

UNDEF



The United Nations
Democracy Fund

**PROVISION FOR POST PROJECT EVALUATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS
DEMOCRACY FUND
Contract NO.PD:C0110/10**

EVALUATION REPORT



**UDF-LAO-10-385 – Youth as Agents of Democratic Change through
Knowledge and Information Acquisition and Exchange in Laos**

Date: 18 December 2014

Acknowledgements

The evaluators would like to thank the staff of the Participatory Development Training Center (PADETC), who took the time to share their experiences and information with the evaluation team. In particular, the team would like to thank PADETC's Deputy Director, Mr Kolaka Bouanedaoheuang, and Mr Houmphann Khammanivong, Head of Division at the Ministry of Education and Sports (project implementation partner), for their assistance, information and logistical support. All errors and omissions remain the responsibility of the authors.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UNDEF or of any of the institutions referred to in the report.

Authors

This report was written by Dieter Wagner and Khosada Vongsana. Mr Landis MacKellar provided editorial and methodological support. Ms Aurélie Ferreira provided quality assurance. Mr Eric Tourres was Project Director at Transtec.

Table of Contents

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
II. INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT	4
i. The project and evaluation objectives.....	4
(ii) Evaluation methodology	4
(iii) Development context	5
III. PROJECT STRATEGY	6
(i) Project strategy and approach	6
(ii) Logical framework	7
IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS	8
(i) Relevance	8
(ii) Effectiveness.....	10
(iii) Efficiency	13
(iv) Impact	14
(v) Sustainability	17
(vi) UNDEF Value Added	19
V. CONCLUSIONS	20
VI. RECOMMENDATIONS	22
IX. ANNEXES.....	24
ANNEX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS	24
ANNEX 2: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED	25
ANNEX 3: SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS	26
ANNEX 4: ACRONYMS.....	28

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(i) Background

The project ran from 1 April 2012 – 30 June 2014, with a total grant of USD 200,000. It was designed by the Participatory Development Training Center (PADETC), and was implemented in six provinces (Vientiane Capital, Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, Xiengkhouang, Oudomxay and Khammouane) of Lao PDR. It was implemented in partnership with the Physical and Arts Education Department of the country's Ministry of Education and Sports. The target population consisted of 30 youth groups, i.e. 60 youth leaders and 960 youth members. As defined in the Project Document, the overall objective was to provide capacity building in democratic and participatory processes regarding the management and use of natural resources, using information and communication technology (ICT). Accordingly, PADETC's strategic approach aimed for three key outcomes for the project's trainees:

- Capacity of youth groups developed in analytical and media advocacy skills; using ICT in the field of bio-diversity preservation and land management issues;
- Participation of youth in sustainable development policy-making realized at provincial, district and village level, in particular with regards to bio-diversity preservation and land management issues;
- Bio-diversity preservation and land management issues integrated in the education curriculum in Laos.

(ii) Assessment of the project

The design of (a) the project's capacity development approach was appropriate to enhance the youth leaders' technical capacity to support rights-based development knowledge as well as the transfer of leadership and multimedia skills; (b) the training in support of policy formulation was an adequate concept to assist the identification of bio-diversity issues and general development challenges, and the preparation of suggestions how to mitigate potential negative effects. The project's (c) curriculum development method was appropriate to gather locally relevant cultural, societal and environmental details, in order to replace specific parts of generic educational information in the national curriculum for primary schools. It is therefore our view that the **overall design of the project represented a relevant effort** to involve youth in democratic and participatory processes regarding the management and use of natural resources.

While several challenges prompted PADETC to adjust its implementation efforts, evaluators noted that the project delivered most of the planned outputs. The grantee integrated 3 modules into a single capacity development event and trained 198 (planned: 60) youth members in rights-based development. Similarly, under the policy formulation component field survey training was provided to 198 (planned: 90) youth members. Subsequent field-work identified about 30 different bio-diversity themes and general development challenges, and suggestions made related to farming practices, but also the need to preserve local culture and traditions. Trained teachers of 17 primary schools from 6 provinces elaborated locally enhanced curricula for indigenous knowledge. Given these achievements and considering the appreciation expressed by central and provincial representatives, evaluators are of the view that **the project effectively contributed** to improved consideration of local

and biodiversity knowledge in local community development processes.

The grantee reserved the largest proportion of the budget (50%) for baseline surveys, meetings, and training enabling youth group leaders and teachers to transfer analytical and advocacy skills, bringing the average unit cost per trainee to approximately USD 75. Spending for advocacy and outreach (6%) was moderate, but the average production price of USD 10 per unit (e.g. comics and text books) is surprisingly high. These high unit prices, and the observation that PADETC appeared completely unaware of its weak communication performance **unfortunately spoil the otherwise positive impression of efficient project conduct**: it has been noted that, with the exception of salaries (5% overspent), spending was below plan along all other budget items, resulting in overall savings of USD 25,773.

The grantee's initially proposed target indicators allow for a first positive assessment. While evidence presented failed to document sufficiently increased use of bio-diversity preservation and land management knowledge, or of electronic networking, evaluators were still satisfied that half of the targeted youth intends to make continued use of their new analytical, media and ICT skills to influence policy making. Most remarkably, local administrations were presented with field practicum results by 198 (planned: 90) youngsters. On this basis and also with the help of independently gathered first-hand evidence evaluators confirmed that **the project generated positive impact**. Local and provincial authorities have started to consider natural resource management suggestions. Bio-diversity and indigenous knowledge topics (local customs and traditions) have made their way into the education curriculum of primary schools in more provinces and are taught by more teachers than expected.

Evaluators came across **issues that risk undermining the sustainability** of the project's results. It will be important (a) to ensure that teaching and promotion of environmental and indigenous knowledge among the Lao youth will be continued (issue: teaching staff mobility) and also expanded to locations previously not covered by the project (issue: consistent teaching staff knowledge); and (b) to counteract the current beneficiaries' over-reliance on external funding (issue: lack of foresight by donor and implementing partner), which results in an expectation that the costs for material needs of both the youth and teachers involved in environmental and other locally relevant action research will be paid for by others.

(iii) Conclusions

- The fact that the approach of PADETC included the conduct of a baseline survey and the formulation of outcome indicators is highly commendable, as this confirmed the project's **relevance** and facilitated the evaluators' **assessment of effectiveness and impact**. However, evaluators would have appreciated a more realistic and rigorous approach to data analysis as well as a reporting, which clearly identifies the most important shortfalls, and that inspires strategies how to address these in the future. Instead, the grantee (a) imposed on itself very ambitious target indicators, and (b) confused monitoring data, all of which made analysis and reporting of project outcomes less pertinent.

- Weak communication of PADETC with UNDEF affected the **efficiency** of the project's management, as the negative effects of (a) its involvement in the Asia-Europe People Forum, and (b) changes to project plan and schedule were not anticipated.

Due a lack of foresight the grantee also missed the opportunity to better address the participating schools' long-term equipment needs.

- Therefore, continued and improved outreach will be needed to ensure **the youth's sustained involvement** in improving the efficiency, appropriateness and ownership of local resources management.

(iv) Recommendations

- In accordance with our **observations on effectiveness and impact, we recommend to the grantee** to design monitoring frameworks, which make consistent use of baseline and target indicators, as this could enable PADETC to improve its current assessment in qualitative terms and thus enhance the organization's strategic objectives. Exploiting the results of progress monitoring more systematically facilitates the identification of remaining and new needs. This may also help the grantee to attract new donors and implementing partners for an expansion of the original project.

- **Based on our comments on efficiency and sustainability we strongly recommend to the grantee** to become more transparent by informing its donors as soon as an event of negative or positive significance to human or financial resource utilization becomes a known fact. Timely anticipation of any such issues (e.g. temporary unavailability of staff, or unexpected budget savings) usually generates new options that may help to improve the sustainability of results.

