

External Review Mission Lao DECIDE Info Project



Final Report

Prepared for the
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC
Laos

Thomas Hoesli
Thatheva Saphangthong





Table of Content

0. Executive Summary	4
1. General Information on the Lao DECIDE Info Project	13
1.1 Development Goal and Project Objectives for Phase II	13
1.2 Project Components, Outcomes and Outputs for Phase II	14
1.3 Institutional Setup of the Project Phase II.....	17
1.4 Project Finances Phase II	18
1.5 Project Phases of the Lao DECIDE info Project.....	19
2. Evaluation Procedure and Results.....	19
2.1 Objectives of the External Review.....	19
2.2. Evaluation Procedure in Detail.....	20
2.3 Interviews with Key Stakeholders and Users	21
2.4. Information Gathered from Project Documents.....	21
3. Analysis of the Lao DECIDE Info Project Phase II.....	22
3.1 Relevance of the Project Goal and Strategy.....	22
3.2 Projects contribution towards formulated Outcomes and Activities	23
Component 1: Dissemination and utilisation of the Socio-economic Atlas at the local level.....	23
Component 2: Web-based access to socio-economic information	25
Component 3: Spatial information services at the Department of Statistics	28
Component 4: Remote access of socioeconomic information	29
Component 5: Integration of spatial analysis in education system	30
Component 6: Contribution to development knowledge and discourse.....	30
Component 7: Geographic Knowledge on Commercial Land Concessions.....	32
3.3 Review of the Overall Progress of Project Implementation.....	33
3.4 Current Project Management and Implementation Arrangements	33
3.5 Cost-effectiveness Analysis	34
4. Assessment of the Lao DECIDE Info Project Phase II.....	34
4.1 Tentative SWOT Analysis of the Project Phase II	34
4.2 Key Lessons and Issues to Be Considered	35
4.3 Key Measures and Recommendations	36
5. Possible Phase III of the Lao DECIDE Info Project.....	36
5.1 Proposed Aim and Cornerstones for Phase III.....	37
5.2 Proposed Outcomes for Phase III	37
Component 1: Data Enhancement	38
Component 2: Information Management.....	40
Component 3: Information Distribution	40
Component 4: Information Analysis.....	41



Component 5: Policy Integration	42
6. Possible Organisation for Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III	43
6.1. Possible Project Implementation Organisation.....	43
6.2 Possible Organisation of cross-sectoral Information Sharing	44
6.3 Tentative SWOT Analysis of Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III	45
7. Estimation of Finances for Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III	46
7.1. Foreseen Costs for some Activities for Phase III	46
7.2. Preliminary Budget for Phase III.....	46
8. Recommendations for Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III	47
8.1 Recommendation for Project Handling between SDC and CDE.....	47
8.2. General Recommendations.....	47
Annexes	49
Annex 1: Terms of Reference for the External Review	49
Annex 2: Persons visited for ER and Summary of interviews.....	54
Annex 3: Summary of interviews	55
Annex 4: Draft Logframe for Phase III	56

List of Figures

Figure 1: Project Organisation for components 1 to 4	17
Figure 2: Agreed Budgets for the Lao DECIDE info Project Phase II	18
Figure 3: Project Phases for the Lao DECIDE Info Project	19
Figure 4: Persons and institutions interviewed for the External Review	21
Figure 5: Samples from Outputs of the DECIDE Info Project	22
Figure 6: Distribution and Sale of Socio-Economic Atlas and CD as well as Poverty book up to date	24
Figure 7: Web-based Access to Spatially Referenced Socio-Economic Data	26
Figure 8: Online User Development of the DECIDE info Web Platform	27
Figure 9: Online User Access by country to the DECIDE info web platform	27
Figure 10: Activities carried out under component 6	31
Figure 11: SWOT Analysis of the Lao DECIDE Info Project Phase II	35
Figure 12: Knowledge Enhancement Cycle of Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III	38
Figure 13: Possible Datasets to be enhanced under Lao DECIDE info Project Phase II	39
Figure 14: Planned new Web Interface for Lao DECIDE info Project Phase	41
Figure 15: Lao DECIDE info Project organization	43
Figure 16: Lao DECIDE info Information Sharing Organization	44
Figure 17: SWOT Analysis of the Lao DECIDE Info Project Phase III	45
Figure 18: Possible average yearly Budgets for the Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III	46



0. Executive Summary

0.1 Short Brief on the Lao DECIDE Info Project

The Lao DECIDE Info project aims at capitalizing on the **achievements of the Lao Poverty Mapping and Socio-economic Atlas project**, by developing means for disseminating and further analysing and processing the developed spatially highly detailed national socio-economic data base and by sensitizing analysts and planners towards the importance of spatial dimensions in socio-economic development analysis and planning. The Lao DECIDE-Info project Phase II was designed as a **2.5 years project** to be implemented between July 2009 and December 2011 by the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Berne (Switzerland), in collaboration and under an agreement with the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI). Out of different reasons and opportunities Phase II went into an extension, which is currently under way and lasts up to August 2013. The project is fully funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) at planned costs of **CHF 1'632'753**.

Regarding the development goal the Project Documents states, that in Lao PDR socio-economic policies and decisions are made utilizing the best available knowledge on socio-economic disparities in the country in order to improve social and economic equity including gender and ethnicity dimensions and increased accountability of decision-makers. The project aims at the utilisation and explicit reference of data in these fields. The project objective was enhanced for the project extension and formulated as follows: Foster **cross-sectoral information exchange** and analytical use towards more integrated and **evidence-based planning** processes and to extract and communicate key knowledge for **better informed** national planning and policy-making.

0.2 Scope of the External Review of the Lao DECIDE Info Project Phase II

The external review (ER) of the Lao DECIDE Info Project was defined as an exercise to be carried out by an international and a national consultant within twenty working days. The time frame was set from March 27th to April 14th 2013 on site in Vientiane and Luang Prabang (Laos).

The objectives of the ER were **to assess** the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the project and **to provide** detailed recommendations and a draft logframe showing possible directions for the project continuation. While the first objective deals mainly with the past, the second objective aims at the **future** (where the consultants, in agreement with SDC, put their emphasis). During the first week of the mission over 21 institutions with different backgrounds were visited and a total of 36 people interviewed. The consultants also had the task to analyse the Project documents and products and ask the Project team for clarifications or explanations.

0.3 Relevance of the Project Goal and Strategy

The interviews with the different key stakeholder and users carried out during the ER (and also during the Mid-Term Review - MTR - two years ago) and the high demand for the project outputs show that the project goal and especially also the strategy to reach it are **well elaborated and designed**. Especially the on-going activities in the framework of the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) or the Project's input into the discussions of the National Assembly on developing a land policy show that there is much need for easily available and reliable data and processed information for decision makers. There is also a readiness to question some of current policies (such as the policy on 70% forest cover) and to develop more realistic and meaningful development policies.

However, taking into account the **time frame** and the **financial resources** allocated, the Project aims and outcomes seem rather ambitious. Especially to build a solid institutional setup seemed to be a time consuming effort. As a consequence the time for reaching a sustainable solution for maintaining the current output level of the Project is a real challenge for the Project team.

0.4 Projects Contribution towards formulated Outcomes and Activities

The DECIDE info Project has **clearly contributed** to an increased understanding within GoL for the need for and benefits of exchanging reliable information for development planning. The Project achievements have created demand for support in this area, which is crucial to facilitating the necessary shift in current practices into a more active provision of information based on existing data or evidence. Therefore it can be clearly stated, that the Project made good progress towards the Project development goal that Lao PDR socio-economic policies and decisions are made utilizing the best available knowledge on socio-economic disparities in the country in order to improve social and economic equity including gender and ethnicity dimensions and increased accountability of decision-makers.



With its achievements to influence the data sharing policy in Laos or to facilitate the distribution of socio-economic data over a web platform the Project set some high standards. With its outputs on policy level like the visualization of possible incoherencies in terms of spatial planning among different sectors for the National Assembly, the involvement in the elaboration of the first National Land Policy or the elaboration of the Land Concession Report the Project, again, showed remarkable and rather unexpectedly good achievements.

It can also be clearly stated by looking at the outputs realised that the formulated Project outcome can be attained to a big extent. There is a very strong need and demand for further capacity building in the use of spatial and statistical development information for analysis and planning which has been expressed both at national and sub-national levels. This indicates the GoL staffs interest and readiness to change current practices of sector-specific and target oriented planning towards an evidence-based multi-sector development planning.

The project is structured in 7 components with corresponding outcomes and outputs. While the direct Project partner of the CDE for the components 1 to 4 is the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB), the partner for component 5 is the National University of Laos (NUoL), for component 6 SDC and for component 7 the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) respectively. To describe the contribution of the Project towards formulates outcomes and activities, the achievements of the Project until now are listed.

Component 1: Dissemination and utilization of the Socio-economic Atlas at the local level

Outcome 1: National, Province and Districts Officers of the Ministry of Planning and Investment and other Governmental Agencies use the data and maps of the Socio-economic Atlas in their planning and decision-making.

Outputs: map reading guidelines, distribution of Atlas and Poverty book, workshops and trainings of GoL staff, creation and distribution of promotion material

The **Socio-Economic Atlas** and its CD, as well as the **Poverty book**, have been widely distributed in Laos on national, provincial and District level. According to the records of the Project team around 800 Atlas and Poverty books have been distributed or sold so far. The biggest share went to institutions of the GoL, followed by sales in bookshops and then to different organisations. **Map reading guidelines** and **training materials** have been prepared and distributed at a series of 3 training of trainers' sessions in Vientiane and 7 **regional training workshops**, where over **200 MPI** staff from all provincial and district offices were given practical training in the usage of the online platform.

