strong similarities in design and objectives to reduce poverty.

partnership with WFP. Cooperation with FAO, especially in the area of food security and nutrition information could be further strengthened, as both agencies work on assessments of various aspects of food security. An integration of this information would be useful to fill data and information gaps. The sub-working group on uplands (see paragraph 45 above) also provides opportunities for developing synergies for market development using WFP's purchase-for-progress activities.

53. **Education.** The main partners supporting the Government's efforts to develop the education sector include bilateral and multilateral agencies (see paragraph 0 above) who are the leading members of the Education Sector Working Group. These development partners make major contributions to the reform and development of the national education system, including the formulation of the ESDF, investments into the education infrastructure and in the quality of education, and orienting the education system towards pro-poor programmes in remote areas. The

programmes of WFP (school feeding) and UNICEF (school of quality) are working together towards improving enrolment, attendance and progression through primary schooling of good quality in disadvantaged communities in Northern Laos, which are also receiving assistance from the ADB and from the EC. The goal to enhance education for girls is shared by many of these partners.

54. **Nutrition.** UNICEF, WHO and FAO, have provided specific nutrition interventions to Laos. FAO is the lead agency in the nutrition sector and supported the development of the NNP. UNICEF focused its efforts on maternal and child health and nutrition with programmes such as promotion of breastfeeding and complementary feeding, vitamin A supplementation for preschool children, and universal salt iodization. The World Health Organization (WHO) has provided a programme of iron supplementation through the antenatal care services, however, the coverage and compliance remains limited due to low rate of antenatal care usage. WHO also piloted a maternity waiting home project in Bokeo and Borikhamxai, where there are diverse ethnic groups. This project intends to provide a safe place for mothers before, during and after child birth. The services include free board and delivery, food, health education, postpartum follow-up and incentive for participation. Several of these experiences should provide lessons and challenges for the implementation of nutrition programmes. Jointly, FAO, UNICEF, WHO and WFP are implementing the initiative to end child hunger (REACH) for which Laos is one of the two pilot countries. The initiative intends to raise awareness, advocate streamlining nutrition and identify strategic points where synergies may be strengthened.

55. In addition, the WFP works with a number of NGOs, who have their own, significant programmes and use resources for FFW activities to supplement their programmes. For villagers it is impossible to distinguish or appraise the performance of the various actors (WFP, NGOs, IFAD, MLSW and many others that do not partner with WFP), although they experience the different priorities and ways of working in an immediate sense. In some cases they are required to provide free labour to community development projects, in others they

are paid for in cash or in food, depending on the project sponsor. WFP's approach has the strength of partnering with a variety of agencies, thus demonstrating flexibility and full alignment with whoever the partner may be. However, from the perspective of communities and partners at the district and community level, the Programme appears to be without a clear corporate strategy for its recovery activities.

Alignment with WFP Corporate Strategy

56. The evaluation chose to use the new Strategy Plan (2008-2011) as its reference point, knowing that the current portfolio cannot be held accountable against this framework – it was adopted only in June 2008, whereas the portfolio was designed and has been in operation before then. Instead, the evaluation analyses the extent to which the portfolio still matches priorities – and concluded that overall the programme is well aligned – and what needs and opportunities exist for adjustments, as detailed below.

57. **Strategic Objective 1.** Goal 2 under this strategic objective is “to protect livelihoods and enhance self-reliance in emergencies and early recovery” (WFP, Strategic Plan 2008-2011, paragraph 25) to which the FFR activities in Laos are fully aligned. In addition, the Country Office demonstrated that its emergency assessment work – one of the tools under this strategic objective – contributed to the inter-agency needs assessments following the August 2008 floods, and more recently drew attention to increasing food insecurity following higher than usual rodent infestations.

58. **Strategic Objective 2.** Goal 2 under this strategic objective is “to support and strengthen resiliency of communities to shocks through safety nets or asset creation, including adaptation to climate change” (WFP, Strategic Plan 2008-2011, paragraph 34). The current FFW activities (DEV and PRRO) share the goal of creating assets. Among the other two areas, supporting the creation of safety nets has not been perceived as an explicit need, because safety nets have largely been informal in Laos, particularly so in rural areas. This situation might change with the transformation of the rural sector from subsistence to a cash-crop economy, and thus might become a need in the near future. The use of FFW in adaptation to climate change has not been recognised, even though the Government's policies are to manage natural resources more sustainably and through community-based approaches. Among the tools under this Strategic Objective, WFP has undertaken the CFSVA, which was recognised for its strong contribution to generating an understanding of malnutrition in Laos, and periodic vulnerability assessments for its own targeting.

59. **Strategic Objective 3.** WFP's FFW activities in Laos could equally fall under Goal 2 of this strategic objective “to support the re-establishment of livelihoods and food and nutrition security of communities and families affected by shocks” (WFP, Strategic Plan 2008-2011, paragraph 44), in particular as the PRRO aims to assist people suffering multiple shocks, or goal 3 which emphasises the re-establishment of capacities to supply food, which is at the core of FFW to recuperate or develop new paddy land. Included under this strategic objective is the provision for introducing cash and vouchers, which the Country Office is exploring (see paragraph 68 below).

60. **Strategic Objective 4.** School feeding in Laos is fully in line with the provisions of goal 2 under this strategic objective that aims “to increase levels of education and basic nutrition and health through food and nutrition assistance and food and nutrition security tools” (WFP, Strategic Plan 2008-2011, paragraph 53). This strategic objective also opens opportunities for placing greater emphasis on nutritional goals, especially goal 1 that aims “to help countries bring under nutrition below critical levels and break the intergenerational cycle of chronic hunger” (WFP, Strategic Plan 2008-2011, paragraph 52).

61. **Strategic Objective 5.** Goal 1 under this strategic objective foresees “to use purchasing power to support the sustainable development of food and nutrition security systems, and transform food and nutrition assistances into a productive investment in local communities” (WFP, Strategic Plan 2008-2011, paragraph 62). As indicated in paragraph 21 above, WFP has over the past years procured much of the food distributed locally. This effort has been much appreciated by the Government, but has not been without challenges to ensure the quality of food and its delivery. In addition, this strategic objective includes developing capacities for handover. In Laos, plans are currently underway for finalising a hand-over strategy for school feeding, which strives for increasing the Government’s active role and responsibilities in managing and monitoring school feeding programmes and increasingly participate in sharing its costs. The assistance includes providing computers and training in their use for counterparts in provincial education services, who are also counterparts on the UNICEF-supported School of Quality project. A local consultant was hired and assigned to the Ministry of Education to facilitate the process of ownership transfer, including the participation of the Government in the planning and implementation of the school feeding hand-over strategy.

2.2. Making Strategic Choices

62. The evaluation analysed the factors that underlie WFP’s decision-making process to understand how these factors influence the extent to which choices are strategic or could be more strategic. In so doing, the evaluation drew on the assumption that information – such as assessments, appraisals and evaluations – can contribute to better informed, and thus more strategic decisions.

Generating and Using Analytical Information

63. The Country Office developed Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping at district level which informed decisions about geographical targeting of programmes and subsequent geographical presence of WFP. The resultant choices overlapped in part with the most vulnerable districts identified by the Government (see paragraph 32 above). Overall, WFP’s programme demonstrates a rather broad geographical coverage (see paragraph 19 above and Table 2. For FFR this coverage can be explained by the occurrence of natural disasters, albeit at small scale, almost throughout the country. School feeding was far more focused: first on three provinces in the North and now being expanded in a further three provinces in the South.

64. In addition, the Country Office generated a number of analyses of factors that affect food security such as resettlement, opium eradication, market analysis including high food prices, and impact of the current transformation of the rural sector due to concessions, hydropower dams, etc. In so doing, the Country Office demonstrated a good understanding of current issues.

65. The number of reviews and analyses is impressive given the limited resources of the Country Office and reflects both the Office’s desire to learn about issues that should determine programme design and make improvements. Because of limited staff or financial resources to conduct analytical work, a considerable amount of work is done with the help of volunteers, interns and consultants. Their work is commendable. Reports often provide an analysis of the wealth of existing studies and a good starting point for a deeper level of analysis. For instance, the (draft) cash crop study synthesizes details on the rapidly transforming rural economy and highlights, among other things, the information gaps that exist. The value of these analyses is in the synthesis of issues, which then needs to be taken further to understand resultant implications for food security and WFP’s response strategy.

66. Reviews-cum-appraisals of ongoing operations were undertaken to determine the design of new operations or piloting of other initiatives. The recommendations of a number of these reviews have been taken up in subsequent programmes, as discussed further in the paragraphs below. However there are some recurrent issues about targeting, monitoring and process efficiencies that remain unresolved. This situation is in part due to

- a lack of systematically sharing these reviews and making them more accessible by storing them in a retrievable way,
- the high workload of staff that makes it difficult for them to review, absorb and internalise the results of such reviews
- presentations that are not always short, easy and user-friendly, and
- structural or institutional factors that inhibited solutions to operational problems.

67. The CFSVA, while appreciated by many partners as a key analytical piece used effectively to raise awareness and place malnutrition on the agenda of Government and partners, has not yet resulted in making strategic choices about the composition of WFP's programme activities. The CFSVA highlighted shortcomings in the diversity of diets, in particular in terms of fats and proteins, and in specific target groups, especially mothers and small infants. The current programme activities are not providing corresponding nutrition diversity nor is it focused on what is by now recognised as key vulnerable groups. Choosing to adjust programme activities to these needs would also correspond to the Strategic Plan 2008-2011 (see paragraph 60 above). The Country Office argued that time was required to adjust the programme and that the absolute number of potential beneficiaries together with low population density makes it challenging to design an efficient response to the malnutrition problem, beyond the current focus on training to change dietary habits through the *Feeding the Future* initiative.

68. In relation to FFW, the Country Office found the resources for (a) a baseline survey to study at the outset the expected outcomes; (b) a review of FFW in 2006; and (c) a review-cum-appraisal of the PRRO in 2006⁴⁵ and undertook with its own staff resources a self-evaluation of the PRRO in 2008. These analyses, especially the reviews of operations focused largely on operational concerns and how to resolve them, which was helpful, but were not designed to assist in making choices about strategic directions of FFW. In addition, the Country Office also contracted a consultant to produce (a) an options paper for introducing cash-for-work, and (b) proposal for piloting the cash option. Both documents are well prepared, reviewing various dimensions of cash transfers, including preferences of recipients, potential efficiency gains based on cost, the mechanisms for implementing such a scheme, and issues or concerns associated with it. Again, given the limited resources of the Country Office, these efforts demonstrate its readiness to explore whether and how corporate policy can be implemented. However, the challenge will lie in the implementation of the cash option. For instance, efficiency gains are calculated based on the assumption that the total amount of work will be paid for in cash, whereas the proposal assumes a combination of cash (10-20 percent) and food (80-90 percent), which will affect the efficiency of cash transfers. This choice would also shift the cost of transportation of food supplies from WFP and its partners to the villagers, which is unproblematic in cases when local markets function and can be used to purchase supplies; something that would have to be monitored constantly as rural areas transform towards cash-based economies with greater cash crop production (as pointed out in the cash crop study, see paragraph 65 above). In cases where markets are more

⁴⁵ WFP, Evaluation of PRRO 10319.0 and Appraisal of 10319.1, prepared by Adam Folkard under the supervision of WFP's Regional Bureau, 2006.

remote, the cost and challenge of transport during the wet season, which makes villages inaccessible by regular means of transportation, is not likely to increase food security of recipients.

69. Finally, analytical information on portfolio performance, that is monitoring data, is not collected systematically across years. A number of spreadsheets exist in which information is recorded, but not necessarily in formats that make comparison across years possible. Efforts are under way to develop or improve the current monitoring systems for the various programme activities. However, generally, the information that is gathered does not feed into a *layered* or decentralised system of decision-making, whereby each level of decision-makers receives information about programme or portfolio performance and knows how to act on this information. The systems are not designed or used with the eventual users of information in mind or them knowing what to do with the data that is generated. As a result, activities are not adjusted to ensure they achieve greater results or are more efficient, and systemic bottlenecks are not systematically identified and resolved.

Developing Response Strategies

70. Generally, WFP has been responsive to policy frameworks, as discussed in section 2.1 above, and to needs, as discussed further in section 2.3 below. The planning and decision-making process can be described as *bottom-up* in the sense of working up from the programme tools – FFR, FFW and school feeding – and their possibilities and limitations. In the absence of country strategies, there has not been a need to determine a WFP response strategy based on an analysis of the goals of Government and partners and an assessment of where WFP’s contributions (and tools) would be most effective and efficient to address hunger and malnutrition issues in the country. With the introduction of such strategies⁴⁶ the Country Office in Vientiane will need to determine where the limited resources available for the programme can make the largest contribution to achieving goals in the Lao context. To make such choices it is necessary to

- Understand the goals and sector strategies of Government and partners, which the Country Office is doing to the extent that the WFP programme “fits in” with policies, but not necessarily based on an understanding of where the biggest results could be generated with the limited resources that WFP can contribute;
- Analyse issues arising from a rapidly changing rural sector, which the Country Office is doing to the extent possible with the available means; and
- Determine implications for WFP programming and opportunities for partnerships that enhance synergy effects between WFP programmes and those of others. Some concrete examples of such synergies – already realised or yet to materialise – are discussed in the section on portfolio performance and results (section 2.3 below).

WFP Priorities and Operating Model

71. WFP’s choices in the country are determined by corporate policies and strategies, in addition to the needs of the country. Section 2.1 above indicated the alignment with the new Strategic Plan and how it provides opportunities for changes in the portfolio. Yet, the challenge for a small country office, such as the one in Laos is to have sufficient expertise and experience to implement, for instance, the new tools.

⁴⁶ WFP Management decided to introduce country strategies after the adoption of the Strategic Plan 2008-2011 in June 2008. These country strategies are meant to ensure the Strategic Plan gets implemented at country level.

72. WFP's programming and associated decision-making in Laos is grounded in the reality of the Programme's funding model. This realism is very pragmatic and reflects the limitations that WFP faces in the country: the tonnage associated with the portfolio is small and thus generates limited direct support costs to run the operations. This funding level means the Country Office has very few professional staff positions; other human resource requirements are met with volunteers and interns, and consultants fulfilling staff functions. Individuals are highly motivated and enthusiastic about their tasks and responsibilities in spite of high workloads. Yet, continuity is affected by high staff turnover: people who are in Vientiane for personal reasons and leave for the same (for instance spouses get transferred); the PRRO has had five managers in four years. In addition, the degree to which authority can be delegated to, for instance, sub-office heads depends highly on their familiarity with WFP and their qualifications.

73. In addition, the actual funding level of an operation determines the number of people (volunteers, consultants and interns), working on its implementation. An operation with higher funding levels will have more people on the ground than one that is under-funded. The funding model therefore means that each operation has its own implementation structure: staffing levels and responsibilities are directly associated with the operation from which staff is funded. The clarity of this division of labour is in line with the funding model, but it has the draw-back that operations take place in isolation from each other. Valuable opportunities to create synergies between programme activities or learning from one to the other operation are lost. The Country Office introduced some changes over the last 12 months to improve this situation, but the underlying problem remains.

74. The Programme's realism about the likelihood of raising funds for Laos for certain programmes – and not for others – is another important factor that determines the choices that are made when designing operations with a tendency to stick to the familiar, as it secures the necessary funding for operations and the Country Office.

2.3. Portfolio Performance and Results

75. The evaluation assesses the performance and results of those programme activities that are predominant in the portfolio: FFR, FFW and school feeding, and the nutrition-related *REACH* and *Feeding the Future* initiatives. It summarises information on the outreach of operations – the number of people fed – and reports on standard criteria of relevance and appropriateness, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and connectedness.

Performance: Outreach – People Fed

76. For 2005-2007, the total *number of beneficiaries* of the portfolio is shown in Table 5. The table illustrates an increase in beneficiary numbers from around 280,000 in 2005 to around 500,000 in 2006 and 2007, and slightly dropping off in 2008.⁴⁷ The information is broken down by age group and gender. It shows the even distribution between gender, but also bias towards reaching adults: 50 percent of beneficiaries are reportedly female; Around 47.1 percent of beneficiaries are adult; 39.2 percent in the age bracket between 5 and 18 years; and 13.7 percent below the age of 5. The data does not allow an analysis the extent to which the female adult population includes pregnant and lactating women. The vulnerable groups identified in the CFSVA – infants and pregnant and lactating women – are thus not the priority group reached by the current programme.

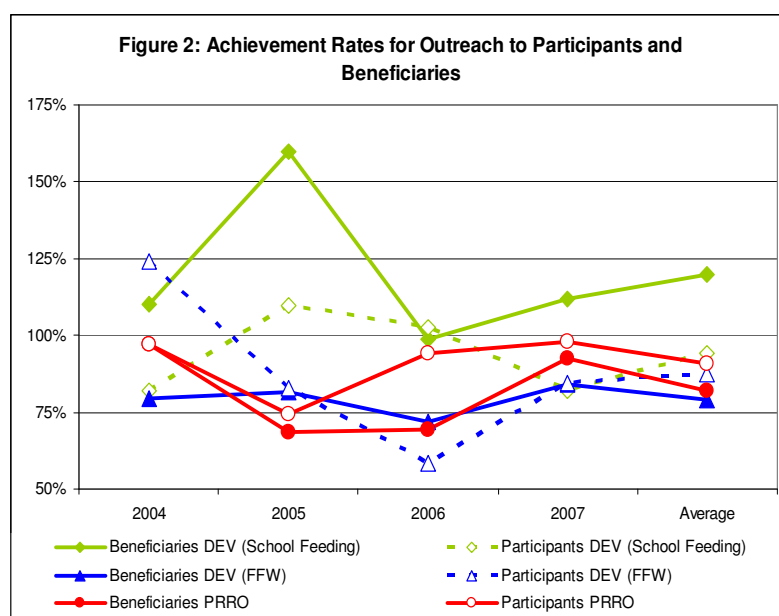
⁴⁷ The figures were taken from the standard project reports (SPR). It was not possible for the evaluation to reconfirm or reconcile these figures with those in the monitoring systems, as the latter are extremely fragmented. This situation raises questions about the reliability of data in the SPRs.