- **In relation to our conclusion that continued and improved outreach is needed to ensure sustainability, we recommend to the grantee** the following measures:

- Suggest to the Ministry of Education and Sports (i.e. the implementation partner) the joint preparation of plans (a) extending this activity to all teaching staff of the previously targeted primary and secondary schools, and (b) for rolling out the project to schools located in the 11 provinces not yet covered.
- Secure the implementation partner's agreement that its existing structural, human and financial resources will be accessible to support a future expansion of the project, and involve the Ministry in developing a strategy providing an appropriate response to the participating schools' basic material needs. Indicatively, such strategy could foresee shared financing by the Ministry (e.g. for pencils, pens, paper) and by the participating schools. The latter could consider selling the products generated during indigenous knowledge education sessions, thus creating revolving funds covering future needs (e.g. for cooking ingredients, handicraft materials).
- Undertake targeted donor screening in preparation for a proposal seeking support for an extension of the project in line with the above suggestions. Ensure the proposal's approach matches with donor expectations and offers added value as compared to the original project (such as: intensifying cooperation between youth groups, local farmers and local entrepreneurs to jointly develop ideas emphasizing the local identity of certain products, or promoting locally developed concepts for sustainable tourism). Address the schools' long-term equipment needs (i.e. computers and cameras for action research) as part of the donor-funded budget proposal.

II. INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

i. The project and evaluation objectives

This report contains the evaluation of the project entitled “Youth as Agents of Democratic Change through Knowledge and Information Acquisition and Exchange in Laos”. The project ran from 1 April 2012 – 30 June 2014 (including a three-month extension), with a total grant of USD 200,000 (out of which UNDEF retained USD 20,000 for monitoring and evaluation).

The project was designed by the Participatory Development Training Center (PADETC), and was implemented in six provinces (Vientiane Capital, Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, Xiengkhouang, Oudomxay and Khammouane). It was implemented in partnership with the Physical and Arts Education Department of the country’s Ministry of Education and Sports. The target population consisted of 30 youth groups, i.e. 60 youth leaders and 960 youth members. As defined in the Project Document, the overall objective was to provide capacity building in democratic and participatory processes regarding the management and use of natural resources, using information and communication technology (ICT).

UNDEF and Transtec have agreed on a framework governing the evaluation process, set out in the Operational Manual. According to the manual, the objective of the evaluation is to “undertake in-depth analysis of UNDEF-funded projects to gain a better understanding of what constitutes a successful project which will in turn help UNDEF devise future project strategies. Evaluations also assist stakeholders to determine whether projects have been implemented in accordance with the project document and whether anticipated project outputs have been achieved”.

(ii) Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was conducted by an international expert, working with a national expert, under the terms of the framework agreement between UNDEF and Transtec. In accordance with the agreed process, the evaluation aimed to answer questions across the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, as well as the additional criterion of UNDEF value added (see Annex 1).

The evaluation took place from October – November 2014 with the fieldwork conducted in Laos from 27 – 31 October 2014. The evaluators reviewed available project documentation and contextual / background materials on issues surrounding the implementation of the government’s policy framework for participatory planning at local and province levels (Annex 2). Initial and final interviews were held at the grantee’s offices in Vientiane, with PADETC’s deputy director, a representative of the Ministry of Education and Sports, as well as with the project’s resource persons. Other meetings focused on interviews and exchanges with persons involved in field coordination, and with beneficiary representatives of the target groups from 4 provinces, to confirm the project beneficiaries’ experiences and to obtain updates of their most recent activities. These interviews and group meetings were carried out in Vientiane Capital (also including Khammouane province) and Xiengkhouang province (also including Sayaboury province), as well as at the PADETC office (for Vientiane capital and Khammouane), involving 6 resource persons and 21 project beneficiaries.

(iii) Development context

Since the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) in 1975, charting the country's path of development from a post-colonial and post-war country proved challenging, especially in the Lao context where its small population of diverse ethnic and cultural groups tended to live in small rural agriculturally self-subsistent and socially self-reliant communities. With its limited management and financial capacities, the country's government faced difficulties to improve basic social service delivery systems, develop public administrative, finance and legislative structures and frameworks, build transportation and communication systems, and promote sustainable development – all of which are the basic building blocks for developing a modern society and economy¹.

Aspiring towards developing Laos quickly and shedding its image of “under-development”, Lao leaders and policy makers over the past 40 years have experimented with different models of development; from following the Soviet-style central-command economy in the early post-1975 years, to adopting a more open free-market economy under a centrally-controlled political system since the early 1990s. Both development models may have had their successes, but they still failed to meet the expectations and aspirations of the majority of the Lao people, especially in terms of delivering sustainable livelihoods and an enhanced quality of life for the rural people, who represent the majority of the Lao population².

Centrally commanded reform towards an open-door / free-market economy, which promotes rapid foreign investments in natural resource extraction, land exploitation, and large-scale urban commercial and recreational development, has led to the loss of land and livelihoods, and has deepened the rural-urban income gap and environmental degradation. In 2009, however, the Lao government made a move to encourage the participation of civil society, by enacting the Decree on Associations³. Providing the legal basis for establishment and registration of local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)⁴, it protects the rights and legitimate interest of an association, its members or communities⁵ and helps governmental agencies to achieve Laos' 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2011-2015).

While attempts to participate in governance processes still require official authorization, the government continues to gradually shift towards a policy that provides a little more space for public discourse, which represents a window of opportunity for preserving the livelihoods and quality of life of the local population. Working with the government, organizations like PADETC aim to empower voluntary youth groups by raising their capacity to communicate with local and provincial authorities. Such a feedback loop, which identifies negative impacts on biodiversity, and the population's wealth, carries the potential to improve local ownership by the youth and to enhance the efficiency of the country's policy formulation system.

¹ See also Yves Bourdet, in “The Economics of Transition in Laos: from Socialism to ASEAN Integration” (Cheltenham, UK, Edward Elgar, 2000).

² See also Stephen Erbrike, Ami Probandt, Andrew White, and Yiwen Mao in “International poverty and development report: Lao PDR” (2010).

³ Decree Number 115/PM, approved by former Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh on April 29th, 2009. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) is assigned to provide the registration of CSOs in Laos.

⁴ It is relevant to note that NGOs are referred to non-profit associations (NPAs). The term “non-governmental” or NGO is considered to give the impression of being in opposition to the government and therefore not palatable or appropriate in Laos.

⁵ Handbook of Association, as provided by the Civil Society Division, MOHA.

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

(i) Project strategy and approach

The overall objective of the project “Youth as Agents of Democratic Change through Knowledge and Information Acquisition and Exchange in Laos”, as defined in the Project Document (UDF-LAO-10-385) in April 2012, was to provide youth leaders and their groups with capacity building in democratic and participatory processes regarding the management and use of natural resources, using information and communication technology (ICT).

Although a government policy framework for participatory planning existed at the outset of the project, its implementation was weak. Realities on the ground did not reflect the policy’s intention, since local/provincial governments and citizens lacked knowledge and adequate inputs to take informed decisions; and in the absence of guidance and orders from central government, officials did not feel empowered to take decisions. According to the grantee’s initial analysis, this particularly affected the lives of marginalized communities, who lacked opportunity to raise their concerns about issues linked to land concessions, dam construction, and foreign direct investment activities which had an impact on their land, resources and thus their livelihoods. Therefore, the grantee’s approach foresaw to (1) assist young people with the documentation of local sustainable and bio-diversity preservation practices and (2) incorporate these in the education system. In addition, the ambition was to encourage youth volunteers to conduct simple action research and dialogue with communities on land use patterns and ownership, in order to influence policies and practices.

Accordingly, the project’s three key outcomes were defined as follows:

- Capacity of youth groups developed in analytical and media advocacy skills; using ICT in the field of bio-diversity preservation and land management issues;
- Participation of youth in sustainable development policy-making realized at provincial, district and village level, in particular with regards to bio-diversity preservation and land management issues;
- Bio-diversity preservation and land management issues integrated in the education curriculum in Laos.