How much the GoL institutions **use** the data and maps of the Socio-economic Atlas in their **planning and decision-making** cannot easily be assessed. As indicators the Project team got feedbacks from the participants at the end of the training workshops and analysed the log-in in the web-based platform, which showed a high appreciation of the trainings, but also revealed the lack of internet access and computer skills. The interviews of the ER team on provincial and district level confirmed these findings.

A **significant contribution** of the Project to the formulated outcome can certainly be reached. Nonetheless, in the light of the overall limited resources and the short time at disposition to introduce a new innovative approach and a change of behaviour in the lower administrative levels of the GoL, the outcome seems rather ambitiously formulated. However, the interest of GoL staff in the DECIDE info platform and the numerous wishes of trainees for more statistical and spatial data show that a **strong need** for modern decision-making and planning tools exists. Lack of budget seems to be a main constraint for the regional and local GoL institutions to fulfil the wishes for planning and decision making tools. The activities in these fields need to be continued and strengthened in a possible Phase III.

Component 2: Web-based access to socio-economic information

Outcome 2: A wider public uses evidence based socio-economic information for development related analysis and planning activities.

Outputs: new data distribution policy of LSB, socio-economic spatial database, meta data, data access, user rights management system, WEB platform for data viewing and distribution, hardware upgrade, improvement of user friendliness, offline version on DVD

The achievements in this component determine the **key results** and the **visibility** of the Project towards the common users. The backbone of the component is the implementation of the spatial socio-economic database and to make it available over a web-based platform. With the **new data distribution policy** of LSB a new era has started in Laos and **crucial socio-economic information** offered with this Project can be used for the



planning and designing of many activities. The recently launched **web-based platform for viewing and ordering of data** as part of the LSB internet website is a pioneer for Laos and a very strong Project output.

It is widely acknowledged, that the web-based DECIDE info platform is an absolutely **crucial and unique achievement** of the Project. Through it detailed village-level spatial and statistical data for the over ten thousand villages of Laos are freely available. The set of online tools for the visualization, analysis, and dissemination of spatial socio-economic data and information on the web platform allow the 700 registered users to choose according to their needs. User statistics and surveys indicate that the information and tools provided are used and appreciated widely.

The **appropriateness** in the Lao context of such innovative technology and means of user-specific visualization, querying and communication used for DECIDE info could be questioned. However, **none** of the ER respondents or the Project team found the technology unfit for their working environment. On the contrary, this innovative approach is on the way to **reshape** the data exchange and distribution policy between stakeholders in Laos. It can be clearly stated, that in this crucial component the Project **reaches** the formulated outcome, but has to address the capacity building issues in LSB and GoL with even more emphasis for the rest of Phase II.

Component 3: Spatial information services at the Department of Statistics

Outcome 3: LSB and other key national government agencies concerned with information development are able to manage spatial socio-economic data and to respond to information requests from a broader public.

Outputs: LSB Database compiled, management tool, GIS and on-the-job training, cross-sectoral national datasets integrated, easy data distribution

The **database** was compiled, and respective database **management tools** were developed and set up. An easy to use **interface** has been developed to speed up the handling of data request at LSB. On-the-job training on management and handling of spatial data have been provided to staff of LSB as well as of other key departments (MAF, MoNRE and MPI). The staff also got practical training on spatial data management for further **processing**, integration and **analysis** of the data.

New national spatial statistical data sets were supported and developed: the **land concession inventory**, the highly detailed **agricultural census 2011**, the **transport network** and the **market places**. Since all data sets have been geo-referenced at the village level they can be analytically linked to the socioeconomic information available on the DECIDE info platform which opens the doors widely for **cross-sectoral analysis** of the information, which is a **tremendous achievement**. If the work continues as planned, the formulated outcome can be **well reached**. Here again, the short time at disposition for the Project posed a challenge to strengthen the capacities planned in this component.

Component 4: Remote access of socioeconomic information

Outcome 4: Remote users across sectors have improved knowledge about and access to adequate socio-economic information through new communication channels.

Outputs: Need assessment, DVD with focus on province and district level, socio-economic profiles, experimental mobile phone system, metadata database

An **assessment of needs** and the related **challenges** has been conducted among various stakeholders and MPI staff of all provincial and district offices. As a consequence the project developed and finalized products for **offline dissemination** of the online toolbox on DVD, along with the relevant data and information.

Furthermore, a draft version of an experimental **mobile phone based** system for augmented reality has been developed and is being tested by CDE and an initial **national metadata platform** has been established which is currently hosting the evolving national **multi-sector** metadata database. A substantial number of on spatial and statistical information has been co-produced by the different partner institutions of the GOL. If the work continues as planned by the Project team, the formulated outcome can also be reached to a good extent until the end of Phase II. Again, the short time at disposition for the Project posed a challenge.

Component 5: Integration of spatial analysis in education system

Outcome 5: Spatial analysis methodology is integrated in the Lao research and education system.

Outputs: didactic concept, BSc university course with materials, Flyer



The main achievements are the integration of the products and knowledge generated with the socio-economic Atlas in the regular **higher educational system**. A **course** has been developed and should enhance the understanding at BSc level at NUOL on poverty related issues. A **flyer** highlighting the material of the course has also been established and printed. The Project partner of NUOL finds the course very **useful and important**. The translation into Lao is still pending, but the necessary steps for approval by the faculty and the Ministry of Education have been made to integrate the course into the regular curriculum of NUOL. If the work continues as planned by the Project team, the formulated outcome can be reached.

Component 6: Contribution to development knowledge and discourse

Outcome 6: Development discourse and policy making processes at national level are nourished by evidence-based research based on the content of the socio-economic Atlas and other key national databases

Outputs: intensive networking, direct project support, maps and analysis

Various and diverse activities have been undertaken within the frame of this component. Building on the long CDE presence in the region, the network of their experts today is extensive and creates excellent opportunities for the dissemination of results and analysis in connection with the socio-economic Atlas.

Outputs were produced for **World Bank / Ministry of Health** project activities, the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF), the Lao Environmental Outlook of WREA/ UNEP) and many others. So the **visualization** of possible incoherencies in terms of spatial planning among different sectors was presented and discussed with members of the National Assembly. As a reaction to these results the illusionary 70% forest policy of Laos was questioned publically. DECIDE info staff was called onto the expert committee of the Lao National Assembly for the elaboration of the first National Land Policy. Through this, several significant inputs were made to feed into the land policy elaboration process. At different high level events, the challenges and possible approaches to **resolve incoherent spatial planning**, with a special focus on land governance in the Lao PDR, were presented and discussed. This, among others, included: the Development Partner Meeting organized by the UN, the World Bank management meeting, and different meetings with representatives of the National Assembly. As a result of different development agencies (e.g. the Government of Finland, the German BMZ, the EU, UNDP, and The World Bank) sought the advice of DECIDE info in relation to the strategy of their development support.

The **quality** and the **professionalism** of the CDE **outputs** are generally very high. Especially the map products with their analysis and interpretation are of excellent quality and integrate, analyse and display rarely used data before the Project came along. The aim of a **better informed targeting** of national and international development programs can be achieved and has been supported substantially by this component. The latest results show that the socio-economic information produced by the Project is taken up by the development discourse at national level and also helps to address gender and ethnicity dimensions (e.g. Policy brief on Poverty). Based on the planned activities a **very significant** contribution to the formulated outcome can surely be reached.

Component 7: Geographic Knowledge on Commercial Land Concessions

Outcome 7: Knowledge on the geographic extent and dimensions of commercial concessions on land has been increased

Outputs: national concession inventory, on-the-job training, maps and analysis, report, policy brief national workshop

Based on the national land concession inventory (by LNRRIC and GIZ) a national **comprehensive geo-references database** has been developed. The data has been geo-referenced at the village level, and has been linked to the socio-economic information available on the DECIDE info platform. A **detailed analysis** based on the inventory, in combination with spatial socio-economic information, has been conducted and results (report, policy brief) were compiled and published. A national workshop with participants from GoL, the private sector, research and the international community, was held in Vientiane in order to widely disseminate and publicise the results. In this component the formulated outcome **will be reached** until the end of Phase II.

0.5 Review of the Overall Progress of Project Implementation in Phase II

The interviews for the ER and the available documents illustrate the progress of the Project so far. While most of the components seem to be **well on course** to achieve the anticipated results, some have to be the focus of the remaining time of the Project. Many important activities are now getting on the way, like the launch of an



enhanced web-based platform or the promotion activities. One focus in the remaining time for the Phase must therefore lie on the **training and capacity building** of GoL personnel in the analysis of spatial socio-economic data and usage the web interface, as well as the off-line DVD. As another focus the Project team plans to increase **promotion and visibility** of outputs, as well as the improvement of the **usability and the user friendliness** of the web interface.

The **distribution of the funds** to the components was only made as a provision for budgeting. The project accounting does not follow the component lines and the money spent cannot be attributed to them. Without this information only a very **broad analysis** of the cost effectiveness of the Project is possible. To the consultant's experience the outputs reached and the Project funds spent are in a good relation.

