



LE GOUVERNEMENT
DU GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG
Ministère des Affaires étrangères
et européennes

Direction de la coopération
au développement et
de l'action humanitaire

Evaluation of disaster risk reduction activities in Laos financed by the MAEE Luxembourg and implemented by CARE in Luxembourg, Fondation CARITAS Luxembourg and the Luxembourg Red Cross, from 2011-2014

Final Report

EVAL/2015/01

4th December 2015

Extract of the final report: executive summary

In 2015, the Directorate of Development Cooperation and humanitarian action of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs commissioned an independent evaluation of disaster risk reduction activities in Laos financed by the MAEE Luxembourg and implemented by three Luxembourg NGOs. The evaluation was conducted by ARTEMIS Information Management S.A. The Ministry publishes below a summary of the main results of this exercise (executive summary).

Observations, assessments and recommendations expressed in this document represent the views of the evaluators and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) activities in Laos financed by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MAEE) and implemented by Care in Luxembourg (CIL), the Fondation Caritas Luxembourg (Caritas Luxembourg) and the Luxembourg Red Cross (CRL) (2011-2014) is the first of its kind. Its objective is to encourage mutual learning between NGOs and the MAEE based on the field experiences of these three NGOs.

The MAEE has chosen the company ARTEMIS to carry out this assessment. A team of four evaluators has been mobilised: two in Luxembourg, Thierry PACCOUD and Sandrine BEAUJEAN, and two in Vientiane, Dr Manivanh SOUTHAMMMAVONG and Keopheth PHOUMPHON. This team benefited from the techno-organisational support of Virginie KREMER.

The evaluation started with an initial phase during which the exercise was launched and the available information was analysed (April-May 2015). This phase was completed in Luxembourg with the help of a Steering Committee comprising the NGOs, the MAEE and the evaluation team. This was followed by a two-part phase of field work (May-June 2015):

- meetings with members of the central administration, the NGOs' local partners, other NGOs active in DRR and international and bilateral foreign aid agencies in Laos, and
- visits of projects in the 3 provinces¹ in which the Luxembourg NGOs intervened. The evaluation ended with a final phase for analysis, cross-referencing information, report writing (July-August 2015) and presentation of its results to the Steering Committee (September 2015).

Primarily, this evaluation has made it easier to get an understanding of the situation in Laos in terms of DRR. The different modalities and geographic areas of intervention of these three NGOs also enabled the comparative analysis of their practices in the context of the country's situation. The evaluation also looked at issues that were of common interest to all three NGOs and analysed the application and effects of the MAEE's Humanitarian Aid (HA) strategy. These elements can be found in the evaluation summary report which also includes three detailed assessment reports in the annex, one for each NGO.

Disasters in Laos: nature and recent changes

The little information that is available in Laos about disaster risks shows that the country's situation is no worse than that of its neighbouring countries. As is the case elsewhere, new phenomena need to be considered, such as the alternance of periods of drought and of heavy rainfall, powerful localised storms and flash-flooding. These are not solely the consequences of climate change. In fact they are the result of an accumulation of different phenomena, such as the effects of major infrastructure projects and economic development that has put uncontrolled pressure on natural resources.

The Laotian government's response does not effectively address these risks: to this day no national DRR management strategy has been adopted, despite a huge amount of preparatory work being carried out. The Laotian administration, at a central and decentralized levels, faces structural weaknesses and there is still confusion over responsibilities in this sector. The efforts made, both in the domain of risk reduction and in providing emergency help to victims, have

¹ The province of Khammouane for the CRL, the province of Sekong for CIL and the provinces of Xiangkhouang and Saysomboun for Caritas Luxembourg.



essentially been the result of foreign aid. Without this help, no concrete DRR achievements would have been made in Laos today.

Comparative analysis and summary of the three NGOs' work

This exercise aimed to facilitate the sharing of experiences and the analysis of the issues of common interest identified by the NGOs and the MAEE at the beginning of the evaluation. The exercise showed that the populations targeted by the NGOs were often but not always some of the poorest and most vulnerable. In terms of the forms of intervention, in these chosen projects, the CRL responds principally to urgent issues and the management of risks; CIL also targets the question of prevention and response to the primary needs linked to resilience through an integrated approach that combines DRR projects and development projects; and finally Caritas Luxembourg projects aim to move beneficiaries from vulnerability to resilience or even development. In general, these three NGOs have good relationships with government actors and are flexible enough to be able to respond to the needs and requests of authorities. Coordination with other DRR actors at a provincial level varies depending on the NGO.

The work has also made it possible to identify a set of best practices that were exchanged between the NGOs and discussed in Luxembourg with the MAEE.

