



... emergency needs assessment branch

Laos:

Review of the
assessment process
leading to selected food
aid and non-food
programmes
implemented in the Lao
People's Democratic
Republic (PDR) and
implications for future
emergency food security
assessments

Groupe URD

Review of the assessment process leading to selected food aid and non-food programmes implemented in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) and implications for future emergency food-security assessments.

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Views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of WFP.

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Executive summary

1 Introduction

This review examines the process of needs assessment leading to WFP's implementation of food and non-food programmes in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and analyses the processes applied in designing and implementing operations. It also provides general recommendations and recommendations specific to the Lao People's Democratic Republic for future needs assessments.

The methodology of the review comprised two main phases: (i) a desk review, conducted before and after the field visit and (ii) field visits involving interviews with stakeholders, observations in the field and additional document collection and analysis. Whenever possible, the Groupe URD team sought to use participatory approaches with WFP staff and government and village partners to understand processes, constraints and opportunities and to assess the quality¹ of food-for-work projects.

This report focuses on WFP emergency relief and recovery operations in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The field visits took place in Khammouane and Savannakhet provinces and in the recently targeted province of Xienghuang in the north. Many villages were visited, covering all stages in the FFW project cycle.

2 Context of WFP operations

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is one of the least developed countries in the world with only 17 percent of the population living in towns. Addressing food-security issues involves understanding the risks faced by populations affected by the crisis, including abnormal weather, unexploded ordnance and government resettlement policies, and the resilience they have developed to cope in difficult situations, such as seasonal and situational mobility, exploitation of natural resources and investment in livestock.

WFP has a dual strategy to address the needs of the population: development operations and protracted relief and recovery operations; this review focuses on the latter. From 2000 onwards, targeting criteria have changed repeatedly to reflect the magnitude of crises; WFP staff have had to choose between targeting people most affected by the crisis or targeting those who were most vulnerable and facing chronic food insecurity.

The country office decided to implement its emergency operations from 2000 onwards through government structures. WFP also works in partnership with the villages targeted for food for work.

3 Analysis of WFP operational processes

WFP's operational process comprises five phases: (i) alert; (ii) project design; (iii) implementation; (iv) monitoring; and (iv) evaluation; linkages between each phase were examined. Emergency operations and protracted relief and recovery operations are programmed and implemented in much the same way; this is especially true in view of the repeated extensions of the emergency operation and the constant shift from emergency to protracted crisis. As a result, emergency operation 6311 and protracted relief and recovery operation 10319 can be considered as two programmes made up of the same components.

¹ As defined in the Quality COMPAS on the basis of 12 quality criteria.

WFP plays a leading role in the disaster management team; it must also continue to strengthen its capacity to conduct needs assessments. However, despite recommendations, no in-depth damage or food-security needs assessment has been carried out since 2001; if links between needs assessment and project design are not established, mistakes may occur during the design process.

During the implementation phase, WFP operations have shown flexibility, first in shifting successfully from food for assets to food for work and vice-versa as necessary. In terms of expertise, WFP operations require specific technical expertise for building roads, bridges and fishponds and for expanding paddies but it seems that operators focus too much on acquiring these skills at the expense of food-security expertise.

All documents from 2000 underlined weaknesses in the monitoring system, which focused solely on “the number and type of rice recipients and amount of rice received”. The emergency operation and the protracted relief and recovery operation aim to mitigate food insecurity, but there is a lack of “objective-achievement oriented monitoring”. Insufficient information was recorded in the monitoring phase, which had an impact on the amount of information available for the evaluation.

Analysis of selection processes leading to food-for-work schemes

This section examines the selection processes for food for work schemes in the protracted relief and recovery operation by assessing: (i) the methods used for gathering data and for targeting villages, activities and beneficiaries; (ii) training for staff involved in selection processes; and (iii) sharing of responsibilities between WFP and partners in the selection process.

This chapter outlines four findings:

- i) The village selection process focuses too much on damage to rice and rice deficit rather than on global analysis of damage and food security resulting from inappropriate methodology, limited questionnaires and lack of training.
- ii) The village selection process is dependent on the reliability and validity of government data, given that villages are selected on the basis of a list provided by district authorities.
- iii) The feasibility study often fails to identify operational risks satisfactorily, which raises questions about the resources and expertise that WFP should provide, such as non-food items, technical expertise and removal of unexploded ordnance.
- iv) It is questionable to what extent the methods used to select activities in the food-for-work scheme ensure that community interests are taken into consideration in government priorities.

4 Recommendations for food-security assessment in Lao PDR

Improving actors' understanding of food-security principles.	<p>WFP should train its staff at Headquarters and in the field on food-security principles to ensure that they share understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of needs, WFP's role and project objectives, and the importance of multi-sector approaches and inter-agency cooperation.</p> <p>Government officials should be invited to attend training sessions where appropriate.</p>
Improving the quality of village selection methods.	<p>Essential steps complementing village meetings To improve the relevance of the data collected in the needs assessment phase, field staff should interview informants and villagers.</p> <p>WFP field staff should also carry out field visits so that operators can ensure that data are correctly triangulated.</p> <p>The semi-structured interview (SSI) technique There is a need for more in-depth but flexible interviews that would allow field staff to collect qualitative and quantitative information for more thorough analysis.</p> <p>Conducting household interviews To obtain an overview of the situation, field staff must conduct household interviews as well as interviews with informants, and make field visits.</p> <p>The country office recognises the importance of refining the data-collection process; resources and tools should now be allocated to the field teams to consolidate these efforts.</p> <p>Designing analysis grids The analysis grid should be designed on the basis of information from semi-structured interviews; partners should collaborate in the design process.</p> <p>The analysis grid should be based on qualitative and quantitative data.</p> <p>Training in needs assessment methods WFP field staff and government staff should be trained in targeting to improve their understanding of the objectives and methods of the village needs assessment (VNA).</p>
Shifting from rice-damage criteria to food-insecurity criteria.	<p>It would be advisable to provide an analytical framework that takes into account qualitative information.</p> <p>Targeting of food-insecure people could be improved by ensuring that selection procedures distinguish between those who benefit from work and those who carry out work and receive rice.</p>
Developing "project supply chain" assessment capacities and responses.	<p>Clarifying the supply chain amongst partners In light of these objectives and the considerable difficulties encountered in the supply of non-food items, WFP should examine the option of supplying non-food items in addition to rice in their projects.</p> <p>To ensure that project implementation is successful, WFP should study different options for technical assistance, especially when new agricultural activities are introduced to a community.</p> <p>Reinforcing the feasibility study at the food-for-work design phase It is essential to carry out a feasibility study in which the constraints and partners' capacity to overcome these constraints are documented.</p>

5 General recommendations for food-security assessment in WFP

<p>Recommendations for managing the project cycle as a whole.</p>	<p>Including the phase of a global food security assessment (GFSA) A GFSA phase that gives understanding of needs should be included in the process. WFP should consider this as a separate phase in the process.</p> <p>Clarifying links between data collection and assessment tools Three tools – district vulnerability analysis (DVAs), food-security assessments (FSAs) and VNAs – identify vulnerable and food-insecure populations, and thus need to be linked to ensure coherence.</p> <p>The results of the GFSA should be used to confirm or challenge the validity and relevance of the DVA to enable operators to remove or add indicators where applicable.</p> <p>The GFSA should be seen as a tool, especially in terms of the type of information to be collected, to ensure coherence with other tools.</p> <p>Designing a monitoring and evaluation system that is linked to PRRO indicators WFP should design and implement a monitoring system that provides information on the outputs and allows operators to assess the extent to which objectives are being met, thus anticipating outcomes. Monitoring information should include evaluation of beneficiary satisfaction, covering access and usage issues.</p> <p>The logical framework for WFP operations must be taken into account when designing monitoring and evaluation tools.</p>
<p>Recommendations for the EFSA.</p>	<p>Recommendation for guidance provided in the <i>Emergency Food Security Assessment Handbook</i> WFP should design and disseminate a ‘pocket’ version of the handbook for use in the field.</p> <p>From a narrow to holistic approach Holistic food-security needs assessments should be carried out as often as possible, taking into account all factors related to (i) food availability, (ii) food access, (iii) food consumption and (iv) food utilisation.</p> <p>Encouraging inter-agency needs assessments The country office should promote inter-agency assessments and joint responses to needs that result from natural disaster or chronic poverty and food insecurity.</p>

1 Introduction

This report presents the results of the third of three emergency food security assessment (EFSA) reviews commissioned by the Emergency Needs Assessment Branch (ODAN) and WFP Afghanistan, Colombia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR).

1.1 Objectives of the review

The objectives of the review were:

- i) to examine the linkages between selected food and non-food programmes in the Lao PDR and the assessments that preceded them; and
- ii) to identify best practices and the most useful information to collect and criteria to apply at the assessment stage to enhance decisions and design of food-for-work (FFW), food-for-recovery (FFR) food-voucher and non-food programmes such as cash transfers and cash for work in combination with or independent of unconditional food assistance programmes such as school feeding, vulnerable group feeding (VGF) and general food distributions (GFDs).

The terms of reference (TORs) (see Annex 5) were modified after the first EFSA review mission in Afghanistan as a result of initial feedback from the ODAN team. Greater emphasis was placed on the EFSA process and its linkage to project design and implementation.

1.2 Expectations of WFP staff in the Lao PDR from the review

The research team began this EFSA review mission by interviewing all WFP staff in the Vientiane office to understand their expectations. As stated in the TORs, one expected result was to provide guidance for Lao assessment teams; it was therefore essential to provide feedback on issues that particularly affect WFP field staff. WFP staff expressed three main expectations:

- guidance for designing criteria that distinguish between structural and event-specific food insecurity;
- guidance for improving needs-assessment methods in the country office, especially in terms of qualitative data; and
- recommendations that take into account WFP constraints such as access, limited availability of technical expertise and limited staff; the EFSA process should be simple, cost-effective and sustainable.

1.3 Methodology

The methodology adopted for the EFSA review mission comprised two main phases:

- i) a desk review before and after the field visit; and
- ii) field visits involving interviews with stakeholders, observations and additional document collection and analysis.

1.3.1 Document collection

Documents were collected before and after the field visit. They can be divided into two main categories: (i) protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO)/emergency operation (EMOP) documents and (ii) scheme documents. This distinction has been made in order to conform with the terminology used by WFP in the Lao PDR.

(i) PRRO and EMOP documents reviewed by the research team included documents related to assessment and baseline surveys, targeting, project design and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and to information on training.

(ii) Scheme documents reviewed by the research team included the FFW project cycle the FFW pro forma for targeting, baseline surveys, planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting, a list of all schemes and data related to them, and field reports on distribution, village assessment and monitoring. Other documents included reports on the development programme (DEV) and school feeding implemented by WFP in the Lao PDR, and training modules and tools for country teams designed by WFP. Some documents were collected from the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) World Vision and Comité de Coopération avec le Laos (CCL), which are currently operating in Lao PDR. Annex 4 gives details about the reports and documents collected.

1.3.2 Interview methods and tools

Whenever possible, the Groupe URD team used participatory approaches with WFP staff and their government and village partners. At an introductory meeting, the research methodology and expected outputs were presented, and the field mission programme and expectations were discussed. At the beginning of the field visit, a one-day workshop with district officers was held using Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis (SWOT). Semi-structured interviews (SSI) were conducted with WFP and government staff. Group discussions were organised with whole villages present and with men and women separately. The new vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM) officer accompanied the team for the duration of the field visit. At the end of the field visit, a feedback meeting with WFP staff considered the main findings and initial recommendations, and validated data.

1.4 Scope of the study

1.4.1 Areas visited

Nine of the fifteen days were dedicated to visits to FFW activities. Field visits took place in two provinces initially targeted in the PRRO: in Khammouane four villages were visited in two of the four districts receiving assistance through the PRRO; in Savannakhet, one village was visited in the only district targeted by WFP. The province of Xienghuang in the north was previously targeted by the DEV; the recent change to a PRRO was made to address the effects of recurrent floods and droughts.