The big changes in the Project implementation plan between the main phase and the extension period make it **difficult** for the consultants to assess the **overall progress** in accordance to the (partially newly formulated) aims and envisaged outcomes. According to the Project documents and based on the interviews with the Project team the **implementation schedule** is **still valid** and will bring activities to the finishing line at the end of the Phase. Seeing the progress so far and the results achieved in all the main components, the consultants are **positive**, that the defined outputs can be reached with only some exceptions. The exceptions are mainly caused by a rather ambitious formulation of some the outcomes.

0.6 Assessment of the Lao DECIDE Info Project Phase II

Right from the start of the ER the consultants encountered an **open and constructive working atmosphere** within the team of the Lao DECIDE Info Project. The staff of LSB and the other Project partners all seem highly motivated and interested in the progress and success of the Project. This is also true for the team of CDE, which seems highly dedicated and committed to reach the Project aims. However, there are apparently phases when the collaboration between LSB and CDE is **not optimal** and **expectations** from all sides are not met. But both partners came a long way and the overall successes of the Project are remarkable. The consultants had the impression that the work on the Project activity lines, under these conditions, can continue very well.

Based on interviews, consulted documents and own observations a **tentative SWOT analysis** was carried out by the consultants. The **weaknesses and threats** sides show that the remaining time of the Project should be used to explore and address the issues raised and find mutually satisfying solutions. This is especially true for the **institutional set up** and the **training and capacity building** of LSB and other partners. The Project team has already started the necessary actions (e.g. organising training courses, strengthen the documentation of the web application, dissemination of promotion material etc.). On the other side **the strengths and opportunities** have to be analysed in detail and brought into the context of a possible next phase of the Project. The good examples of addressing **gender and ethnicity** dimensions within the project activities, one of the core issues of SDC' development interventions can be further improved.

0.7 Key lessons learned and Recommendations

According to the consultants appraisal the Project is well under way and there is no mistake in the design or the implementation of the Project observable. With the knowledge of the ER today, certain adjustments in the Project design and the **formulation of the outcomes** could have been highly advantageous. One of the key lessons is therefore the importance to bring **time schedule, resources, outputs and outcomes** in accordance in the design phase. For DECIDE Info some outcomes were formulated a bit too ambitious for the time frame or their reaching is difficult to prove. However, in the consultant's opinion these discrepancies do not diminish the overall success story of the Project so far.

Another key lesson is the need to assess the risks of **implementation delays** in more detail when dealing with new technologies for the implementing staff. This is true for the application of GIS analysis in LSB and especially for the development and adaption of a technologically leading web-based platform. Also here the delays experienced in the past do not influence the overall success story of the Project.

Another point is the **increase of visibility** of the Project's products. If people do not know what products are available, they most certainly also do not use them. The communication of the work done has to be intensified and the use of the products has to be promoted even more. The widely publicised launch of the Report on **Land Concessions** was a good example, since it made its way into the newspapers. In the consultant's opinion that increasing the visibility will enhance the overall success story of the Project.

Another key lesson is the adjustment of the **Project approach** by CDE to the felt relevance of the Project by the partner LSB. It can be assumed, that DECIDE Info was in the beginning and in the extension of the phase not



perceived as the key project within LSB. This had the advantage of reducing expectations, easing collaboration and bringing only minor adjustments to the LSB's organisation. Certainly the Project reached its goal much better by producing excellent results in a quiet way than with another approach, where as a start the whole partner organisation and its policy etc. is changed. In the consultant's opinion the chosen way (lead by example and outputs) steered directly to the success story of the Project today.

A last point concerns the project approach of having **7 components** working with **four different partners** which was surely not making the work of the Project team any easier. But the consultants saw no signs, that this setup was affecting the results negatively. The aim to foster cross-sectoral information sharing also implies that there is a bigger number of partners to handle and integrate. A more serious need for correction of the approach lies in the limited felt ownership of the Project by the local partners. Due to the limited time at disposition the **issue of sustainability** could not be solved satisfactorily. For the next Phase the Project should change and aim at a joint organisation (e.g. a Lao counterpart for the Chief technical advisor from CDE).

The institutional set up and the organisational arrangements of Phase II so far seem **sound** in the Lao context, as they lead to measurable and well received results of **excellent quality**. Therefore there is no need for additional recommendations for the rest of Phase II, besides addressing threats and weaknesses mentioned in the SWOT analysis. According to the consultant's appraisal and based on the already planned activities the Project can continue for the rest of its time **without bigger modifications**.

0.8 Possible arrangements for a Phase III of the Lao DECIDE Info Project

It is the strong conviction of the consultants that a Phase III to the Lao DECIDE Info Project **should be foreseen**. On one side to **build up** on the good results of the Project and on the other side to enhance the **usage** and **sustainability** of the Project outputs. The Project should aim in Phase III primarily at fostering **information sharing** for improved evidence based planning and decision-making in the Lao PDR. It is proposed to expand respective efforts **beyond** the main partners of Phases I and II towards a **multi-sector data analysis** and **information exchange**, engaging institutions of various key Ministries of different sectors.

The cornerstones for Phase III can be brought into a conceptual context by introducing a **knowledge (enhancement) cycle** for the DECIDE info Project. The cycle helps to realise the relationship between planned interventions and to understand the future situation of the Project. The partners of the different GoL institutions can be at different stages in the cycle over time. Keeping this in mind, **five project outcomes** are proposed for to reach the main project aim of **fostering cross-sectoral information exchange and analysis towards integrated and evidence-based planning processes and knowledge based policy-making**.

These outcomes are **mostly not new**, but were implemented under different titles or groupings during Phase II. This guarantees that the well-designed inputs in the Project frame so far are continued and give the opportunity to **monitor** the Project progress over all the phases, past and future. So the possible **project aims, outcomes** and **organisation** for Phase III were developed based on the interviews from the Reviews, strategy papers of the CDE Project team, intensive discussions with SDC and CDE as well as the consultants' experiences.

Component 1: Data Enhancement

Outcome 1: Key GoL institutions have improved capacities to design and implement harmonised national data collection campaigns with a geographic reference to facilitate cross-sectoral integration

The following outputs are envisaged:

- *The population and housing census 2015 allows detailed poverty mapping and analysis based on geographical reference*
- *The generation of key thematic datasets by institutions of various Ministries is supported and spatially enhanced*
- *The variables of data collection campaigns are coherently defined*

This component takes into account, that there is still a big need to **support** GoL institutions in their mandate to generate and update key data sets needed for their administrative processes. Especially the introduction of spatial reference and quality conditions in these key data sets (e.g. population census 2015) is envisaged, in order to overlay information and enhance overall evidence based decision making. Besides the population census several other **thematic datasets** from various Ministries could be supported and enhanced while they are being generated by the Departments in charge. The support of the Project team will allow the integration of these new thematic datasets into the DECIDE info platform in Phase III. The information at disposition on the web platform will contribute **significantly** to the project aim



Component 2: Information Management

Outcome 2: Thematic data bases of key GoL institutions on national level have a spatial component and follow agreed upon standards to facilitate integration across sectors

The following outputs are envisaged:

- *Key thematic datasets of different Ministries allow spatial analysis across sectors*
- *Structured, standardised and documented data models are introduced in key Ministries*
- *Dissemination of data modelling methods in key institutions of GoL is initialised*

This component concentrates on the **necessary technical assistance** and capacity building in the partner institutions to bring cross-sector information together and promote the **sharing** of information between the different GoL institutions. Starting with single key datasets in each key institution value-adding through potential cleaning, geo-referencing, and systematic structuring with data models shall be achieved in close collaboration with the data owners and technical support by the Project team. Concrete products will be developed and published to add visibility to the information bases, while supporting the broader integration and availing of the information through the DECIDE platform.

Component 3: Information Distribution

Outcome 3: Key information from across different thematic databases is accessed through an information platform and used by GoL institutions and national and international development partners

The following outputs are envisaged:

- *The web-platform is thematically broadened and easy accessible*
- *The web-platform and its off-line products are well known and widely used in key GoL institutions*
- *The concept for organisation and IT architecture of DECIDE info database and web-platform is established*

This component **continues** the development of the **DECIDE info web platform** and drives at the distribution and usage of the information in a **user friendly form** on all GoL level (national to local) and by development partners (like UNDP, GiZ, WorldBank, etc.). It was getting clear from ER interviews and the user surveys that the data distribution should mainly be geared towards **GoL administration** and **development partners** because of different obstacles. However, access by public users to strengthen transparency of on-going processes is still encouraged.

Component 4: Information Analysis

Outcome 4: Planning processes of GoL institutions are improved by enhanced capacities for spatial integrated cross-sector analysis

The following outputs are envisaged:

- *The capacity of key GoL institutions to analyse cross-sectoral information is enhanced*
- *Key GoL institutions generate maps and planning references with cross-sectoral information*
- *Key GoL institutions exchange their experiences and results of spatial integrated cross-sector analysis*

This component concentrates on the **necessary capacity building** in the partner institutions for them to be able to use the information at disposition from different Government sources. At the same time **know-how exchange** and **transfer** on spatial integrated cross-sector analysis are encouraged, with workshops are held in regular intervals to present best practice cases from key GoL institutions.