Issues of common interest for all three NGOs

Among the main preoccupations of the three NGOs, those identified to be of common interest were those issues linked to participation and appropriation, the implementation of projects, and coordination and political issues.

- Participation and appropriation
 - Weak national counterparts: although the best solution today is to bypass this weakness by setting up project teams, it is also worth considering going through local associations, as Oxfam does, for example.
 - Weak organization of the Civil Society: it is important to put together a systematic strategy for strengthening abilities in order to increase the assimilation of practices and procedures and the durability of project results. One option would be to work more directly with local communities and to find a balance between supporting authorities and communities.
- Implementing projects
 - Delays in signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU): This has a direct impact on foreign aid interventions. Working together with other NGOs to set up interventions, or even asking for support from the Hanoi Office in the framework of the policy dialogue it has with the authorities in Laos, are both solutions that should be looked at.
 - Preliminary analysis of local contexts: as it can be difficult to carry out monitoring and evaluation activities in Laos due to a lack of reliable information at all levels, it is extremely useful to have access to preliminary assessments, not only to help design interventions but also to help create a system of monitoring and evaluation that builds on informed objectives and benchmarks,
 - Measuring the effects of interventions: a micro-study carried out at the population level (participative assessment of beneficiaries) to analyse their behaviour after a DRR project could be used to estimate their satisfaction with the project, its effects on their living conditions and their behaviour following the project,



- Overlaps in funding: there is sometimes a lack of coordination between the various bodies involved in DRR on a province and/or district level.
- Coordination
 - Between those involved in development at local level: this local coordination should normally be the responsibility of the local authorities. More systematic dialogue should be encouraged, as well as the involvement of local partners and authorities,
 - Between those involved in Luxembourg's overseas development: fundamental development issues need to be discussed with authorities in order to address the underlying causes that turn normally manageable events into disasters. As long as the structural problems remain untreated, public funds spent on these projects will bear no sustainable fruits. These discussions are not the responsibility of the NGOs but they must pass on the facts about their respective activities to the MAEE in order to help convince partner authorities.

Humanitarian aid (HA) strategy: its application, its effects

The interventions carried out in the projects investigated were analysed in the context of the elements that make up the operational approach developed in the document outlining Luxembourg's HA strategy and orientation.

According to the operational structure of Luxembourg's HA, the DRR actions which are implemented in Laos by the three NGOs are more specifically part of the "prevention and resilience" element, the contents of which is closest to development operations in general. There is nonetheless a large margin for interpretation of what DRR consists of, and that can have financial and operational consequences. The issue of strengthening abilities comes up against various obstacles, whether in terms of local authorities or beneficiaries, or the question of the limited scope and duration of projects.

It is after a consultation session between the NGOs and the MAEE that decisions are made on the best distribution of funds between HA projects and development projects. It is then up to the NGOs to organize whether the project's financial compensation comes from their HA or development budget. When it comes to DRR, it is often difficult to define the boundary between HA and development. The projects investigated as part of this evaluation are all on the border between resilience and development.

Conclusions and recommendations

One of the conclusions of the evaluation is that an exercise evaluating a sector of intervention (DRR) in a country (Laos) is useful on various levels. Among other things, it can be used to:

- make direct comparisons between the practices and forms of interventions carried out by different NGOs,
- learn globally relevant lessons and identify best practices,
- expand the field of the evaluation beyond specific projects or actors, giving it a more strategic nature.
- It is not certain that it will be possible to generate practices and examples that will be immediately useful in other contexts based on the experiences of the various NGOs in Laos. Nonetheless, it has been possible to formulate conclusions and recommendations addressed specifically to the three NGOs concerned and the MAEE.



- The situation in Laos is characterized by a strategic DRR framework that is vague and whose reorganisation, which has been under way for some years now, is taking a long time to have an effect: in Laos the field of DRR needs more coordination and collaboration, both horizontal (between NGOs) and vertical (with Luxembourg's other instruments for overseas development).
- The results of DRR actions clash with the consequences of development policy choices that have an impact on the environment and on the ability of populations to protect themselves from the effects of disasters: work must be done in advance to discuss the question of large-scale development projects with the government; locally, it is important to gather the facts and arguments needed to feed this dialogue.
- Local administrations have very weak abilities and there are various restraints on strengthening them. It is useful to adapt the forms and methods of strengthening capacities locally and to work more with local personnel.
- There is a lack of reliable data on the effects and impacts of disasters at a local level. Systematic work must be done to gather witness testimonies and carry out post-disaster assessments.
- The boundaries between HA and development actions are vague and DRR is located along this boundary: NGOs and the MAEE should discuss the integration of DRR into development projects.