Visits to numerous villages covered all stages of FFW: (i) villages that have only received relief assistance of two months of rice distribution either during the EMOP or during the PRRO under the food-for-assets (FFA) component;² (ii) villages not yet targeted where WFP field staff were observed assessing needs; (iii) villages already assessed by WFP field staff and awaiting approval from WFP project managers; (iii) villages targeted for paddy (rice field) expansion in 2005 where work has been delayed by WFP because of unexploded ordnance (UXO)³; (iv) villages with an ongoing FFW scheme for road construction, paddy

² The FFA component in EMOP 6311 refers to a rice distribution over two months that benefited the whole community. The purpose of FFA is to assist affected populations in cleaning, repairing and rehabilitating infrastructure damaged by flooding. More details of FFA are provided in Annex 6; the definition is taken from the Emergency Relief Training document, Central and Southern Lao PDR, November 2000.

³ Between 1964-1973, the United States dropped over two million tons of bombs on Laos and to this day much of the countryside remains littered with bombs that failed to explode. Despite continuing efforts to clear

expansion and fishponds; and (v) villages where FFW is complete, where new roads have been built and rice has been distributed. Annex 3 gives details of the villages visited.

1.4.2 People met

The research team met many people involved in FFW. Given that the Government's administrative structure is highly decentralised, special emphasis was placed on meeting people at the national, provincial and district levels. The WFP country director, programme officers involved in EMOP, PRRO and development projects and programme assistants were met in the capital; field monitors for Khammouane, Savannakhet and Xienghuang and the head of the sub-office at Champasack/Attapeu were met in the provinces. Meetings were held with Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) personnel including the Deputy Director General, provincial food aid coordinators (PFAC) and district governors, district deputy directors and district officers and also with representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The team also met men and women from the villages, including members of village development committees, a village chief, a representative of the women's union and a representative of the senior union, Neo Hom. Meetings were held with NGOs such as World Vision. Annexes I and II give further details.

1.5 Constraints and limitations of the study

The relatively new staff in WFP's Vientiane office – the programme officer had taken up his responsibilities five months before the visit, the VAM officer only a week before – and the absence at the time of the EFSA review mission of the head of the PRRO programme were limiting factors in the study. Only limited documentation was available at the country office. Obtaining information through interviews was difficult.

Several key informants were unavailable at the time of the EFSA review mission: it was not possible to interview anybody from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) who could give insight into the WFP programme; the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry collaborates with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour in implementing WFP programmes. The research team was unable to collect detailed information or questionnaires from government staff regarding internal procedures for carrying out needs assessments in crisis-affected villages. The research team did not succeed in triangulating information with WFP, villages and the Government and so was unable to draw conclusions about the reliability of government data-collection procedures.

A representative from the NGO Care, recommended as a key informant because of their wide experience of working in the Lao PDR and with WFP in particular, was unfortunately absent on field visits the whole time the research team was in the capital.

Constraints inherent to the Lao PDR such as poor communications in remote areas and high ethnic and linguistic diversity had an impact on the EFSA review mission, affecting in particular (i) potential field visits in the short time allocated for the field mission: the research team was unable to visit projects in the southern provinces of Champasack, Saravan and Attapeu, and (ii) exchange with villagers, particularly in situations where two translators were required to communicate with all the villagers.

unexploded ordnance (UXO), it continues to pose a threat to Lao civilians. Many experts consider Lao PDR to be the most heavily ordnance-contaminated country in the world.

2 Context of WFP operations in the Lao PDR

Lao PDR is one of the least developed countries in the world, ranking 143rd of 172 countries in the 2002 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index⁴: per capita gross domestic product (GDP) is US\$320.

Only 17 percent of the population live in towns; the economy relies heavily on rural activities. Apart from the main highways, roads are poor and farmers have limited access to markets.

In the Lao context, addressing food-security issues involves understanding the risks that crisis-affected populations face and the resilience factors they have developed. The vulnerability of a community is determined by a combination of these.

2.1 Risk and resilience factors

Risk factors include:

- droughts and floods;
- UXO in certain areas;
- government resettlement policies aimed at reassembling communities previously living in remote mountainous areas that often lack the technical expertise/do not have access to inputs for cultivation of crops in the new settlements;
- limited opportunities for *hai* (slash-and-burn cultivation) because of demographic pressure, designation of conservation areas or the banning of the practice; and
- limited access to markets, water and sanitation and health facilities.

Resilience factors include:

- seasonal and situational mobility by men and women in search of work outside villages;
- hunting, foraging, fishing and other opportunities such as selling handicrafts;
- investment in livestock as a means of saving; and
- remittances sent from relatives outside the Lao PDR.

2.2 WFP emergency operations in the Lao PDR

Since 2000, WFP has expanded its capacity by setting up a country office and gradually strengthening its staff capacity.

WFP currently has a dual strategy to address the Lao population's needs: (i) DEVs 10306 and 10078.1 (school feeding) in partnership with international NGOs and (ii) EMOP 6311 and PRRO 10319 implemented through government administrative and management structures. This review focuses on EMOPs and PRROs.

In the first PRRO document, seven provinces in central and southern areas were targeted. Recent changes to the PRRO programme have introduced a new beneficiary base in the northern provinces, areas that were previously targeted by development operations.

FFA and FFW activities were implemented under EMOP 6311 and PRRO 10319.

From 2000 onwards, targeting criteria changed repeatedly according to the magnitude of floods or droughts each year; WFP staff faced the dilemma of targeting people most affected by the crisis or targeting those who were most vulnerable and facing chronic food insecurity.

⁴ Work Bank Country Brief, April 2003.

The research team identified a significant number of documents analysing or reviewing the targeting criteria. Box 1 gives an example:

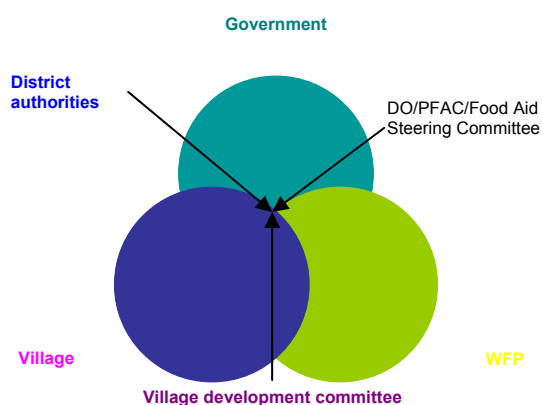
Box 1: Example of targeting criteria for the PRRO 10319

In the “Village Selection for FFW Activities during PRRO 10319” document of 8 February 2005, the targeting criteria are defined as (i) a rice deficit of at least four months per year, (ii) limited dry season/irrigated rice production, (iii) more than 80 percent of households in the village have farming as their main occupation, (iv) limited secondary crop production and livestock assets, and (v) coping strategies are employed to a degree that indicates serious rice shortages.

The first four criteria seem to refer to “chronic” food insecurity, whereas the fifth refers to a temporary shift in the severity of food insecurity. This type of shift may affect chronically food-insecure households or temporarily food-insecure households.

2.3 WFP’s partners for EMOPs

Diagram 1: WFP and its partners



2.3.1 Villages

WFP works in partnership with the villages targeted for FFW. As soon as a village is selected, its members are involved in decision-making. This partnership is formalized by the FFW activity agreement form signed by the village, the district authorities and WFP, which outlines each partner's role and responsibilities.

Each village selects a village development committee (VDC) whose role is to oversee project implementation. It is composed of at least the village chief and a representative from the Lao Women's Union.

2.3.2 The Government

The country office made the decision to implement all EMOPs from 2000 onwards through government administrative structures. This partnership was formalized for the PRRO in a letter of understanding (LoU) signed in July 2005 that defines the purpose of government operations and WFP assistance, describes each partner's obligations and provides for an additional memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the provincial authorities and WFP to determine the obligations of the partners in each province. The MoU is reportedly not yet operational.

The LoU establishes an operational management structure put at WFP's disposal for delivering food aid⁵ based on the Government's decentralized administrative structure, consisting of:

- a national food aid coordinator from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare;
- a provincial food aid coordinator in each province where WFP operates in partnership with the Government; and
- two district officers in districts where WFP operates in partnership with the Government.

Both partners expressed their satisfaction with the current partnership, but the research team observed that the decision to operate solely through the Government and the organizational aspects of government management impose constraints on WFP's project implementation. The team noted (i) high turnover of district officers and provincial food aid coordinators, which made it difficult for WFP to ensure that qualified and well-trained staff were available for FFW, and (ii) the fact that the district officers originate from administrative offices such as the Department of Transport, Posts and Communications, the Department of Planning and Cooperation, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Labour and Social Welfare; as a result, they often lack the qualifications and expertise to manage the FFW activities for which they are responsible.

WFP field staff encountered difficulties in managing staff from an external structure where there is a lack of common working methods and no organizational links.

WFP also contends with constraints related to the selection of villages as part of the partnership between WFP and the Government and data gathered for the DVA.

⁵ LOU between the Government of Lao PDR and WFP for PRRO 10139.

3 Analysis of WFP operational processes

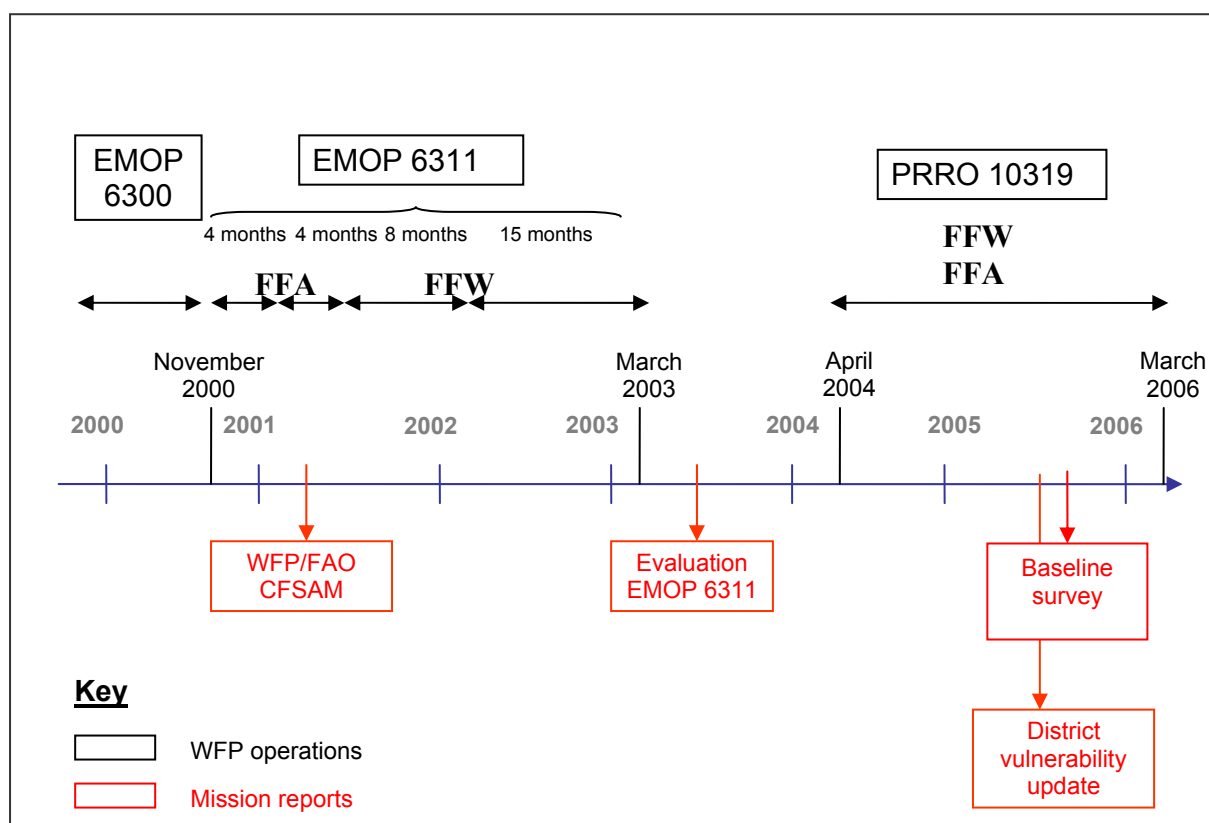
EMOP 6311, which was designed for eight months, was repeatedly extended and eventually lasted for 31 months (see Diagram 2). FFA activities were carried out for the first eight months; FFW was the main activity over the period as a whole.