As a local non-governmental organization, PADETC aims “[...] to make a unique and distinctive contribution to the development of Laos”. The grantee’s vision is based on a holistic approach to education development, in order to support the work of future civic actors promoting a “liveable society” in Laos. Focusing on the youth as the country’s potential agents of change, actions implementing this concept of education for sustainable development represent PADETC’s mission. In close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Sports, the grantee therefore consequently works towards a holistic learning society, with the ambition to ultimately achieve integrated and sustainable development processes, which involve the participation of all sectors of civil society relevant for the future of the Lao PDR⁶.

⁶ Source: <http://www.padetc.org>

(ii) Logical framework

The Project Document translates the grantee's programmatic approach into a structured plan of project activities and intended outcomes. The framework below aims to capture the project logic systematically, and attempts to link activities and intended outcomes with medium-term impacts and long-term development objectives, which evaluators observed dispersed over different sections of the grantee's Project Document, result framework and reporting.

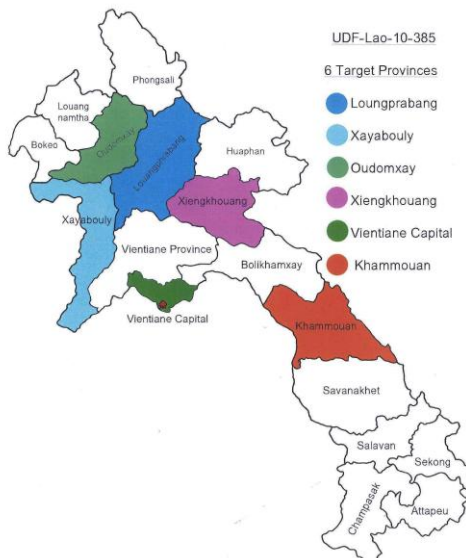
Project Activities & Interventions	Intended outcomes	Medium Term Impacts	Long Term Development Objectives
<p><u>1. Capacity Development:</u></p> <p>Baseline survey assessing the youth's (a) rights-based development knowledge and (b) ICT and media skills</p> <p>Leadership, rights-based development, and multimedia training for youth leaders</p> <p>Youth activity centre opening, youth network formation & dedicated website launch</p> <p>Youth leaders train their youth group members</p>	<p>Capacity of youth groups developed in analytical and media advocacy skills, using ICT in the field of bio-diversity preservation and land management issues</p>	<p>Youth familiarized with bio-diversity documentation and land-management decision making processes</p> <p>Youth shared bio-diversity preservation and community land management knowledge and ideas via project platform</p>	
<p><u>2. Policy Formulation:</u></p> <p>Training on and conduct of village land-use mapping and natural resources zoning</p> <p>Field survey training and practicum leading to (a) the identification & formulation of land management & bio-diversity issues, or general development challenges, and (b) the presentation of action plans to address these</p> <p>Participation in formulating annual village plans</p>	<p>Participation of youth in sustainable development policy-making realized at provincial-, district- and village-levels, in particular with regards to bio-diversity preservation and land management issues</p>	<p>Youth applied newly gained bio-diversity preservation and land management knowledge</p> <p>Youth contributions reflected in village development plans and other policy documents</p>	<p>Youth involved in democratic & participatory processes regarding the management and use of natural resources</p>
<p><u>3. Curriculum Development & Awareness Raising:</u></p> <p>Baseline survey of current classroom teaching & learning</p> <p>Training for teachers, monks, community leaders, youth</p> <p>Print & audio-visual publications, annual project event</p>	<p>Bio-diversity preservation and land management issues integrated in the education curriculum in Laos</p>	<p>Use of bio-diversity preservation, land management, and indigenous knowledge accepted & applied in class-room teaching</p>	

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

(i) Relevance

Baseline Situation

The six provinces targeted by the project (cf. map below)⁷ represent those in which the grantee over the past years had been most successful in establishing cooperation with youth, educators and community leaders. Collaboration between PADETC and the Ministry of Education in these provinces had been continuous since 2000. At the outset of the project, provisions of the government's seventh Social Economic Development Plan (2011-2015) paved the way for adaptation of the management of natural resources to specific local needs, and to steer their use in a self-responsible and participatory manner. The grantee identified this as a specific opportunity for involving the youth, in order to improve the efficiency, appropriateness and ownership of local resources management - both among the citizens living and the local



Targeted provinces: Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, Oudomxay, Xiengkhouang, Vientiane Capital, Khammouane

Selected baseline findings

Youth groups' ICT capacity assessment:

- Low computer, internet, and video camera skills remain a challenge;
- Exception: youth groups based in Vientiane-capital, with previous access to PADETC facilities, and those who previously benefitted from remote PADETC support via electronic media (phone, email, Facebook).

State of indigenous knowledge teaching:

- District-level education officials and primary school teachers were expected to ensure integration into the curriculum;
- Issue: absence of process guidance, hence no launch of activities to identify and integrate locally relevant knowledge.

authorities working in the areas targeted by the project.

In order to ensure that issues identified in the initial analysis of the baseline situation will be properly addressed (c.f. the above section on project strategy), PADETC trained sixty youth group leaders (i.e. secondary school teachers) to conduct surveys among the project's two main target groups. While the first survey assessed the ICT and media skills of 960 youth group members (i.e. secondary-level pupils), the second targeted 54 primary school teachers in order to establish whether they had integrated indigenous knowledge into the national education curriculum⁸. This way of insight (see above box) re-confirmed the grantee's concerns that there was a lack of (1) research, communication and dialogue capacities, and (2) knowledge about local heritage in the targeted provinces, which prevented

⁷ Evaluators met project beneficiaries from Sayaboury, Xienkhouang (visited), Vientiane Capital (visited), and Khammouane.

⁸ Evaluators found no evidence of a third survey intended to assess the targeted youth's rights-based development knowledge.

the promotion of locally sustainable and bio-diversity preservation practices.

The project response

Within the framework of the present project, evaluators found various examples of relevant project design, which addressed the baseline aspects:

1. Capacity Development

This component comprised of a package of training activities, essentially designed to turn youth group leaders into multipliers facilitating the dissemination of information and the transfer of skills to the project's final beneficiaries, the youth group members.

With this objective in mind, the purpose of *leadership, rights-based development, and multimedia training* was to enhance the life skills and community development techniques of youth leaders, in order to prepare them for their future role as trainers of their own group members. Leading by example, they were expected to directly support skills acquisition and knowledge development of the local youth. Given PADETC's extensive experience with youth and community service learning, the grantee made use of its existing curriculum, which includes theoretical and practical approaches designed to strengthen communication, presentation, facilitation, and advisory skills. As stated above, the youth leaders' mission was to transfer all of the acquired skills during the *training of youth group members*. In consistency with the results of the baseline survey, capacity development in rights-based development and the building of multi-media skills were, however, given particular emphasis.

Under the same component the project plan foresaw also the *opening of a youth activity centre, the formation of a youth network, and the launch of a dedicated website*, all of which was meant to create a physical and virtual space, where the young end-beneficiaries can gather, share and exchange information, in order to inspire collective action related to land management and bio-diversity issues.

2. Policy Formulation

Training in and the conduct of village land-use mapping and natural resources zoning served the objective to establish supporting evidence, both to enable the youth to contribute to local annual development plans and to provide them with a negotiation tool should they face potential developers. The results of the mapping and zoning activities were also expected to create a baseline, thus facilitating the youth's monitoring of future environmental changes in their local areas.



Field practicum preparation: pupils jointly review the survey questions

The purpose of the project's *field survey training and practicum* was to equip the local youth with instruments helping them (a) to identify and formulate any land management and bio-diversity issues, or general development challenges, and (b) to prepare action plans aiming to mitigate the effects of these. Following completion of the field practicum, *participation in the formulation of annual village plans* finally was meant to provide the young end-beneficiaries with the opportunity to advocate vis-à-vis local authorities the inclusion of their findings and suggestions. These were communicated in the form field practicum reports,

which were systematically presented in an easy to follow structure describing (a) objective, (b) local context (including location, community, socio-economic characteristics, and findings concerning environment, culture and quality of life), (c) mapping (geography, land use identification, seasonal calendar, development potential), and (d) suggestions for natural resources management and development.