Table 5: Number of Beneficiaries by Age Group

	Adults	Between 5 and 18 Years	Below 5 Years	Total Beneficiaries
2005	107,560	128,822	45,866	282,248
Male	53,780	64,411	22,933	141,124
Female	53,780	64,411	22,933	141,124
2006	247,491	189,305	74,576	511,372
Male	122,682	94,990	37,676	255,348
Female	124,809	94,315	36,900	256,024
2007	241,231	189,516	61,534	492,281
Male	118,410	95,856	30,890	245,156
Female	122,821	93,660	30,644	247,125
2008	234,826	184,485	59,899	479,210
Male	115,266	93,311	30,069	238,646
Female	119,560	91,174	29,830	240,564

Source: Evaluation Team, based on data from the WFP Country Office, Standard Project Reports.

77. The SPRs also reported on the numbers of *participants* in and *beneficiaries*. The difference between these two groups is that participants take part in, for instance, FFW activities, while beneficiaries include family members who benefit from the food distributed (such as FFW or take-home rations). The following analysis focuses on *achievement rates*, meaning the number of people actually reached versus planning figures in the operations, as reported in the SPRs, broken down by gender. Reported achievement rates were aggregated across consecutive operations (such as the two development projects for school feeding) and averaged for the different types of programme activities under these operations.

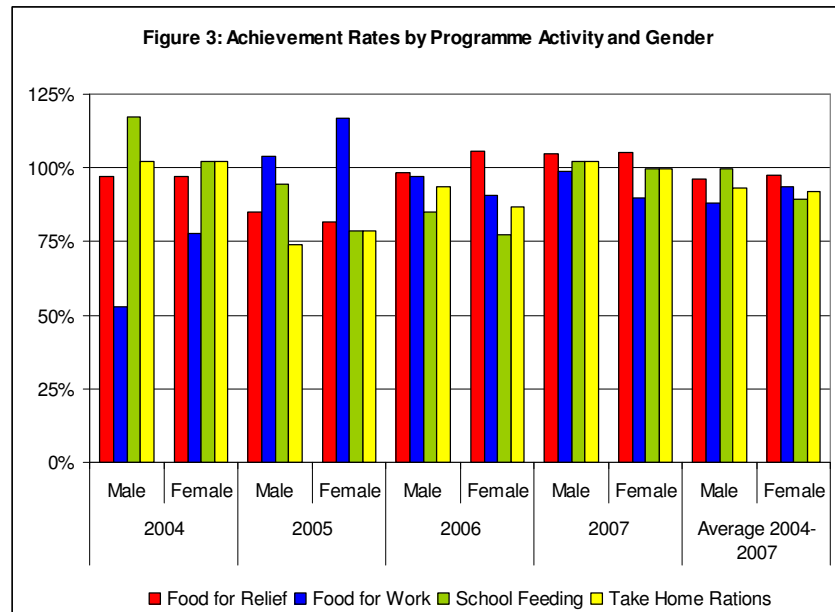


78. **Outreach by Programme Category.** Figure 2 illustrates the average achievement rates are 75-100 percent for all operations, except the development projects for school feeding. Across the years, these operations reportedly reached 100 percent or more beneficiaries although it had on average less than 100 percent participants. The reported figures do not fully explain this divergence, but it is in part due to the distribution of take-home rations among family members.

The PRRO generally reached fewer than the intended number of participants and beneficiaries. A comparison of achievement rates for the beneficiaries and participants in the Development Project (FFW) shows relatively constant outreach to beneficiaries around 75 percent of plans, but rather inconsistent data on the outreach to participants. Normally, the number of participants should be lower or equal to the number of beneficiaries, assuming that a family ration benefits more than those participating in the FFW activity. However, the data indicates several years where the number of participants is larger than the number of beneficiaries, which is an indication of the unreliability of the recorded data.

79. Outreach by Programme Activity.

Figure 3 illustrates that the main programme activities actually reached between 75 percent and 100 percent of their intended beneficiaries between 2004 and 2007. FFR average outreach over the four year period was close to 100 percent, with lower achievements than expected in 2004 and 2005, which were compensated in 2006 and 2007. Across the four-year period, women and men equally benefited from FFR. FFW (both Development Project and PRRO) showed the highest variability from below 75 percent to reaching over 100 percent of its intended participants and with high variations in its outreach by gender. On average, FFW reportedly had more female participants than male, although for both gender this programme activity performed below its expected outreach. School feeding, including take-home rations, showed lower than expected outreach for the years 2005 and 2006. On average, in-school feeding reached its targets for boys over the four year period, but reached fewer girls. Take-home rations had an equal outreach to boys and girls, which is unusual. However, in the case of Laos communities found the preferential targeting of girls with take-home rations unacceptable from an equity point of view, but accepted different ration sizes for girls and boys, which makes the rations more complex to manage.



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Performance: Relevance and Appropriateness

80. The relevance of the WFP assistance to national policies and strategies was discussed in section 2.1 above; this section reviews the relevance and appropriateness of operations to the needs of the recipients.

81. **Short-term Food Insecurity.** FFR, as a tool, is relevant to address short-term hunger needs, as individuals, households and communities experience crop losses due to shocks: flash floods, rodent infestations, isolated droughts. If delivered in a timely manner, FFR would address these short term needs and prevent negative coping strategies (see paragraph 93 below). The ration, based on rice, is an appreciated staple and appropriate to address hunger. The villages visited by the evaluation team confirmed this view and pointed out that other foods were not considered problematic. However, to address dietary diversity, as the indicator foreseen in the new strategic results framework for this type of operations, any effects of WFP’s programme would depend on individuals and households supplementing rice with other foods to ensure nutritional values and diversity rather than bringing this diversity about through FFR distributions. Depending on the nature of the disaster, supplementation may or may not be possible. For instance, with increasing replacement of natural forests with rubber plantations, natural resources traditionally used as sources of food might cease to be available, increasing food insecurity and possibly reducing dietary diversity, and potentially resulting in a seasonal increase in floods or water shortage. The CFSVA’s observation that diets generally are insufficient in protein and fats would imply that

these items could or should be added to the ration. Such change in ration would affect, however, the efficiency of the operation, as discussed below.

82. FFW as a means to address short-term food insecurity by providing work that is compensated for by food would be relevant, if the timing of the work and food distribution is such that work is done when the household or individual is not food insecure and distribution happens the latest when food insecurity sets in. Otherwise labour needs to be spent on generating food through subsistence farming or by gathering wild foods and would not be available for FFW. For instance, local, informal safety nets ensure that communities generate work (small scale projects) when a poor household is in need of food or income; payment (in food or cash) takes place immediately upon completion of the work. By contrast, the appropriateness of FFW schemes to address short term hunger is affected by the required process that involves the necessary checks and balances. Such processes are time consuming (as discussed further in the section on efficiency) and thus result in a time lapse between work done and payments made. As a result, households or communities have to bridge the time between work done and food received.

83. **Rebuilding Livelihoods.** FFW as a means to build or rebuild assets is relevant, if it is conceptualised as an additional input to and complemented by other non-food inputs. Positive examples exist when WFP works with NGOs, who include FFW into an integrated plan, developed in consultation with communities, and provide the technical expertise needed for the assets to be built. By contrast, FFW that takes place without additional inputs, schemes have to focus on what can be done with manual labour, which may not always be the most relevant and appropriate solution to the problem that needs solving. For instance, the destruction of rice paddy as a result of flash floods normally requires heavy equipment to remove large boulders and tree trunks. Access to such equipment is limited and its cost is prohibitive to villagers. Therefore, the use of FFW alone will not help rehabilitate lost paddy fields, but instead require developing paddy extensions where they can be built solely with labour and limited equipment.

84. The primary driver to make FFW relevant to the needs of local communities is their ownership (see also paragraph 42 above). The successful selection of FFW activities is proportional to the quality of the consultation process carried out with villagers, or lack thereof. Villagers are highly knowledgeable about what will work or not, both physically and socially. Though this seems to be an elementary point, villagers were not consulted in many cases resulting in non-utilised assets. Where value exists in villager opinion, regardless of whether ownership is communal or private, assets will be used and maintained. In general though, villagers do not like working for communal assets. In some instances, such as communal fishponds in Attapeu, these assets were perceived serve the purpose of the district, but not the villages or individual families. They provided the labour, who participated to obtain the rice. By contrast, assets, even with no commercial value, are appreciated when they have a *sociocultural* value. In the villages of Somboun, VangXay, and Mixay, according to beneficiaries they used WFP-supported FFW to build traditional community houses (see photograph). This type of activity, while not recorded by the Country Office under the schemes that were supported, was very well received because of its cultural significance. In another village (PhiaKeo) a *sala* for the school yard was built and this was also considered a worthy activity by the villagers. This raises an interesting point about the distinction between *socioeconomic* assets (preferred by government and developers) versus *sociocultural*



assets (often preferred by villagers). The value ascribed to an asset differs depending on value systems of a stakeholder; in traditional rural communities in Laos, communal assets are, generally, not valued purely for their commercial value, but also for their sociocultural contribution to the community.

85. FFW for road development generated mixed feedback on its relevance to the needs of villagers. In some instances, the roads fulfilled district development goals of connecting certain villages, but were not perceived as directly benefiting villagers. In one example in 2006, Akha villagers in M. Sing, Ban Lau Khau, were asked to participate in constructing a 4 kilometre road that the district wanted. To overcome the reluctance of villagers to participate, the village chief required that at least one person from each household had to work on the road. The economic value of this road is discussed in paragraph 109 below. In other cases, FFW has been used to build roads to remote villages and thereby prevent relocation or connect relocated villages to their former paddy land; these roads were seen as highly relevant by the villagers.

86. A challenge that both FFR and FFW have dealt with is that of responding to what has become known as “policy induced shocks” (see also paragraph 36 above), whereby policies to transform the rural economy have resulted in greater food insecurity, at least in the short term and possibly into the medium-term. The need for food assistance is obvious when for instance relocation deprives communities of access to paddy or other agricultural land and natural resources to complement their diets, and does not provide access to other income sources (wage-labour based). However, food assistance can be only a temporary solution, but could take off the pressure for finding sustainable solutions if not managed carefully. Efforts have been made to use FFW to create basic accessibility that reduces the need for resettlement, but risks greater exploitation of natural resources; a conundrum that the Government and its partners will have to address.

87. **Relevance to Educational Goals.** In terms of design, school feeding aims to address a gap in enrolment and attendance rates, especially among girls, by providing an incentive to families to send their children to school. In 1,084 schools (or 19 districts) in the Northern provinces of Laos, school feeding is delivered together with the essential package that is supported by UNICEF (school of quality project) and the ADB (basic education project for girls), which financed school buildings, the adaptation of school curricula to meet local needs, and awareness training about the importance of girls education. These projects took place in the same areas – and over the same period – in which school feeding takes place. This situation resulted in positive synergy effects that enhanced the relevance of school feeding through a generally strengthened education system. However, the evaluation observed limitations to school feeding as an incentive: the importance of the teacher’s ability to speak the local language and thus communicate with pupils and parents was essential for local ownership and a strong incentive to attract children into school (see paragraph 42 above). In some cases, in more remote and poorer ethnic areas, school feeding, even along with school building construction and teacher’s training, showed to have limited impact. Other efforts or incentives are needed, such as information campaign targeted to parents to convince them of the importance and benefits of education for their children, especially for girls, and/or improving the teaching-learning quality and relevance of primary education, as for instance provided under the ADB’s project. Especially in Akha communities, parents still tend not to send girls to school as they are expected to look after their younger siblings. In some of these villages, there are schools and teachers, but there are not enough pupils attending school.

88. **Nutritional Needs.** From a nutritional point of view, school feeding comes closest to having nutritional dimension in WFP's Laos portfolio because of its use of oil and protein (CSB) to the diet of school children and pre-school children when they participate. However, the nutritional or even food value is not always fully appreciated.⁴⁸ Apart from the nutritional value of CSB in school feeding, the current overall composition of programme activities does not correspond to the nutrition needs identified in the CFSVA. The latter would call for an increase in dietary diversity – adding appropriate sources and amounts of fats and proteins to current diets – and by increasing a stronger focus on the most vulnerable target groups, in particular mothers and infants. Especially the FFR and FFW programmes do not provide dietary diversity: they involve the distribution of the staple commodity rice. The Country Office attempted to add oil to the response to the August 2008 floods, but the cost of the ration increased beyond what was an acceptable level for the common appeal, and the lack of stocks meant the delivery would have had to be delayed.

89. Among the two explicit nutrition programmes, REACH focuses on assisting the country to scale up country actions by providing evidence-based solutions through 3 key action areas: knowledge sharing, financing and resource mobilisation, and communications and advocacy. In so doing, REACH uses a systematic process beginning with stock-taking and compiling evidence-based information with ultimate goal of scaling up effective nutrition interventions. It emphasises the importance of understanding a holistic view of the current nutrition situation and causes, activities taken by the stakeholders and activities, including government, international organisations, bilateral partners, and NGOs. The latter's community-based approaches is seen as having essential synergy effects in this area. REACH identified 10 strategies⁴⁹ for scaling up. In this sense, REACH is relevant to the need for greater coordination and integration of operational nutrition programmes of the various partners. It is important that REACH leads to operational responses otherwise it will not generate relevant and appropriate responses to the needs of people. The *Feeding the Future* initiative is a community-based nutrition education programme – addressing on the third dimension of food security: the use of food – focused on ethnic minorities. It is relevant to the observed need to improve nutrition awareness and appropriately designed to the dietary preferences of the targeted ethnic populations. The initiative was designed and tested in Laos and seems appropriate to local needs, although the Ministry of Health felt that some of the nutritional education messages could be better aligned to its own. Further integration into government programming would transform this “WFP project” into a locally-owned initiative.

90. **Targeting.** In terms of geographical targeting, the programme activities are most relevant in the areas of highest food insecurity. These are identified as indicated in paragraph 32 above, albeit partly based on rather poor secondary data. The field team found that of the ten villages visited in three districts, only one (BanKapNeua in Viengphoukha) was poor,

⁴⁸ As the field team observed in one of the schools (the mixed Tarieng and Hrak village of Ban Mixay in Sanxay) where the food was steamed in small balls the children would throw these into the air and try to catch them with their mouths. When they would miss the balls of food would simply fall onto the ground and be left there with no apparent regret.

⁴⁹ (1) Expand the outreach and integrate standardised nutrition package into mobile clinics; (2) Develop routine community delivery through community nutrition team; (3) Introduce schools as intervention delivery point and material distribution hub; (4) Engage private sector along 3 dimensions: workplace, production, distribution, sales and marketing; (5) Implement multi-channel messaging; (6) Deliver micronutrient/deworming package to target group; (7) Implement country-wide screening/referral procedures and treatment protocol for acute malnutrition; (8) Link food-based nutrition education with homestead food production at community level; (9) Scale-up household water treatment and safe storage at community level; (10) Conduct integrated nutrition training to build capacity in nutrition at all levels.

along with one ethnically discreet section of a consolidated village (Ban Done May). Experience and research have shown that these villages are largely those affected by policies that change their livelihood systems rather than villages that are remote. For household targeting, communities expressed a strong concern. In the villages visited by the evaluation a great commitment to and concern for equitable distribution was found. In cases where WFP or its partners could not ensure such equity, the community members rearranged distribution. For instance, in the Kwène village of NongKham, Viengphoukha, following flooding of some paddy land on two separate occasions rice was not given to affected villagers, but – by internal village agreement – to less well-off female headed (widowed or divorced) households, albeit unaffected by the flooding. In another example, the KhmouNyouan village of Nam Mang, also in Viengphoukha, an initial assessment of a localised drought in 2008 was made of the damage to the 30 affected households. During the second assessment, the visit was not scheduled in advance, and when the assessment team arrived, only 12 of the 30 households were at home and required supplies estimated on that basis. Five months later in January 2009, the rice arrived the village chief appropriated a portion of rice from each of the 12 households and redistributed it to the remaining 18 households to ensure some degree of equity among the 30 affected households.

Performance: Efficiency

91. **Accessing Remote Areas.** The largest challenge to delivering efficiently in Laos applies to all programme activities equally. It rests in the limited and difficult access to remoter areas and the low case loads because of low population density and limited number of people in need. Most of the studies, in particular on FFW, mentioned in section 2.2 above dealt with the efficiency questions under the operating environment in Laos. They made various proposals for the Country Office's implementation. In part, the issue is addressed through geographically targeting districts and including, for instance, all schools where poverty and food insecurity are high and educational attainment indicators are low. In another approach for ensuring efficiency, WFP chose distribution points that shifted responsibilities and cost for transporting food to the recipients, who in some few cases decided that the associated resources (time and labour of the recipients) were too high to make the programme attractive. As a result, these communities dropped out of school feeding activities. As indicated in paragraph 90 above, remoteness of a community is not necessarily an indication of food insecurity – rather the functioning livelihood system is – therefore communities may not have seen the programme as relevant to their needs and their resources as inefficiently employed for the transport of the commodities.