The current PPPO 10319 was designed for two years, with FFW as its main component. However, as a result of unexpected climatic events (flooding and drought), FFA was implemented in 2004 under the relief assistance provision in the PPPO 10319 project document.

These initial observations indicate that EMOP 6311 and PPPO 10319 can be considered as two projects made up of the same components.

There appears to be little difference between an EMOP and a PPPO in the Lao PDR, especially in view of the repeated extensions of the EMOP and the constant shift from emergency to protracted crisis. For the sake of simplicity, this report focuses on the distinction between relief assistance such as FFA and FFW, rather than between the EMOP and PPPO themselves.

Diagram 2: Chronology of WFP operations and mission reports in Lao PDR (2000–2006)



3.1 From alert process and needs assessment to project design

WFP plays a leading role in the disaster management team at the national level; it will take over leadership of the team in 2006. It must therefore continue to strengthen its capacity in conducting needs assessments.

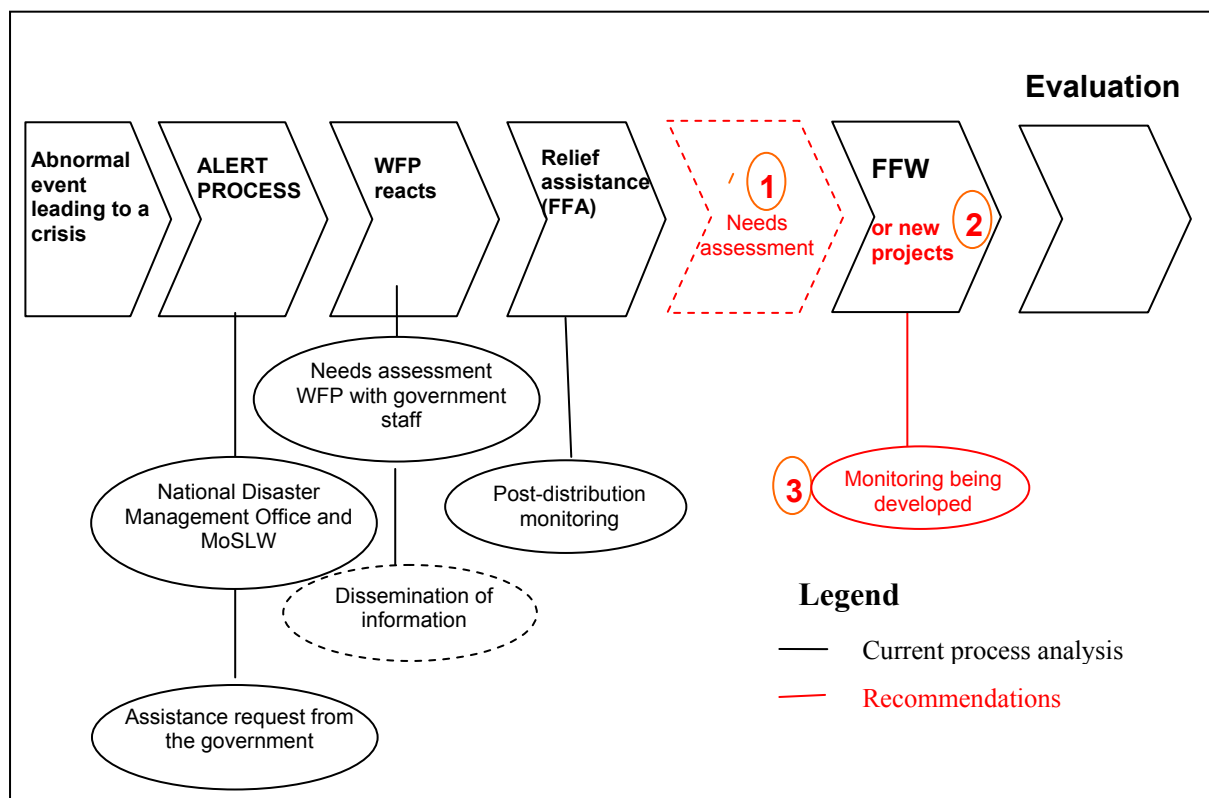
Chapter 1 of the EFSA handbook recommends that “... In a protracted operation, periodic re-assessments may be required every one or two years, notably prior to proposing the formulation of a new phase...”⁶.

As illustrated in Diagram 2, an initial crop and food supply assessment mission (CFSAM) took place in 2001 whose main objective was “...to assess the overall rice supply situation and possible needs for food aid for the 2001 marketing year...”. This CFSAM focused on assessing rice damage in order to design a food aid strategy for 2001; the main medium-term recommendation was “...to strengthen improved needs assessment, infrastructure damage assessment and crop damage assessment capabilities...”. Despite the recommendations, however, an in-depth assessment of damage or food-security needs has not been conducted since 2001.

In 2003, an evaluation of EMOP 6311 was carried out shortly before it ended. One objective was “...to make recommendations on how to design future operations based on the experiences of EMOP 6311...”. A PRRO is not usually designed on the basis of an evaluation mission, so it is questionable whether sufficient information was gathered for this purpose. It is clear that the evaluation raised important issues as to the drafting of the PRRO document, covering technical issues, targeting, implementation and M&E. It is regrettable that an EFSA was not carried out prior to designing the PRRO, first to identify the real needs of the population and second to propose responses to needs other than FFW.

⁶ See WFP Emergency Food Security Assessment Handbook, pg 31.

Diagram 3: WFP operational processes in Lao PDR



It is important to highlight the absence of a needs-assessment phase prior to the design phase of WFP operations (see Diagram 3). Failure to establish a link between needs assessment and project design may result in mistakes in the design process. On the basis of the available information, it appears that some food-security issues are addressed by FFW, but the extent to which these needs are real and whether other needs could have been addressed if alternative methods had been adopted cannot be established.

In terms of dissemination of information collected during the needs assessment, further opportunities for collaborating with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other agencies should be developed. Several opportunities for inter-agency work are not currently being exploited: for example, exchange of information between WFP and FAO is poor, other than by e-mail; formal procedures for sharing information are lacking, which results in loss of institutional memory.

3.2 From design to implementation

Implementation of WFP operations has been flexible, first in shifting from FFA to FFW and vice-versa, for example in the emergency interventions in 2004 under the PRRO, and second in adopting a targeting mechanism that enabled operators to refine targeting criteria. However, additional flexibility in designing new projects would have been appropriate.

WFP's operations in the Lao PDR reflect its three main principles for successful implementation:

- i) mitigating food insecurity, principally by distributing rice and expanding paddies, and constructing roads and bridges;
- ii) assisting communities in remote areas; the project is subject to pressure to be cost-effective, however, causing targeting criteria to deviate from WFP principles; and

- iii) building government capacity by working with the Government on EMOPs and training government staff in FFW methods and principles.

Another concern raised by the issue of linking project design to implementation is the question of the resources and expertise of partners: WFP provides the food resources, but the supply of non-food items may be a constraint.

WFP operations require specific technical expertise for building roads, bridges and fishponds and for expanding paddies but it seems that operators focus too much on acquiring these skills at the expense of food-security expertise.

3.3 From implementation to monitoring

All documents from 2000 onwards, particularly the evaluation of EMOP 6311, underlined weaknesses in monitoring, which focused solely on “...the number and type of rice recipients and amount of rice received...”. The EMOP and the PRRO aim to mitigate food insecurity, but there is insufficient monitoring of progress towards food-security objectives, in particular:

- absence of indicators and a logical framework in EMOP 6311 project documents for assessing and reporting the extent to which the objectives have been achieved;
- lack of forms and questionnaires for PRRO monitoring; the data collected informally does not provide adequate information for PRRO indicators; and
- lack of visits to completed FFW schemes to assess the extent to which objectives have been achieved.

Box 2: Example of outcome indicators in the PRRO

The logical framework of PRRO 10319 provides two impact-level indicators:

- benefit assessment on a scale of 1 to 5 of communal/individual assets with regard to reliable access to food; and
- the percentage of supported assets that are maintained and in use after one year of completion, differentiated by type and size.

There is currently no means of monitoring these indicators.

3.4 From monitoring to evaluation

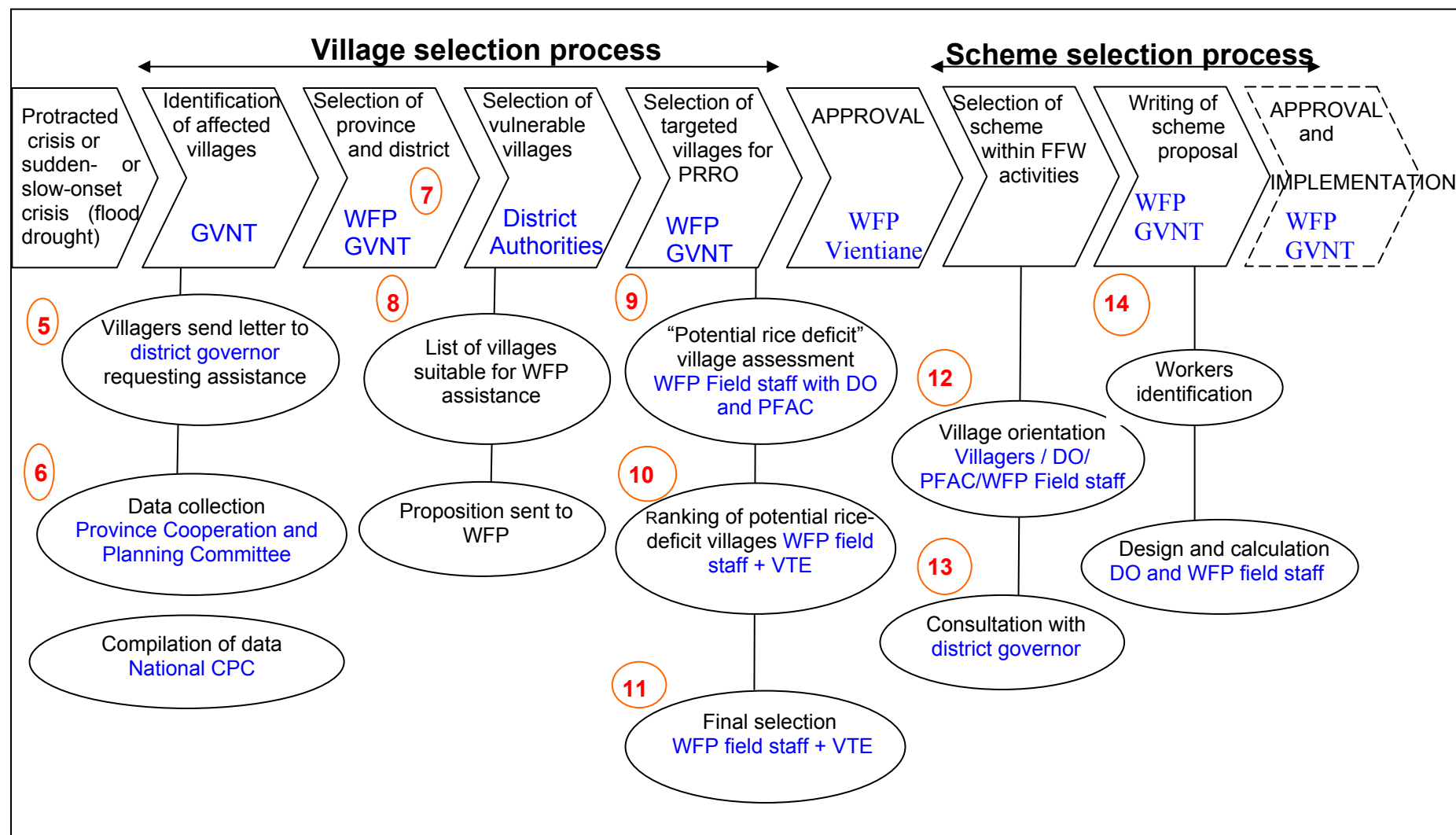
An evaluation was designed and implemented for EMOP 6311, many of whose recommendations have been put into practice: for instance, a baseline survey and research on a coping strategies index, and updating of the DVA with additional indicators.