3. Curriculum Development & Awareness Raising

While the project's first two components targeted secondary-level youth groups (in which participation is voluntary), this component aimed at the integration of local considerations into the curriculum of the (mandatory) national curriculum for primary schools. Based on the findings of the baseline survey, the objective of *trainings for teachers, monks, and community leaders* was to support the launch of a process enabling them to jointly gather locally relevant details (i.e. local customs, traditions and biodiversity information) and to convert these into modules appropriate for replacing specific parts of (rather generic) educational information in the national curriculum for primary schools (grades 3, 4 and 5).

A variety of *print and audio-visual publications*, as well as *annual project events* finally served to promote learning, the sharing of best practices and to disseminate information and raise awareness about key local bio-diversity issues in the targeted provinces and among the wider public.

(ii) Effectiveness

According to the Final Narrative Report (FNR), the project faced a number of challenges. The grantee's active involvement in the Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF), which was held in Vientiane during October 2012, and subsequently, the disappearance of the founder and former director of PADETC in December 2012, led to an internal reallocation of human resources and thus to a delay of the project's implementation. The grantee also underestimated the fact that provincial governments still have little tolerance for critical reflections on land management issues, given its potential for interference with foreign direct investments. The project therefore focused on learning and disseminating best bio-diversity practices to promote policy-making, and avoided critical reflections on current land management practices. Despite these restrictive and volatile conditions, the grantee's efforts led to the delivery of most of the planned principal outputs.



Camera skills practice exchange at the project's youth activity centre

1. Capacity Development

Taking into account that youth leaders have secondary-level teaching obligations, the grantee adjusted the implementation plan, integrating three topics into a single one-week training event. Both the *leadership training* and the *multimedia/ICT training* were provided for 60 youth leaders, as planned. During the same week, the grantee made also an effort to catch up on low project performance, training not only (as planned) 60 youth leaders, but also 138 additional youth group members in *rights-based development (RBD)*.

Youth leaders therefore could subsequently focus on transferring leadership and

multimedia/ICT basic skills when *training youth group members*, while already trained youth volunteers facilitated the dissemination of RBD knowledge among their peers. According to the grantee, the project in this way reached out to all 960 youngsters, as planned.

The *opening of a youth activity centre* (equipped with computers, printers, Internet connection, video cameras, and office furniture) at the grantee's offices in Vientiane reportedly prompted youth both from Vientiane-capital and other provinces (e.g. Sayaboury) to enjoy the possibility to practice their newly acquired video camera, computer and Internet skills (see image above). *Youth network formation* and animation was reportedly supported via the creation of a Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/youngvolunteer.padetc>) and the introduction of a *dedicated webpage* (<http://www.padetc.org/learning-centers-networks/youth-network/>) within the grantee's own PADETC website. During visits to the Facebook page, PADETC website, and interviews with youth group members, evaluators however failed to find evidence that these virtual areas have been actively used by the youth to share their learning experience and to exchange project-relevant knowledge and information.

2. Policy Formulation

In further adjusting the project's implementation plan, the *training in village land-use mapping and natural resources zoning* was held in all 6 (planned: 2) provinces. At the same time its target group was converted, expanding its attendance from 46 (planned: 72) youth leaders, to an additional participation of 198 youth members. This enabled the grantee to merge this activity with the actual elaboration of 6 land-use maps and village development profiles (as planned) for the largest communities of each province, which was initially foreseen to take place separately. All 80 (planned: 82) hardcopies produced were provided to the participating youth groups, for use as reference material in classroom teaching and to facilitate the launch of communal land titling procedures with the district and provincial authorities.



Youth group members discuss the findings of the mapping exercise

PADETC also expanded the target group of the *field survey training*, which was designed to prepare youth group members for the independent conduct of a field practicum, to a total of 198 participants from all 6 targeted provinces (i.e. 10 youth leaders and 23 youth group members per province; as compared to originally planned 90 youth leaders from 3 provinces). In terms of the grantee's training delivery, each project beneficiary was made familiar with content and format of a standardised survey template, which had been previously piloted with youth from Sayaboury province. The same 198 (planned: 90) youth group activists thereafter *conducted field practicums* under the supervision and guidance of their youth leaders. The youngsters' field-work led to the identification and formulation of about 30 different bio-diversity themes and general development challenges. Issues addressed and suggestions made related in particular to local farming topics such as local crops, trees, fish, but also to the need to preserve local culture and traditions. Critical reviews of current land management practices were in most cases avoided, as previously

stated, in order to maintain constructive relationships with local and provincial government agencies.

Participation in the formulation of annual village plans: following completion of the field practicum, these youth members were coached by their youth leaders and the grantee's project team to prepare a presentation of the results of their fieldwork. Where appropriate, these included their proposals for improved natural resources management and biodiversity preservation. The youth leaders whom evaluators met praised the youth for having proven their capacity to engage with villagers and other members of the community, in order to shape the formulation of local policy. They confirmed that the youth's activity has influenced their communities, as they have agreed (a) to treat the protection of the environment as a priority and (b) to make natural resources management and biodiversity preservation a priority in future village development plans.

3. Curriculum Development & Awareness Raising

Under this project component 54 (planned: 60) *primary school teachers from 6 provinces were trained* to convert parts of the national curriculum (specified by the Ministry of Education, approximately 20% of the existing learning content) by integrating local, indigenous knowledge into their classroom teaching. As a follow-up, technical support was provided to 23 teachers of 8 schools from Vientiane and Khammouane provinces, to assist both the identification and transfer of relevant knowledge. In addition, a film produced by the grantee provided all trainees with further practical guidance on how to involve other members of the local community in joint learning, thus facilitating the gathering of local, indigenous knowledge. A similar attempt *train 31 (planned: 30) community members* proved less feasible, if not unnecessary, as according to the grantee "[...] they just teach the way they are used to", also sharing the observation that women and elderly people displayed better knowledge transfer capabilities, as they appeared to be more focused and kind when sharing their indigenous knowledge with primary school pupils. Additional technical support was offered as needed, by phone and during field visits. As a result, community members have started teaching indigenous knowledge in 17 primary schools throughout all six provinces covered by the project. While the newly adopted grade 3 subjects include arts and music, handicrafts, and physical education, grade 4 deepens these topics and also introduces information about local food and the preparation of local traditional meals. Grade 5 finally covers the local history and economy including markets, livelihoods, monuments and tourism.

Action-oriented research activities involving the group of 198 beneficiaries targeted under the first two components (e.g. field land use mapping, field practicum) also resulted in the publication of a rich *variety of print- and audio-visual products*. These include: (a) a series of comic and text books on the biodiversity theme, produced by 24 youth groups for use in 40 schools (17 primary and 30 secondary, compared to a planned overall 30 schools), and (b) 30 different short bio-diversity and indigenous knowledge movies, conceived by youth groups under the guidance of 90 trained youth leaders (available



Evaluators are presented with the results of the project's biodiversity comic and textbook competition

as Local Wisdom DVD, and disseminated via Lao TV's youth programme at the time of the evaluator's fieldvisit).

The *annual project events* finally were an opportunity for selected youth participants to meet, exchange and learn from each other, mostly by presenting and showcasing their tangible outputs (field practicum presentations; comic and text book competition awards). Animated by the grantee's and the Ministry of Education staff, these events also gathered participating teachers, community members, and provincial and district authority representatives. Acknowledging that the incorporation of bio-diversity and indigenous knowledge learning effectively leads to the identification of solutions for pressing local issues, participants agreed that continued involvement of the youth in this process would be of benefit to improved local community development.

(iii) Efficiency⁹

Following PADETC's active involvement in the AEPF and when the organisation's former leader went missing, the grantee's ability and performance in communicating effectively and in timely fashion with UNDEF deteriorated significantly. What is regrettable is, that the grantee's weak communication performance during these months (and later on) led to a lack of anticipation (i.e. intermittent provision of information) about the restructuring of planned project outputs and delayed reporting. It appears that continued support of the funding agency was taken for granted, although such performance might well have justified UNDEF to issue a negative decision in this regard. Donor funding therefore was only released with delay, when the grantee's reporting established satisfactory evidence of outputs and results that could be considered as milestone achievements.