92. **Process Efficiency.** For FFR and FFW (under the PRRO), process efficiency has to be balanced with the necessary checks-and-balances that food is directed to and reaches the neediest communities and in the case of FFW for the work schemes accomplished. The current process requires the village or district officer to launch a request, based on a food security assessment, which is checked (desk reviewed) by WFP in the sub-office and the Country Office in Vientiane. The request forms are brief, which has the advantage of being easy and quick to complete, but in the absence of site visits or detailed knowledge of the area a checking of the forms is reduced to ensuring the form is free of inconsistencies. The process cannot ensure that the request is genuinely supported by the community and thus the most relevant and appropriate choice (see paragraphs 42 and 84 above). In cases of incomplete or inconsistent requests, they have to be resubmitted and are reviewed a second time, before the agreement to go ahead with the scheme is given. Once the FFW scheme has been completed, WFP sub-office staff and/or district officers (MLSW) visit the scheme to measure whether it was built as agreed and determine the payment. Previous reviews of FFW (see section 2.2 above) highlighted shortcomings in the process that still remain: requests are launched late

and are incomplete, resulting in delays in starting and completing the schemes, inefficiency from the work distribution among sub-offices and separation of FFW under the PRRO and development project. Often, it takes the process up to the rainy season when villages become less accessible and thus delaying food distributions further. These issues have been, at least in part, been attributed to weak counterparts, as district officers of the MLSW are not well equipped to undertake the necessary backstopping.

93. **Timeliness of Food Distributions.** Monitoring data for FFR (under the PRRO and EMOP) does not allow determining whether there was a delay in FFR distributions and by how much. For the EMOP, data exists for the dates when assessments were done and when food was distributed. The same information was not collected for all provinces in which the PRRO provided FFR in response to the August flooding; distribution dates were included for all locations, but dates of the assessments were included for 2 of the 8 provinces. In none of the cases was there an indication of when food would be required, meaning: when food insecurity was highest.⁵⁰ Assuming the August 2008 floods caused loss of food stocks that required immediate replacement, the data showed that the distribution occurred in September and October 2008 under the EMOP and in November 2008 under the PRRO, overall between 1 and 4 months after the floods, which appears to be timely. The monitoring system⁵¹ for a FFR distribution (PRRO) in response to a drought recorded the dates of assessments and distributions and showed that the average time between these points was over 6 ½ months, with the shortest time being just over 3 months and the longest around 10 months between assessment and distribution.⁵² In another case of responding to multiple shocks in Khammouane province, the response time between assessment and distribution was much shorter: on average just over 2 months with no strong outliers. Contrasting this generally positive performance of FFR, delays in the delivery of FFW rice were common. The fieldwork, especially in Attapeu in relation to paddy expansion, found that delays are considerable, and often rice from the new paddies is already harvested before FFW rice is received. Villagers are grateful for the FFW programme, but irritated with the delays. Similar observations were made elsewhere as well, by this evaluation team and by the reviews contracted by the Country Office. The main causes of delays in FFR and in FFW distributions are

- uneven flows of financial contributions (see figure 1, paragraph 18 above);
- limited priority and thus limited access to interim funding mechanisms;
- waiting for the clearance of unexploded ordnances before the FFW scheme can start; and
- waiting for the inspection at the end (to measure the paddy size to estimate the amount of work to be compensated).

⁵⁰ This information would be necessary to determine whether food deliveries were delayed against the point in time when supplies were needed.

⁵¹ The monitoring system/spreadsheet was not constructed in a way to track information on timely delivery but only to record dates of assessments and dates of delivery. The lack of an automatic computation, which is technically possible, of the time laps between assessment and delivery indicates that this information is not monitored or acted upon.

⁵² As mentioned before, whether these durations are justifiable or not could be established only if the timing of the food insecurity would be recorded in the monitoring sheet and compared with delivery dates.

94. **Unit Cost Comparison.** The evaluation-cum-appraisal report⁵³ of FFW (Dev10306) calculated the efficiency of road construction schemes under the project. It did so by dividing the total length of road constructed over the total amount of food distributed, and then converting the metric ton-per-kilometre into a US\$ value. The calculations suffered from the weak monitoring system that had not record the length of roads constructed in two consecutive years (2005 and 2006). The report filled these data gaps by making reasonable assumptions and observed that the cost of roads per kilometre “compared unfavourably with the costs associated with mechanical construction,” a message also borne out by a comparison of data from the World Bank study and the WFP report, as shown in Table 6. The low efficiency was reportedly compensated by the higher quality of the FFW-roads. The same report estimated the investments into paddy extension to be equivalent to the value of rice paddy created. Overall, it estimated cash-for-work would be 52 percent more efficient than FFW, although the assumed daily amount of rice distributed is above the work norms discussed in the next paragraph.

Box 3: Unit Cost Approach for Evaluating Efficiency of FFW.

The approach to calculate unit costs for FFW schemes is valid. It requires estimating the cost of the scheme, such as a road, a fish pond, a paddy extension, and comparing it with the cost of an alternative delivery mode, such as constructing similar infrastructure under another project. The approach could be used to appraise FFW schemes and determine whether it is not most efficient use of food resources. When combined with an analysis of benefits from the food distributed, the approach would increase further in validity and ensure decisions are made for the most efficient and effective use of resources.

Table 6: Unit Costs for Access Roads

Project	Cost per kilometre
Asian Development Bank (Shifting Cultivation)	US\$4,591 to US\$7,518
Canadian International Development Agency	US\$7,100
Poverty Reduction Fund	US\$1,714 to US\$2,500
WFP FFW	US\$6,600

Source: World Bank, *Community-Driven Approaches in Lao PDR, Moving beyond serve delivery* (2008), and WFP *External Evaluation and Formulation Report* (2008).

95. **Work Norms.** The work norms,⁵⁴ as another area that affects FFW efficiency, were calculated based on national average wage rates, converted into the rice equivalent that the amount of money would buy. While previously rates were set on the number of days worked, it is now adjusted to reflect the amount of work completed; something that is in line with general practice. An issue exists, though, in the lack of consistent approaches by which some organisations and projects require communities to contribute labour without compensation – a measure meant to increase ownership – as contrasted by the compensation (FFW or otherwise) of other agencies. WFP has had some discussions on this issue with the World Bank, the Poverty Reduction Fund, and MTPW.

96. **Efficiency of School Feeding.** The decision to include school feeding in the ESDF, with a projected expansion to all 47 priority districts, would have an estimated cost of US\$140 million (2010-2015).⁵⁵ This would be a dramatic increase from the current WFP-supported school feeding programme with a budget of about US\$28 million (2005-2010) and an implementation in 30 districts. This estimated cost would require allocating almost one fourth of the estimated total recurrent expenditures in primary education to school feeding.⁵⁶ This cost would place a considerable burden on the education budget, especially given the

⁵³ WFP, External Evaluation and Formulation Report, Development Project 10306, June 2008.

⁵⁴ Work norms are the amount of rice paid for work accomplished.

⁵⁵ At the time the evaluation team was in the field, the Ministry of Education planned to expand school feeding to all 47 priority districts and the cost was calculated accordingly.

⁵⁶ Early childhood and primary education expenditures comprise over a third of the total recurrent share in education. ESDF – Government of Lao PDR, January 2009.

priority areas identified in the Public Expenditure Review (see footnote 17) for recurrent expenditures: (i) teachers' salaries; (ii) a education management information system; and (iii) other measures to improve teach qualifications and placement in schools. The Public Expenditure Review also estimated that in 2003-2004, the Government spent around US\$9.9 per pupil in primary school. At the operational level, based on figures from the SPR for 2004, school feeding cost US\$24 per child fed.⁵⁷ This compares unfavourably with the global average yearly cost per pupil for food for education of just below US\$19, and the average cost for the essential package of US\$35 per year per pupil,⁵⁸ but is explained by the higher cost of the programme in Laos is due to high transport cost, low population density in rural areas and the cost of international shipping of in-kind contribution. The Country Office started reviewing the school feeding ration in 2009 and ways to decrease its cost and increase sustainability through increased local purchases. This information should be helpful to inform discussions around the medium-term expenditure framework that the Ministry of Education is preparing with the support of the ADB.

97. **Organizational Ratios.** At an organisational level, the planning figures in the UNDAF 2007-2011 (see Table 7 below) demonstrates that WFP aims at a ratio of staffing and overhead costs to total programme cost of 7 percent, which is well below other agencies and in line with corporate policy. However, this ratio represents WFP's standard international cost factor and does not include the direct support, transport and handling charges, and other development cost that may be associated with WFP operations and their implementation. Yet, the minimal funding levels have an effect on staffing and resource levels, as pointed out earlier, whereby the Country Office is dependent on locally recruited consultants, volunteers and interns for large parts of its staffing requirements.

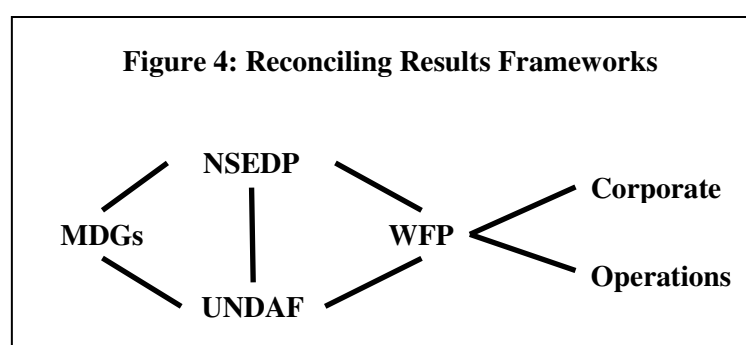
Table 7: Comparison of Programme Cost to Overheads – UNDAF 2007-2011

	Programme Cost	Staffing and Overhead Cost	Programme to Overhead Ratio
	(in US\$ million)		
FAO	\$ 8.2	\$ 2.5	30%
UNDP	\$ 54.6	\$ 9.0	16%
UNICEF	\$ 33.4	\$ 5.7	17%
WFP	\$ 37.1	\$ 2.5	7%

Source: United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2007-2011.

Results: Frameworks and Indicators

98. To evaluate the results of the portfolio, in addition to those of the individual programme activities, the evaluation chose to analyse the various results frameworks in existence and to determine, to the extent possible, the contributions that WFP's assistance has made to attaining expected results. Figure 4 illustrates, in a simplified way,



the various frameworks that were brought together: at the international level the MDGs, at

⁵⁷ WFP, Standard Project Report, Project 10078.0, 2004.

⁵⁸ WFP, Food for Education Works, 2006.

the national level the NSEDP and UNDAF, and for WFP a combination of corporate and operational results. Each of these documents was used to extract information relevant to the WFP operations in Laos.⁵⁹ This approach was taken to ensure a clear focus on WFP's activities and how they contribute to larger goals.

99. The goals and performance indicators are most consistent in the *education sector*: from the MDGs, through NSEDP and UNDAF to WFP corporate and operations, the focus is on enrolment, attendance, and completion rates and gender equity across all of them. When it comes to *nutrition*, the NSEDP understandably does not include specific objectives, as the NNP was approved only after its adoption. The UNDAF includes nutrition services in its output 2.2.1, but the associated performance indicators focus more on health service provision. In future, it should be relatively easy to align performance indicators in this sector with internationally accepted indicators, such as stunting (height for age), wasting (weight for height) and underweight (weight for age). For *food security and malnutrition*, MDG1 on poverty and hunger includes two targets: Target 1.8 Prevalence of underweight children under-five years of age; and Target 1.9 Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption. In Laos, it also includes stunting as an indicator.

100. The indicators in the UNDAF and WFP operations are more complex and nuanced as they try to capture the results that the various programmes aim to achieve. There is far less coherence between the stated objectives, targets and indicators in the area of food security or livelihood rehabilitation as compared to the education sector (where the indicators are well aligned and the WFP operation updated its logic framework). In addition, the WFP operations suffer from a lack of a unified logic framework (for the portfolio as a whole) and/or a shortage of indicators that are actually relevant to outcomes or impacts instead of outputs. In part these differences can be explained by the timelines of the project document for the WFP development project, which predates the UNDAF, but not for the PRRO which was approved after the UNDAF. A reconciliation of the results frameworks in Laos would be an important step in the direction of creating a harmonised monitoring framework.

101. In addition, the Country Office will be reconciling the indicators with WFP's corporate results framework, which has been done for school feeding (albeit that these may need to be updated once the school feeding policy is adopted). Paragraphs 57-61 above discussed how the programme activities relate to corporate strategic objectives. As could be seen from that analysis, FFW activities could fall under a number of strategic objectives and their sub-goals, thus choices have to be made about their objectives and which indicators to monitor. In addition, monitoring of the associated indicators, such as household or community asset scores, coping strategy indices, or the household food consumption scores⁶⁰ will have to include a system that captures other influences on these scores and indices. Otherwise, the role and significance of WFP assistance to changes observed in them could not be established. All of these indicators are time consuming and costly to collect, which needs to be considered given the limited resources of the Country Office.

⁵⁹ The NSEDP runs into over 200 pages and spells out many objectives. Only few were copied into the annex and used for the analysis, as a comprehensive analysis of all Government priorities would not be appropriate for this evaluation.

⁶⁰ The household food consumption score is based on the concept of dietary diversity. Data is collected through household interviews, requiring recall of, for instance, the frequency of consumption of food items common in habitual diets during the past month. Data quality depends on recall, which is challenging, and the usefulness of data depends on the range of options available and its match with typical diets. The information tends not to be quantified (the amount of food intake), which limits the extent to which the actual dietary gap can be established. Being a household indicator, intra-household variations cannot be captured.

102. For the purpose of this evaluation, the evaluators used the standard education indicators, as they are consistent across international, national and WFP systems, and developed a simple logic model for the FFR and FFW programme activities, as show in Table 8 below. No nutritional indicators were collected or analysed, given the limited nutritional dimension of the portfolio and the absence of nutritional data for school age children. The details on the findings are included in the relevant sections below.

Table 8: Simplified Logic Model for FFR and FFW

	Outcome (Effectiveness)	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FFR ▪ FFW with relief objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduce negative coping strategies ▪ Meet short-term food needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Faster recovery of productive capacity and food security ▪ Reduced distress to families and communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FFW with asset creation objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Productive or economic effects of assets, such as changes in travel/transport time and cost as a result of roads, changes in production of rice or fish as a result of paddy extension or construction of fishponds, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Changes in household wellbeing, including changes in food consumption (nutrition status), both from consumption of additional/new produce and/or income from increased sales, and changes in ability to cope with shocks through a diversified asset base

Source: Evaluation Team.

Results: Attaining Objectives – Effectiveness

103. **Addressing Short-term Hunger.** As indicated in paragraph 93 above, it is not possible to determine systematically whether FFR arrived with delays, although generally the response time seemed to have been timely. However, this observation was contrasted by perceptions of some stakeholders in Vientiane and elsewhere, and community members. For instance, the evaluation observed that relief was carried out either by the Lao Red Cross or directly by MLSW. In the case of the MLSW villagers in both LuangNamtha and Attapeu related that the assistance provided was rapid, usually within two days of the disaster, but that (1) the quantities of food provided were very small, and (2) often only commodities were given, for example, bed nets, spoons, dishes, or even corrugated roofing (but only three sheets per family, which is too little to be useful). With the Lao Red Cross, which was WFP’s major partner in responding to the August 2008 floods, greater quantities of food were provided but arrived very late; monitoring data summarised in paragraph 93 above indicated that the response time was 1-4 months. Similar observations were made for the distributions under the FFW programmes (DEV project and PRRO). Therefore, it is difficult to say whether FFR was effective in meeting short-term hunger needs, while FFW generally seemed to arrive too late to meet short-term hunger needs. These activities did provide a valuable and much appreciated resource transfer. School feeding addresses short-term hunger in the class room.

104. **Nutritional Outcomes.** WFP is recognised for its contribution to awareness raising and policy dialogue that led to the preparation and adoption of the NNP. This advocacy work is now taken further by WFP’s contribution to the REACH initiative that will help bring about a coordinated institutional response to nutrition issues. The *Feeding the Future* pilot programme is too new and too limited to have had an impact on eating habits or nutritional status,, but the uptake these materials by NGOs is expected to have a multiplier effect. Anthropometric data for school-age children would be needed to determine whether school feeding has had nutritional outcomes, but such data does not exist.

105. **Educational Outcomes.** Anecdotal evidence indicates that school feeding has successfully enabled school children from food insecure communities in northern Laos, to access primary education. It is well appreciated by families, schools and communities and has helped in keeping children, particularly girls, to stay in school, and progress in the primary education. In ethnic communities, it has encouraged parents to understand the importance of education for their children, especially for girls. Parents are motivated to send their children to school instead of keeping them at home to work or care for their siblings. These observations were borne out by the evaluation's field work. The majority of villages visited viewed school feeding as a good motivation in promoting school attendance. Parents and teachers alike also believe school feeding helps their children perform better in school; in one case (Ban Nam Mang, KhmouNyouan) parents said school feeding helped their children learn Lao faster. Statistics showed positive performance of key education indicators in the schools in the Northern provinces. Net enrolment rates for primary schools increased significantly in all three targeted provinces within one year of the project implementation: by 11.2 percent in Oudomxay, 9.1 percent in Luang Namtha and 9.5 percent in Phongsaly. The average national average increase was 3.1 percent. Table 9 below shows the recent performance indicators.

Table 9: Education Performance Data (in percent)

	2005-2006	2006-2007		2007-2008	
	All Schools	All Schools	ABEL Schools	All Schools	ABEL Schools
Luang Namtha					
Enrolment Rate Total	77.82	87.70	94.87		
Enrolment Rate Girls	74.82	79.26	92.47		
Repetition Rate Total	22.05	20.42	13.01		
Repetition Rate Girls	21.77	19.86	13.68		
Drop-out Rate Total	13.45	7.70	3.90		
Drop-out Rate Girls	15.31	8.14	3.85		
Oudomxay					
Enrolment Rate Total	85.65	88.60	95.62	92.20	97.15
Enrolment Rate Girls	87.94	87.50	95.04	91.20	95.40
Repetition Rate Total	17.12	18.70	15.63	14.50	13.69
Repetition Rate Girls	17.81	19.40	14.51	14.90	12.94
Drop-out Rate Total	4.93	10.90	4.41	14.50	5.60
Drop-out Rate Girls	6.37	12.10	4.61	15.20	4.17
Phongsaly					
Enrolment Rate Total	76.05	79.60	90.03	86.60	92.52
Enrolment Rate Girls	71.05	73.70	89.46	81.90	90.83
Repetition Rate Total	12.31	21.70	21.70	20.80	19.47
Repetition Rate Girls	0.38	11.30	18.68	20.60	17.01
Drop-out Rate Total	10.83	10.60	3.46	10.05	2.86
Drop-out Rate Girls	10.61	10.02	3.48	10.00	2.41

Source: Access to Basic Education for Laos Project. June 2009.