The fact that insufficient information was recorded in the monitoring phase had an impact on the amount of information available for the evaluation. The mid-term assessment planned in the PRRO project document has not yet taken place.

In short, there are significant weaknesses in WFP’s internal processes for linking needs assessment, project design and monitoring. Some of these issues are being addressed through procedures being developed by the new management team:

- recruitment of a VAM officer responsible for building a needs assessment team;
- rewriting of the PRRO logical framework and updating objectives and indicators; and
- designing an M&E system with a field visit form that provides information on the logical framework indicators.

Diagram 4: Selection processes for implementation of FFW activities



4 Analysis of selection processes for implementation of FFW activities

4.1 Methods and tools used by WFP

This section refers to Diagram 4, points 7, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 14.

4.1.1 WFP data-collection methods

It is important to underline the high levels of motivation and commitment among WFP field staff in their work with communities: despite the lack of training in this type of assessment, field staff adopted the most participative methods and ensured that women's views were taken into account. This was one of main strengths of the village assessment method.

WFP field staff currently use a “global” method for collecting data in villages, but they have not had training in carrying out needs assessments and rely on interviewing a whole village as a group; some questions may be addressed to the women present. During such interviews, WFP staff use a questionnaire entitled “Potential Rice Deficit Village Assessment” to obtain quantitative data in seven categories: (i) general village information; (ii) paddy rice production; (iii) upland rice production; (iv) other crops grown in the village; (v) household rice deficits; (vi) livestock; and (vii) coping strategies.

The observations of the research team on the questionnaire are:

- The questionnaire fails to give information about the type of crisis and its rate of recurrence.
- The history of the village and its ethnic characteristics are not recorded.
- Questions focus on the effect of the crisis on rice production and fail to take other crops, livestock or assets into consideration.
- There is no means of indicating the relative importance of different coping strategies.
- The questionnaire does not provide sufficient information on livelihood strategies such as remittances, other income or off-farm activities.

The questionnaire also raises issues regarding the relevance of collecting quantitative data such as the number of livestock or the rice deficit per household using techniques that have a risk of bias or inaccuracy and that apply only at the household level because household composition and wealth vary widely. The same applies to questions on coping strategies such as “Do the households seek work outside the village (Y/N)? If yes how many (households/people) and how many days (average)?” This information is only relevant at the household level and should be analysed prior to decision-making. But interviews are not conducted at the household level and thus cannot provide direct observations on household assets and living conditions.

Staff responsible for collecting data must be involved in designing the data questionnaire. District officers complain that alterations are made to the questionnaires without explanation, which can lead to misunderstanding as to how the data will be used in the selection process.

4.1.2 Targeting methods

Provinces and districts. The choice of provinces and districts is based on the DVA document, in consultation with the Government. The use of criteria such as those used in VAM is commendable because it minimizes the risk of the bias that could result from targeting conducted by the Government alone.

The DVA does not take into account the diverse agricultural, ecological and climatic systems that characterize Lao PDR, where 80 percent of the population live in rural areas.

Villages. Prior to WFP selection, the government provides a list of villages that have requested assistance. In the WFP targeting strategy for 2006, villages are ranked according to (i) effects of the crisis in terms of damage to rice, (ii) rice deficit and (iii) coping strategies⁷. The analytical framework is based primarily on quantitative data – but even though the criteria are relevant, the absence of qualitative analysis and disaggregation by household reduce the quality of the analysis as a whole.

Some structural factors that are not defined as criteria have an effect on the selection of villages: the number of villages selected in a district depends on the number of district officers, each of whom is responsible for a maximum of four FFW schemes; the Government should nominate two officers per district, so no more than eight villages can be selected per district.

The EMOP 6311 evaluation report emphasized that accessibility and the presence of UXO are basic factors in selection: remote villages may be excluded because access is difficult, and WFP regulations prohibit the implementation of schemes in areas with UXO.

Activities carried out in the FFW component. WFP has a methodology called “village orientation” for selecting activities that can be implemented in villages. The research team was unable to attend any village orientations, but discussions with villagers indicate their satisfaction with the way discussions were conducted by WFP and district office staff.

Participative methods are widely used, for example to prioritize needs with the community. Gender issues are taken into account: men and women are split into two groups to prioritize the types of activity to be implemented. Voting by raising of hands enables groups to make decisions, though the team questions whether this ensures that the various interests are fully taken into consideration. In all the village meetings attended by the research team, there were many more men present than women; if this true for village orientation exercises, the question arises to what extent women’s interests are represented, especially because men and women often express different needs – women tend to prioritize food and health issues; men tend to prioritize construction or repair of bridges and roads.

The main problem in selecting activities stems from weaknesses in feasibility studies, which often fail to identify operational risks.

Although details of the non-food items to be provided have to be given in the scheme proposal form, the provider is not specified, which was a major difficulty in implementing the scheme. This issue is addressed in the LOU between WFP and the Government in these terms: “...the main non-food items will be provided by village and government contributions, in addition to which WFP will attempt to supply or arrange for the supply the following non-food resources...”. These terms do not determine a supply chain for non-food items, nor specify how the responsibility will be shared.

⁷ Currently being prepared by the programme officer.

People's technical skills are not assessed adequately, and the technical requirements for new activities such as expanding fishponds or paddies are not defined; as a result, villagers have occasionally selected activities for which they had neither the technical skills nor access to agricultural inputs or markets (see Box 3). According to WFP staff, technical support is supervised by government technical departments, but it is not clear whether government support is sufficient to enable villagers to acquire technical skills. According the villagers of Labotham in Savannakhet province, the district representative from the agricultural department helped them to identify a location for a new paddy field, but he did not train them in matters of soil quality and yield improvement.

Limited involvement by staff of technical departments may be explained by the fact that WFP does not provide them with a daily subsistence allowance (DSA) or transport, whereas these benefits are given to district officers, except for those nominated by district governors to assist WFP in FFW schemes.

UXO are a major constraint, a factor has not always been assessed properly. Some areas with UXO have in fact been selected for paddy expansion without coordination with the government department responsible for carrying out UXO clearance. Schemes have as a result been delayed in certain villages without provision for alternative assistance.

Box 3: The story of a fishpond recounted to a WFP field monitor

A new fishpond activity was implemented in a village in southern Lao PDR under FFW. The village completed the work and received rice. One year later, the field monitor returned to the village and noticed that the fishpond had fallen into disrepair and that villagers were no longer using it. In discussion with the villagers, he realized that they had not understood at the time of implementation exactly what a fishpond entailed and they did not have the technical knowledge to run it correctly. Eventually, they had given up trying to farm it.

Several interviews were conducted with government representatives at the national and district levels (see point 13 in Diagram 4). Box 4 gives some examples of the different priorities expressed by government representatives and village chiefs.

Box 4: Examples of different priorities in the Bualapha district, Khammouane province

At the national level, a representative from the Department of International Economic Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained that the Committee for Planning and Investment had designed a National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2006–2010) in which they had included the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES); 47 districts were targeted for assistance, including Bualapha.

In Bualapha district in Khammouane province, the district governor's priorities were: (i) developing infrastructure and (ii) improving crop and livestock selection. He envisaged that WFP would be responsible for bridge construction and the district government for road construction.

In Bualapha district, FFW activities focused on road and bridge construction. In Kengyaloune village in Bualapha district, men indicated that a bridge was their main priority; women indicated that it was increasing rice production through paddy expansion or irrigation.

This emphasizes the importance of the needs assessment phase in the FFW scheme process: without appropriate methods and tools there is a significant risk that a top-down approach may be adopted rather than one that is bottom-up. Evaluations of priorities and needs at the national, provincial and district levels are well founded, but they may not correspond to the beneficiaries' own priorities.

Workers. As recommended in the EMOP evaluation report, the FFW modality focuses on whole communities rather than households so as to respect community social links. No prior selection of workers is carried out; rice is distributed to workers according the number of days they work. But some unintentional selection was observed:

- In any scheme, only households that have labourers can be selected for work and receive rice.
- There is a natural selection for road or bridge construction: only the healthy and physically strong can undertake the work.
- Given that paddy fields are not communal land, the same households benefit from rice distribution for their work in expanding the paddy fields and from the paddy expansion itself.

FFW thus selects workers on the basis of their capabilities rather than vulnerability.

4.2 Training programmes

WFP field staff train government staff in managing FFW projects. An example is the training programme for district officers and provincial food aid coordinators in October 2005 on (i) the principles of FFW, (ii) activities supported by WFP FFW, (iii) targeting strategies and target group selection, (iv) calculation of basic rates and work volumes, (v) filling out WFP forms, (vi) stakeholders' roles and responsibilities, (vii) the importance of monitoring and (viii) the use of monitoring tools. Initial training is followed by monthly refresher workshops for district officers, provincial food aid coordinators and WFP field monitors.

Session 3 of the training programme specifies that before "targeting": "...in close consultation with local authorities, WFP aims at identifying rice deficit and vulnerable target villages for its FFW activities". The training programme failed to provide any details of the methods used. WFP field staff responsible for village selection did not receive training on needs assessment methods, nor was training on WFP food-security principles provided. As a result, the concepts of food security and their implications in terms of assessment were not fully understood by the field team. When WFP field staff were asked about the food-security status of a village, they were unable to provide an adequate response.

4.3 Involvement of WFP partners in the selection processes

4.3.1 Villages

In each village visited (see Diagram 4, point 5), the chief referred to a letter sent to the district governor in which the village stipulates its needs or requests government assistance after a drought or flood. WFP staff do not have access to these letters. The research team did not have access either. But it appears that the letters may provide important information about expressed needs (see Groupe URD's Quality COMPAS – Diagnosis phase⁸).

⁸ See www.compasqualite.org

4.3.2 The Government

The first collection of data on the population's needs (see Diagram 4, points 6 and 8) is carried out by the Cooperation and Planning Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry at the provincial level. Government staff have a strong sense of ownership of the data-collection exercises at the district, province and national levels. Once the data have been collected, government staff compile a list of villages that could benefit from WFP interventions.

Some respondents queried the reliability of the data collected. The research team was unable to meet people directly involved in data collection and so could not triangulate the information. However, the uncertainty as to the reliability of the data-collection process is significant, in that WFP considers only villages on the government list. WFP's VNA method of selection can determine whether the data in the government list is reliable, but the question as to whether the list contains all vulnerable villages or all villages severely affected by crisis will remain unanswered as long as WFP works in direct partnership with the Government.

The VNA method does not address the validity of the data or ask "Does the data collected provide insight into the food insecurity and vulnerability situation of the villagers?". The WFP data-collection method has several weaknesses in assessing food security.