Component 5: Policy Integration

Outcome 5: Development discourse and policy making processes at national level are nourished by cross-sectoral research results

The following outputs are envisaged:

- *Key national development issues are analysed*
- *Individual and contextual analysis are made and result in specific planning and policy advisory*
- *Gained insights are fed into the national policy discourse and decision-making process*

This component aims at the **continuation** of the quite successful initiatives to bring analysis and research findings in the last phases into the political processes in Laos. Like in Phase II this component should be implemented directly between CDE and SDC. However, **regular meetings** will assure that the outputs are



produced according to the expectations of both partners. It will be CDE's job to include other GoL or international institutions into the production of outputs and to **enhance sustainability** of the activities.

To make the Project approach a bit simpler the components could be reduced to only **three** by grouping components 1 and 2, as well as 3 and 4 together and joining the respective outputs.

0.9 Possible Project Organization for Phase III of the Lao DECIDE Info Project

For Phase III the Project organisation has to be adapted to include the envisaged **changes in focus**. The cross-sectoral data integration calls for an **inclusion** of the **newly participating** GoL institutions (e.g. MAF, MoNRE etc.) in the project activities and the planning. **Main partner** for the next phase should still be **Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB)**. The collaboration has been very good so far. The focus of this close collaboration between LSB and the Project team lies on the preparation of the next population census (e.g. strengthen the geographical referencing) and capacity enhancement (e.g. information analysis). Additionally LSB has a GoL mandate with the Statistic Law to **bring together cross-sectorial information** (though originally focussing on statistical data).

In order to learn from Phase II and to make the approach more sustainable there should be a well-defined DECIDE info Project organisation. There should be a Chief technical advisor (of CDE) and a Lao GoL counterpart, 1 or 2 Lao staff with a more technical education and 1 or 2 experience senior experts (of CDE) for information integration, but especially also for producing outputs towards policy making. It is highly recommended that the Lao counterpart to the CTA is a well-trained and **high level GoL staff** recruited and paid by the Project, but on a **secondment from GoL**.

Information is produced and updated on the budgets of line Ministries and therefore **free data sharing** is rather the **exception** than the rule. However, as the current Project phase demonstrates, a close collaboration of different Ministries to reach the common goal of enhancing evidence based decision making is possible. Today LSB, MAF and MoNRE show their willingness to share key data like population census, agricultural census or land concession data with other GoL institutions. However, with the new Phase III the **organisational setup** for **information sharing** has to be defined. In order not to alienate one of the partners, an equal role for all of them is foreseen. To ensure high level support to the information sharing endeavour a steering committee consisting of the Vice-Ministers of the participating Ministries and the head of SDC's Coordination Office in Laos is envisaged.

With this setup foreseen, the analysis of **strength and weaknesses, opportunities and threats** for Phase III has obviously many similarities to prior SWOT analysis. On the weaknesses and threats side the **focus** of the Project Phase III should be laid on establishing **solid working relations** with the partner institutions, but especially with **LSB**. Therefore the **institutional set up** (e.g. establishing a project organisation with a Lao counterpart) and the **training and capacity building** of LSB and other partners have to be treated and solved to every partner's satisfaction. The propagation and strengthening of **e-Government** in Laos as well as the promotion of DECIDE info are also a very important tasks. On the other side the strengths and opportunities should lead to **positive result** in the expected Project outcomes in Phase III.

0.10 Estimation of Finances for Phase III of the Lao DECIDE Info Project

To give an idea a **tentative budget** for Phase III is proposed in a minimal and a maximal version. It is clear that the organisational structure of the Project should be changed. Previously it was relying mainly on expatriate expertise for the management and running of the activities, because there was insecurity on its continuation and limited provision in the budgets even for a technical advisor. Now there should be a distinct DECIDE info Project organisation with its own staff, partly from GoL and partly from CDE to enhance the sustainability of the Project approach. The costs for such a proposed **organisation** could reach as high as **CHF 600'000 per year**.

In addition to this estimated cost for the Project organisation from **CHF 300'000** (minimal scenario) to CHF 900'000 (maximal scenario) should be foreseen for other project activities. It has to be taken into account while budgeting, that the support of the upcoming Population and Housing Census might well need funds in the range of CHF 500'- 700'000 based on first estimates. So the minimal budget scenario will not allow a lot of activities besides financing the Project organisation and the Census support.

0.11 Recommendations for Phase III of the Lao DECIDE Info Project

Several discussions during this ER mission show that the **involvement** of the SDC representatives in Laos in the Project could be enhanced. It is not meant to be a critical assessment of the Project team or its activities and outputs so far, but as a **missed opportunity** to keep SDC up to date with planned and on-going activities. The consultants therefore suggest:



- **Regular quarterly meetings** between SDC and CDE to exchange information and, more importantly, to discuss politically interesting topics, policy issues and key elements to SDC's strategy in the region
- **Proactive and timely information** of SDC on upcoming events and activities regarding DECIDE info and other projects with CDE involvement
- **Adjustment of the contract** between CDE and SDC to reflect the needs for SDC for reporting and submission of financial statements

CDE, on the other hand, could be **reinforced** in their overall (from the consultants' perspective) excellent work and resource intensive activities in Laos by a more **long term oriented** allocation of project funds. The DECIDE info **history of Project phases** (e.g. prolongation or extension for only one year), for example, makes the planning of activities and especially the build-up and support of a GoL partner and a sustainable project organisation a **very difficult task**. The consultants therefore suggest:

- *Provision of a four year Phase for Lao DECIDE info Project with sufficient funds to build up a GoL institution as a valid partner*
- *Arrangement of funds and support to allow a joined Project organisation consisting of GoL seconded and CDE staff defined in the Project mandate between SDC and CDE*

As a difficulty for both SDC and CDE the **steering of inputs** in funds, man power and other resources regarding the different outputs of a Project is not possible today, since the reporting does not follow up the different outcomes or components. It could **greatly enhance** the transparency, monitoring, controlling of the Project activities, as well as an **evaluation**. The consultants therefore suggest:

- *Finances, inputs of human and other resources are from now on **budgeted and reported** according to outcomes or project activities defined in the Project Documents*

The **institutional set up** and the **organisational arrangements** of the Project so far seem sound in the Lao context, as they lead to measurable and well received results of excellent quality. However, the **sustainability** poses a certain risk to date. The consultants therefore suggest:

- *The Project organisation has to bring together **innovative GoL officials** of the different Ministries ("early adapters of innovation") to promote the **acceptance** of the cross-sectoral data sharing and to create an **innovation friendly environment** for the Project*
- *A **Lao counterpart** to the CTA has to be selected/recruited and paid (according to local experts standards of international organisations) by CDE, preferably a well-trained and high level GoL official on a secondment from GoL should be chosen*
- *To promote the know how sharing and transfer between GoL institutions a **yearly competition** in the form of a workshop should be held to honour **best practices** in spatial information analysis and give visibility to the partner institutions*
- *Since the availability of GoL staff to be trained can be limited due to other commitments, the **time schedule** and the **scope of trainings** should to be fixed early with the annual work plan. At the same time some **innovative incentives** could be used to reduce a possible high turn-over of GoL technical staff attached to the Project*
- *Because the products of the Project are not very well known so far, activities to **strengthen** and **increase the visibility** of the products should be continued and enhanced (as it is planned for the remaining time of Phase II)*

The Project needs to **explain the necessity** to introduce structured, standardised and documented data models to its key partners, which is not an easy undertaking. The consultants suggest:

- *In order to learn from experiences in other countries a workshop with **international speakers and resource persons** could be organised to promote the advantages of data models and share the experiences to get to a National Geodata Infrastructure in different places*

On a more **technical side** the question of using open source products for such a platform could be raised. Going into a new Phase, the technical architecture should be looked into again. The consultants therefore suggest:

- *In the light of the cross-sectoral approach and the data sharing infrastructure a baseline paper with pro and cons on the use of open source against commercial software and the respective use cases of the two has to be developed and discussed with key partners.*



1. General Information on the Lao DECIDE Info Project

In the TOR for this mission it is stated, that the Lao's People Democratic Republic places a high priority on **reducing poverty and hunger**. The country is committed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and to gradually exit from the least developed countries (LDC) by the year 2020. Until recently, the main source of information on poverty in Laos heavily relied on raw data produced by the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB, formerly Department of Statistics - DoS) of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), which covers a wide range of topics related to household livelihood. Although the necessary baseline data often exists, it can rarely be used for evidence-based socio-economic situation analysis, decision-making and planning. The main reasons for this phenomenon comprise **poor access to data**, inadequate information derived from those data, and **lacking dissemination** across different administrative levels of Laos.

The Lao DECIDE Info project (phase II) aims at **capitalizing on the achievements** of the Lao Poverty Mapping and Socio-economic Atlas project (phase I), by developing means for disseminating and further analysing and processing the developed spatially highly detailed **national socio-economic data base** on the one hand, and by **sensitizing analysts and planners** towards the importance of spatial dimensions in socio-economic development analysis and planning. The Lao DECIDE-Info project (phase II) was designed as a **2.5 years** project to be implemented between July 2009 and December 2011 by the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Berne (Switzerland), in collaboration and under an agreement with the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI). Out of different reasons and opportunities (e.g. programme structure, negotiations with partners, land concession reporting) Phase II went into an **extension**, which is currently under way and lasts from July 2012 to August 2013. For the end of October 2013 the start of a possible **new phase** of the Lao DECIDE info Project (phase III) is planned. The overall project is funded by the **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)**.