Involving the youth in democratic and participatory processes regarding the management and use of natural resources represented the project's principal focus. Accordingly, 50% of the budget's expenditure related to the conduct of *baseline surveys, meetings, and training*¹⁰, aiming to build capacity among youth group leaders and teachers to transfer analytical and media advocacy skills. Staff travel costs associated with these actions required acceptable expenses in the order of 8%. Expending about 6% of the project's budget for *advocacy and outreach*, the grantee invested moderate levels of funding to raise awareness and support the dissemination of relevant information (village land use maps and profiles, comics and text books, short movies, baseline reports). With an amount of approximately USD 10, however, the average production price per unit of these outputs is surprisingly high, and is only offset by the fact that the short movie outputs are also disseminated to a wider audience via Lao youth TV.

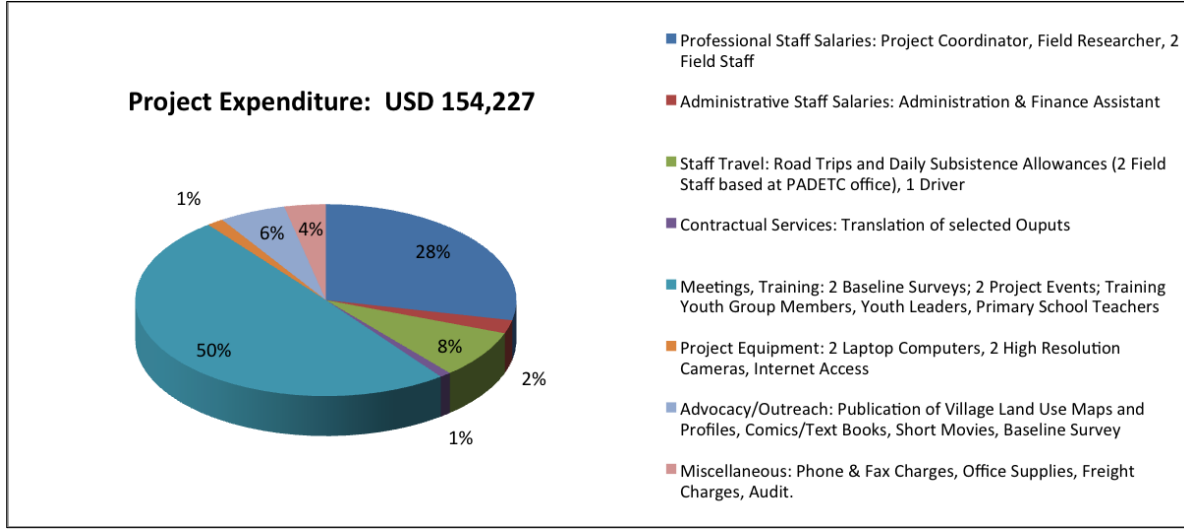
Breaking the amount spent for baseline surveys, meetings, and training¹¹ over the reported total number of 1,020 trainees provides a relatively high average cost of approximately USD 75, which was spent per beneficiary. Given youth participation in policy development is a novelty in Lao PDR, evaluators still consider this an acceptable

⁹ Quantitative assessments made in this section are based on the total amount of project expenditure, which excludes the budget amount reserved for evaluation by UNDEF.

¹⁰ These costs most importantly include expenditure for training youth leaders in preparation for (a) knowledge and skills transfer to youth group members and (b) supervision and guidance of youth field activity, including village land use mapping, field practicum and action research.

¹¹ Expenditure considered for this purpose in addition to the actual cost of the training includes associated staff travel costs.

investment, in particular when considering the potential long-term benefits of applied bio-diversity preservation and land management knowledge.



Spending about USD 47,000 for salaries of professional (28.4% for a project coordinator, a field researcher, and two field staff) and administrative (2.2% for assistance in administration and finance) staff, the grantee’s nominal staff costs amounted to more than 30% of the total budget. This is acceptable, given that an additional 3 resource persons from PADETC’s youth development and action research team were provided free of charge. With 4%, the grantee’s miscellaneous expenses to run and administrate the project were low. The grantee’s 1% allocation for project equipment was also insignificant (existing computer hardware was used, with the exception of the purchase of two laptops and two high resolution cameras).

It is important to note that, with the exception of salaries (USD 2,227 overspent for professional staff), savings were made along all budget items. Most significantly, the merger of certain training activities generated reduced costs of USD 15,709 in the meetings and trainings budget category. Overall project spending was below plan, resulting in overall savings of USD 25,773 (not disbursed by UNDEF, c.f. further remarks under sustainability).

(iv) Impact

The design of the grantee’s initially proposed outcome indicators allows for a preliminary analysis of impact. Evaluators reviewed monitoring and reporting of the project’s outcomes against PADETC’s initial targets. Paired with their field observations, evaluators however concluded that the grantee’s assessment erroneously confused monitoring data demonstrating capacity development with data documenting the youth’s actual ability to participate in policy formulation. The consolidated review leads to the following assessment:

Capacity Development

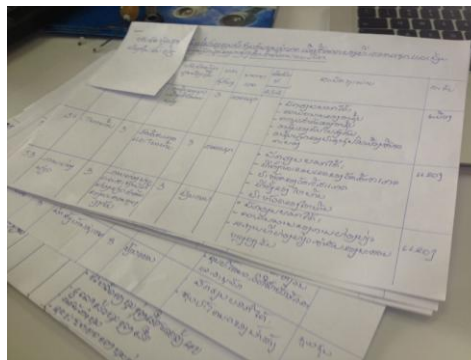
- Although 960 youth members have been trained as planned by their youth leaders, there is *no credible evidence that 80% of these end-beneficiaries have made use of their newly gained bio-diversity preservation and land management knowledge*. Opportunities of contribution to the community development planning process were demonstrated (e.g.

involvement in action research, field practicum, as well as the production of comic/text books and short movies) but actual reporting did not reach the target figure of 768 end-beneficiaries.

- Instead of the targeted 60% of youth who participated in the project, *only 33% (315 beneficiaries) are reported to have networked electronically* in order to exchange ideas and share knowledge on bio-diversity and land management.

Policy Formulation

- Compared to the targeted 80% of youth who participated in the project, *only 48% (376 end-beneficiaries) have reportedly developed the capability and remain interested to use their new analytical, media and ICT skills for the purpose of active participation in local land management decision making processes.* This finding is backed up by the grantee's assessment that the environment for youth action in favour of bio-diversity promotion has been less enabling than assumed at the time of signature of the UNDEF project document.
- Instead of the targeted 90 youngsters, *198 youth group activists (60 youth leaders and 138 youth group members) have reportedly completed a field practicum in one village in each of the six provinces.* Remarkably, the local and provincial authorities concerned have considered these inputs, that contain numerous useful suggestions of which almost all relate to natural resources management, in the village development planning process.



Finalised primary school curricula

Curriculum Development & Awareness Raising

- Both *bio-diversity and indigenous knowledge topics (local customs and traditions) have made their way into the education curriculum of 17 primary schools in all 6 provinces covered by the project (planned: at least 2), and these subject are trained by 54 teachers (14 more than expected).*

On the basis of group interviews held with 6 resource persons and 21 project beneficiaries, evaluators however independently formed the view that the project generated first positive effects. They demonstrate that the grantee managed to bring about change, since (1) secondary-school level youth has started to apply it newly gained knowledge to when engaging with the community and participating in local development processes to make suggestions for improvements and (2) primary-school level pupils for the first time have acquired locally relevant information as part of the classroom-teaching. Selected anecdotes are provided below¹². They are grouped along key issues identified at the outset of the project (= baseline, cf. section on relevance), in order to demonstrate if and how the project contributed to the increased use of local and bio-diversity preservation knowledge by and for young people. These examples show that the grantee has indeed managed to provide a first appropriate response to address the baseline situation:

¹² In line with current development practice, an effort was made to identify recent anecdotes or to obtain, where possible, details of relevance complementing the grantee's available report documentation, to conduct an independent assessment of impact.