5 Recommendations for FSAs in the Lao PDR

5.1 Improving actors' understanding of food-security principles

Groupe URD recommend dividing food security into four sub-categories – (i) food availability; (ii) food access; (iii) food consumption; and (iv) food utilization – rather than the three identified in the EFSA handbook (food availability, food access and food utilization). This should allow WFP and government staff to gather more precise information on the causes of food insecurity. The same recommendation was made in the needs assessment review in Afghanistan (see “Real-Time Review of Selected Food Aid Programmes Implemented in Afghanistan and Implications for Emergency Food-Security Assessments” paragraphs 91 and 92).

Whatever distinctions are adopted for food-security issues, particularly between food consumption and food utilization, which are typically grouped together as “food utilization” in the handbook, it is essential that all aspects of food security are included. For example, a flood may result in widespread damage and affect a community’s capacity to prepare food, resulting in temporary food insecurity, or it can affect the quality of drinking water and cause health problems such as diarrhoea and poor food absorption. The Lao PDR is subject to droughts and flooding, so food consumption – including preparation of meals, food diversity, number of meals and distribution in households – and biological utilization – involving matters of health, water and sanitation – should be considered.

WFP needs to reinforce capacity-building for its staff by providing more training. It is also essential to improve understanding among government staff of food-security principles: government officials should be invited to attend training for WFP staff in Vientiane. At the field level, a new module should be incorporated into the current training programme for district officers and provincial food aid coordinators.

The complexity of the interacting factors that affect food security in chronically food-insecure countries is such that analysis requires understanding of subjects such as rural economics and nutrition. Local staff with backgrounds in relevant subjects should be recruited to build capacity in country office teams.

→ WFP should train its staff at Headquarters and in the field in the principles of food security to ensure common understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of needs and to improve understanding of WFP’s role and project objectives and of the importance of multi-sector approaches and inter-agency cooperation. More training should be given to government officials.

5.2 Improving the quality of village-selection methods

5.2.1 Essential steps that are complementary to village meetings

Participatory methods have been developed and adapted to humanitarian work in *Participatory Techniques and Tools, A WFP Guide* and the *ALNAP/Groupe URD Participation by Crisis-affected Populations in Humanitarian Action, Practitioners' Handbook*⁹. These methods underline the importance of a step-by-step approach whereby actors progressively improve their understanding of the situation by using participatory tools.

⁹ ALNAP/Groupe URD, *Participation by Crisis-affected Populations in Humanitarian Action, Practitioners' Handbook* (draft), Overseas Development Institute, London 2003

Good practice requires three essential steps: (i) interviews with key informants at the outset; (ii) a minimum of field observation through a transect walk and a mapping exercise; and (iii) a community meeting.

→ To improve the relevance of data collected in the needs-assessment phase, field staff should conduct interviews with key informants such as village chiefs and representatives of the Lao Women's Union, and interviews with the village as a whole.

→ WFP field staff should also carry out field visits to enhance understanding of cultivation methods, identify areas affected by crisis and observe village facilities, making it possible to triangulate the data correctly.

5.2.2 Using the semi-structured interview technique

The analysis grid on which field staff based their needs assessment questionnaire was a structure for obtaining quantitative data with criteria related to the amount of rice deficit per household, the number of buffaloes and cattle, and the number and relative importance of coping strategies. But the risk of manipulation and approximation is high when this kind of data are collected publicly in a village meeting.

→ There is a need for more in-depth, flexible interviews to allow field staff to collect qualitative and quantitative information for more thorough analysis.

These interviews should address: (i) the history and characteristics of the village; (ii) the characteristics of the crisis and its potential evolution; (iii) risks faced by the villagers; (iv) resilience factors of the villagers; (v) damage caused by the crisis to crops, livestock, assets and water and sanitation facilities and (vi) the effects of the crisis on nutrition and health; qualitative as well as quantitative data should be taken into consideration.

5.2.3 Conducting household interviews

→ In the village-selection process there is rarely enough time for in-depth statistical assessment. To obtain a full overview of the situation, field staff must conduct household interviews in addition to interviews with key informants and field visits.

Various approaches can be used to select households for interview. Eight to ten households should be chosen on the basis of the village chief's recommendations. The selected households should include vulnerable and non-vulnerable households, different ethnic groups if relevant. Alternatively, random selection can be used. When interviewers have enough consistent answers to obtain an accurate understanding of the situation, the interviews can be terminated.

The objective of household interviews is to enable WFP field staff to improve their understanding of living conditions and of the impact of the crisis on gender, ethnic and wealth groups. The interviews should cover issues such as non-food items and assets, nutritional habits, nutritional and health status, water and sanitation and income and expenditure. They should allow WFP field staff to make their assessments more accurate by including qualitative criteria. Needs-assessment teams could also adopt the semi-structured interview model to address the additional topics mentioned above.

→ The WFP country office recognizes the importance of refining the data-collection process; resources and tools should be allocated to field teams so that their efforts can be consolidated.

5.2.4 Designing analysis frameworks

It is not possible at this stage to design an analysis framework in which information is weighted according to its importance. EFSAAs have several outputs, one of which is designing the analysis grid. This section provides general guidance for analysis purposes rather than an outline for an analysis framework.

→ The analysis framework should be designed on the basis of information from semi-structured interviews; partners should collaborate in the design process.

→ The analysis framework should be based on qualitative and quantitative data.

Qualitative data can be used either to help to explain quantitative findings or, once it has been analysed in a quantitative analysis framework, to provide information about targeting criteria; in this way quantitative and qualitative data can be used simultaneously. It is important that interviewers have the experience and capacity to obtain an overall view of the situation, to ensure that qualitative data is fully taken into account in the analysis and that households are ranked according to their living conditions.

Qualitative data such as “general opinion about living conditions” can be ranked “very good/good/bad/very bad” and incorporated in an analysis framework with quantitative data on one side and qualitative data – respondents’ assessments – on the other.

Similarly, household interviews should allow needs-assessment teams to complete this information and define a flexible approach that is capable of taking into account local characteristics:

- Socio-economic disparity: is there a significant difference between wealthy and poor people? WFP may choose to adopt a selective approach to targeting workers.
- Ethnic/social disparity: is one ethnic group particularly at risk? Disparity could exist because of new arrivals in the village following a government-led resettlement campaign. WFP may choose to adopt a selective approach to targeting workers.
- Gender concerns: do women have specific needs? Do men and women have the same needs? Women often express different needs from those of men, partly because of their different household responsibilities: women are usually in charge of food stocks, cooking and childcare; men are responsible for purchasing and labour. In this case, it may be appropriate to adopt a selective approach for women in planning activities or targeting workers.

This type of analysis depends on the expertise of the staff carrying out the assessment. WFP field monitors or district officers are responsible for the analysis process, even though final approval may be made in the capital. The quality of the analysis is linked to field staff’s understanding of the food-security situation, so training on food-security issues and needs assessment methods should be a priority.

5.2.5 Training in needs-assessment methods

WFP field staff may have used an adaptation of the village orientation method for needs assessments as a result of gaps in training.

→ WFP field staff and government staff should be trained in targeting to improve their understanding of the objectives and methods of VNAs.

The objectives of this training should be to: (i) improve understanding of the methods and tools and their relevance in each stage of the needs assessment process; (ii) provide guidance as to which method is appropriate at each stage; (iii) improve understanding of the challenges of VNAs in relation to WFP's mandate and principles; and (iv) enable WFP and government staff to adopt an analytical and self-critical approach to their work.

The training should cover: (i) the objectives of needs assessments, from data collection to selection; (ii) a food-security and livelihoods analytical framework; (iii) methods and tools, including types of interviews needed to understand interests and risks; (iv) the relevance of different types of data; (v) the criteria used for targeting; (vi) the links between data collection and targeting criteria and the use of an analytical framework; and (vii) bias and traps to avoid such as providing the answer in the question.

The content of this training is partly developed in section 3.3 of the EFSA handbook.

5.3 Shifting from rice-damage criteria to food-insecurity criteria

This shift had been envisaged and applied in EMOP 6311, particularly Phase 3, but no analytical framework had been defined in the village targeting process as a basis for it. Several improvements can be made to the analytical method to document targeting more effectively. An analytical framework should take into account qualitative information such as: (i) an assessment of living conditions according to local vulnerability criteria and VAM criteria; (ii) an assessment of the magnitude of the crisis in relation to the crisis history of the village; (iii) a ranking of the damage caused by the crisis and its impact on food security to determine what the villagers most urgently require; and (iv) a ranking of coping strategies by relative importance.

Targeting of food-insecure people could be improved by ensuring that selection procedures distinguish between those who benefit from the work, and those who carry out the work and receive rice. For community work, WFP could select workers from the most vulnerable households. For road construction, for example, WFP could select workers from surrounding villages on the basis of food-insecurity levels. According to the WFP country office, however, selecting workers for FFW is a complicated process; self-targeting remains the most appropriate solution for these activities.

5.4 Developing project supply chain assessment capacities and responses

A project supply chain includes materials such as nails and timber for bridge construction, equipment, inputs such as young fish for fishponds, assistance such as planning to remove UXO and technical support such as training modules on managing fishponds.

5.4.1 Clarifying the supply chain among partners

The PRRO objectives include long-term impact on household food security.

→ In view of these objectives and the difficulties encountered supplying non-food items, WFP should examine the option of supplying non-food items in addition to rice in their projects.

→ WFP should develop a way to address the need for technical assistance to ensure that projects are successful and that objectives are met, especially when new agricultural activities are introduced to a community.

One possibility for a short-term improvement could be to motivate government staff in district technical departments by giving them the same working conditions as district officers – DSA, motorcycles and fuel – or an equivalent inline with WFP regulations.

5.4.2 Reinforcing the feasibility study at the FFW design phase

→ To resolve the above difficulties, a feasibility study must be carried out to document the constraints and each partner's capacity to overcome them.

The feasibility study should assess and record the technical constraints and inputs required for construction or cultivation and what solutions exist.

6 General recommendations for FSAs in WFP

6.1 Recommendations for managing the project cycle as a whole

6.1.1 Including a GFSA phase

A GFSA is an in-depth assessment (see EFSA handbook) at the country level that also takes into account regional geographic diversity. GFSAs should be conducted following a crisis and repeated at regular intervals, depending on the evolution or recurrence of the crisis. The regular flooding, drought and widespread chronic food insecurity in the Lao PDR call for comprehensive understanding of people's needs by means of GFSAs.

→ A GFSA phase should be included in the WFP operational process to enable comprehensive understanding of needs. WFP should consider GFSAs as a separate phase in the operational process (see Diagram 3, point 1).

A GFSA phase should facilitate the identification of actual needs as opposed to expressed needs (see question 19 in Quality COMPAS). Operators can extend their analytical framework and increase the range of potential operation modalities if necessary (see Diagram 3, point 2). This new type of project modality is already under discussion in the country office.

The country office already has the staff to carry out and support GFSAs: a VAM officer, a programme officer and sub-office programme officer, field monitors and district officers; guidance is already available in the EFSA handbook. The only potential problem is the risk that the GFSA phase is eclipsed by an emergency situation; this underlines the importance of raising awareness in WFP of the relevance of a GFSA phase.