106. The positive education outcomes can be explained by a combination of investments, including the basic education for girls' project of the ADB,⁶¹ the 'school of quality' inputs of UNICEF and the access to basic education project of WFP and UNICEF. The combination of these projects enabled provision of infrastructure, learning and food assistance, all of which are essential in ensuring improved performance of key education indicators.

⁶¹ The project completion report for the project indicated "The Project Survey 2006 conducted in six project districts) showed that net enrolment for girls in project schools increased significantly from 66 percent in 2002 to 88 percent in 2006; net enrolment rates for boys rose from 67 percent to 87 percent in the same period. The survival ratio for grade 5 girls was 12 percent in 2003, but this had increased to 54 percent in 2006, while for boys the rate increased from 16 percent to 55 percent in the same period."

107. These positive findings are contrasted by examples where the motivational aspect of school feeding is closely linked to the attitudes and commitment of the teachers, and to the ethnicity of the village, as indicated in paragraph 87. For example, in Ban KapNeua, many Lahu children, do not attend school because of a number of problems: (a) the absence of the teacher so that both classes and school feeding did not take place; (b) language problems as the assigned teacher did not speak the local language; and (c) the village being poor necessitated that children accompanied their parents to stay in the upland fields for many months out of the year, so it is difficult or impossible for these children to attend school. Data for this village showed that the children did not attend school before or after school feeding was introduced. A Brao village in Attapeu had similar problems, in this case with teachers being outright derisive about the Brao students, who faced language problems and equally stayed with their parents near fields rather than in the village. As a result, out of a registered enrolment of 75, only 8 or 9 students attend school regularly, in spite of school feeding. So here again, ethnicity, quality of teachers, and livelihood necessities reduce the effectiveness of school feeding as an incentive. It would seem that for villages such as these, a more flexible non-formal or adult education approach may be more useful and could possibly be supported with “food for education” to complement Government plans for formal education.

108. **Preventing Negative Coping Strategies.** Delays in delivering FFR and FFW rice reportedly had negative effects on coping mechanisms in that households borrowed rice to bridge the time until distributions arrive. The evaluation team was told about lending rates on rice as high as 100 percent, which meant that once the FFR rice was distributed it was passed on to the “rice lender” without being of benefit to the food insecure household. However, the field team did not encounter examples of borrowing rice at usurious rates either in Attapeu or LouangNamtha. Rice for consumption in the interim is simply borrowed from relatives or friends, with no interest. When the FFW rice arrived it is consumed first and the newly harvested rice used to repay debts.⁶² No other negative coping strategies were noted during the field visits.

109. **Productive Assets and Their Economic Benefits.** The absence of consistent monitoring data on the creation and use of productive assets does not allow for an evaluation of these benefits. However, the evaluation collected first hand information through field visits. These samples are few and not representative, but confirm earlier indication of the importance of ownership, the technical feasibility and the need for expert advice and training. The observations showed variable results:

- **Rice Paddies.** The best-received and most valuable assets generated under the FFW programme in the south are new paddies. From a villager perspective these are permanent assets. The activity itself specifically addresses an age-old livelihood problem of what to eat while investing time in new paddy construction which is ordinarily a major constraint on adaptation following resettlement (all of the villages visited in this district have been relocated by the government). By contrast, in the north, the Hmong village of KokMouang (Meuang Sing) had undertaken a similar FFW project. Villagers could not remember details well other than that the programme targeted families who had land with paddy potential. In the end, the FFW scheme was not altogether successful: villagers would have liked to receive more technical assistance as to the feasibility of the potential paddy creation

⁶² When new paddies are formed they do not hold water, and so dry rice is always planted for the first 2-3 years until decaying vegetation plugs the holes in the porous soil. Yields from this are high and more than adequate to repay the debt.

because of the lack of water. The paddies were not functional and therefore not a productive asset.

- **Roads.** Villagers who had originally resisted the construction of a road, as it was perceived to be government-driven (see paragraph 85 above) now say that the road helps them travel to collect non-timber forest products for sale, and that it allows tourists to come to stay at the village (an initiative organized a GTZ project), both of which generate economic benefits. The road has made a big difference in the lives of the villagers, mainly by enabling the GTZ project to take place. By contrast, in Sanxay district, Attapeu, villagers generally do not think of the road construction project of the district which took place in 2003 as an asset. Some families from Ban Somboun use the road to collect non-timber forest products, but no one from Ban PhiaKeo uses it. This and the villages of Mixay and Vangxay worked on the road, but do not see it as an asset due to low ownership, as they do not consider it “theirs” and would have preferred FFW for paddy extension. To make matters worse, the road is now used by loggers who cut their forests and make them poorer.
- **Fishponds.** Fishponds were problematic: as a community asset large ponds were not used after the first year due both to lack of community based management and the problem of aestivating native fish species appearing and devouring the domestic stock. As individual assets, they were sometimes successful, and sometimes not, depending on whether soils and water sources were adequate, and knowledge of how fish should be raised in ponds was available. For example, in Ban Somboun, individual fishponds, all the same size, 10m X 10m x 2 meters deep were dug by 12 families. But in the end only 5 were functional. One man, Mr. Bounke, stocked his pond with four species of fish from fingerlings bought in the district, 1,000 fish in all, and so far in 2009 has realized 450,000 kip from the sale of his fish. In most cases, however, villagers expressed a lack of knowledge of how to select sites for ponds that will work and how to undertake fish farming and would like to receive expert advice on these matters if the activity is to be continued.

110. **Market Effects.** An “unintended” outcome, in the sense that it was not stated as a deliberate objective was the effect of local purchase on local markets. The quantities purchased were not large enough to have had a strong impact on local markets, but the quality standards and procedures for checking on quality are reportedly having a positive effect on local producers.

Results: Impact

111. **Reduced Distress.** Disasters that cause stress, insofar as the villages surveyed are concerned, were limited to flooding and drought (there was a single instance of a major fire, but no relief was provided). In the case of flooding, not all households in any given village were affected, so that village coping strategies allowed such disasters to pass relatively stress free. Drought has a gradual onset period, allowing time for mitigating strategies to be put into place well in advance such that levels of stress are relatively low or nonexistent.

112. **Faster Recovery.** Likewise, the disasters reported were not of as serious enough nature as to be debilitating to villages as a whole, so initial recovery was often well under way by the time FFR or FFW distributions took place, albeit that the latter contributed to the recovery of livelihoods.

113. **Changes in Wellbeing.** In most villagers where paddy construction was undertaken in FFW programs, there is no question, livelihoods definitely changed for the better. The only exception was the Hmong village of KokMouang in Meuang Sing, and this was because

technical expertise was not brought into the effort. In other FFW endeavours the issue of improvements in well-being is less clear and sustainability more uncertain. This is true, for example, in the case of fishponds. But with respect to school feeding, this is a generally accepted improvement in well-being, though not something that is directly measurable in economic terms. But the fact that children are eating the food supplements, that parents and teachers are keen on it, and that the nutritional value is high, indicates an improvement.

114. **Educational Impacts.** Research that may have been conducted on this issue is not yet available, so precise measurements showing before-and-after achievements in school are not available. However, teachers and parents interviewed unanimously reported that students attention span, along with academic performance, have improved since school feeding was initiated, and that attendance is better. So even allowing for a certain amount of exaggeration, it would appear that there are real differences being observed.

Results: Sustainability and Connectedness

115. The sustainability of school feeding is more likely now that it has been embedded in the ESDF. However, it will depend on the financial viability and affordability, to be determined in the expenditure framework for the education that will determine the extent to which the programme could be sustained in the medium term. From the perspective of the Government, it was essential that the programme did not depend on foreign imports that could not be afforded, but if continued should be based on local production. From a management perspective, the capacities to manage and implement school feeding are limited and would have to be strengthened considerably, along with capacity needs in other areas. From the perspective of the villagers, it was felt that without continued modification of the commodity and varying of the taste of the food provided that it would eventually wane and be discontinued.

116. The sustainability of assets created depends on their ownership, but also on natural events that may affect the technical sustainability of the assets created. For instance, roads built only with FFW are not all-weather roads; they are not usable in the wet season and get washed out in heavy rainfalls. The sustainability of paddy fields is more likely as these assets have direct economic benefits to the families, whereas the sustainability of fish ponds is questionable.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

117. In presenting its findings, the evaluation reverts to the three main questions it posed, which provide the structure for the overall assessment. It then draws up those lessons that form key issues for the future before coming to its recommendations.

3.1. Overall Assessment

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

118. WFP's role and operations are well aligned with government policies. They share common objectives and while government policies do not foresee the provision of food aid, they do not prevent food assistance from playing a role within the development process. The operations are well aligned also with WFP's new strategic plan.

119. Ownership of the programmes is best at the higher levels of government, in particular for school feeding, which has been integrated into the sector development framework and for FFR, which is implemented through the appropriate government structures. However, FFW being implemented through MLSW lacks the ownership and technical support of relevant line ministries, such as agriculture and transport, to have adequate ownership. At village level,

ownership was dependent on the degree of participation and self-determination that communities could exercise in the choice and implementation of programme activities (especially for FFW) and on the degree to which other *sociocultural* factors were in place to ensure schools and thereby school feeding was accepted and locally owned. The difficulties observed with ensuring participation and empowerment are not unique to WFP's operations, but were also observed by the World Bank on a number of community-driven development projects.

120. WFP participates in the government-led processes for coordination and shares common objectives with other partners. In reality, however, challenges continue to exist to translate these coordination efforts into coordinated programmes. School feeding did well by taking place together with UNICEF's efforts for schools of quality, and coincided with the ADB's investment in basic education in the same provinces. FFW is, in part, implemented in partnership with NGOs and IFAD, who become implementing agencies for these schemes, but are not well linked into other development projects for rural development or transport.

121. The high degree of alignment does not imply a strategic positioning to ensure WFP's limited resources are making the best possible – most efficient and effective – contribution.

Making Strategic Choices

122. The Country Office undertook a surprising amount of analytical work, which was a clear indication of a desire to learn about the operational context, to explore possibilities to implement new initiatives, and inform decision-makers, both within WFP and among partners. The CFSVA is the strongest example where such analytical work, combined with effective advocacy, contributed to the awareness of stakeholders in government and partners of nutritional issues. A similar approach – of effective advocacy – was taken in the case of the rodent infestation and its implications for food security. However, the analytical work showed limited use for resolving systemic problems or for strategic decision-making. For instance, the adjustment of programme activities to the findings of the CFSVA will be forthcoming in the next programme design.

123. This situation is partly due to the fact that the Country Office was not required to design a programme with a country strategy in mind. A country strategy will be developed only in the near future, and even then it remains to be seen whether it will establish a WFP goal for providing assistance to Laos rather than entertaining operations that fit within the strategic objectives. The former requires making choices and setting priorities, the latter is permissive of a range of programme activities. At present, operations are planned in a rather pragmatic “bottom up” approach, considering what programme activities can do and whether they will be funded. It corresponds to the operating model, resulting from funding arrangements, that separates operations even when they implement similar programme activities. This approach, however, leaves open the question whether the programme activities are strategically placed to make the best possible contribution to the development process of Laos. It also misses a focus on results and synergies between WFP operations and with operations of other partners.

Portfolio Performance and Results

124. Between 2005 and 2007 the Laos portfolio between 300,000 and 500,000 people per year of which 50 percent reportedly were women, reaching 75-100 percent of its intended beneficiaries. There was no strong discernable difference in the performance of programme categories, although among the programme activities on average school feeding seemed to be performing somewhat better while FFW showed highly variable performance and outcomes.

125. The WFP programme activities – FFR, FFW and school feeding – are in principle relevant and appropriate to the needs of people. The assistance was highly appreciated by all beneficiaries that the evaluation team spoke to, and WFP is recognised as a strong partner by the Government and the international community. The relevance of programme activities was affected by (a) delays which meant assistance was not received on time; (b) participation in selection and implementation of programmes, which determined their relevance and appropriateness. Positive and negative examples of participation and ownership were found in the WFP portfolio; and (c) the integration of programme activities into relevant programmes of other partners to provide technical support and/or complimentary activities. Positive examples centred on school feeding, which increased in relevance when it complemented other investments in the education sector, or FFW schemes that complemented the work of NGOs. Less successful examples derived from the lack of integration of some of the FFW schemes into government or partner programmes to ensure necessary synergies. From a nutrition point of view, school feeding comes closest to being relevant to the nutrition needs.

126. Collectively, it is difficult to establish the relevance and appropriateness of the programme activities without having a goal at the country level. If, for instance, WFP's aimed to reduce malnutrition, the observations made in the CSFVA would call for a nutrition programme that targets infants and pregnant women and lactating mothers (a group that is currently not targeted) and greater diversity in diets. A goal of reducing food insecurity would need to take stock of the root causes of food insecurity and determine the most relevant response strategy them.

127. The efficiency of the portfolio was hampered by low population densities and relatively high transport cost in relation to the quantities of food distributed, procedures of checks-and-balances that aim to ensure proper use of resources but are time consuming, and costs per unit delivered that are high in comparison with other providers (for FFW-roads) and with WFP averages (for school feeding).

128. The effectiveness and impact of the programme activities was affected by difficulties in carrying programme activities out in time. Meeting objectives such as reducing short-term hunger and preventing negative coping strategies were not fully attained because of alternative coping strategies of communities that made them less dependent on food deliveries and helped bridge periods until deliveries arrived. Since shocks that households experienced were not depleting all of their food supplies or resources available to them and/or communities, alternative coping strategies buffered the level of distress and providing opportunities for early recovery from own resources. The effectiveness in creating productive assets and their economic spin-offs showed mixed results with the evaluation finding examples of success and failures. These pointed to the importance of participation and local ownership, the technical viability of FFW schemes, and the need for technical advice to ensure assets are operated and generate returns. *Sociocultural* assets were equally valued by many traditional communities. School feeding was recognised as making a contribution to educational outcomes, in combination with other factors within communities and investments by other agencies and potentially has had a nutritional outcome.

129. The sustainability of assets created through FFW-schemes depends highly on local ownership and capacity to main the assets. In the case of FFW-roads, they are known to have difficulties withstanding weather conditions, given their lack of hard surfacing, and deteriorate even faster in case heavy trucks misuse the roads. The sustainability of school feeding is supported through the inclusion of school feeding in the Government's policy framework (ESDF), but will require commensurate capacity development and financial

allocations. Government expressed concern over the programme being dependent on imported foods, which would hinder its capacity for greater programme implementation. This concern is being considered by the Country Office. The forthcoming medium-term expenditure framework will be indicative whether the programme is financially sustainable or the extent to which it will require external financial support.

3.2. Key Lessons for the Future

130. The portfolio evaluation in Laos demonstrates that the choices about the portfolio are driven by very pragmatic considerations – how things work and what can be funded – but less so by the results that it aims to attain in Laos. Programme activities are explained within the framework of WFP’s Strategic Plan and match corporate strategic objectives, and only then are linked to the objectives of the Government, partners and the people these programmes are to serve. The lesson to be drawn from this approach is that using a broad framework to justify activities reduces their focus on specific achievements they aim to have and dilutes certain decisions. For instance, when FFW is implemented to create assets it is essential to partner with the relevant line ministry rather than with MLSW, whereas the latter becomes a central partner if FFW were to serve as a public works/employment programme (the equivalent of a social safety net measure).

131. A second lesson the evaluation derived from its observations of the Laos portfolio is that of a fragmentation of programme activities and the implementation structure. In part this is due to the lack of a unifying goal for WFP’s assistance to Laos, in part to the funding model and its operational implications. A tonnage-driven model provides incentives to look for tonnage-based solutions, as other solutions – even if equally or more relevant – does not generate resources that are essential to implement them. While fully in line with WFP’s rules and regulations, the operational realities meant that, for instance, monitoring systems were developed and running poorly and in parallel, staffing levels were very uneven and responsibilities out of sub-office adjusted to fit funding structures rather than operational needs, and very little learning took place across operations.

132. The evaluation differentiated very little between FFW under the PRRO and FFW under the development project, because the challenges FFW schemes faced in terms of participation, ownership, implementation and results were similar for both. However, a significant difference existed when FFW schemes were implemented in cooperation with NGOs, who provided the technical expertise, non-food items and supervision, and necessary training and technical advice to communities. As shown in the performance and results section of the evaluation, recipients of assistance considered these inputs essential for FFW success. The lesson to be drawn from this experience is the need to partner with relevant providers of technical inputs. While WFP chose this partnering arrangement under the development project, it is not intrinsic to this category and could be employed under the PRRO as well.

133. Another essential success factor in Laos is recognising the importance of ethnicity in the design of programme activities. While there are strong efforts to radically transform rural communities, they have also adapted and adopted coping strategies to deal with system change in ways they find appropriate. Understanding ethnicity, preferences and priorities of different ethnic groups while supporting them in an ever changing environment is essential to have a real impact on people’s lives. This is true for FFW-schemes, but also for educational interventions (delivered through formal or informal channels), and for nutritional activities. For the latter, WFP has recognised the need for ethnic adaptation in its *Feeding the Future*

programme, the effectiveness of which will need to be established once it has gone beyond the test phase.