Key issue addressed: Lao youth had limited opportunity to exchange about biodiversity and land management issues, and lacked the necessary research and communication capacities to engage in village development planning processes

Phanmaly Sysomphone, who teaches at ***Hinboun Tai Secondary school (Hinboun district, Khammoune province)***, was invited to the training in her capacity as voluntary leader of several youth groups. Working on the baseline surveys and using Google GIS data to determine the village perimeter and zones of the village provided her with new technical skills and local insights. Having obtained guidance to lead her youth group members to identify her area's key issues and challenges proved interesting and particularly useful for the students and the local community: "Interviewing farmers we learned about the issue of low rice productivity during the dry season, caused by snails which destroy rice seedlings. PADETC informed us about organic fertilizers to help to biologically control the snails." A youth group assisted a pilot exercise, starting to experiment the natural method on the teacher's own rice plots. The benefits of the natural method became visible quickly, and today all villagers have adopted the organic approach on their rice fields. Unorganised waste disposal was an issue identified by another of her youth groups. Following a meeting with the youngsters, the village authority agreed to construct a designated waste disposal facility. Group members also felt that for future generations the preservation of fish in the nearby river was important: "They were then excited to find out that their survey, which determined fishing seasons least interfering with reproduction, resulted in their participation in the production of a short movie". Both Phanmaly and the village youth were happy to observe these changes and that they were able to help the village community, and she adds: "The parents of my students were positively surprised and very pleased about the capacities their children have developed."

Boudsady Xayphunya, a final year (grade 7) student at ***Phonsavan upper secondary school (Paek district, Xiengkhouang province)*** and a youth volunteer, applied the new survey techniques, which her youth leader shared with her, when conducting a field survey in Nao village. While other youth members collected information about aspects pertaining to environment, culture, and people's happiness (satisfaction with their quality of life), her fieldwork focused on the local economy and did not reveal particular concerns, as villagers reported that the rice harvest and sales of rice noodles produced was sufficient to generate income and cater own needs. "While discussing with these family businesses I learned new economic terminology and I now know how to distinguish between revenue and profits. Actually I kept asking my youth leader until I was sure I have understood." However, she observed poverty among many villagers and also thinks that the numbers of children in school call for more teachers. Boudsady is convinced that this exercise has helped her and her fellow youth group members to better understand what defines the area in which they have grown up. She therefore hopes that they will have opportunity to conduct this kind of research in other neighbouring villages. She would like to teach both in Lao and English language. "Once I have grown up and finished university, I would like to come back to my hometown and become a teacher. I would like to be involved in education to develop the knowledge about our community and the rural areas of our province."

Thongphanh Chanthavong, a teacher at ***Saya secondary school (Sayaboury province)*** praises the field practicum for the secondary effects it had on the members of his youth volunteer groups: "They have become the first to answer teachers' questions in the classroom and they do so in a more precise and systematic way. Most importantly they have developed an urge to contribute to an improved quality of rural life, be it its cultural, social, economical or political dimension." His colleague Souksakhone from ***Ekkapharb secondary school (Sayaboury province)*** agrees: "There is more initiative, participation, and positive peer pressure. These students always participate in charitable projects. They also pro-actively encourage others to reduce the problem of waste at our school."

Key issue addressed: Lao teachers lacked methodological skills and insight into local customs and traditions to integrate indigenous knowledge into the primary school curriculum

Phimpha Xayakosy, who teaches third, fourth and fifth year graders at **Samket primary school (Sikhot district, Vientiane Capital)**, highlights that she was unclear how to work with indigenous knowledge prior to her participation in the training. Proudly presenting to evaluators a copy of the three curricula she conceived (see image above) she says: "I have submitted these drafts for grades 3 to 5, which I prepared with the help of the project's reference manuals, to the central level and have obtained approval for immediate use." Contents of the national curriculum have been complemented with relevant information about the district's economic development, as well as its cultural and culinary heritage. "Our pupils already display improved knowledge which produce we grow, which local dishes we prepare, and how we fabricate traditional rice baskets. They are now aware which customs define and which occupations secure the livelihoods of our area." She enjoyed the challenge of undertaking fieldwork to prepare the new curriculum content: "You have to research, go and meet people, and acquire the materials to work with or go out into nature to acquire them, e.g. for producing baskets. It was an exciting experience and great learning." But she also worries: "We had material costs covered by the UNDEF project, so the real challenge will be how to finance rice basket materials and ingredients for cooking in the future."

Sythong Thammavong, director of **Syphom primary school (Khoun district, Xiengkhouang province)** and two of her teaching staff understand their participation in the development of the local curriculum was an opportunity to improve the quality and relevance of education at their school: "We conducted a survey at the local market, walking up to people asking them why they sold or purchased certain types of food. We also organized in coordination with the village authority and the Lao Front for national construction meetings with elderly people and other resource persons living in the area." They gained access to information about the history of Syphom's temple, local songs and food recipes, and about the villagers' principal occupations and livelihoods. "Initially surprised, the local population quickly expressed their appreciation for the school's investment in the history of the town." Once they had integrated their findings with the existing national curriculum for three school grades, they started piloting the teaching of these contents in 2013, before obtaining approval by the Ministry of Education of the full use the following year. "We are pleased that we can offer relevant local knowledge to our pupils", Sythong says, and she continues: "It is a way to preserve the culture and traditions of our community for future generations and we hope to have found an attractive way for the kids to develop a stronger sense of belonging to the area they live in".

(v) Sustainability

Evaluators came across issues that risk undermining the sustainability of the project's results. While the project's achievements are not to be disputed, additional efforts will be therefore required, in order to ensure the sustainability of the present project's achievements:

a. Continuation and expansion of environmental and indigenous knowledge promotion

Although central- and provincial-level staff members of the Ministry of Education emphasized the project's important contribution to the realisation of the government's national strategy for the development of the youth, they were also quick to point out to evaluators that high staff mobility among teachers was posing a threat to this achievement in the long-term. Teachers themselves also mentioned the risk of loss of knowledgeable staff capacity, as they regularly move on to new positions. In their discussions with evaluators both groups of interview partners therefore argued that an extension of the grantee's activity to all teaching staff of the previously targeted primary and secondary schools would be needed to ensure continued youth engagement and the promotion of biodiversity and indigenous knowledge. Openly expressing their appreciation for PADETC's achievements to date, Ministry representatives in addition to the above made a strong recommendation for the grantee's project to be rolled out to schools located in areas previously not covered by the project (N.B.: the grantee has been working with schools across the country's 17 provinces since 1996, establishing so far a total of at least 55 youth groups). At the time of this report PADETC and its partner were, however, neither prepared to present their strategy for a possible future expansion, nor had they conducted a donor screening for matching their financing needs.

b. Coverage of material needs: equipment and subsistence

Throughout all meetings and at the school locations visited, evaluators found themselves confronted with teachers who expressed future material needs. They claimed that lack of continued funding prevented them from offering practical exercises (e.g. in local cooking and crafting skills) as part of indigenous knowledge teaching for primary school pupils, and from conducting participatory research (e.g. field- and communication work) for secondary-school level youth groups. The equipment needs articulated by teachers ranged from (i) basic materials such as consumables (e.g. pencils, pens, paper, cooking ingredients, handicraft materials), to (ii) rather sophisticated items which can be exploited long-term, such as digital cameras, lap tops, and photo & film editing software.

Secondary school teachers were also highlighting the fact that youth group members conduct their activity voluntarily after school hours, which is why they usually involve the provision of snacks for the kids and the payment of an allowance, plus a modest project budget (for field expenses, e.g. phone calls and fuel for transportation), for the teachers. Some reported to have continued without funding, improvising by borrowing or using (out-dated) equipment, which at some point though became unavailable or broke, all of which led to frustration among youth leaders and their group members. In another case a youth group deferred its activity to weekends, organising itself with their teacher's and parents' support outside school premises (i.e. holding its meetings on a local football field).