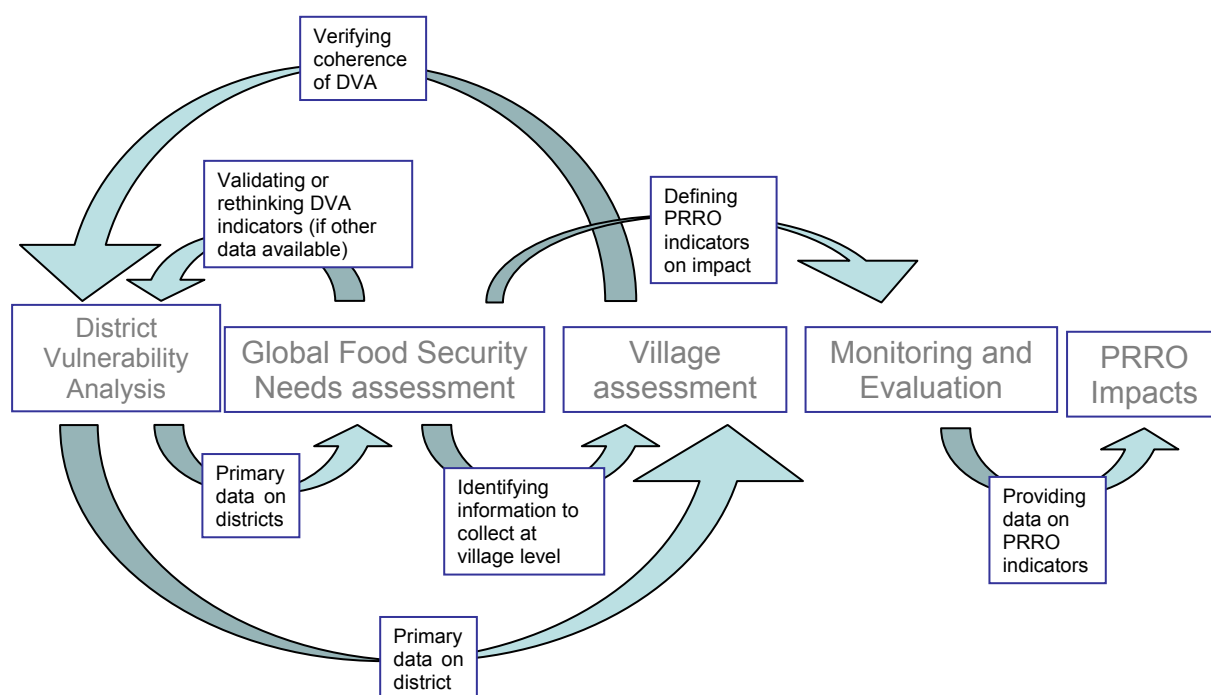
6.1.2 Clarifying links between data collection and assessment tools

DVAs, FSAs and VNAs identify vulnerable and food-insecure populations; they need to be linked to ensure coherence.

GFSA results should be used to confirm or challenge the validity and relevance of DVAs, enabling operators to remove or add indicators to the DVA as necessary. Adding new indicators is a challenge, because the indicators are usually chosen on the basis of the availability of data at the district level, not on the basis of validity or reliability. Adding new indicators thus depends on the capacity of local authorities to provide additional data.

GFSAs should be seen as a tool, especially in terms of the type of information to be collected, to ensure coherence with other tools. VNAs should be consistent with GFSAs, especially in terms of quantitative data.

Diagram 5: Linking DVAs, FSAs, VNAs and M&E



This coherence is apparent in the Lao PDR in that some of the quantitative data collected by means of the VNA questionnaire overlaps with DVA indicators (see Table 1), so it is possible to provide data on DVA indicators using data collected in villages.

Such cross-referencing should be used more widely, and a mechanism should be set up to ensure that DVAs are coherent with village characteristics in terms of level of vulnerability or cluster rank. This up-dating mechanism should make it possible to confirm or challenge the validity and relevance of DVAs and update vulnerability mapping.

Table 1: Links between DVA indicators and potential rice-deficit village questionnaire used by WFP Lao PDR

DVA indicators	Data to be collected
Rice production per capita	Paddy and upland rice production
Cropping diversity	Other crops grown in village
Livestock ownership	Animals in the village
Access to forested areas	Foraging in the forest (Y/N)
Access to roads and rivers	Not directly informed
Malaria incidence	Not informed
UXO impact	UXO present (Y/N)
Education	Not informed

6.1.3 Designing an M&E system linked to PRRO indicators

WFP needs to design and implement an M&E system that provides information on outputs such as activities carried out, quantities distributed and work completed and that allows operators to assess the extent to which objectives are being met, thus anticipating the

outcomes. Information from M&E should include evaluation of beneficiary satisfaction with access and usage issues.

Questionnaires and semi structured interviews (SSI) etc. used in monitoring should provide data for measuring PRRO indicators (see Diagram 5). It is therefore essential that the logical framework for WFP operations be taken into account when designing M&E tools.

6.2 Recommendations for EFSA

6.2.1 Recommendation on guidance in the EFSA handbook

If EFSA is to have an impact on WFP operations, the EFSA handbook needs to be promoted in training modules: the evidence indicates that training is important to ensure widespread application of the EFSA handbook. Training should target expatriate and local staff in the capital and in the field. The existing training module should be further developed, given the importance of this type of operational support material.

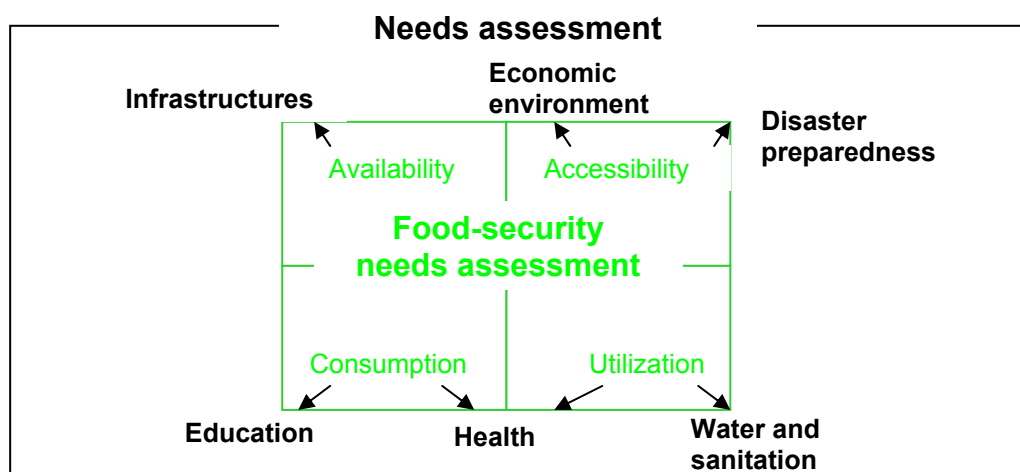
The EFSA handbook helps managers to support and check the quality of the methods used by their staff to carry out assessments, organize training courses and enhance the quality of food-security needs assessments and operations; but its present format is too detailed for use in the field.

→ WFP should design and issue a ‘pocket’ version of the EFSA handbook for use in the field.

6.2.2 From a narrow to a holistic approach

A holistic approach should be used whenever possible for food-security needs assessments, taking into account the factors related to the four food-security themes.

Diagram 6: Adopting an holistic approach for FSAs



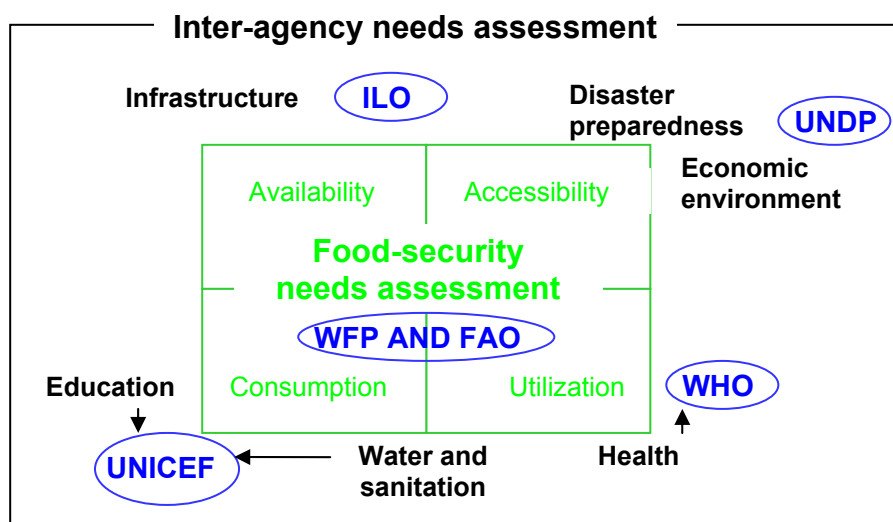
Food insecurity could be the result of one problem or a combination of different problems, so it is necessary to consider:

- Food availability: the amount of food available in a country or area from domestic production, commercial imports and food aid; the quality of infrastructures that enable communities to access markets or other food sources must be assessed.
- Food access: how households access food through their own production (crops, livestock, fish), purchases, barter exchange, gifts, borrowing or food aid, potential deterioration of household production capacities, economic resources such as wages and other income, and market structures, prices and the political context must be assessed.
- Food consumption: the way food is handled and cooked, which food items are included in meals, how frequently food is consumed and how food is distributed in households. People's understanding of how to prepare and store food, hygiene, nutrition and childcare concerns must be assessed.
- Food utilization: the use of food by the body; health, water and sanitation issues must be assessed.

6.2.3 Encouraging inter-agency needs assessments

Food-security issues are linked to other technical areas, but United Nations technical skills are divided among several agencies. WFP needs to reinforce its collaboration with other United Nations agencies – FAO on agriculture, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on disaster preparedness, UNICEF on nutrition and education, WHO on health – to make the shift to a holistic approach.

Diagram 7: Designing inter-agency needs assessments



However, it is not easy to put this recommendation into practice. Motivation in WFP alone is not enough: it must become a shared concern for all United Nations agencies. But the challenge must be taken up to improve understanding of the needs of crisis-affected or vulnerable populations and to deliver better quality aid.

→ The country office should promote inter-agency assessments and joint responses to needs resulting from a disaster or worsening chronic poverty and food insecurity.