1.1 Development Goal and Project Objectives for Phase II

In the Project Documents for phase II (and its extension) prepared by CDE in 2009 and 2012 it is stated that development partners **do value knowledge and information** as an important basis for shaping their **overall strategies**. Furthermore, the mentioned orientation on socio-economic problems and potentials will also necessitate access to knowledge and information as well and hence supports the assumption of evidence-based decision-making. However, it should be noted that knowledge and information is **only one** among many other important factors. Prominent among the other factors are the political, legal, and institutional issues in the Lao PDR as well as agreements and consultations among different stakeholders. This implies that making knowledge and information available alone is **not enough**. To efficiently integrate knowledge into decision-making it must be related to **policy dialogue** on the one hand, and brought into **multi-stakeholder consultations** on the other hand. To conclude this analysis of evidence based decision-making in the Lao context it should be highlighted, that the main orientation of the Project Documents is given by the gap between:

- a. the **considerable potential** of knowledge and information to influence socio-economic decision-making in the Lao PDR, where LSB through MPI has a prominent role to play,
- b. the **current problems of providing access** to timely and high-quality data and information at LSB in a form that is not limited to isolated outputs but rather interrelates with policy debates and stakeholder negotiations.

Key challenges faced by governments today are **growing in complexity**: an increasing number and diversity of different stakeholders, from farmers to powerful international investors, express increasingly conflicting interests e.g. over land or water resources. Such growing complexities demand drastically increased capacities in integrative analysis for sound development planning, taking into account a broadened range of factors from different thematic sectors.



Therefore, the **integration** of information from a multitude of sectors and the translation of the combined data pool into practical, useful information and eventually into applicable and applied holistic knowledge is becoming increasingly important for effective evidence-based planning towards **sustainable and equitable development**. The respective key issues therefore can be summarized as:

- *The **weak capacity** of GoL institutions to analyse and translate information into policy relevant knowledge, and*
- *a general **lack of cross-sector data and information exchange***

Regarding the development goal the Project Documents states, that *in Lao PDR socio-economic policies and decisions are made utilizing the best available knowledge on socio-economic disparities in the country in order to improve social and economic equity including gender and ethnicity dimensions and increased accountability of decision-makers*. The project aims at the utilization and explicit reference of data in these fields.

The **project objective** of the Lao DECIDE info Project Phase II is formulated in the project document as follows:

Foster evidence based decision making by enhancing the adequate availability and accessibility of socio-economic information and knowledge

For the current project extension of Phase II the overall aim of was enhanced in the project document as follows:

Foster cross-sectoral information exchange and analytical use towards more integrated and evidence-based planning processes and to extract and communicate key knowledge for better informed national planning and policy-making.

1.2 Project Components, Outcomes and Outputs for Phase II

The Project is structured in Phase II to comprise **seven components** with corresponding outcomes and outputs. Component 7 was only added towards the end of Phase II. For the on-going extension of Phase II the **outcomes were adjusted** (*italic, no italic*) and **outputs added** (in red) to reflect the current status of discussions with different partners and the changing focus of the activities:

Component 1: Dissemination and utilisation of the Socio-economic Atlas *and spatial information* at the *national and* local level

Outcome 1: National, Province and Districts Officers of the Ministry of Planning and Investment and other Governmental Agencies use the data and maps of the Socio-economic Atlas in their planning and decision-making.

Output 1.1: Guideline on how to read and interpret the maps in the Atlas

Output 1.2: The Atlas and the guideline are distributed to MPI's province and district offices

Output 1.3: The district and province officers of MPI understand the possible application of the Atlas for their work and have a basic awareness of the role and potential of spatial aspects of socio-economic planning

Output 1.4: Targeted information campaign promoting DECIDE info

Output 1.5: Information materials on combining DECIDE info with other information systems

Output 1.6: Training courses and manuals for government staff and non-government users



Component 2: Web-based access to socio-economic information

Outcome 2: A wider public uses evidence based socio-economic information for development related analysis and planning activities.

Output 2.1: Coherent spatial socioeconomic database

Output 2.2: Technical environment and guidelines for user rights and restrictions, data sharing are negotiated

Output 2.3: Online platform for visualization and dissemination of national spatial socio-economic information

Output 2.4: Improved user-friendliness and guidance tools for DECIDE info

Output 2.5: Extended functionalities of DECIDE info tools for visualizing and analysing data

Output 2.6: Offline version of DECIDE info platform

Output 2.7: 'MapDispenser' application for online map request by email or web download

Component 3: Spatial information *handling and services* at the Department of Statistics *and other key Government agencies*

Outcome 3: LSB and other key national government agencies concerned with information development are able to manage spatial socio-economic data and to respond to information requests from a broader public.

Output 3.1: Information system to manage and handle the spatial socioeconomic data

Output 3.2: LSB staff is trained in the management of the information system and can handle data and information requests

Output 3.3: Demand-driven user requests are handled by LSB

Output 3.4: New national spatial statistical data sets compatible with existing DECIDE info platform

Output 3.5: Capacity for national statistical data management

Output 3.6: Negotiation on an enlarged DECIDE info platform with expanded data availing to users at various levels are initiated with data owners

Component 4: Remote access *and exchange* of socio-economic information

Outcome 4: Remote users across sectors have improved knowledge about and access to adequate socio-economic information through new communication channels.

Output 4.1: Assessment of information and knowledge needs and challenges of users at different levels and scales

Output 4.2: Innovative means of user specific visualization, querying and communication of the spatial national socio-economic information

Output 4.3: Pilot implementation in remote areas in collaboration with selected SDC partner projects

Output 4.4: National metadata platform

Output 4.5: Technical staff capacity and knowledge for metadata development

Output 4.6: Extended multi-sector metadata database



Component 5: Integration of spatial analysis in *research and education* system

Outcome 5: Spatial analysis methodology is integrated in the Lao research and education system.

Output 5.1: Didactic concept for the transformation of the products of the Atlas project Phase 1 to the BSc level

Output 5.2: Teaching materials for a BSc level course on welfare and

Output 5.3: Materials are tested and introduced at NUOL and training workshops are conducted at MPI

Output 5.4: Improved analysis capacities in national development information providers

Component 6: Contribution to development knowledge and discourse

Outcome of component 6: Development discourse and policy making processes at national level are nourished by evidence-based research based on the content of the socio-economic Atlas and other key national databases

Output 6.1: Key socio-economic development issues are identified

Output 6.2: Proactive advanced spatial and statistical analysis geared as inputs to current policy dialogues

Output 6.3: Demand-based support to SDC development policy in the Lao PDR through adequate forms such as policy briefs, presentations, etc.

Output 6.4: Key national development issues are analysed

Output 6.5: Individual and contextual analysis and specific policy advisory

Output 6.6: Gained insights are fed into the national policy discourse and decision-making process

Component 7: Geographic Knowledge on Commercial Land Concessions

Outcome of component 7: Knowledge on the geographic extent and dimensions of commercial concessions on land has been increased

Output 7.1: A consolidated national spatial database to the spatial component of the Land Concession inventory is available to the Land and Natural Resource Research and Information Centre (LNRRIC) and their staff is able to manage and use the consolidated database for analytical work.

Output 7.2: A national report describing the applied data analysis methodology and presenting key statistics and results from the Land Concession inventory analysis is available both in English and in Lao language.

Output 7.3: A policy brief on key insights and messages regarding on-going debates in the land sector in the Lao PDR is under development both in Lao and in English.

Output 7.4: A dialogue paper on selected current debates surrounding commercial pressure on land at the global level is under development.

Output 7.5: A national seminar with key government stakeholders and development partners for the dissemination and communication of the results of the analysis, along with the resulting recommendations, is to be held.

The Project's component 7 was introduced as an addition to its Phase II in summer 2011. The other adjustment and expansion of outcomes, outputs and activities to the Project were done in July 2013 for the extension of Phase II.

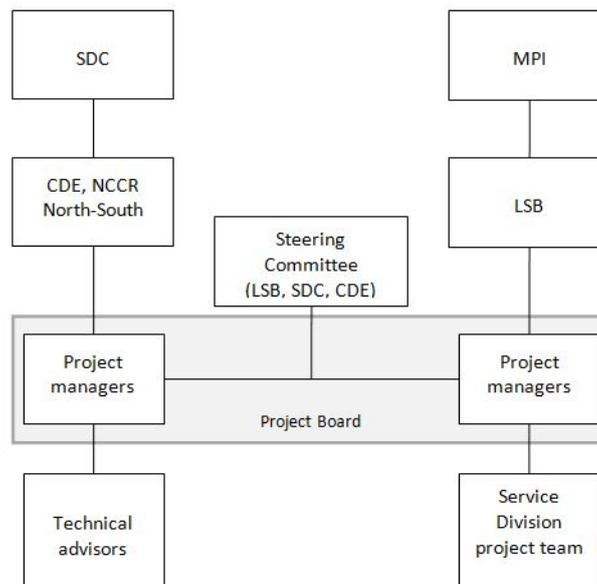


1.3 Institutional Setup of the Project Phase II

While the direct Project partner of the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) for the **components 1 to 4** is the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB, formerly DoS) under the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), the partners for **component 5** are the National University of Laos (NUOL), for **component 6** the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and for **component 7** the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) respectively.