3.3. Recommendations

134. **Recommendation 1: the Country Office should continue to undertake analytical work that informs the choice of “hunger solutions” which are most relevant to Laos.** Such analytical work would build on the work already undertaken by the Country Office. It would entail researching and integrating an understanding of the underlying causes of food insecurity and of the current transformation of rural Laos (see paragraph 3 and 4 above) with the findings for the CFSVA. This recommendation requires providing the Country Office with additional resources to complement the work it already has done in compiling and analysing existing research. This information should form, together with this evaluation and WFP’s pragmatic “bottom up” planning approach the basis for developing the country strategy. A certain level of analytical capacity should be retained in the Country Office, given the speed at which rural Laos seems to be transforming and the reputation WFP acquired with the publication of the CFSVA.

135. **Recommendation 2: in developing its country strategy, the Country Office should define clearly a unifying goal for its portfolio in Laos.** The goal should be based on priority needs and “hunger solutions” that make a strategic contribution to government and partner plans, and be rooted in WFP’s strategic directions and mandate. For instance, the analysis undertaken following Recommendation 1 may conclude that reducing chronic malnutrition should be the overriding goal for WFP’s portfolio in Laos, which would have different implications for the programme than if the conclusion was that a formal social safety net is needed. The former would result in a programme primarily focused on mothers and infants and address their nutritional needs to reduce high stunting rates and break the inter-generational cycle of hunger, involve a strong engagement in the nutrition “sector” and corresponding partnerships. The latter would require that the Government decide on setting up such safety net, then placing WFP programme activities within its context and understanding how food-based programmes complement other safety net measures. The selected goal would be the basis for prioritising programme activities, identifying strategic partnerships, designing corresponding programme activities to attain this goal, and setting up monitoring systems that help WFP manage for results.

136. **Recommendation 3: the Country Office, its partners and other stakeholders should determine ways to improve participation and increase local ownership.** The experience of others (such as the World Bank study, findings of the participatory poverty assessments, and other research on ethnicity and gender) should be taken into account in this process and linkages built to other ongoing initiatives. Improving participation is likely to require political will from the centre and provincial capitals, training for local officials, awareness creation of community members to help them make well informed decisions, and using experienced support teams that ensure improved targeting of needy communities. Ownership, apart from demonstrating good governance and being good practice, is essential for improving WFP portfolio performance and results and can build on WFP’s comparative advantage of having a strong field presence and a network of partnerships. A feedback loop should be created from these participatory approaches into a continued analytical capacity (Recommendation 1) via WFP’s monitoring system (Recommendation 5) to ensure the needs of the people are incorporated into future strategic choices and planning. The participatory approach will require a different way of working than is typically for a food aid operation, and require WFP to find different operating arrangements.

137. **Recommendation 4: at the corporate level, the discussions of WFP's funding model should take into account how WFP's comparative advantage is affected by high-tonnage choices to generate funding.** The main challenge in implementing recommendation 3 lies in current tonnage-based funding arrangements. The model creates a vicious cycle whereby large (high-tonnage) programmes are needed to generate sufficient direct support cost to fund necessary staff. Participatory approaches tend to be more time-consuming, therefore would require higher staffing levels, but do not automatically necessitate or justify high-tonnage programmes which would be needed to generate the necessary overheads.

138. **Recommendation 5: the Country Office, with the support of the Regional Bureau and/or Headquarters, should design a monitoring system that informs decision-making at various levels.** The information needs of decision-makers should be the driving design principle in the design of the monitoring system. Its development should be accompanied with training about how monitoring data is used to support decisions to continue or revise portfolio design and/or implementation depending on the results it is producing. Ideally, WFP monitoring systems would be built to inform continuously about changes in the operating areas so that analytical work (see Recommendation 1) is corroborated with and benefits from WFP's operational experience.

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Annex 2: Operational Goals and Objectives

Category	Number	Main Activity	Longer-term/Higher Goal	Objectives			
Relief							
EMOP	6311	FFR		a) to help prevent serious food shortages for households who have lost the capacity to provide sufficient food for their own consumption due to the floods;	b) to prevent people from depleting their assets or migrating to seek income/food to ensure either their recovery or their family's food security in response to the destruction of their rice fields and food production capabilities;	c) to assist families to recover and restore food security and assist in rehabilitation of land, villages and local infrastructure damaged by flooding through the provision of food for rehabilitation and food for work;	d) to prevent any further set back of the health and nutritional status of the affected population with special attention to woman, children and other groups.
EMOP	10770	FFR		To provide immediate assistance to the people who lost their food stocks in the floods and who are unable to meet their immediate food needs;	to support people who have lost their crops and who are likely to face serious rice shortages soon		
Relief and Recovery							
PRRO	10566	FFW and FFR	to provide relief and recovery assistance to vulnerable food insecure households and improve household food security	providing food assistance during critical times of the year	building up physical and human assets through Food for Work (FFW) and Food for Training (FFT) activities	support HIV/AIDS patients and their families with an incentive to adhere to their anti retroviral treatment (ART)	

Category	Number	Main Activity	Longer-term/Higher Goal	Objectives			
Recovery							
DEV	5874	FFW	The long-term objective of the WFP input is to assist food-insecure villagers to become more self reliant through village based community development. WFP supported activities will be linked directly to supporting the transitional period to achieving food security.	Improve access to food amongst village families;	Decrease dependency on shifting cultivation and increase access to arable land through land clearing, soil conservation (erosion control, terracing, etc.) and small scale irrigation;	Improve links to markets and to services through construction and rehabilitation of rural roads;	Mitigate the effects of natural disasters through construction of small-scale irrigation works, dams and weirs.
PRRO	10319	FFW	The project's goal is to address two of WFP's strategic priorities: to Protect Livelihoods in Crisis Situations and Enhance Resilience to Shocks; and to Help Government Establish and Manage National Food-Assistance Programmes.	Households' longer-term food security is improved by the rehabilitation of productive assets damaged by consecutive floods.	Households' vulnerability to the effects of natural disasters is reduced through the creation of new assets contributing to disaster mitigation.	Vulnerable and chronic food insecure households improve the utilization of their resources for a better access to food.	Local and National disaster response structures are strengthened and better utilized.
DEV	10306	FFW	The long-term objective of the project is to improve the livelihood basis and hence the food security of vulnerable households in transition.	Improved immediate food security of households in selected villages through participation in food-assisted activities.	• Improved longer term food security of households by protecting, expanding and diversifying livelihood bases and food security strategies.	• Diversified range of food-assisted activities to contribute to sustainable, long-term household food security.	• Increased capacity and ownership of village communities and Government institutions in the management and implementation of food-assisted development programmes

Category	Number	Main Activity	Longer-term/Higher Goal	Objectives			
School Feeding							
DEV	10078 and 10078.1	SF	The long-term objective will be to improve access to primary education, especially for girls	more children are enrolled in assisted primary schools;	the gender gap is reduced in assisted primary schools;	children's capacity to concentrate and learn is improved; and	more children are attending school.

Annex 3: Terms of Reference

Excluding Annexes.

1. The purpose of these terms of reference (TOR) is to specify the rationale and objectives of the evaluation, the scope (including the time-frame to be covered and which operations and activities are included and which are not), and evaluation methods. The TOR were prepared by the evaluation manager (Caroline Heider, Director, Office of Evaluation) based on the review of documents, information provided by the Country Office in Lao People's Democratic Republic (referred to as Laos in these TOR), and discussion during a preparatory mission to Laos (12-16 January 2009) and Bangkok (19 January 2009) by the evaluation manager and team leader (Gregory Pearson, Independent Consultant).

2. The TOR will direct the evaluation team in its work during the inception, main, and reporting phases of the evaluation. They are structured along the following lines: Chapter 1 provides background information to understand the context in which WFP operates and to give an overview of the WFP portfolio; Chapter 2 provides the reasons for undertaking the evaluation and who its main users are; Chapter 3 defines the scope of the evaluation; Chapter 4 identifies key issues that the evaluation will address; Chapter 5 spells out the evaluation approach; and Chapter 6 indicates how the evaluation will be organized.

1. Background

3. This section is based on some of the publications listed in Annex 1. A further analysis of these documents, as appropriate for the evaluation, will be done during the evaluation.

1.A. Country Context

4. **Poverty.** Laos is one of the least developed countries in the world. "The economy is largely subsistence based, with 85 percent of Lao PDR's 5.6 million inhabitants living in rural areas, and significant parts of the country inaccessible by road."¹ The population is characterised by a large proportion of ethnically diverse people. Non-farm income generating opportunities are limited in rural areas, increasing rural households' dependence on agriculture.² Recent growth in the



agriculture sector is one of the contributing factors to the reduction of poverty, which dropped from 48 percent in 1990 to 33 percent in 2003.³ While these improvements are reflected in the Human Development Index – Laos moved from being ranked 141st of 173 countries in 1993 to 135th in 2003 – poverty still continues to be twice as high in rural areas in comparison to urban areas.⁴ In more recent years, continued high economic growth rates resulted in a further drop of the poverty incidence to 22v percent in 2008. However, the rural sector has also seen parallel developments, such as opium eradication, village consolidations, and more recently land concessions which all affect the livelihoods of the rural populations.

¹ WFP, Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis, 2006.

² World Bank, Public Expenditure Review, 2007.

³ Asian Development Bank, Country Assistance Program Evaluation, 2006.

⁴ UNDP, *Meeting the Millennium Development Goals in Lao PDR*, downloaded from <http://www.undplao.org/mdgs/index.php> on 4 November 2008.

5. **Food Insecurity.** While Laos is considered “on track” in reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),⁵ there are concerns that the proportion of populations in Asian least developed countries reaching minimum dietary energy levels is stagnating. In Laos it is expected to remain higher than goal of 15.3 percent by 2015.⁶ According to the MDG Progress Report for Laos,⁷ latest available data for the proportion of underweight children under 5 years of age had not changed between the baseline year 1990 and the update in 2000 with 40 percent of children affected. According to the same source, the proportion of the population below the minimum dietary intake dropped slightly from 31 percent in 1990 to 29 percent in 1998 (most recent figures). According to FAO,⁸ Laos is among the countries with 20-34 percent under-nourishment, but trends show that it is slowly progressing towards meeting the World Food Summit targets in reducing the number of undernourished people. The ratio “current to baseline” number of undernourished is 0.9 with the target figure of the World Food Summit being 0.5.

6. WFP estimates food insecurity at 30 percent of the population⁹ and that the proportion of the rural population with poor or critically low food consumption at 2 percent with an additional 11 percent at the borderline, during the harvest period. These percentages are assumed to go up significantly during the peak lean season.¹⁰ Levels of stunting are “at an alarmingly high level”¹¹ with every second rural child under five years of age stunted. Seventy percent of households with poor and borderline food consumption are concentrated in seven provinces: Saravane and Sekong in the Southern Highlands; Oudomxay and Bokeo in the Northern Highlands, and in Luangprabang, Huaphanh and Xiengkhuang. In some provinces (especially in the Vientiane Plain and the Mekong Corridor) a smaller proportion of households are poor or have borderline food consumption, however these provinces have larger populations, so that in absolute numbers the number of people affected might well be larger.¹²

7. **Natural Disasters.** Over the last 20 years, Laos has been periodically affected by floods, storms and droughts. The most severe events are listed in Table 1 below. The most recent floods in August 2008 were estimated to have affected a total of 200,000 people (48,925 households) in 865 villages in Luangnamtha, Bokeo, Luangprabang, Xayabury, Vientiane Province and Capital, Borikhamxay, Khammuane, Savannakhet¹³ some of which have also shown the highest concentration of food insecure. Food security, already compromised by high food prices is expected to further be affected by the loss of livelihood assets due to the August floods. In addition to these major natural disasters, the country faces frequent occurrences of floods, droughts, forest fires and landslides on a smaller scale.

⁵ IMF, *Lao People’s Democratic Republic: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper—Annual Progress Report*, 2008.

⁶ UNDP, *Voices of the Least Developed Countries of Asia and the Pacific: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals Through a Global Partnership*, 2005.

⁷ Government of Lao PDR and the UN, *Millennium Development Goals Progress Report*, 2004.

⁸ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*, 2006.

⁹ WFP, *Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis*, 2006.

¹⁰ WFP, *Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis*, 2006.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Government of Lao PDR and Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Rapid Assessment of Impact and Needs arising from the August 2008 Floods*, September 2008.

Table 1: Types of Activities by Operation 2000-2008

Type of Disaster	Year	Total Number of People Affected
Flood	2001	453,000
Flood	2000	450,000
Flood	1996	420,000
Flood	1995	391,400
Storm	1995	1,000,000
Storm	1992	268,877
Flood	1991	332,000
Drought	1988	730,000
Total		4,045,277

Source: EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database www.em-dat.net - Université Catholique de Louvain - Brussels - Belgium

8. **Government Strategy.** The Government adopted its National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) in 2003. It combines strategies for growth and poverty reduction with the aim to exit the group of least developed countries by 2020. Food insecurity is embedded within the context of poverty as is evident from the Government's definition of poverty: "Poverty is the lack of ability to fulfil basic human needs such as not having enough food, lacking adequate clothing, not having permanent housing and lacking access to health, education and transportation services" (Instruction No 010/PM, June 25, 2001). Government programmes are foreseen to develop the productive and social sectors (agriculture, education, and health) and include initiatives for rural development that focus, among others, to achieve a change in shifting agriculture practices. The NGPES also emphasises that food security has always been high on the Government's list of priorities. "The Government of the Lao PDR aims, through the district approach to poverty eradication, to ensure that all possible measures are undertaken to address food insecurity at the household, village and district level."¹⁴ In December 2008 the Government adopted a nutrition policy which aims to address malnutrition issues, and will be accompanied by a nutrition strategy and action plan to be developed in 2009.

9. **International Assistance.** According to the International Monetary Fund (see footnote 21) Laos is heavily dependent on official development assistance (ODA), which accounts for 85 percent of public investments and 38 percent of total public expenditure. Total commitments (grants and loans) for the fiscal year 2005-2006 amounted to US\$420 million, of which US\$350 million were disbursed. Figures from the OECD/DAC¹⁵ (see Annex 2) indicate that in 2006 Laos received US\$364 million in ODA. The three main providers of funding were the ADB from their soft-loan window Asian Development Fund, Government of Japan and the World Bank at IDA conditions. In comparison, net private flows for the same year were US\$1,032 million. The largest proportion of ODA was spent on economic infrastructure and programme assistance. Humanitarian assistance is a small proportion of the total. Between 2000 and 2008, Laos received US\$20.6 million in humanitarian assistance from 16 donors with Germany, the European Commission (ECHO) providing more than US\$7 million each, followed by Canada (US\$2 million) and the Netherlands (US\$1 million) (see Annex 3 for details).¹⁶ Laos' key partners in food security were (in 2006, latest information) European Commission, FAO, Japan, Luxemburg, New Zealand, Norway, UNODC and WFP.¹⁷ Their roles and potential interest in the evaluation are discussed in section 1.C. Stakeholders.

1.B. The WFP Portfolio in Laos

10. **Overview.** WFP operations started in Laos in 1975. Since then, a total of 44 operations have taken place for a total value of (in current prices) US\$ 104 million (excluding the value of 11 bilateral projects for which there is no information on the dollar value), of which US\$ 75 million were in food

¹⁴ Government of Lao PDR, National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy, 2003.

¹⁵ OECD/DAC, *Foreign Aid to Lao PDR*, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/62/60/1878247.gif>

¹⁶ OCHA, *Total Humanitarian Assistance per Donor*, <http://www.reliefweb.int/fts> (table ref R24)

¹⁷ UN Resident Coordinator, *Donor and Development Partner Profiles*, 2006.

cost (68 percent of total). The majority of these operations were responses to emergency situations or follow-up thereto, which explains the relative infrequent approval of projects as can be seen from the diagram in Annex 4, which also provides a list of all operations.

11. In 2000 WFP opened an office in Vientiane and expanded its portfolio. Since then, 8 projects have been approved with a total tonnage of 84,175 metric tons for school feeding, food-for-work (FFW), and general food distribution (GFD) or food-for-relief (see Table 2). Table 2 does not show smaller activities, such as food-for-training or providing food assistance to people living with HIV and AIDS, because the amounts of food used for these activities is very small.

Table 2: Types of Activities by Operation 2000-2008
(metric tons of food, as per design documents)

Operation Category and Number		Approval	Completion	Total	Food-for-Work	Food-for-Relief	School Feeding
DEV	5874.0	2001	2003	6,634	6,634		
EMOP	6311.0	2000	2003	6,960		6,960	
DEV	10078.0	2002	2005	6,850			6,850
DEV	10306.0	2004	2009	11,855	11,855		
PRRO	10319.0	2004	2007	10,000	10,000		
DEV	10078.1	2005	2010	26,854			26,854
PRRO	10566.0	2007	2009	14,441	7,605	6,836	
EMOP	10770.0	2008	2008	581		581	
Total				84,175	29,460	21,011	33,704

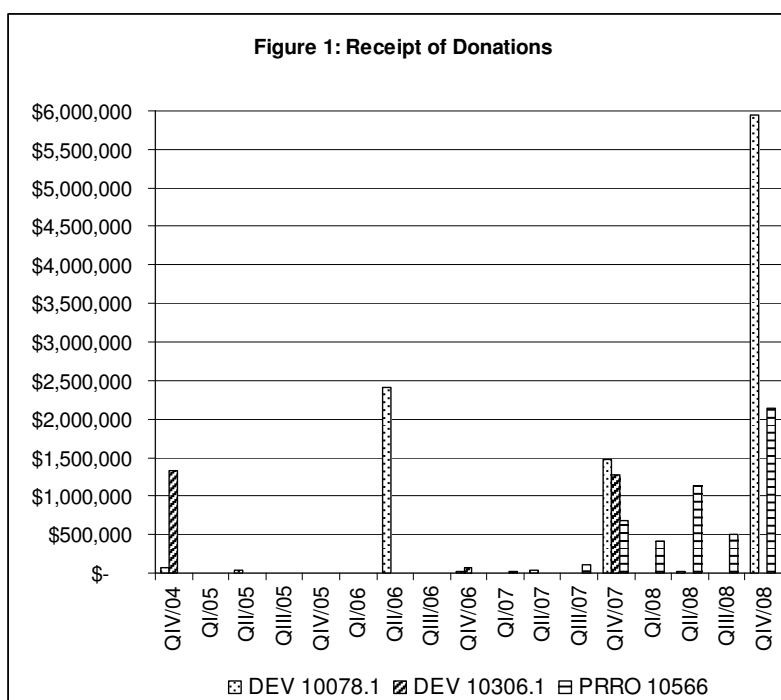
Source: WFP Country Office Laos and project documentation.