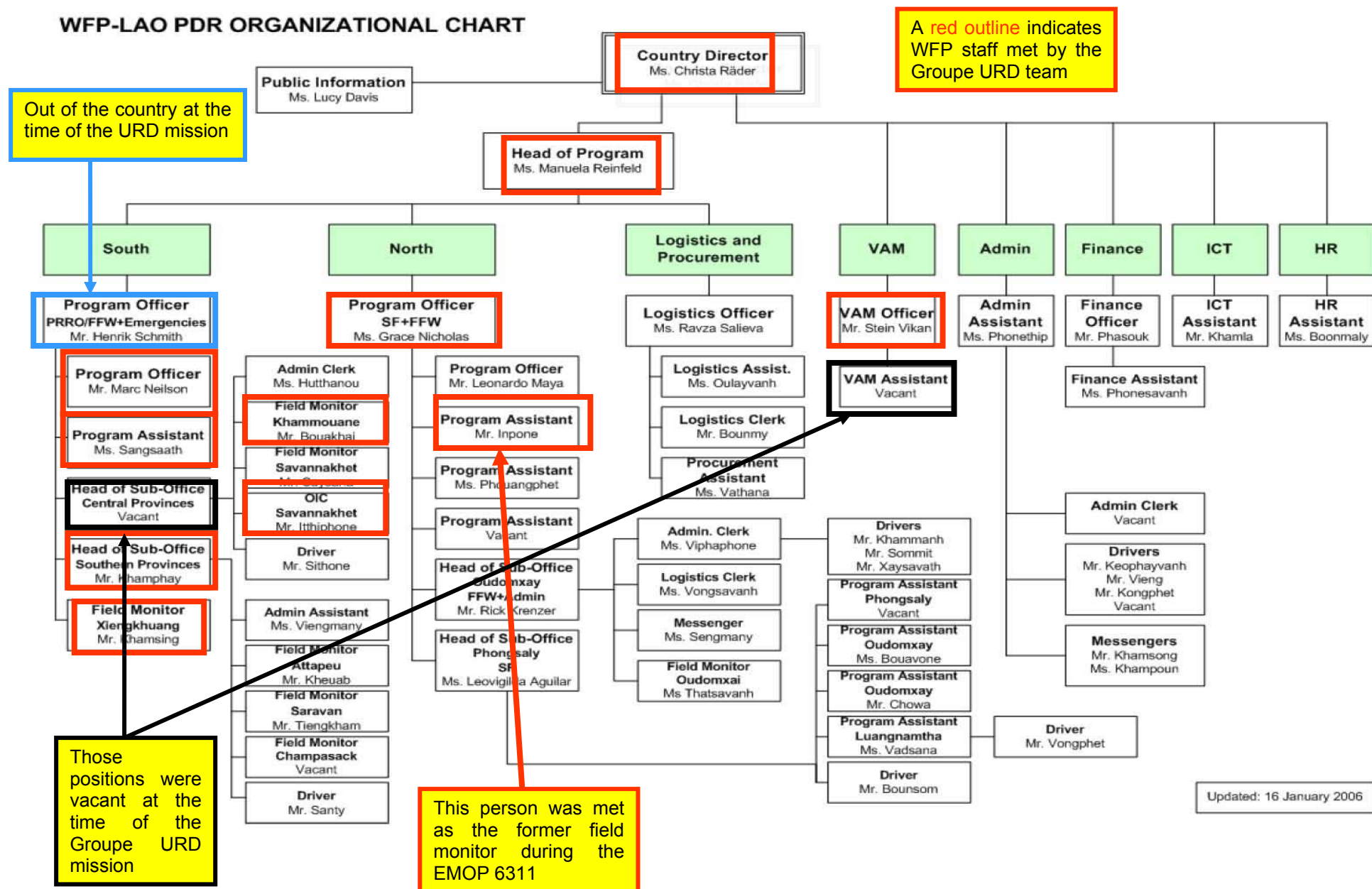
Annexes

ANNEX I: ITINERARY AND PEOPLE MET

Date	Location	Activities	People met
24 Jan 2006	Vientiane	Introduction meeting with WFP staff	Managerial team in Vientiane Office
25 Jan 2006	Vientiane	Individual interviews	Mr Inpone, programme assistant and former provincial manager for Khammouane and Savannakhet Mr Marc Nielson, programme officer Ms Manuela Reinfeld, head of programme Ms Sangsaath, programme assistant
		Meeting with Government representative	Mr Khamphao Homphangna, deputy director general of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
26 Jan 2006	Vientiane	Individual interview	Ms Christa Rader, country director
		Visit of French NGO working for 25 years in Lao PDR	Comité de Coopération avec le Laos
	Khammouane Province	By road to Ta Khaet	Mr Stein Vikan, WFP VAM officer
27 Jan 2006	Khammouane Province Town of Ta Khaet	Participative workshop with district officers	Seven district officers representing four districts: Mahaxai District: Mr Vern and Mr Khounta; Nakai District: Mr Inthava and Mr Dalavanh; Boulapha District: Mr Kongkham and Mr Suneta; Xaibouthong District: Mr Lungern; Mr Muangma: provincial food aid coordinator; Mr Bouakhai: WFP field monitor, Khammouane; Mr Ittiphone: field monitor, Savannakhet.
		Individual interview	Mr Stein Vitan, VAM officer
28 Jan 2006	Khammouane Boulapha District	Meetings with villagers	Village Kengyaloune: 30 men and 20 women, including members of the village FFW committee
29 Jan 2006	Khammouane Boulapha District	Meeting with Boulapha district representative	Mr Bounsuan, president of the Boulapha District Development Committee
		Meetings with villagers	Vagueak village: 40 men and 15 women
		Individual interviews	Mr Muangma: provincial food aid coordinator Mr Bouakhai, WFP field monitor in Khammouane
30 Jan 2006	Khammouane	Meeting with Hinboun district representative	Hinboun district deputy director, district governor and collaborators

	Hinboun District	Assessment conducted by Mr Bouakhai and Mr Muangma	Huay Burk village: 30 men and 10 women
		Visit to flood-damaged paddies and other croplands	Naant village
31 Jan 2006	Savannakhet Sepone District	Meeting with villagers	Labotham village: 30 men, including the village chief
		Meeting with Sepon district representative	Mr Soukhaseum Senavong, Sepon district party secretary, and governor and collaborators
		Informal discussion	Mr Saysana, former field monitor in Savannakhet
		Individual interview	Mr Itthiphone
1 Feb 2006	Back to Vientiane	Return to Vientiane	
2 Feb 2006	Vientiane	Meetings with NGOs implementing FFW projects	World Vision: Mr Khamnoi Channavong, food aid project manager
		Individual interview with WFP staff member involved in development programme	Ms Grace Nicholas, programme officer, school feeding and FFW
3 Feb 2006	Vientiane	Individual interview	Mr Khamphay, head of sub-office for Champasack Saravan and Attapeu provinces
	Xienghuang Province Town of Phonsavanh	Meeting with WFP field staff, district officers and provincial food aid coordinator	Mr Bouaphanh Phamasa, provincial chief of Labour Social Welfare/provincial food aid coordinator; Bouathorg Bounkhamkone, chief of cabinet of Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare Pek/district officer; Mr Kasming, WFP field monitor
4 Feb 2006	Xienghuang Pek and Koun districts	Meeting with villagers	Khangnong Louang village in Pek district: 25 men, including the village chief
		Meeting with villagers	Navieng Kham village in Pek district: 30 men and 15 women, including the village chief and women's union representatives
		Discussion with the chief of the village and visit to flood-damaged fields	Nond Luang village in Koun district: the village chief
5 Feb 2006		Return to Vientiane	
6 Feb 2006	Vientiane	Presentation of Quality COMPAS	WFP staff in Vientiane
		Meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative	Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Mr Latsamy Keomany, deputy director general
7 Feb 2006	Vientiane	Feedback meeting	WFP staff in Vientiane

ANNEX II: WFP-LAO PDR ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



ANNEX III: VILLAGES AND SCHEMES VISITED

Province	District	Name of village	Type of crisis	Project	Type of activities	Number of beneficiaries	Project status	Comments of the project implementation
Khammouane	Bualapha	Kengyaloune	Flood in 2005	FFW	Road construction	36 households / 189 people	Completed	The project started in Dec 2004; interrupted by delay in UXO clearance; restarted in December 2005.
Khammouane	Bualapha	Vaguagueak	Flood and drought 2005		Data collection by district officers	60 households / 353 people		
Khammouane	Hinboun	Huay Burk	Flood in Sept 2005	Village proposed by district authorities for FFW				
Khammouane	Hinboun	Naant	Flood in Sept 2005	Village proposed by district authorities for FFW				
Savannakhet	Sepon	Labotham	Drought in 2003	FFW	Paddy expansion	40 households / 217 people	Delayed	Initially planned to start in March 2005; WFP decided to delay it because of UXO; villagers did not follow WFP Vientiane decision and expanded paddies without waiting for UXO clearance in 2005; villagers are currently claiming rice distribution.
Xienghuang	Pek	Khangnong Louang	Drought in 2003	FFA	Sewing and cropping	41 households / 282 people	Completed	Rice distribution carried out in September 2004.
Xienghuang	Pek	Navieng Kham	Drought in 2003	FFA	Road upgrading, cropping vegetables	62 households / 419 people	Completed	The rice distribution carried out in September 2004.
Xienghuang	Koun	Nong Luang	Flood in 2005	FFW	Paddy, road, fishponds and well	54 households / 353 people	Ongoing Road completed	The project started in December 2005; first road construction is complete; other works were delayed due to UXO clearance.

ANNEX IV: LIST OF REVIEWED DOCUMENTS

The reports and documents are classified following two main categories: WFP documents and reports and other documents from NGOs and partners in Lao PDR. The categories contain sub-categories referring to the purpose of reports and documents.

A WFP documents and reports

1 WFP project documents in Lao PDR

Assessment and mission reports:

- “Chronology of a Crops and Food Security Assessment Mission”, 12–23 February.
- “FAO/WFP and Food Supply assessment mission to Lao PDR”, March 2001.
- “WFP Food Aid activities: Lao PDR”, not finished, no date.
- “District Vulnerability Analysis”, 2005 update LAO PDR, final draft, 26 June 2005.
- “Baseline survey for PRRO 10319 (June-September 2005)”: initial report.
- “Summary of quantitative findings”, Laos SP2 Baseline report.

Project design:

- EMOP 6311: assistance to flood affected people in Lao PDR.
- PRRO 10319 – Recovery assistance to the Disaster Prone and Vulnerable Insecure Communities in the Lao PDR.
- Letter of Understanding the government of Lao PDR and the World Food Programme.
- Draft - PRRO 10319 – Logistical Framework.

Targeting documents:

- “Objective of Emergency Operation 2000–2003”.
- “Summary of key principles of WFP FFW”.
- “Village selection for FFW activities during the PRRO 10319 – 8 February, 2005”.
- “Village selection for FFW activities during the PRRO 10319 – Second village targeting exercise”.
- Draft – “Targeting Procedure and Log Frame 2006”.

Monitoring and evaluation:

- “Evaluation Report EMOP 6311”, June 2003.

Training:

- Emergency Relief Training – Central and Southern Laos – Flood relief: November 2000.
- FFW Training in Oudomxay 3–7 October 2005.

2 WFP scheme documents and field reports in Lao PDR

Process:

- WFP– FFW Project Cycle.

Forms:

- Village targeting form “Potential rice deficit village to take part in FFW activities”.
- FFW Impact assessment HH questionnaire (Baseline Survey).
- FFW Pro formas – planning, implementing, monitoring and reporting (Village FFW committee (VFC), FFW activity agreement, scheme proposal, survey and design form roads, dam and irrigation channels, survey and design form paddy expansion, fishponds and tree planting, FFW rates 2005–2006, labour attendance form, guide to complete midterm and final implementation reports).
- Draft – field visit form for PRRO 10319 and 10306.

Scheme data and list:

- List of all schemes implemented or approved in 2005.

Field reports:

Xienghuang province:

- The procedure of village selection for Xiengkhuang and Huaphanh provinces.

- Summary of site visit to Xiengkhuang and Houaphanh Provinces – 30 October–3 November.
- PRRO 10319 – Khoun district, Numnai Village assessment on 5–6 December 2005.
- PEK district - List of village affected by drought in 2003.
- Khoun district, Nongluang – scheme proposal: upgrade accessibility.

Khammouane province:

- Boualapha district, Vanfgouak - Village targeting form filled in by district officer.
- Boualapha district, Vanfgouak - Village targeting form filled in by WFP field monitor.
- Boualapha district, Vanfgouak – Scheme Proposal: Road construction.
- Report from the PFAC in Khammouane.

Saravan and Attapeu province:

- Saravan Province – Progress of all activities and record of the post-distribution monitoring.
- Attapeu Province – Phonlong district, Ban Idoum - scheme proposal: paddy expansion.

Savannakhet province:

- Sepon district, Labothom – scheme proposal: paddy expansion.
- PPRO field visit in Savannakhet and Khammouane provinces from 7–11 November 2005.
- Summary of site visit to Champasak, Savannakhet and Khammouane Province 10–17 December.
- PRRO 10319 –Distribution in Luang Phrabang for drought-affected villages.

3 Other WFP project documents in Lao PDR

- “Development project brief, September 2005 – Laos 10306.0 Assistance to Food Insecure Households in Transition”.
- “Development Project – Lao PDR 10306.0: Assistance to Food Insecure Households in Transition”.
- “Development project – Lao PDR 10078.1: Access to Primary Education for Girls and Boys in Remote Areas of Lao PDR”.

4 WFP general guidance documents

- “Definition of Emergencies”, 2 December 2004.
- Draft – “Exiting Emergencies: Programme Options for Transition from Emergency Response”, 2 December 2004.
- Household Surveying Modules.
- WFP Reporting Modules.