Since the implementation of **components 1 to 4** was more complex, the following project organisation was implemented:

Figure 1: Project Organisation for components 1 to 4



In the course of the Project LSB added the IT and the Social Statistics Division as additional partners with directly assigned staff in Phase II. This was due to the strongly IT related activities and the focus on socio-economic data in component 2.

In the **extension** of Phase II the Steering committee was not meeting so far, among other things because the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was delayed. The respective tasks of the different organisational bodies and their mode of operation were specified in greater detail in the MoU as a baseline for the interaction between SDC and MPI.

Component 5 is directly organised with the Project counterpart, the Dean of Faculty of Environment at the National University of Laos (NUOL). The main activities of the component were carried out by a staff member of CDE directly attached to NUOL.

Component 6 was designed to contribute with scientifically sound analysis and outputs to the general development discourse in Laos. While the general project partner is the coordination office of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in Laos, many of the activities are carried out directly with different international organisation (e.g. World Bank) or nationwide projects (e.g. Poverty Reduction Fund funded by SDC).

Component 7 was not originally proposed at the project's outset but instead pursued upon the completion of the national inventory on land concessions and leases supported, among others, by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). Most activities were implemented by CDE with the main partner Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE).



1.4 Project Finances Phase II

The overall amount budgeted by SDC for the Lao DECIDE Info Project Phase II (inclusive of the extension of the phase II) comes to **CHF 1'632'753** (approx. USD 1'714'915). This amount is distributed almost evenly between the Project's phase II and its extension. Because of the different time frames (27 month and 14 month) the actual amount at disposition for the Project is much **higher in the extension phase**. This reflects the felt need of SDC and CDE to increase know how transfer, support of partner institutions and expert based inputs to the Project to reach its aims.

According to the final account statement of CDE for Phase II (without the extension) the expenditure was amounting to CHF 824'068, which corresponds very well with the accepted budget by SDC of the phase. Within the extension of Phase II CHF 250'497 have been spent up to 31.12.12, which means that the **finances are well on track** and no overspending is in sight.

While CDE is elaborating budgets **according to components** in the respective Project Documents for the Phase II and its extension, the financial accounting does not follow that structure. Therefore the distribution of the budgeted funds to the different components can only been taken as an **orientation** (Figure 2) and to give an idea about Project priorities. The Project expenses cannot be easily attributed to the component lines.

Figure 2: Agreed Budgets for the Lao DECIDE info Project Phase II

Components and Budgets	Phase II in CHF	Extension in CHF
Component 1: Dissemination and utilisation of the Socio-economic Atlas and spatial information at the national and local level	140'000	113'620
Component 2: Web-based access to socio-economic information	170'000	86'988
Component 3: Spatial information handling and services at the Department of Statistics and other key Government agencies	145'000	167'175
Component 4: Remote access and exchange of socio-economic information	105'000	98'212
Component 5: Integration of spatial analysis in research and education system	50'000	
Component 6: Contribution to development knowledge and discourse	150'000	333'598
Component 7: Geographic Knowledge on Commercial Land Concessions	72'760	
Grand Total	832'760	799'593

Source: Project document of DECIDE Info

Since the Project has a strong focus on providing information for planning and decision making, more **technical issues** like data management (quality etc.), spatial data analysis and Web-based data distribution are important and call for qualified personnel. Additionally the Project is expected to make contributions to the **on-going discussions in development**, which has as a consequence that the long-term personnel costs take up a big part of the Project budgets. This is true despite the fact that only a 60% Project leader position was budgeted for a period of two years in Phase II.

Nevertheless, the Lao partner LSB and NUOL profited from training and support to different activities within the Project frame. The Project gives them the **opportunity and the support** to develop new activities and gain visibility in their respective fields of work.



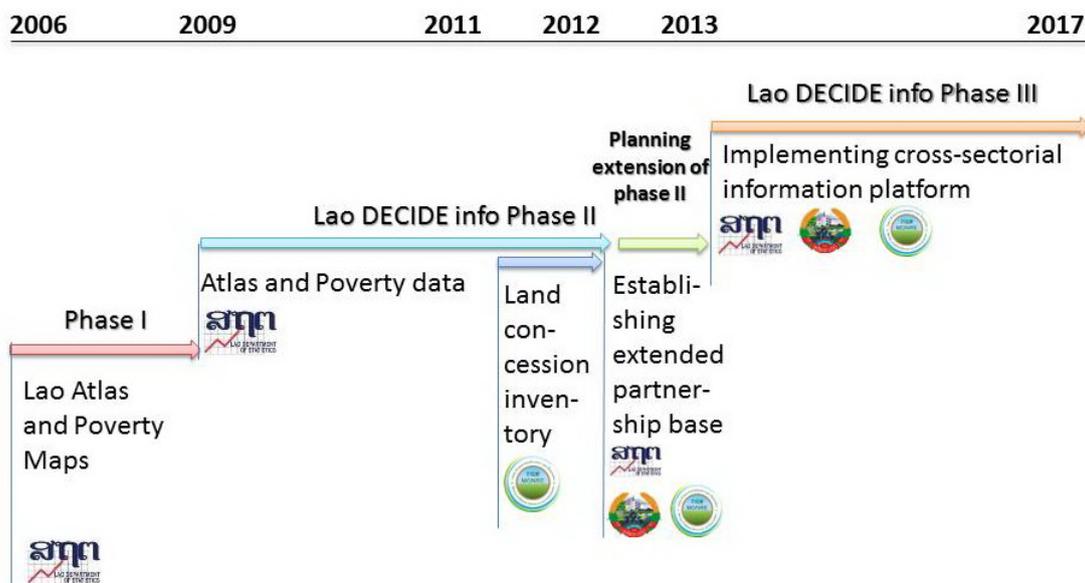
1.5 Project Phases of the Lao DECIDE info Project

The SDC supported *Lao Poverty Mapping and Socio-Economic Atlas Phase II* was planned to work from 01.07.09 until 31.12.11, comprising **two Partial Actions (PA)**: *Lao Decide Info* and *Agriculture Census*. With an additional credit proposal SDC was extending Phase II to run from 01.07.09 to 31.08.13.

The interdependence of the two PAs considering time frame and funds led for the Lao DECIDE info Project to a prolongation of 3 months up to end of March 2012 (over the foreseen Project end of 31.12.11). Additionally the component on the land concession inventory added within Phase II was not finished yet.

Between March and June a short “break” in the Project activities ensued until the extension of Phase II came into effect, starting from 01.07.12 and running up to 31.08.13. In order to finalize the many activities of the extension of Phase II a (no cost) prolongation of two months up to the 31.10.13 is already under discussion.

Figure 3: Project Phases for the Lao DECIDE Info Project



The **main aims** of the extension of Phase II focused on establishing **additional partnerships** with GoL institutions from Ministries like MAF and MoNRE and prepare the intended cross-sectorial data sharing activities. A possible **Phase III** is planned to start on 01.11.13 and to run for four years until 31.10.17.

2. Evaluation Procedure and Results

The external review (ER) of the Lao DECIDE Info Project was defined as an exercise to be carried out by an **international and a national** consultant within **twenty working days**. The time frame was set from March 27th to April 14th 2013 on site in Vientiane and Luang Prabang (Laos).

2.1 Objectives of the External Review

The objectives of the External Review (ER) are determined by the TOR's as follows:



1. **Assess** the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the project in terms of achieving defined outcomes and results (OECD/DAC evaluation criteria);
2. **Provide** detailed recommendations and a draft logframe showing possible directions for the project continuation towards the institutionalization of cross-sectoral integrated planning and decision-making in the Lao PDR, in view of the planning for the next phase of the project.

While the first objective deals mainly with the past, the **second objective** aims at the **future** of a possible Project Phase III. In agreement with SDC the consultants put the emphasis of the ER onto the second objective (around 60%, as an indication). The TOR's specify the main assessment element and project issues in detail.

In order to come up with meaningful recommendation and a draft logframe for a possible next phase the ER team takes the Mid-term review (MTR) of 2011 and its recommendations as a start and focus on:

- *Activities and achievements since the last review, focusing mainly on the extension phase starting on 01.07.12*
- *Activities planned up to the end of the extension phase on 31.08.13*
- *Discussion held and strategies elaborated so far for the next phase of the project*
- *Agreements reached for potential cross-sectoral institutional arrangements and setups.*

2.2. Evaluation Procedure in Detail

The **evaluation procedure** and the time schedule were defined in the consultant's TOR (Annex 1). In order to complete the assessment and formulate recommendations, the External Review team went through related project documents, interviewed key project stakeholders and users, organised planning workshops and conducted field visits. The different steps:

1. Desk review of relevant documentation
2. Consultative approach by discussions with key stakeholders and beneficiaries.
 - a) Meetings with past, current, and potential key partners, but especially with representatives from LSB / MPI, DoP / MAF, NREIC / MoNRE
 - b) Meetings with key players in spatially integrated, cross-sectoral planning, like EMSP, Finnish Embassy and GiZ at MPI
 - c) Key users in and outside the Government of Lao, especially users at subnational levels, and WB.
3. Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data
4. Workshop with key partners to discuss draft logframe and findings

While **structured interviews** were foreseen with groups b) and c) in Vientiane and in Luang Prabang, small workshops separately by Ministry were planned for group a). However, these workshops could not be held as planned because of many commitments of GoL staff during the time of the ER mission. As a consequence mainly structured interviews were made with representatives of these institutions as well.