EMOP: emergency operation; DEV: development project; PRRO: protracted relief and recovery operation.

12. **Objectives.** The operations approved during this time period state objectives that can be grouped as follows: (i) food-for-relief: to address emergency needs in times of mostly natural disasters and livelihood transitions. These operations have the objective to provide immediate assistance to those facing severe food shortages to secure sufficient food for consumption and prevent people from negative coping strategies such as depleting livelihood assets; (ii) food-for-work: to improve the livelihood or reduce long-term food insecurity of food-insecure people, households, and communities. These operations have dual objectives of meeting immediate food needs while at the same time aiming to help in the recovery of livelihood assets and to achieve longer-term objectives such as strengthening livelihood assets and improved use of existing resources; and (iii) school feeding: to contribute to the improvement of school enrolment and attendance rates in primary schools. However, there is no collective logical framework or common goal at the country level that the operations pursue. Annex 5 provides goals and objectives for each operation.

13. **Resource Flows.** The receipt of donations for the currently ongoing three operations is illustrated in Figure 1. It shows (a) the rather infrequent flow of funds, with implications for cash-flow and stock management, and (b) an increase in donations over the last year in particular for the PRRO 10566.0.

14. **Geographical Focus.** The operations taking place between 2000 and 2008 have a broad geographic coverage as illustrated in Table 3: most of them cover five provinces or more. The operations have different timelines, so that some operations are successive, while others operate in parallel. Some concentration of activities can be seen around Luangnamtha in the north and the central and southern provinces of Khammuane, Savannakhet, Saravane and Attapeu. Generally, operations did not target entire provinces, but within each province districts were identified based on their food insecurity and other targeting criteria (for instance enrolment rates for school feeding).



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Table 3: Geographic Focus by Operation and Province

	Total Provinces	Phongsaly	Luangnamtha	Bokco	Oudomxay	Sayabouly	Luang Prabang	Houaphanh	Xieng Khuang	Vientiane Province	Vientiane (Capital)	Bolikhamxay	Khammuane	Savannakhet	Saravane	Sekong	Champasak	Attapeu
DEV 5874	6		X						X				X	X		X		X
EMOP 6311	7									X		X	X	X	X		X	X
DEV 10078	3	X	X		X													
DEV 10306	5	X	X	X	X		X											
PRRO 10319	7									X		X	X	X	X		X	X
DEV 10078.1	6	X	X		X										X	X		X
PRRO 10566	11	X					X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
EMOP 10770	10		X	X			X			X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Total		4	5	2	3	0	3	1	2	4	1	3	5	5	5	3	4	5

Source: WFP project documentation, compile by the Office of Evaluation.

15. **Other Activities.** In addition to the traditional portfolio, WFP has undertaken a number of other activities. Most significantly, WFP's Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) provided an analysis of food insecurity in the country that has raised awareness of all

stakeholders – Government and other partners alike – of malnutrition issues in the country and contributed to the articulation of a nutrition policy. To complement the findings of the CFSVA (that give indications on levels of food insecurity at provincial level only) and to facilitate geographical targeting of districts for programming purposes the WFP is conducting an update of the 2005 district level analysis. Based on the most reliable and currently available data, the purpose of the district level analysis is to support geographical targeting of districts within the provinces. In addition, WFP conducted a number of qualitative assessments on transitions in livelihoods to inform programme design (opium assessment and resettlement). The *Feeding the Future* initiative, supported by AusAID, focuses on developing nutrition education materials for ethnic groups. The initiative has piloted the materials, but awaits further funding before rolling out the training in more villages. Under the *Ending Child Hunger* (REACH) initiative, WFP is partially funding a 1-year consultant and providing operational support to map out the various activities undertaken by UN and other agencies in the nutrition sector.

Table 4: Additional Activities

Additional Activities – not tonnage based	Approval	Completion	Value	Source
Access to Basic Education: Feeding the future	2007	2008	\$175,200	AusAID
Joint UN Sustainable Livelihoods Programme	2007	2008	\$118,329	Swedish TF
Vulnerability Assessments			\$41,588	DfID IS
Geo-referenced Database			\$8,788	DfID IS
Price-rise Impact			\$8,400	DfID IS
M&E			\$45,022	DfID IS
Support to REACH	2007	2008	42,751	DfID IS
Nutrition	2008	2009	39,500	DfID IS
Total			\$479,578	

Source: WFP Country Office Laos.

AusAID: Australia's Aid Programme; DfID: Department for International Development of the United Kingdom; IS: Institutional Strengthening grant programme; TF: trust fund.

16. **Commodities Procured in Laos.** Over the last three years, local procurement has increased from almost nothing to 75 percent of commodities distributed in Laos. Over the same period, almost 95 percent of commodities procured by the Country Office were sourced within the country. The commodities include rice (71 percent of total goods procured), corn-soya-blend (CSB), and salt. Rice purchases are a fraction of total production in Laos.¹⁸ Sugar and oil are procured by the Country Office from a local company in Laos, which imports from Thailand. Local procurement had the advantage that the preferred glutinous rice could be procured, but quality standards (moisture content and infestations) were typical problems especially in the start-up phase. The sourcing of goods are dynamic, for instance, CSB is now procured by the Regional Bureau rather than locally, and starting from 2009 onwards, the school feeding programme will receive in-kind contributions (white rice, canned fish and CSB), which will affect local procurement.

¹⁸ According to the National Statistics Center, Lao PDR, the country produced some 2.2 million tons of season rice in 2006 (see website <http://www.nsc.gov.la/Statistics/Selected%20Statistics/Agriculture/Rice.htm>).

Table 5: Commodities Procured by the Country Office (2006-2008)(in metric tons)

By Province	Rice	CSB	Sugar	Salt	Oil	Total	% of Total
Within Lao PDR							
Vientiane	1,873.0	-	-	105.0	-	1,978.0	19.3%
Luangnamtha	199.0	-	-	83.0	-	282.0	2.8%
Khammouane	1,189.0	-	-	-	-	1,189.0	11.6%
Champasak	3,413.0	-	-	-	-	3,413.0	33.3%
Oudomxay	1,185.0	-	-	-	-	1,185.0	11.6%
Bokeo	-	1,795.0	-	-	-	1,795.0	17.5%
SUB-TOTAL	7,859.0	1,795.0	-	188.0	-	9,842.0	96%
LP of Imported Food							
Thailand	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SUB-TOTAL	-	-	405.0	-	5.0	410.0	4.0%
TOTAL	7,859.0	1,795.0	405.0	188.0	5.0	10,252.0	100%
By Program	Rice	CSB	Sugar	Salt	Oil	Total	% of Total
PRRO	5,377.0	18.0	-	-	3.5	5,398.5	52.7%
FFW	1,280.0	-	-	-	-	1,280.0	12.5%
SF	621.0	1,777.0	435.0	188.0	1.5	3,022.5	29.5%
EMOP	581.0	-	-	-	-	581.0	
TOTAL	7,859.0	1,795.0	435.0	188.0	5.0	10,282.0	100%

Source: WFP Country Office Laos.

17. **Future Directions.** WFP's corporate strategic plans provide directions to operations. In 2008, WFP adopted a new Strategic Plan (2008-2011) and is discussing the introduction of country strategies that ensure the implementation of corporate strategic plans at country level. While the operations under evaluation were designed and approved while other strategic plans were in force, the evaluation will consider only the most recent strategic plan and the alignment of the operations to it (see Section 4 below). The strategic objectives of the strategic plan are reproduced in Table 6 below.

Table 6: WFP Corporate Strategic Plan 2008-2011

STRATEGIC PLAN (2008-2011)
Strategic Objective 1: save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies;
Strategic Objective 2: prevent acute hunger and invest in disaster preparedness and mitigation measures;
Strategic Objective 3: restore and rebuild lives and livelihoods in post-conflict, post-disaster or transition situations;
Strategic Objective 4: reduce chronic hunger and under nutrition;
Strategic Objective 5: strengthen the capacities of countries to reduce hunger, including through hand-over strategies and local purchase.

Source: WFP/EB.A/2008/5-A/Rev.1

18. **Country strategies** are expected to be developed as country strategy documents (CSDs) with the following objectives:¹⁹ "(a) Assess the rationale and define strategies for future WFP activities in the country; (b) Strengthen/redefine the strategic position of the CO in the host country's humanitarian and development process and among UN and other development partners; (c) Guide and support the implementation of the Strategic Plan at the CO-level Support the strengthening of the CO's analytical capacity, political influence and national capacity development efforts with the aim of including hunger, food security and disaster issues in the national humanitarian and development framework and policy discussions; and (d) Outline the CO's orientation, main strategies and focus areas of intervention." For the Country Office in Laos, the primary step will be to prepare a preliminary country strategy, develop a new PRRO through which part of the programme may be adjusted to the new strategic plan, and then draft a full country strategy document in 2010.

¹⁹ Framework for the Strategic Plan implementation at the CO-level through a Country Strategy Document; draft under development. The CSD concept is under discussion and needs to be confirmed.

1.C. Stakeholders in WFP's Programme

19. The *recipients* of food assistance are important to inform the evaluation team about the appropriateness, timeliness, fairness of targeting and dignity of programme choices, and the proportionality of food assistance. Consultations with them will involve focus group discussions, participatory evaluation methods and impact assessments.

20. *Government* stakeholders set the policy agenda in the country (national strategies and development frameworks) and are the main partners in deciding on and implementing operations, in particular school feeding and food-for-work (under the PRRO). Under the Vientiane Declaration, which is modelled on the Paris Declaration, the Government also aims to attain ownership, harmonization and aid effectiveness.

21. *International NGOs* are WFP's partners in programme implementation (food-for-work under the Development Project) while at the same time operating their own programmes of a similar nature. Similarly, *bilateral* and *multilateral* partners are either funding WFP operations or other operations in related fields. For instance, a group of international partners are developing an education sector development framework, which should inform the evaluation about the development context for school feeding, while the evaluation could inform the stakeholders about how school feeding fits into this framework. Similarly, a number of bilateral partners are developing their rural development strategy, in which food-for-work can and does play a role. Again both stakeholder groups – WFP and its partners – can benefit from the insights of the evaluation. All of these stakeholders are important informants for the evaluation to discuss and understand how WFP works in partnership with others and to what extent operations are complementary (positive synergies) or overlapping (unnecessary duplication). Most of these stakeholders will be participating in key informant interviews, although a focus group discussion on specific issues might be useful (and decided during the inception phase or during fieldwork).

22. Within *WFP* a number of stakeholders play an important role in conceiving, implementing and monitoring the operations included in the scope of the evaluation and the portfolio overall. The Country Office plays an obviously prominent role in learning from the experience, using the findings of the evaluation to reposition WFP in the country context, if that is necessary, and adjust programme design and implementation. In addition, colleagues in the Regional Bureau and at Headquarters will also have an interest in learning from this experience.

23. The list of stakeholders (see Annex 6, table A6.1) illustrates that WFP has partnered with government agencies, bilateral and multilateral organizations and non-governmental organization (NGOs). The stakeholder map in Annex 6, table A6.2 illustrates the roles of stakeholders in the programme, their interest in the evaluation and the consequence for the evaluation design. The map has been divided by stakeholders involved in the three main types of operations, namely emergency assistance, livelihood recovery, and school feeding.

2. Reasons for the Evaluation

2.A. Rationale

24. The *rationale* for country portfolio evaluations in general is to provide accountability and learning at the country level, including an understanding of the strategic position within a country, the strategy pursued and the collective results achieved (including synergies, where they exist). The rationale for this country portfolio evaluation in Laos is to provide evaluative evidence on the portfolio as a whole to the Country Office, as it will be designing a number of new operations in 2009-10 and developing its country strategy in 2010.

The intention of this country portfolio evaluation is to generate evidence on past performance and results to help guide choices about strategically positioning WFP for the future.

25. The main *users* of the evaluation will be the WFP Country Office and its partners in Government, the international community, NGOs, private sector, and civil society. The evaluation expects to inform

- WFP about decisions regarding strategically positioning its operations in the future and adjusting programmes to the extent necessary. It thereby will be informing the preparation of the new project phases including the new PRRO and of the country strategy;
- Government about ownership, harmonization and alignment in the spirit of the Vientiane (and Paris) Declaration; and
- International partners (bilaterals and multilaterals) regarding the performance and results of activities including school feeding and food-for-work, which can help determine whether and how these programmes may complement education and rural development strategies; and
- The UN Country Team, if it decides to undertake a mid-term review of the UNDAF.

26. The evaluation will be presented to the Executive Board of WFP to inform Board members about the performance and outcomes of WFP's portfolio in Laos from 2000 to end 2008.

2.B. Objective of the Country Portfolio Evaluation

27. This country portfolio evaluation aims to generate evidence and analyses that will support decision-making about strategically positioning WFP in Laos. The evaluation has the dual objectives of

- *accountability*: assessing and reporting on the performance and results of WFP's portfolio in the context of its mandate and in response to humanitarian and development challenges that the country faces; and
- *learning*: generating evidence-based analysis and insights that will inform the Country Office in making choices about positioning itself vis-à-vis partners, and the design and implementation of future operations.

28. The evaluation will place greater emphasis on learning in that it will be using the latest strategic plan to learn how the portfolio needs to be revised rather than using the past strategic plans to assess the extent to which the portfolio met the objectives set out. Equally, the evaluation will assess to what extent the current portfolio meets the challenges of chronic malnutrition, as documented in the CFSVA, to learn what adjustments are needed, but without holding the programme accountable against these needs as they were understood only after the operations were designed. At the level of operations, promises of expected results – made in design documents – will form the basis of evaluation, in that exercising accountability against what had been planned versus what has been achieved.

29. Secondary, but important, objectives of this country portfolio evaluation are to (i) develop and test the methodology for undertaking this type of evaluations at WFP; (ii) deciding, after testing the evaluation approach in another couple of countries, on the future use of this evaluation approach (country portfolio versus operations, or complementary); and (iii) generate the methodological basis that enables WFP to participate in joint country portfolio evaluations, for instance, of UNDAFs. Without its own capacity to evaluate its portfolio in a country, WFP would not have the technical expertise to participate effectively in such joint evaluations. This secondary objective will be dealt with by the evaluation manager and the team leader, through a debriefing on the methodology, which will not be included in the evaluation report. This country portfolio evaluation is the second in the 2008-2009 Biennium.

3. Scope of the Evaluation

3.A. Scope

30. **Timeframe.** The evaluation will cover the period 2000-2008, because the Country Office was opened in 2000, indicating an increase in operational presence in the country. This timeframe will be used as reference to understand how the portfolio has changed over time, but not necessarily result in an evaluation of all operations that took place during the period (see section 3.C. below).

31. **Analytical Work.** The evaluation will also review the CFSVA to determine whether and how it complements existing analytical work undertaken in Laos by other partners. The evaluation will not assess the methodology used to conduct the CFSVA or its quality as such.

32. **Portfolio.** The evaluation will include the operations listed in Table 2 above, and focus on three groups of activities, namely food-for-relief, food-for-work, and school feeding. The evaluation will also include a focus on nutrition, but in the sense of assessing in how far the current programme (type of activities, target groups and rations) are appropriate to address chronic malnutrition issues. Initiatives such as the *Feeding the Future* or the small HIV&AIDS programme will be included in this review, but will not be evaluated in-depth.

33. **Procurement and Logistics.** WFP's footprint on the domestic market has not yet been significant enough to warrant a detailed analysis of local procurement from Laotian sources; it will therefore not be included in the evaluation. Nor will the logistics arrangement be made a key subject of the evaluation, except for the challenges of reaching remote areas in Laos.

34. **Geographic scope.** Table 3 above indicates that the operational programme is rather dispersed throughout the country. The evaluation at the strategic level will consider the portfolio for the country as a whole, including for instance the implications of the broad geographical coverage for strategic choices and impact. However, for the fieldwork (data collection and site visits) the focus on the evaluation will be narrowed down to two provinces. At the time of preparing the terms of reference, the evaluation manager and evaluation team leader considered Oudoumxay in the north and Attapeu in the south to be the best selection, given that follow-up data collection could be undertaken that would allow an assessment of change over time. These two provinces represent two different geographical areas: one with high degree of ethnic diversity and dynamic developments and the other less so. This choice and the selection of districts and villages within the provinces will be confirmed (or revised) in the inception report.

3.B. Evaluability Assessment²⁰

35. The first round of country portfolio evaluations faces the challenge that none of the countries have country strategies that express WFP's goals or objectives for the country as a whole. Each operation has a logical framework with associated indicators for performance monitoring. However, these logical frameworks do not add up to a goal for operations in the country overall, nor do they include activities that fall outside the operations. The evaluation will use an evaluation model (see paragraph 43) that will not compensate for the lack of a country strategy, but use the operations as designed, aggregate them to develop an understanding of their contribution to the relevant sector (e.g. school feeding to the education sector and food-for-work's contributions to the rural development sector and livelihood/coping strategies/resilience of communities). In the absence of a country strategy, the evaluation will review the implications of not having established a goal at the country level (see key questions, Q2 in paragraph 40).