A frequently expressed concern: the unavailability of technical equipment, e.g. for future youth film productions

All of the above issues indicate a lack of foresight both on the part of the grantee and its implementation partner. The participating schools' needs in terms of sophisticated equipment (to continue electronically capturing, communicating and exchanging the results of future action research, e.g. via PADETC's Facebook page) represent a particularly critical sustainability issue, which evaluators believe could have been solved prior to project completion. If PADETC would have timely anticipated that they would achieve 14.3% in project budget savings (USD 25,773), they could have tried to suggest to UNDEF an adjusted spending of funds for improved sustainability purposes (e.g. for the purchase of a lap top and a digital camera for each of the 30 participating schools).

Given PADETC's implementation partner carries overall responsibility for maintaining the country's education standard, evaluators however see little justification why an absence of funding for basic consumables is threatening indigenous knowledge education at primary schools and creative writing and drawing activities both at primary and secondary schools. Taking into account that many of these actions also generate marketable products (e.g. rice baskets, food products and publications), it also surprises that school personnel rarely felt encouraged to sell them, thus generating income to cover future financial needs.

(vi) UNDEF Value Added

According to the grantee, PADETC identified the United Nations Democracy Fund as a logical partner due to its objective to foster democratic governance, and because youth represents one of UNDEF's focus areas: "Having worked solely in education for youth before, UNDEF for us was the preferred partner to pilot a new approach, namely the involvement of the same youth in local and environmental governance and the development of the rural areas, in which they live."

V. CONCLUSIONS

i. The grantee's pre-project analysis of the baseline situation (weak implementation of government provisions encouraging self-responsible and participatory management of natural resources) was confirmed by surveys among secondary school youth group volunteers and primary school teachers. Accordingly, the project was designed (1) to assist young people with the documentation of local sustainable and bio-diversity preservation practices, and (2) to incorporate these in the education system. While the grantee foresaw to train secondary teachers in the transfer of analytical and media advocacy skills to their youth group members, training for primary school teachers aimed to provide guidance in the collection of relevant local heritage and bio-diversity preservation knowledge for integration into the education curriculum. It is our view that **the project represented a relevant effort** to involve youth in democratic and participatory processes regarding the management and use of natural resources. Our findings show that (a) the capacity development component was programmed to enhance the youth leaders' technical capacity to support rights-based development knowledge as well as the transfer of leadership and multimedia skills; and that (b) the policy formulation component assisted the identification of bio-diversity issues and general development challenges, in order to support the youth's preparation of suggestions how to mitigate potential negative effects. The project's (c) curriculum development component finally was meant to gather locally relevant cultural, societal and environmental details appropriate to replace specific parts of generic educational information in the national curriculum for primary schools.

ii. Although the project had to cope with delays, evaluators noted that the grantee's adjusted implementation efforts led to the delivery of most of the planned principal outputs: (a) PADETC considered the youth leaders' regular teaching obligations, integrating separate capacity development modules into a single training event. Notably, 198 (more than triple compared to planned: 60) youth group members were trained in rights-based development; (b) more than doubling the target group quantity under the policy formulation component, 190 (planned: 90) participants from all 6 (planned: 3) targeted provinces obtained field survey training to prepare for and subsequently conduct independently a field practicum. The youngsters' field-work led to the identification and formulation of about 30 different bio-diversity themes and general development challenges. Issues addressed and suggestions made related in particular to local farming practices, but also to the need to preserve local culture and traditions; (c) the efforts of 54 teachers from 17 primary schools across all six provinces to elaborate locally enhanced curricula for indigenous knowledge were supported through to approval by the Ministry of Education. Given these achievements and considering the appreciation central and provincial government representatives expressed for most of the outputs the youth elaborated (including a series of audio-visual and print publications), evaluators are of the view that **the project was and effective contribution** to improved consideration of local and bio-diversity knowledge in local community development processes.

iii. The grantee's initially proposed target indicators allow for a preliminary assessment of impact in respect of the project's achieved outcomes: (a) in terms of capacity development, the evaluators' consolidated review confirmed that the youth had opportunity to contribute to community development planning processes. The evidence presented was, however, insufficient to prove whether the targeted proportion of end-beneficiaries has made use of their new bio-diversity preservation and land management knowledge, or if they kept in touch electronically for networking purposes; (b) while it is documented that more than half of the targeted youth intends to continue using their new analytical, media and ICT skills to influence policy making, most remarkably the completion of a field practicum by more than triple the number of targeted youth group has reportedly driven local and provincial authorities to consider numerous natural resource management suggestions; (c) bio-diversity and indigenous knowledge topics (local customs and traditions) finally have made their way into the education curriculum of primary schools in more provinces and are taught by more teachers than expected. Evaluators on the basis of independently gathered first-hand evidence also confirmed that (1) secondary-school level youth has started to engage with the community to make suggestions for improvements; and (2) primary-school level pupils for the first time have been taught locally relevant subjects. Despite a reported shortfall across several target indicators, evaluators therefore conclude that **the project generated positive impact.**

iv. Weak communication by the project's management and relatively high output unit costs per beneficiary **unfortunately spoil the otherwise positive impression of efficient project conduct:** given that PADETC appeared completely unaware that its weak communication performance could have put UNDEF's financing at serious risk, the grantee in future projects clearly needs to address and overcome this unsatisfactory aspect of its project management. In terms of project expenditure, the largest proportion of the budget (50%) was spent for baseline surveys, meetings, and training enabling youth group leaders and teachers to transfer analytical and advocacy skills. The grantee's nominal staff costs amounted to more than 30% of the total budget. Breaking the amount spent over the reported total number of 1,020 trainees provides a relatively high average cost of approximately USD 75, which was spent per beneficiary. Moderate levels of funding (6%) were spent to raise awareness and support the dissemination of relevant information (e.g. comics and text books), but their average production price of USD 10 per unit is surprisingly high. It has been noted though that, with the exception of salaries (5% overspent), spending was below plan along all other budget items, resulting in overall savings of USD 25, 773.

v. While the grantee's achievements are not to be disputed, evaluators came across **issues that risk undermining the sustainability** of the project's results. Among these were (a) the need to ensure that teaching and promotion of environmental and indigenous knowledge among the Lao youth will be continued (issue to be addressed: staff mobility) and also expanded to locations previously not covered by the project (issue to be addressed: consistent staff knowledge); and (b) the necessity to counteract the current beneficiaries' over-reliance on external funding (issue to be addressed: lack of foresight on the part of donor and implementing partner), which results in an expectation that the costs for material needs of both the youth and teachers involved in environmental and other locally relevant action research will be paid for by others.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen the outcome and similar projects in the future, evaluators recommend to UNDEF and project grantees:

i. The fact that the approach and methodology of PADETC included the conduct of baseline research and the formulation of outcome indicators is highly commendable, as this enhanced the project's **relevance** and significantly facilitated the **assessment of effectiveness and impact**. Evaluators, however, would have appreciated a more realistic and rigorous approach to data analysis: the grantee despite its experience with the operating environment (a) imposed on itself ambitious target indicators, and (b) confused monitoring data demonstrating capacity development with data documenting the youth's actual ability to participate in policy formulation. Reporting of project outcomes therefore lacked clarity, which of the identified shortfalls were considered most important, and inspiration for strategies how to address these in the future. Based on the above **we recommend to the grantee** to design monitoring frameworks, which make consistent use of baseline and target indicators. Exploiting the results of progress monitoring more systematically facilitates the identification of remaining and new needs. This could enable PADETC to improve its current assessment in qualitative terms and thus enhance the organization's strategic objectives. It may also help the grantee to attract new donors and implementing partners for an expansion of the original project.

ii. In relation to our conclusion that the grantee's communication with UNDEF was affecting the project's **efficiency** (e.g. missing to anticipate the effect of (a) its involvement in the Asia-Europe People Forum, and (b) changes to project plan and schedule) **we strongly recommend to the grantee** to become more transparent by informing its donors as soon as an event of significance to resource utilization becomes known. It is also due to the above stated lack of foresight that the project missed the opportunity to address the participating schools' long-term needs in terms of equipment. **Based on our observations on efficiency and sustainability, we therefore also recommend to the grantee** to timely anticipate and report project budget savings, and to suggest adjusted spending of funds if this can clearly improve sustainability (e.g. by proposing the purchase of computer and camera equipment for each participating school).

iii. Despite the above shortcomings it is our strong belief that (a) continued youth action in schools already engaged in the project, and (b) wider outreach to schools located in provinces previously not covered by the UNDEF project, will be essential to ensure the youth's involvement in improving the efficiency, appropriateness and ownership of local resources management - both among the citizens living and the local authorities working in areas across the Lao PDR. **Based on our comments on sustainability, we therefore recommend to the grantee** to:

- Suggest to the Ministry of Education and Sports (i.e. the implementation partner) the joint preparation of separate plans (a) extending this activity to all teaching staff of the

previously targeted primary and secondary schools, and (b) for rolling out the project to at least 25 youth groups located in the schools of 11 provinces not yet covered – with the objective to ensure continued youth engagement and the promotion of biodiversity and indigenous knowledge throughout the country.