In order to assess **ideas, discussion** held and **strategies** elaborated for a possible Phase III the consultants met also several times with representatives of the implementing institution CDE as well as representatives of SDC, the Project's donor. These discussions were always very focussed, conducted in a very open atmosphere and provided valuable input into the forward looking exercise.

As a preparation of the ER mission SDC and the Lao DEDCIDE info Project team made the following documents and products available to the consultants:

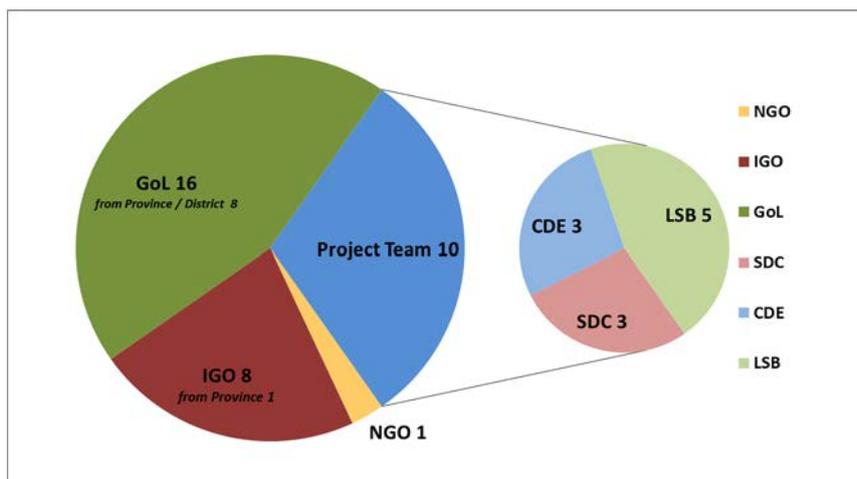


- *Project documents of Phase II (logframes and budgets)*
- *Interim and Progress Reports of Phase II*
- *Strategy papers relevant for a possible Phase III*
- *User surveys and communication material (leaflets, posters etc.)*
- *Project products of Phase II: Socio-Economic Atlas, map-reading guide, maps, training materials, website, CDs, etc.*

2.3 Interviews with Key Stakeholders and Users

During the first week of the mission, the consultants visited over **21 institutions**, ranging from different agencies of the Government of Laos (GoL) on National, Province and District level, to International Government Organisations (IGO) (like World Bank or bilateral development projects) as well as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO). Different questions regarding the Project outputs were discussed with a total of **36 people** (see Annex 3 and 4). The questions were more of a red line in the discussion with the respondents and less of a strict framework for the interview. This was mainly due to the fact, that the knowledge on the DECIDE info Project varied strongly among the respondents.

Figure 4: Persons and institutions interviewed for the External Review



Source: Own computations

Despite the heavy workloads of the persons interviewed, the ER team was **well received** and very helpful information and many useful suggestions and recommendations came forward.

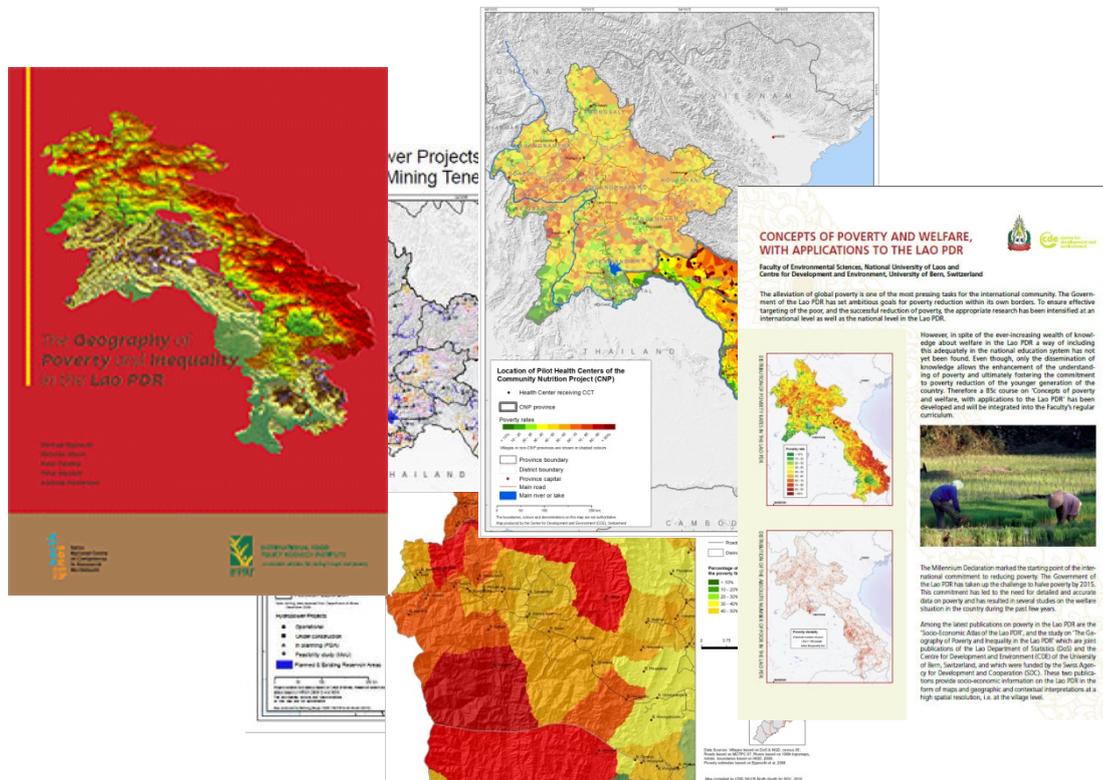
2.4. Information Gathered from Project Documents

The consultants also had the task to go through the **Project documents** of Phase II, **analyse** the content according to the TORs of the ER and ask the Project team for clarifications or explanation. For this working step the Project leader of CDE was very helpful and open about Project activities and went out of his way to look for additional documents or maps.

With regard to the Project documents the focus was laid (like in the interviews) on the outputs of component 1, 2 and 6, especially on the data distribution policy, the web-based access to spatially referenced socio-economic data and the inputs into development policy and various projects.



Figure 5: Samples from Outputs of the DECIDE Info Project



3. Analysis of the Lao DECIDE Info Project Phase II

3.1 Relevance of the Project Goal and Strategy

The interviews with the different key stakeholder and users carried out during the ER (and also during the MTR two years ago) and the high demand for the project outputs show that the project goal and especially also the strategy to reach it are **well elaborated and designed**. Especially the ongoing activities in the framework of the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) or the Project's input into the discussions of the National Assembly on developing a land policy for the Lao PDR show that there is much need for easily available and reliable data and processed information for decision makers. A comparison with the situation of 2011 during the MTR shows, that the demand for reliable information is measurably and fast increasing. There is also a readiness to question some of current policies (such as the policy on 70% forest cover) and to develop more realistic and meaningful development policies.

However, taking into account the time frame and the financial resources allocated to the Project in Phase II, the Project aims and outcomes seem, like stated already in the MTR, **rather ambitious**. Especially to reach a solid institutional setup in time with the start of the Project seemed to be a time consuming effort. So the MoU between SDC and MPI could only be signed in November 2009 and resulted in a delayed start of the activities with the Project counterpart LSB. The extension of Phase II showed similar difficulties regarding institutional setup. As a consequence the time for reaching a **sustainable solution** for maintaining the current output level of the Project is a real **challenge** for the Project team.



3.2 Projects contribution towards formulated Outcomes and Activities

The DECIDE info project and related activities have clearly **contributed** to an **increased understanding** within the GoL for the need for and benefits of exchanging reliable information for development planning. The demonstrated **achievements** of the Project in Phase II have created demand for support in this area, which is crucial to facilitating the necessary **shift** in current practices into a more active **provision of information** based on existing data or evidence. Therefore it can be clearly stated, that the Project **made good progress** towards the **Project development goal** that *Lao PDR socio-economic policies and decisions are made utilizing the best available knowledge on socio-economic disparities in the country in order to improve social and economic equity including gender and ethnicity dimensions and increased accountability of decision-makers.*

With its achievements to influence the **data sharing policy** in Laos or to facilitate the distribution of socio-economic data over a **web platform** the Project set some high standards. With its outputs on **policy level** like the visualization of **possible incoherencies** in terms of spatial planning among different sectors for the National Assembly, the involvement in the elaboration of the first National **Land Policy** or the elaboration of the **Land Concession Report** the Project, again, showed remarkable and rather unexpectedly good achievements.

It can also be clearly stated by looking at the outputs realised within the 7 components of the Project, that the formulated **Project outcome** to *Foster evidence based decision making by enhancing the adequate availability and accessibility of socio-economic information and knowledge* can **be attained** to a big extent. This can be shown in the **achievements** of all the components. There is a very strong **need and demand** for further capacity building in the use of spatial and statistical development information for analysis and planning which has been expressed both at national and sub-national levels. This indicates the GoL's interest and readiness to change current practices of sector-specific and target oriented planning towards a **more evidence-based multi-sector** development planning.

To describe the contribution of the Project towards formulates outcomes and activities, the **achievements** of the Project until now are listed for **all components**. Wherever it was possible, comments or remarks from the ER or MTR interviews were integrated in the description of the achievements.

Component 1: Dissemination and utilisation of the Socio-economic Atlas at the local level

Outcome 1: National, Province and Districts Officers of the Ministry of Planning and Investment and other Governmental Agencies use the data and maps of the Socio-economic Atlas in their planning and decision-making.