36. Baseline information exists for food-for-work and for school feeding activities, and some monitoring data has been collected. However, the monitoring data is insufficient to assess outcomes and impacts. Instead, the evaluation will collect this data, following a similar, though more limited approach that had been used during the baseline studies. In addition, the evaluation will draw on self-evaluations and reviews that the Country Office commissioned earlier to support its evaluation evidence. Evaluations undertaken by others, such as the World Bank of the school feeding operation in Phongsaly, will be taken into account by the evaluation team to complement its findings.

²⁰ Evaluability is the extent to which an activity or a program can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion, which depends on the clear understanding of the situation before assistance was provided, a clear statement of intended outcomes and impacts, clearly defined appropriate indicators, and target dates by which expected outcomes and impacts should occur.

3.C. Limitations to the Evaluation

37. The evaluation will not be able to undertake data collection in more than two provinces due to financial and time limitations. Given the diversity of Laos, no two provinces or districts can be representative for Laos and thus the case studies will be indicative rather than fully representative.

38. The evaluation will also not be able to undertake a full follow-up study to the baseline studies undertaken previously, or replicate the same survey that was used by the World Bank in the evaluation of school feeding. Nonetheless, to ensure comparability the field instruments will be designed taking into account those used during the baseline exercises.

39. For the food-for-relief activities, the inception report will present the extent to which case studies can be constructed to evaluate these programmes.

4. Key Issues for the Evaluation

40. The evaluation will focus on the following key issues, which will be further elaborated in the Inception Report, where an evaluation matrix will develop further sub-questions, relevant indicators, and relate the questions to the relevant standard evaluation criteria:

Q1: Strategic Alignment and Positioning. How well has WFP's portfolio been aligned with strategic plans of the Government including for instance the Vientiane Declaration, the education sector policy, the nutrition policy, and rural development plans, the UNCT and other partners (multilateral, bilateral and NGOs) in Laos or regional frameworks? What have been WFP's contributions to developing national or partner strategies, and how has it positioned itself in these contexts? Have there been trade-offs between aligning with national and partner strategies (external coherence) and with WFP strategic plans and corporate policies (internal coherence)?

Q2: Strategic Planning. How has WFP positioned itself strategically in the past, especially considering formal strategy documents and evolving strategies through its portfolio? What have been the main factors (from political factors to realities of financial resource levels and flows, human resource profiles, or logistics) that influenced (strategic) choices and how do these need to be considered and managed in future strategic planning? What have been advantages and disadvantages of not establishing a goal for WFP's operations at the country level in Laos for its strategic positioning and planning and resultant operational choices, implementation and results?

Q3: Performance and Results. What have been the performance and results in terms of standard evaluation criteria (relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability) of the WFP portfolio for food-for-relief, food-for-work and school feeding? How can these results be explained, including factors beyond WFP's control, and what can be learned from and applied to future strategic choices and operations? Has there been synergies between the programme activities and if so what can be learned from this for strategically positioning and using programmes to generate multiplier effects?

5. Evaluation Approach

5.A. Methodology

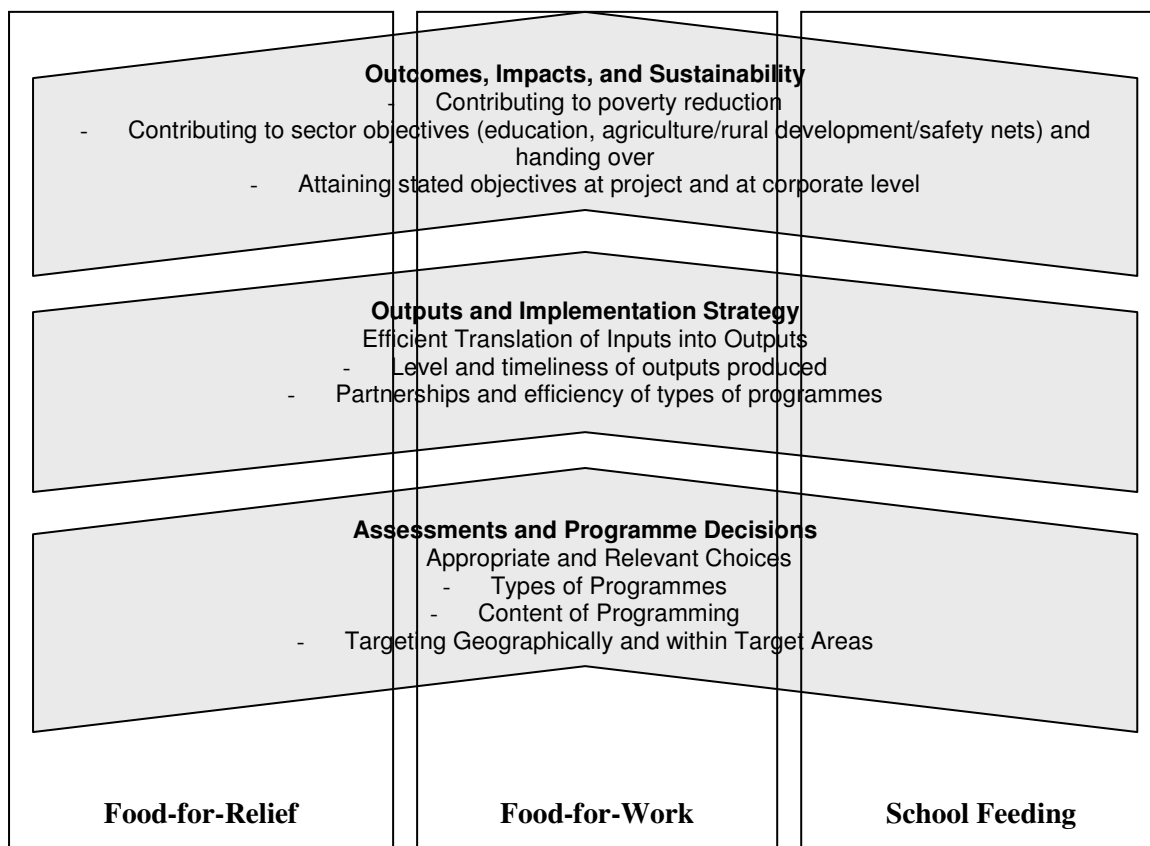
41. **Mixed Method.** The evaluation will use a mixed method approach that involves the review and analysis of existing documentation, including reviews/evaluations undertaken or commissioned by the Country Office, and data that is complemented by key informant interviews, quantitative and qualitative data collection (surveys and focus group discussions), and site observations. Information from these sources will be used to triangulate and corroborate findings of the evaluation team. In gathering data and views from stakeholders, the evaluation team will ensure that it considers a cross-section of stakeholders with diverse views to ensure the evaluation findings are as impartial as possible. The evaluation will not represent the sole views of one stakeholder, but consult diverse stakeholders to base the evaluation team's observations and conclusions on a good understanding of potentially differing views.

42. **Document Review.** A review of existing documentation, both from within WFP and other sources, will be conducted during the evaluation. A large part of responding to Q1 and Q2 will be

based on an analysis of relevant documents of the Government and its partners (multilateral, bilateral, and non-governmental) and of WFP (both publicly available and internal documents). The document analyses will be undertaken prior the fieldwork to ensure the evaluation team is well prepared. Among others, the analyses will help determining baseline information and changes over time, and identify issues to be reviewed and discussed with stakeholders in the evaluation. The analysis of documents, whenever appropriate, will employ a standardized template to ensure information is extracted systematically and to the extent possible on the same issues.

43. **Evaluation Model.** In respect to Q3 above, the evaluation methodology will be based on a model that looks at the three “*main activities*” (see paragraph 16) that have taken place in the context of a number of operations. This approach means that the country portfolio evaluation will not evaluate operation by operation, but rather food-for-relief, food-for-work and school feeding activities, regardless from which operation they were financed. Through this approach, the evaluation will be able to take a longer-term perspective to: (a) understand evolutions in programme design, if any, over time; (b) determine the extent to which food-for-recovery and food-for-work activities contributed to increasing resilience and preparedness for subsequent shocks; and (c) the longer-term effects (both outcomes and impacts) of school feeding programmes in terms of their contributions to education sector development and the children and families who benefited from the programmes. Figure 2 provides a generic outline of an evaluation framework. The inception report will build on this approach and present a full evaluation framework for the three types of activities that the evaluation will cover.

Figure 2: Simplified Evaluation Model to Assess Performance and Results



44. **Existing Data.** The analysis of existing monitoring data will be undertaken by the evaluation team based on information made available by the Country Office and the Regional Bureau. The preparatory mission illustrated how limited the monitoring data is, but the evaluation team will make

use of it to the extent possible. Other data, such as existing evaluations and reviews, will be used as additional source documents.

45. **Additional Information on Operations of Others.** In addition, the evaluation will make use of information on programmes other than those supported by WFP to understand what other factors played a role in materialising the changes that the evaluation team will observe. While such observations will not be a scientific means to attribute changes to one source of intervention or another, it will inform readers of the evaluation of the range of interventions that have taken place.

46. **Case Study Data Collection.** During fieldwork, the evaluation team will use key informant interviews, focus group discussions, surveys and observations at sites to collect first hand information from people and households receiving food assistance and those who do not participate in WFP programmes, village elders and community-based associations such as the Lao Front and the Lao Women's Union. People consulted will come from a diverse range of ethnic groups, as relevant to the villages selected for site visits. Fieldwork will involve the following types of case studies:

- Follow-up to the baseline study of food-for-work which included schemes under the PRRO and Development Project;
- Comparative analysis of three models of food-for-work, implemented in cooperation with (a) the Government; (b) INGOs; and (c) IFAD. The evaluation will complement the set of villages visited in follow-up to the baseline study to ensure all three cooperation partners are covered adequately to generate insights into comparative advantages;
- Follow-up to baseline study of school feeding;
- An analysis of food-for-relief activities that were followed by food-for-work projects to determine whether and how these types of assistance complemented each other.

47. **Site Selection.** The inception report will specify criteria for selecting sites (districts and villages) within the selected provinces (see paragraph 34).

48. **Triangulation.** The information collected from the various sources will be compared with the findings of document reviews, analysis of existing monitoring and across different stakeholders to triangulate and corroborate findings and evidence.

49. **Code of Conduct.** During interviews and meetings, each evaluation team member will act in line with the code of conduct for evaluators. Each evaluation team member will record the information gathered during fieldwork and share this information with the team leader and other team members, following the guidance of the team leader. The information will be used in the final report in a way that demonstrates stakeholders, in particular beneficiaries, were consulted while maintaining confidentiality of responses.

50. The detailed evaluation methodology will be presented in the inception report.

5.B. Quality Assurance

51. The evaluation team, under the guidance of the team leader, is expected to ensure the accuracy and reliability of information and data reported in the draft and final evaluation reports. Where the accuracy of data cannot be ascertained, the evaluators will indicate potential weakness in the data and explain how this affects the conclusions they are drawing. The inception report shall explain what measures are built into the evaluation method to ensure the accuracy and reliability of information and data.

52. WFP's evaluation quality assurance system (EQAS) is based on the UNEG norms and standards and good practice of the international evaluation community (ALNAP and DAC). It includes quality assurance of evaluation products (the inception report, evaluation report, and summary evaluation report), based on standardized checklists. The quality assurance process aims to ensure that findings are evidence-based and reports are clearly written. Quality assurance does not interfere with the views of the evaluation team.

53. The evaluation manager will exercise the first level quality assurance. In addition, this evaluation will be supported to two external reviewers. Ms. Suganya Hutaserani, Principle Evaluation Specialist and team leader for the ADB's country assistance programme evaluation for Lao PDR, has extensive experience in evaluation and in particular with country portfolio evaluations and in Laos. Professor Jonathan Rigg, Head of the Department of Geography at Durham University has undertaken extensive research about development, poverty reduction, trajectories of change and the role of NGOs in fostering development. His knowledge of Laos and his understanding of development processes will be useful in the quality assurance process.

5.C. Phases and Deliverables

54. The evaluation will be undertaken in six phases, which are typical for evaluation processes, presented in Table 7 below and further detailed in Annex 7, where the specific outcomes of each phase are specified.

55. The evaluation team aims to conduct fieldwork in March 2009, however, the exact schedule is subject to the availability of the other evaluation team members. At the time of writing the TOR, the following two options are proposed:

- Option 1: start-up 1 March, Debriefing 18 March
- Option 2: start-up 21 March, Debriefing 8 April.

The actual timing will be confirmed once the additional consultants have been confirmed.

Table 7: Phases and Deliverables for the Evaluation

Phase	Timing	Expected Outputs
1. Design Phase, including preparatory mission	November 2008 – January 2009	Terms of Reference
2. Inception Phase	January – February 2009	Inception Report
3. Evaluation Phase Preparation Work	February – March 2009	Initial Findings Working Papers (internal to evaluation team)
Field work	March – April 2009	Debriefing Presentations
4. Reporting Phase	April – May 2009	(Draft and Final) Evaluation Report Comments Matrix
5. Follow-up	May 2009 August/September 2009	Management Response Follow-up Actions
6. Executive Board	Reports by June 2009 Presentation October 2009	(Draft and Final) EB Summary Report

6. Organisation of the Evaluation

6.A. Expertise Required

56. The evaluation team will be composed of a team leader, two technical/sector experts as members of the core team, and locally based research team that brings together experience in anthropology, rural sociology, and data collection.

57. All will be independent consultants, who have not worked extensively or exclusively on the Laos portfolio or have other conflicts of interest.

58. The *team leader* will have experience in complex evaluations, strategic positioning and strategic planning, and in leading evaluation teams. He has knowledge of development and humanitarian assistance, strong analytical skills, ability to conceptualise the evaluation and to understand the strategic implications of findings of other team members. He has excellent verbal and written communication skills. His responsibilities include leading the team, conceptualising the evaluation methodology, covering Q1 and Q2 and the rural development part of Q3.

59. The technical team members will be (a) a *nutritionist*, who will be analysing the current portfolio (type of activities, target groups, and ration composition) and assess the extent to which it addresses issues of malnutrition identified in the CFSVA, and whether/how the programme would

need to be revised in light of the Government's new nutrition policy. The nutritionist will also review the smaller nutrition-related programmes (*Feeding the Future*, REACH, and HIV&AIDS), but not undertake site visits; and (b) an **education specialist** who will analyse whether/how school feeding fits into education sector development plans of the Government and its development partners, the sustainability of school feeding and the capacity development needs and corresponding activities identified by WFP. The education specialist will also review the results of the fieldwork undertaken by the locally-based team and interpret the findings for inclusion in the evaluation report.

60. The locally based **research team** will be responsible for designing the field instruments (survey questionnaire and semi-structured guide for focus group discussions) in agreement with the team leader, conduct the data collection at project sites (villages, districts, and provincial level as necessary and appropriate), compile and process data, analyse and report on the data. The research team will be composed of an anthropologist (international), a rural sociologist (Laotian), a rural development specialist and two research assistants (Laotian).

6.B. Roles and Responsibilities

61. **WFP Stakeholders.** The Country Office is a major stakeholder in the evaluation and is responsible for (i) providing access to information that is necessary to conduct the evaluation; (ii) being available to the evaluation team to discuss the programme, its performance and results; (iii) facilitating the evaluation team's contacts with stakeholders in Laos; and (iv) setting up schedules of meetings, facilitating field visits, and providing logistic support during the fieldwork. The Country Director will be the overall contact person and assign a staff to facilitate putting information together for the team. The Regional Bureau plays an important role in that it was responsible for the regional operations. It was consulted during the preparatory mission, will be contacted during the evaluation, and may participate in the debriefing meeting in Laos. It received the terms of reference and will receive future evaluation products for comments and/or information. However, a large number of Bureau staff have been reassigned within WFP, so that the evaluation team leader will consult with them via email, telephone or at Headquarters. In addition to colleagues formerly associated with the Laos portfolio, the evaluation will also consult with other headquarters colleagues in their respective roles and responsibilities of providing support to the Country Office. To ensure independence of the evaluation, Country Office and Regional Bureau staff will not be part of the evaluation team or participate in meetings where their presence could bias the responses of the stakeholders.

62. **WFP Partners.** Stakeholders in Laos and the region will be key informants for the evaluation team. They will be a source of information to understand the context in which WFP operates, to give an appreciation of WFP from the partner perspective, and provide insights into WFP's operations and their results in as much as they worked with WFP on implementation. These stakeholders include representatives from Government (at national and sub national level), the UNCT and other international partners, and INGOs, who partner with WFP in the implementation of its portfolio (see also Section 1.C and Annex 6). They will participate also in briefings and debriefings of the evaluation team and become involved in the discussions to determine the performance and results of WFP's portfolio.

63. **Evaluation Team.** The evaluation team, under the team leader, will be responsible for the inception report, the preparatory and field work, and reporting. The evaluation team will be responsible for the content of the evaluation report and provide feedback on the way in which comments from stakeholders were taken into account and if comments were not considered provide reasons for doing so. The evaluation team will be responsible for consulting a broad and diverse range of stakeholders in Laos, the region and at WFP headquarters so that it is well informed and as unbiased as possible. It is responsible for giving an initial briefing at the time of the start-up of the evaluation fieldwork and for a debriefing at the end of the fieldwork. The evaluation team will abide by the code of conduct for evaluators of the UN Evaluation Group.

64. **External Reviewers.** The role of the external reviewers is to provide additional quality assurance to the process to ensure the methodology followed is appropriate to the purpose and scope of the evaluation and that the evaluation report is credible, i.e. presents well documented evidence and analysis to support findings, conclusions and recommendations. In that, the external reviewers support

the evaluation manager in her task of managing and ensuring the quality of the evaluation. They will be reviewing and commenting on the draft terms of reference, the inception report and the draft final evaluation report.