B – Documents from other NGOs or partners in Lao PDR

1 World Vision in Lao PDR

- FFW Project request.
- Master beneficiaries list.
- FFW project monitoring report.
- FFW project completion report.

2 Government of Lao PDR

- “Plan of Action for Poverty Eradication”, Summary document, period of implementation 2006–2010.
- “Decree pertaining to the Management and Use of Official Development Assistance”, Prime Ministry’s office, Lao PDR, November 2004.

- Draft “Sixth National Socio Economic Development Plan (2006–2010)”, Committee for Planning and Investment, Lao PDR, January 2006.

3 CCL (Comité de Coopération avec le Laos)

- Boumard, P., Gentil, D., *Le Laos, doux et amer : 25 Ans de pratiques d’une ONG*, Karthala 2005
- Laffort, J.R., *Des tracteurs dans les vallées – évolution d’un système agraire dans le sud de la province de Sayabouri*, SEGIP 1998

Review in Laos

Review of the assessment process having led to selected food aid and non-food programmes implemented in Lao PDR and implications for future emergency food-security assessments

Proposal

These terms of reference (Part I) incorporate the feedback received on the first real-time review conducted by the URD Group in Afghanistan and they also take into account the need to pay attention to the process of conducting emergency food security assessments (EFSAs) and communicating EFSA results and not only to technicalities. The present proposal further details the scope, methods, time frame and budget foreseen to conduct this work.

Introduction

The review of selected food aid and non-food programmes implemented in Lao PDR, the linkages with the emergency food-security assessments (EFSAs) which preceded them, and implications for emergency food-security assessments has been commissioned by the WFP as part of the SENAC project,¹⁰ which is implemented by the WFP Emergency Needs Assessment Branch (ODAN). The review in Laos is also part of a broader exercise to examine the EFSA process and is linked to complementary research activities to anticipate the effects, comparative advantages and limits of non-food programmes.

Objective

The **objectives** of the review are:

- 1 To examine the linkages between selected food and non-food programmes in Laos and assessments that have preceded them.
- 2 To identify best practices as well as the most useful *ex ante* information to collect and criteria to apply, at the assessment stage, to better inform the decisions and design of food-for-work (FFW), food-for-recovery (FFR), food vouchers and non-food programmes (e.g. cash transfers and cash-for-work) interventions, in combination or not with other food assistance programmes provided unconditionally (school feeding, vulnerable groups feeding and general food distributions).

Expected results

- **Feedback on the achievements and difficulties** faced by some food aid programmes (in particular FFW, FFR) and cash or other non-food programmes carried out in Laos, and how these were linked to emergency needs assessments' results and recommendations.
- **Recommendations on the EFSA process**, including on partnership (with government, NGOs, donors etc.), conduct of EFSAs, EFSA data analysis and communication of results to the various stakeholders.

¹⁰ Project "Strengthening Needs Assessment Capacity in WFP" (SENAC), funded by ECHO.

- **List of the essential information (quantitative and qualitative) to collect and guidance to follow *ex ante*, during emergency needs assessments**, to support decisions for various types and combinations of non-food and food aid programmes (particularly – but not limited to – FFW, FFT, FFR, food vouchers, cash-for-food and other cash transfer programmes), particularly in the first few months following a shock or triggering event.
- **Both Laos-specific and general guidance for assessment teams to apply the guidance and the technical methods** in emergency situations.
- **Recommendations for selected data and indicators to include in a monitoring and evaluation system** of selected food and non-food programmes particularly during the first 6 to 12 months of implementation.

Scope

1. Intended users

- Staff from WFP and partner organizations (NGOs and government services) involved in assessing needs and making recommendations for assistance interventions in emergencies, particularly WFP emergency needs assessment teams.
- At headquarters, ODAN will be the primary user when undertaking and providing training on emergency needs assessments.

2. Period covered by the research

Programmes under evaluation will either be ongoing (e.g. protracted relief and recovery operation – PRRO – launched in April 2004) or recently completed (e.g. previous PRROs or emergency operations – EMOPs). To the extent possible, non-food programmes implemented by other agencies and targeting the same areas, beneficiaries and needs, will also be included.

3. Types of programmes

Non-food interventions include activities that do not involve any food transfer, such as cash grants, cash-for-work, distribution of household items or agricultural inputs, etc.

“Non-free” (or conditional) food aid programmes cover essentially food-for-work, food-for-training, food-for-recovery, cash-for-food/food vouchers.

“Free” (or unconditional) food aid distributions cover activities such as general food distributions, vulnerable groups feeding, school-feeding programmes, supplementary and therapeutic feeding programmes.

4. Focus of the review

The review in Laos will focus primarily on **“conditional” food aid programmes** implemented by WFP and partners as **(a) short-term interventions**, i.e. within a six- to twelve-month timeframe and **(b) a rapid response to household food insecurity**, i.e. within weeks or months following a significant event or corporate trigger. Other **“free” food aid interventions** responding to earlier emergency needs assessments in Laos such as school

feeding, food distributions for vulnerable groups will also be included. Additionally, the research team will also consider non-food responses implemented by other aid agencies.

Longer-term non-food interventions such as micro-credit, improved governance, large infrastructure repairs and institutionalised social welfare or safety nets programmes will not be included.

The short-term emergency non-food interventions of priority interest for the review will be those most directly related to the WFP mandate, including (but not exclusively):

- food-for-work (FFW), paying particular attention to the rehabilitation of infrastructures (water, irrigation and other agricultural schemes) given their direct relevance to food security);
- food-for-recovery (FFR);
- cash-for-food (CFF); and
- food vouchers.

As a second priority, the review will consider vulnerable group feeding programmes and other targeted general food distributions, and non-food programmes not frequently implemented by WFP in emergencies or falling outside the current mandate of WFP but which (i) are also relevant to food security, (ii) have a potential for wider use in emergency contexts, and (iii) can benefit from close links already established with specialized agencies (UNICEF, FAO and some NGOs).

These include:

- food-for-seed;
- food-for-fodder;
- food-for-livestock;
- cash grants; and
- cash-for-work.

Methodology

A. Implementation approach

The research is based on:

→ **Systemic analysis.** The needs assessment process will be examined as part of a wider process, and in relation to other systems and objectives, including:

- needs assessment phase as part of the project cycle (i.e. the diagnosis phase which includes needs assessment, stakeholder analysis and context appraisal);
- actors involved in the needs assessment and/or in the ensuing programmes;
- needs-assessment process as seen by WFP and stakeholders; and
- tools and their application at different levels.

→ **Active listening and participation of** all actors involved in the process. Tools are only useful if practitioners (i.e. WFP staff, implementing partners) are prepared to use them. Results are also only useful if responding to the requirements of decision-makers. It is therefore essential to listen to practitioners' and partners' needs, expectations and opinions and obtain a full understanding of the issues.

Similarly, listening to the affected populations will provide relevant information about how the needs-assessment process is carried out in practice and its effect on populations.

→ **Multicultural/multi-expertise research team**, which will ensure that different points of view are included and a natural triangulation takes place.

→ **Coordination between related research processes** (e.g. Afghanistan and Colombia needs assessment review, etc.) to avoid duplication. As specified under Part II of these Terms of Reference, Group URD will synthesise recommendations for the improvement of WFP emergency needs assessment process and methods.

→ **Sensitive to the context, local culture and emergency constraints** (e.g. time, resources, etc.).

B. Research stages and methods

1. Desk review

A review will be carried out focusing on the following aspects:

- process, existing methods and tools that have been used for emergency needs assessment in Laos;
- existing needs-assessment reports over the last two years;
- existing reports of the project implemented during the last two years (project documents, mid-term reports and final reports if the project has already been completed) in relation to, or independently from, previous needs assessments;
- existing procedures to launch emergency needs assessments, in Laos;
- current WFP Laos country office and WFP headquarters staff involved in the needs-assessment process;
- WFP implementing partners and other NGOs/agencies emergency needs assessment reports, project documents and project reports referring to the same population groups or regions covered by WFP programmes (to the extent feasible);
- general information related to the crises and the context and their evolution; and
- livelihoods characterization of affected populations.

Expected results

1. Comprehensive understanding of:
 - projects;
 - emergency assessment procedures, methods and tools;
 - types of intervention;
 - WFP implementing partners and other stakeholders;
 - the food-security context and affected populations; and
 - hypotheses and key questions to answer.
2. Preliminary appreciation of the existing needs assessment process.
3. List of persons to be interviewed.

NB This phase needs to be as exhaustive as possible to permit a comprehensive understanding of the range of processes, actors and constraints involved in carrying out emergency needs assessments in Laos.

2. Development of the methodological frame

Based on the results of the similar researches carried out in Afghanistan and in Colombia for WFP, and on the information collected and analysed by the desk review, the research team will define the methods and techniques to be used during the research period.

3. Interviews and focus groups with strategic stakeholders

Particularly with:

- WFP staff involved in emergency needs assessments;
- selected country office staff, including those involved in programming and implementation;
- selected WFP implementing partners;
- selected NGOs and other agencies carrying out programmes (particularly non-food interventions) for the same population groups.

Expected results

- Clarifying the expectations and needs of the various stakeholders.
- Clarifying context constraints and the scope of the project, sharing this information with stakeholders.
- Agreeing on hypotheses and key questions to answer, on a collective basis.
- Identification and thorough understanding of difficulties and problems experienced by WFP assessment teams and implementing partners and other agencies during the emergency needs assessment process.

Identification and analysis of approaches, techniques and tools most frequently used in the emergency needs assessment (procedures, definition of hypotheses and information to collect, analysis and communication of the results etc.), strengths and limitations (time, expertise, funding, logistics, etc.).

NB Participation is paramount during this phase to permit a comprehensive understanding of relevant practitioners' needs, and of the constraints and strengths of existing processes and methods. This is also an opportunity to identify any risks of overload caused by the research process itself, or possible "over-participation", as a result of similar projects or research being undertaken at the same time in Laos.

4. Selection of field visits/planning and logistics

Based on the:

- typology of projects;
- typology of implementing partners and other agencies;
- typology of types of intervention;
- availability of WFP, partners and other agency staff involved in the projects; and
- other ODAN research projects in Laos.

Expected results

- List of projects by WFP, WFP implementing partners and other agencies to be analysed in relation to emergency needs assessments.
- Review of time, staff, security and other practical constraints.

- Timetable of field visits and logistics requirements.
- List and preliminary contacts with (e.g. appointment dates by telephone) representatives from WFP, WFP implementing partners, other NGOs or agencies to be interviewed.

NB Here, the key issue is to take into account the diversity of projects, contexts, types of intervention/response (FFW, etc.) and type of crises. Furthermore, during this phase the research team should identify the appropriate time for field visits and what method should be adopted to ensure that informants (populations, WFP staff, implementing partners and representatives from other NGOs and agencies) feel well disposed to receive the research group.

5. Field visits

Visits to:

- projects; and
- government counterparts for assessments, implementing partners and other relevant local NGOs and agencies.

Where relevant, the research team will accompany WFP needs-assessment teams in the field for observation purposes.

Expected results

Thorough understanding of:

- Existing needs immediately after a crisis or triggering event, and their assessment (by whom, when, how).
- Stakeholders (within and outside WFP) and affected populations’ perception of the needs-assessment process (methods, tools, procedures applied and coordination between assessment teams by WFP, WFP implementing partners and others).
- Project results (achievements and difficulties).
- Impact of the project on affected populations’ needs and expectations.
- Context constraints.

NB The research team will ensure that:

- information is triangulated;
- the research process avoids negative impacts on populations/project staff (work overload, disruption of distribution processes, etc.); and
- accurate and objective information about project results is obtained.

Among the tools that will be used to assess project quality, the research team will call upon the Project Management Compass Rose and the Compass board (cf. Quality COMPAS), particularly the sentinel indicators and some of the results indicators.