- Conclude with the implementation partner in a detailed agreement that its existing structural, human and financial resources will be accessible to support a future expansion of the project. In particular, involve the Ministry in developing a strategy providing an appropriate response to the participating schools' needs in terms of basic materials such as consumables. Indicatively, such strategy could foresee shared financing by the Ministry (e.g. for pencils, pens, paper) and by the participating schools. These could consider to sell the products generated during indigenous knowledge sessions, to create revolving funds covering future needs (e.g. cooking ingredients, handicraft materials).
- Undertake targeted donor screening in preparation for a proposal seeking support for an extension of the project in line with the above suggestions. Ensure the proposal's approach matches with donor expectations and offers added value as compared to the original project (such as intensifying cooperation between youth groups, local farmers and local entrepreneurs to jointly develop ideas emphasizing the local identity of certain products or promoting concepts of sustainable tourism). Address the schools' rather sophisticated equipment needs, i.e. items that can be exploited long-term (i.e. computers and cameras for action research), in the donor-funded budget proposal.

IX. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? ▪ Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? ▪ Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse?
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? ▪ To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? ▪ Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? ▪ What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this?
Efficiency	To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? ▪ Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? ▪ Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives?
Impact	To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? ▪ Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? ▪ To what extent has the project caused changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? ▪ Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples?
Sustainability	To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? ▪ Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)?
UNDEF value-added	To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project, that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc.). ▪ Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues?

ANNEX 2: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

UNDEF:

- Final Narrative Report
- Mid-Term Report
- Project Document
- Milestone Verification Reports
- Financial Utilization Report
- Project Officer's Evaluation Note

PADETC:

- Field Practicum Report, Chomphet High School, Khoun district, Xiengkhouang province (14 to 17/10/2013)
- Primary School Curricula (grades 3, 4, and 5), Syphom Primary School, Khoun district, Xienkhouang province (2013, 2014)
- Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge Comics (8 booklets, awarded 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prizes as part of a project competition)
- Local Wisdom – Youth and Lessons Learnt from Communities (booklet containing DVD with 30 video spots and printed biodiversity and indigenous knowledge anecdotes)

Government sources:

- Decree of Associations, Decree Number 115/PM (approved by former Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh, April 29th, 2009); for the text of decree, see http://www.iccsl.org/pubs/Lao_PDR_Decree_Law_On_Associations.pdf
- Handbook of Association, as provided by the Civil Society Division, by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), which is assigned to provide the registration of CSOs in Laos
- 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2011-2015), http://www.unpei.org/sites/default/files/e_library_documents/7th_National_Socio-Economic_Development_Plan_Lao_PDR.pdf

Other sources:

- "The Economics of Transition in Laos: from Socialism to ASEAN Integration"; contribution by Yves Bourdet (Cheltenham, UK, Edward Elgar, 2000)
- "International poverty and development report: Lao PDR"; contributions by Stephen Erbricke, Ami Probandt, Andrew White, and Yiwon Mao (2010)

ANNEX 3: SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS

27 October 2014	
<i>Grantee's Project Briefing, PADETC Office, Vientiane</i>	
Kolaka Bouanedaohueang	Deputy Director and Programme Manager, PADETC
Houmphanh Khammavong	National Project Coordinator, Head of Division of Physical and Arts Education, Ministry of Education and Sports
Bouavanh Sidala	Technical Expert, Education Development Unit, PADETC
Vathana Phunkham	Head of Research Unit, PADETC
Bouachanh Thanouvong	Technical Expert, Education Development Unit, PADETC
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Vientiane Capital and Khammouane Province (at PADETC Office, Vientiane)</i>	
Phanmaly Sysomphone	Teacher / Youth Leader, Hinhboun Tai Secondary School, Khammouane Province
Phimpha Xayakosy	Teacher / Youth Leader, Samket Primary School, Vientiane Capital
Thongmee Insisiengmay	Teacher / Youth Leader, Nongbuek Lower Secondary School, Vientiane Capital
Somephone Keoune	Head of Unit, Physical and Arts Education, Vientiane Capital Department of Education and Sports
28 October 2014	
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Xiengkhouang Province</i>	
Thongphiew Sipunya	Deputy director, Provincial Department of Education and Sports, Paek District, Xiengkhouang Province
Vilaysinh Oudomsouk	Deputy Head of Unit of Physical and Arts Education, Provincial Department of Education and Sports, Paek District, Xiengkhouang Province
Khaan Sysavanh	Technician, Information Unit, Provincial Department of Education and Sports, Paek District, Xiengkhouang Province
Soudsady Sysophone	Teacher / Youth Leader, Phonsavan Secondary School, Paek District, Xiengkhouang Province
Sengsomboune Lorbiayao	Pupil / Youth Group Member, Phonsavan Secondary School, Paek District, Xiengkhouang Province
Boudsady Xaypunya	Pupil / Youth Group Member, Phonsavan Secondary School, Paek District, Xiengkhouang Province
Sounedueane Sinhsamay	Province Project Coordinator, Head of Unit of Physical and Arts Education, Provincial Department of Education and Sports, Paek District, Xiengkhouang Province
29 October 2014	
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Sayaboury Province (conducted at Xiengkhouang Province)</i>	
Thongphanh Chanthavong	Teacher / Youth Leader, Saya Secondary School, Sayaboury Province
Mino Douangdy	Teacher / Youth Leader, Mittapharb Lower

	Secondary School, Sayaboury Province
Ms. Souksakhone	Teacher / Youth Leader, Ekkapharb Secondary School, Sayabury Province
29 October 2014	
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Xiengkhouang Province</i>	
Keo Sayavong	Head of Unit of Physical and Arts Education, District office for Education and Sports, Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province
Sythong Thammavong	Director, Syphom Primary School, Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province
Viengkeo Douangphachanh	Teacher, Syphom Primary School, Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province
Somphone Chanthavong	Teacher, Syphom Primary School, Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province
Souksavanh Phalakhone	Teacher / Youth Leader, Chomphet Secondary School, Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province
Ms. Ounkham	Teacher, Head of Student Management, Chomphet Secondary School, Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province
Souksakhone Sayapheth	Pupil, Youth Group Member, Chomphet Secondary School, Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province
Nuthida Phaysanh	Pupil, Youth Group Member, Chomphet Secondary School, Khoun District, Xiengkhouang Province
Vilaysinh Oudomsouk	Deputy Head of Unit of Physical and Arts Education, Provincial department of Education and Sports
30 October 2014	
<i>Evaluators' Debriefing, PADETC Office (Vientiane)</i>	
Kolaka Bouanedaohueang	Deputy Director and Programme Manager, PADETC
Houmphanh Khammavong	National Project Coordinator, Head of Division of Physical and Arts Education, Ministry of Education and Sports
Bouavanh Sidala	Technical Expert, Education Development Unit, PADETC

ANNEX 4: ACRONYMS

AEPF	Asia-Europe People's Forum
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
FNR	Final Narrative Report
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
MOHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PADETC	Participatory Development Training Center
RBD	Rights-based Development
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
USD	United States Dollar