65. **Evaluation Manager.** The evaluation manager has experience in conducting country-level evaluations for the ADB, in setting the guidelines for and supervising staff managing this type of evaluations at the International Fund for Agriculture Development. As the evaluation manager, she is responsible for drafting the terms of reference, identifying, recruiting and overseeing the work of the evaluation team, undertaking the quality assurance of the evaluation products (inception report, evaluation report, and Executive Board summary report) produced by the evaluation team, and for facilitating the communication between the evaluation team and WFP stakeholders. In her capacity as the director of OEDE, she is responsible for presenting the evaluation to the Executive Board.

6.C. Communication

All evaluation products will be produced in English.

66. **Terms of Reference – Short Version.** To improve communication with Laotian stakeholders, a 2-page summary of the TOR will be translated into Laotian. The Country Office will send the short version and the full TOR to stakeholders as soon as finalised.

67. **Inception Report.** The Inception Report is a working document of the evaluation team to ensure that the team has a common understanding of the TOR and the approach to be taken. It provides greater detail on the methodologies to be used during the main phase of the evaluation. Its main audience is the evaluation team, the external reviewers and the evaluation manager, but it will also serve the Country Office in making the arrangements for field work. (See Annex 7 for the outline of the Inception Report).

68. **Interpretation.** The research team is conversant in Lao and various local languages to remove the need for translation when conducting survey work and focus group discussions. For the core team, interpreters will accompany them during site visits. The Country Office will facilitate identifying interpreters that speak Laotian and other local languages.

69. **Early Feedback.** Initial findings will be shared with stakeholders during the debriefing at the end of the field work (there will be one debriefing for stakeholders based in Laos, including Government, donors and multilateral partners, and INGOs and one debriefing with WFP stakeholders in the Country Office, the Regional Bureau and Headquarters). This early feedback is important to (i) verify the initial findings of the team with stakeholders; (ii) give stakeholders in the country the opportunity to clarify issues during the debriefing, should this be necessary; and (iii) ensure a transparent evaluation process.

70. **Dissemination Workshop.** The evaluation findings and recommendations will be presented by the team leader at a dissemination workshop organised by the Country Office. The workshop will serve to determine how the next PRRO and country strategy can follow-up on and implement the recommendations of the evaluation.

71. **Sharing Lessons.** After the evaluation is completed, OEDE will ensure the evaluation lessons are shared widely in particular with country directors through email distribution (with a synthesis of findings in the covering email) and possibly at country director meetings. Lessons will also be incorporated into OEDE's system for sharing lessons, once it is developed. Lessons on the evaluation method will be taken into account in subsequent country portfolio evaluations.

6.D. Resources and Budget

72. The evaluation will be financed from OEDE's Programme Support and Administrative budget. Based on the team composition in paragraph 56, the associated remuneration (daily fees) are estimated to be around US\$100,000 and the cost of international and domestic travel is estimated to be around US\$20,000, bringing the total cost of the evaluation to US\$120,000.

Annex 4: Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Questions	Means of Verification Indicator(s)	Source of Verification and Data Collection Strategy of the Evaluation Team
Q1: How strategically has WFP positioned itself in the country context and how well is it aligned to policies and strategies of Government and partners?		
Do government policies and strategies have a position on food assistance (directly or indirectly) and how has WFP positioned itself against them?	Qualitative Assessment	Analysis of policy and strategy documents to identify whether WFP's operations are in line with these policies and/or whether the policy framework would allow for yet unrealized roles of WFP within its own mandate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Five Year Plans - Sector policies and strategies (agriculture, food security if available, poverty reduction, education, health, nutrition) - Each team member to review documentation to identify whether and how the policy framework reflects food assistance (positively or negatively) - Interviews with MPI, line ministries, and other partners
Do the policies and strategies of other partners in the sectors relevant to WFP (education, rural development, nutrition and health) have a position on food assistance and how does WFP's programme relate to that.	Qualitative Assessment	Analysis of policy and strategy documents to identify whether WFP's operations are in line with these policies and/or whether the policy framework would allow for yet unrealized roles of WFP within its own mandate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Country and/or sector strategies of partner agencies (international organizations, bilaterals, NGOs) - Joint partner programmes (health, education and rural development) - Possibly project documents of other partners (their sector strategies are sometime embedded in a loan project) - Each team member to review documentation to identify whether and how these strategies reflect food assistance (positively or negatively) - Interviews with partners
How well is the current programme (designed with the previous WFP Strategic Plan in mind) meet the new challenges and opportunities provided in WFP's new Strategic Plan?	Qualitative assessment.	Analysis of current programme objectives (annex 5 to the TOR) against WFP's new Strategic Plan 2008-2011. Interviews, especially with current and former CD and current DCD.
Based on the analysis above, is the WFP programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - well aligned with the national policies and strategies - is there ownership of WFP's programme and if so how does it manifest itself - filling important gaps in the overall assistance framework, and thus has the opportunity to make a strategic contribution - missing strategic opportunities, where within WFP's mandate it could make a greater contribution to Laos? 	Qualitative assessment.	Analysis of documents and discussion with stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coherence with policy frameworks - ownership (government commitment, policies, public expenditure framework) - assessment of relative significance of the programme (size, hitting core issues, etc.) - gap analysis. Evidence from the above two plus discussion among the team members.

Q2: Making Choices – what is the evolving strategy and what are the drivers behind it?		
What were the drivers behind WFP's evolving presence and programmes in Laos? Is WFP pro-active (making choices) or reactive (responding to demand)?	Qualitative assessment	List and analyze factors such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - government and donor preferences - needs - changing environment, including natural disasters - funding flows - analytical and other capacities of the office - analytical and evaluative information - partnerships Interviews with WFP and other stakeholders in government, donors, and partners. Resource flows (amount and timing) Analyses (CFSVA) and evaluation reports Partnership agreements
Does the absence of a country strategy have an impact on WFP making choices? What difference would a country strategy make?	Qualitative assessment Findings from Q3 on portfolio performance and results	Interviews, especially with the CD/DCD and programme staff Review of country strategy guidance Assessment whether efficiency or effectiveness would be stronger with a unifying country strategy
What are the positive and/or negative effects of aligning all operations with WFP corporate strategic objectives without articulating a country-specific goal?	Qualitative assessment Findings from Q3 on portfolio performance and results	Interviews, especially with the CD/DCD and programme staff Review of country strategy guidance Assessment whether a unifying goal would change the choices made in portfolio composition/design
Q3: How has the portfolio performance and what have been its results?		
How relevant and/or appropriate has the respective programme (FFR, FFW, school feeding, or nutritional education programmes), been?	Qualitative assessment Beneficiary perceptions Analysis of ration composition compared to nutrition needs	Compare programme design and delivery with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - needs assessments (CFSVA, VAM, other secondary data) - through interviews with key stakeholders and - through focus group discussions with recipients of food assistance - comparison with WFP norms (e.g. school feeding handbook) <i>Keep in mind whether food is appropriate to nutritional needs and to personal preferences (both need to be recorded and balanced), and perceptions about the cultural appropriateness of food assistance.</i>
How efficient has the programme delivery been (for FFR, FFW, school feeding, nutritional education programmes)?	Least cost method Comparators' cost Cost of other options	Try to establish the unit cost (e.g. the cost per child fed) and compare it with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - overall sector expenditure (e.g. amount of money government spends per child on basic education) - cost of programmes run by others, if any - alternative options (type of food delivered, cash or vouchers if markets exist and function) - alternative implementation strategies and/or partners Cost information from WFP Country Office, and other information through discussion with partners.

How effective has the programme been, i.e. to what extent have the objectives of the programme been reached?	Quantitative and qualitative assessment (see matrix below)	Project reports Monitoring data Focus group discussions Interviews <i>Keep in mind to check whether effectiveness would have been greater if the programme was integrated into that of one of the partners (e.g. rural infrastructure development of the ADB)</i>
What impact have the programme activities had?	Quantitative and qualitative assessment (see matrix below)	Monitoring data Focus group discussions Interviews <i>Keep in mind to check whether the impact would have been greater if the programme was integrated into that of one of the partners (e.g. education sector development of the World Bank and other partners)</i>
How sustainable are the outputs, outcomes and impacts of the programme?	Quantitative and qualitative	Maintenance of FFW assets Public expenditure review regarding public spending on continuation of programmes, if WFP were to pull out Capacity (political will, ownership, systems, management structures, human resources, infrastructure) to continue programmes, if WFP were to pull out ?

Annex 5: List of People Consulted

Government of Lao PDR

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Saleumxay Kommasith, Director General, Department of International Organisations

Mr. Khen

Ministry of Planning and Investment

Mr. Bounthavy Sisouphanthong, Vice Minister

Ms. Sisomboun Ounavong, Deputy Director General, Department of International Cooperation

Mr. Morakot Vongxay, Acting Director of UN System Division

Mr. Inthadom Akkharath, Department of Planning

Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

Mr. Khmakeng Keovongsy, Deputy Director General, Dept. Social Welfare

Mr. Khamphao Homphangna, Director, Natural Disaster Management Office

Mr. Vizayphone, Natural Disaster Management Office

Mr. Phosavanh, Department of Social Welfare

Mr. Chomyaeng Phengthongsawat, Chief of International Cooperation Division

Mr. Vilayphong Sisomvang, Technical Senior Official

Mr. Khamphat Sulasinh, Deputy of Public Welfare & Development Section

Ministry of Education

Mr. Chaleun Souvong, Director General, Dept of Primary and Pre-School Education

Ms. Yangxia Lee, Director, Center for Promotion of Education for Women Ethnic-Disabled People

Ms. Khampaseuth Kitignavong, Deputy Director/Project Director, Second Education Development Project

Ms. Siphapane Manivanh, Head of Pre-School Education Division

Mr. Lamphoune, Department of Non-formal Education

Mr. Somphong Lathsavong, PES Deputy Director, Luang Namtha Province

Mr. Mike Lally, Education Consultant

Ministry of Education – European Commission Basic Education Northern Project

Ms. Chanthavone Phandamnong, National Project Director

Ms. Julie Chinnery, Project Coordinator

Ministry of Health

Mr. Vanhmany Chanhsomphou, Health Unlimited

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

Dr. Silavanh Sawathvong, Director General, Department of Forestry

Mr. Savanh Hanephom, Deputy Director General, Department of Planning

Mr. Thongphath Vongmany, Deputy Director General, Department of Forestry

Ministry of Public Works and Transport

Mr. Laokham, Director, Department of Rural Roads

Mr. Belal Hussain, Team Leader, Rural Accessibility Advisor, Basic Access Component

Mr. Nils Gardek, Socio-Economist, Basic Access Component

Mr. Souksakhone Soutannouvong, Basic Access Component

Mr. Khampasay

Communities

Villages visited in Viengphoukha District, LouangNamtha Province	
1. Nam Mang, Ethnic KhmouNyouan	
Focus Groups: a. school children b. parents of children in school feeding	Interviews: a. parents of children b. teachers c. disaster victims d. participants in FFW e. village chief and party secretary
2. Ban Done May, Ethnic KhmouNyouan (30%), Rameet (Lamet) (50%), Lahu Na (20%)	
Focus groups: a. school children b. parents c. teachers d. male disaster affected e. female disaster affected	Interviews a. parents b. individuals affected by disaster c. village chief
3. Ban NongKham, Ethnic Kwène	
Focus groups: a. school children b. parents	Interviews: a. teachers b. village chief
4. Ban KapNeua, Ethnic Lahu Na	
Focus groups: a. school children b. parents c. school feeding committee	Interviews: a. village chief b. (teachers absent) c. parents
Villages visited in Sing District, LouangNamtha Province	
5. Ban Lau Khau, Ethnic Akha PoulyNoy	
Focus groups: a. children b. parents c. school feeding committee	Interviews: a. village chief b. participants in FFW c. teachers d. parents
6. Ban KokMouang, Ethnic Hmong	
Focus groups: a. students b. parents c. school feeding committee	Interviews: a. village chief b. participants in FFW c. teachers d. parents
Villages visited in Sanxay District, Attapeu Province	
7. Ban PhiaKeo, Ethnic Brao	
Focus groups: a. students b. parents c. school feeding committee	Interviews: a. village chief b. participants in FFW c. teachers d. parents
8. Ban Somboun, Ethnic Mixed: Tarieng (66%), Ye (14%), Hrlak (20%)	
Focus groups: a. students b. parents c. school feeding committee	Interviews: a. village chief b. participants in FFW c. teachers d. parents

9. Ban Vang Say, Ethnic Tarieng	
Focus groups: a. students b. parents c. school feeding committee	Interviews: a. village chief b. participants in FFW c. teachers d. parents
10. Ban Mixay, Ethnic Hrlak (84%), Tarieng (15%), Lao (1%)	
Focus groups: a. students b. parents c. school feeding committee	Interviews: a. village chief b. participants in FFW c. teachers d. parents

Bilateral Partners

Ms. Aurelle de Romemont, Chargee du secteur rural, Agence Francaise Developpement
Ms. Dixon, Counsellor Australian Embassy,
Mr. Tim Napper, Second Secretary, Development Cooperation, AusAID
Ms. Kathryn Sweet, Senior Program Manager, Development Cooperation Section, AusAID
Ms. Sounisa Sundara, Activity Manager, Development Cooperation Section, AusAID
Mr. Wolfgang Thoran, First Secretary/ Deputy Head of Mission, German Embassy
Mr. Harsh V. S. Negi, Indian Embassy
Japanese Embassy
Mr. Sang Ryol Lee, Counsellor, Korean Embassy
Ms. Marilyn Alarilla, Philippine Embassy
Ms. Lisbet Bostrand, First Secretary, Swedish International Development Agency
Ambassador and Mr. Ravic R. Huso, Embassy of the USA

Multilateral Partners

Asian Development Bank
Mr. Gil-Hong Kim, Country Director, LAO PDR Resident Mission
Ms. Khamtanh Chanthy, Senior Project Implementation Officer (Social Sector)

European Union

Mr. Stefan Lock, Head of Cooperation
Ms. Helene Quentrec, Attachee Cooperation

FAO

Mr. Serge Vermiau, Representative
Ms. Rebecca Host-Madsen, Food Security and Agriculture Development Officer
Ms. Mirva Ek, Food and Nutrition Advisor
Mr. Brice Plesters, Emergency Coordinator/Agronomist

UNDP

Mr. Stephane Vigie, Deputy Resident Representative
Ms. Verena Linneweber, Head, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator
Mr. Sonam Yangchen Rana, Resident Coordinator
Mr. Souphon Sayavong, REACH National Consultant, Office of UN Resident Coordinator
Ms. Senoe Torgerson, REACH Facilitator, "Ending Child Undernutrition", Office of the UN Resident Coordinator

UNICEF

Ms. Laila Ismail Khan, Representative, UNICEF
Ms. Jill Zarchin, Chief, Basic Education and Gender Equality, UNICEF

Ms. Jane Davies, Representative, UNICEF
Mr. Simon Molendijk, Education Specialist

UN Resident Coordinator's Office

Ms. Verena Linneweber, Head, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator
Ms. Judy Kimaru, Emergency Management and Coordination Officer

WHO

World Bank

Mr. Patchamuthu Illangovan, Country Manager
Magnus Lindelow
Ms. Nina Fenton

Lao Red Cross

Dr. Bountheung Menevilay, Head of Disaster Preparedness & Relief Division
Mr. Davong Xayasane, Lao Red Cross

Non-Governmental Organisations

Mr. Emmanuel Cibla, Head of Mission, Action Contre la Faim
Mr. Henry Pramkerd, CAF EC Delegation
Mr. Manfred Bach, Project Manager (DWHH/GAA Project Nga/Lao) Deutsche Welthungerilfe e.V.
Mr. Henrik Schmith, Country Program Manager, Norwegian Church Aid
Dr. Peter Messerli, Senior Research Scientist, Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) North-South
Mr. Nigel Orr, EOD Technical Advisor, Swiss Foundation for Mine Action
Ms. Jacqueline Degerman and Ms. Vathana Keomany World Vision Lao PDR (WVL)

World Food Programme

Country Office, Vientiane and Sub-Offices

Ms. Karin Manente, Country Director (CD)
Ms. Elisabeth Faure, Deputy Country Director (DCD)
Ms. Julie Spooner, Programme Officer (PRRO, FFW and other components)
Ms. Maiko Tajima, Programme Officer (School Feeding)
Mr. Rick Krenzer, Head of Sub-Office Oudoumxay
Ms. Jean Duclos, Head of Sub-Office, Luang Namtha
Ms. Jutta Krahn, Nutrition Training Consultant
Ms. Aachal Chand, Programme Officer - Nutrition Consultant (Feed the Future)
Ms. Tiziana Zoccheddu, Public Information Officer
Ms. Laura de Franchis, VAM Officer
Ms. Souphavanh Nakhavong, VAM Officer
Mr. Oulayvanh Sayarath, Senior Logistics Assistant
Ms. Ravza Salieva, Head Logistics
Ms. Khammon Xaysavanh, Programme Assistant, Luang Namtha

Regional Bureau Asia, Bangkok, Thailand

Mr. Tony Banbury, Regional Director
Mr. Peter French, Deputy Regional Director
Mr. Gerald Daly, Senior Regional Programme Advisor
Mr. Michael Sheinkman, Senior Regional Programme Advisor (VAM)
Ms. Rita Bhatia, Regional Programme Advisor
Ms. Asaka Nyangara, Regional Programme Advisor (General)
Mr. Aaron Charlop-Powers, VAM Consultant

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CCA	Common Country Assessment (of the United Nations)
CFSVA	Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis
CSB	Corn-Soya Blend
DEV	Development project
ESDF	Education Sector Development Framework
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FFR	Food-for-Relief
FFW	Food-for-Work
GTZ	Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
Lao PDR	Laos People's Democratic Republic
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
MPWT	Ministry of Public Works and Transport
NGPES	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NNP	National Nutritional Policy
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PRRO	Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation
REACH	Renewed Efforts against Child Hunger and Undernutrition (joint initiative of FAO, UNICEF, WHO and WFP)
SPR	Standard Project Report
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
VAM	Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping
WFP	World Food Programme



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