Outputs: map reading guidelines, distribution of Atlas and Poverty book, workshops and trainings of GoL staff, creation and distribution of promotion material

The Socio-Economic Atlas and its CD, as well as the Poverty book, have been **widely distributed** in Laos on national, provincial and District level. According to the records of the Project team around **800 Atlas and Poverty books** have been distributed or sold so far. The biggest share went to institutions of the GoL, followed by sales in bookshops and then to different organisations (Figure 6).

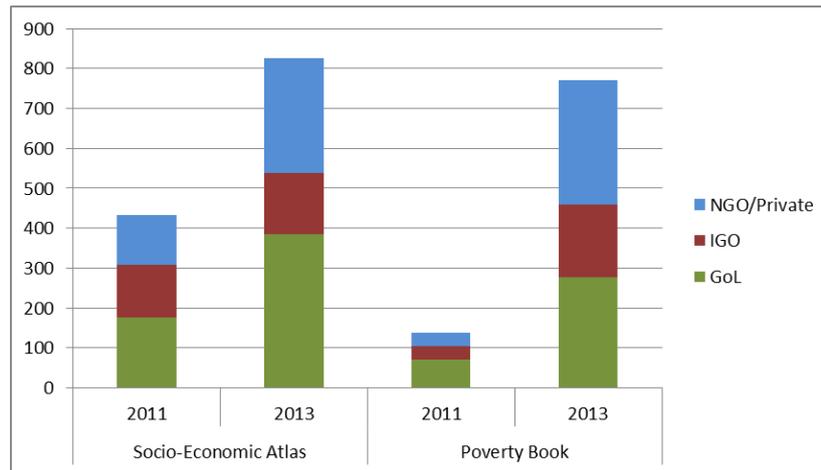
Map reading guidelines in both Lao and English language have been prepared, printed and distributed. The guidelines have been introduced and distributed widely at national as well as at sub-national levels. GoL departments of all sectors at the provincial level, as well as all MPI offices at district level were introduced to and trained in the use of the Atlas. They received a copy along with map reading guide and a CD with the digital versions of the Atlas and the poverty analysis.

Training materials for the sub-national trainings, as well as for the trainers, have been developed, translated, printed and disseminated. A series of three training of trainers' sessions was completed in



Vientiane. Seven regional **training workshops** were organized and conducted by the trained team from the LSB and supported by an international expert. **Over 200 MPI staff** from all provincial and district offices were given a 1.5 day practical training in the usage of the maps provided in the Atlas, and participated in practical exercises on the usage of the maps in their professional environment. Although the introduction to the use of the online platform seems very short at the sub-national level, access statistics indicate that the platform and the thereon provided information and data is being used both by national, as well as by sub-national planning officers.

Figure 6: Distribution and Sale of Socio-Economic Atlas and CD as well as Poverty book up to date



Source: Atlas distribution records of the DECIDE Info Project

Several **training courses** for DECIDE users were provided to various institutions at the national level. These courses were supplemented by the distribution of a DECIDE info training manual. While the completing of the training manuals and the implementation of the training depends on the completing of the revised online tools (see component 2 below), a series of national and sub-national training have been planned for.

How much the GoL institutions use the data and maps of the Socio-economic Atlas in their planning and decision-making cannot easily be assessed. As indicators the Project team got short feedbacks from the participants at the end of the training workshops and analysed the log-in of users in the web-based platform. The **feedbacks** were summarized in the *final report of the trainings* as follows:

- The idea of DECIDE info online tools and its usefulness for **evidence based decision making** with socio-economic information for the MPI offices was **successfully conveyed**, which is shown through the high appreciation by the trainees of the DECIDE info online tools
- Overall, the **trainings** were appropriate in order to cover the whole range on the DECIDE info online tools, but for many participants the three days provided for the training sessions **seemed to be too short** in order to get a full understanding of the tools
- The use of modern **computer and internet-technology**, that is a prerequisite for the use DECIDE info, seems to be at its **beginnings** in the provinces, but particularly at district-level. This impression already arose during the trainings were participants remarked that they will not be able to use DECIDE info due to lack of technical equipment
- Another important issue becoming clear during the trainings is that several officers only have **low knowledge of computer usage** and therefore are overloaded by using a platform like DECIDE info
- The need for **more knowledge on the usage** of DECIDE info was strongly pointed out by the trainees in emphasizing a continuation of the trainings but also to consider more time for them



- *Maps or GIS data is currently only **sparsely used at district and province level**. That this is not related to lack of interest, but to lack of data and knowledge on how to use it. For future information needs maps are ranked highest (along with statistical data) among all other kinds of data.*

The interviews of the ER team on provincial and district level **confirmed these findings**. They also showed, that DECIDE info is not too well known on these administrative levels. Hence there is also a necessity for the Project to develop and distribute **promotional material**.

During the Project extension the key activities on training GoL staff continued with the development of additional training material and an off-line version. Additionally various **materials promoting** the use of the DECIDE info tools and information for development planning were produced like a fact sheet (in Lao and English), a poster on the benefits of the DECIDE, business cards and info folders, flyer and other promotional materials, video on the benefits of DECIDE info and newspaper ads both in Lao and in English.

Theses **promotion materials** were exhibited on different national events and disseminated through various channels, like during key events like the ASEM meetings and other national meetings. The airing of the video on national TV is foreseen for April 2013 and later it will be disseminated through web-based channels. An offline version of DECIDE info platform on DVD has been prepared together with training manuals on the use of the offline tools. Both are ready for printing and dissemination and additional trainings for government staff and non-government users are planned during the extension of phase II.

A **significant contribution** of the Project to the formulated outcome can certainly be reached until the end of the extension of Phase II. Nonetheless, in the light of the overall **limited resources** (of the Project in Phase II) and the **short time at disposition** to introduce a new innovative approach and a change of behaviour in the lower administrative levels of the GoL, the outcome seems rather ambitiously formulated. However, the interest of GoL staff in the DECIDE info platform and the numerous wishes of trainees for more statistical and spatial data show that a strong need for modern decision-making and planning tools exists. Not surprisingly **lack of budget** seems to be a main constraint for the regional and local GoL institutions to fulfil the wishes for planning and decision making tools. Without any doubts the activities in these fields **need to be continued** and **strengthened** in a possible **Phase III**.

Component 2: Web-based access to socio-economic information

Outcome 2: A wider public uses evidence based socio-economic information for development related analysis and planning activities.

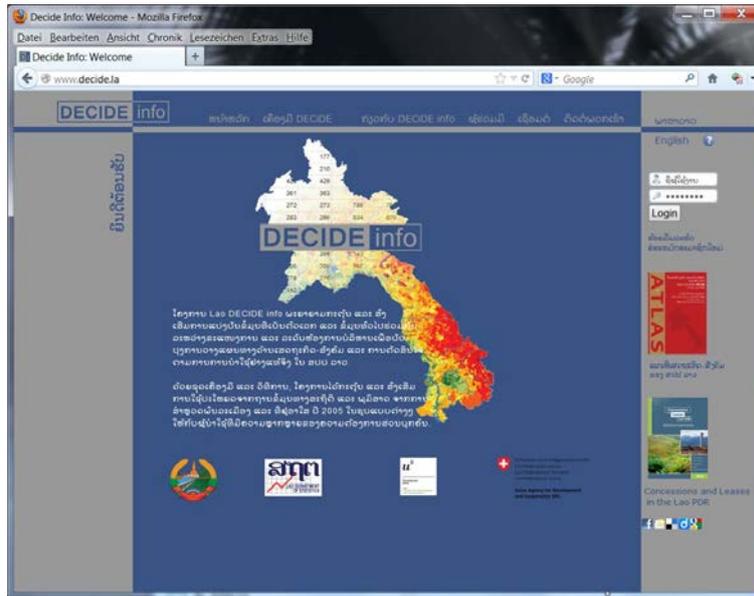
Outputs: new data distribution policy of LSB, socio-economic spatial database, meta data, data access, user rights management system, WEB platform for data viewing and distribution, hardware upgrade, improvement of user friendliness, offline version on DVD

The achievements in this component determine the **key results** and the **visibility** of the Project towards the common users. The backbone of the component is the implementation of the **spatial socio-economic database** and to make it available over a web-based platform. The database includes all available variables from the 2005 Population and Housing Census, all the calculated indicators published in the Atlas, as well as the corresponding spatial references and spatial data layers. The platform was launched as part of the LSB internet website (www.nsc.gov.la/decide or www.decide.la) and is a pioneer for Laos (Figure 7).

The **project partner LSB** started a new era in Laos with its **new data distribution policy** within DECIDE info. In the ER interviews with representatives of key Ministries the increased awareness about the importance and benefits of sharing data and information for evidence based development planning among stakeholders could be felt, even stronger than two years ago.



Figure 7: Web-based Access to Spatially Referenced Socio-Economic Data



It is widely acknowledged, that the web-based DECIDE info platform is an **absolutely crucial and unique achievement** of the Project. Through it detailed village-level spatial and statistical data for the over ten thousand villages of Laos are freely available. The set of online tools for the visualization, analysis, and dissemination of spatial socio-economic data and information on the web platform allow the 700 registered users to choose according to their needs. This greatly facilitates the use of such crucial information by planners, who so far faced a tedious and time-consuming process to gain official permission to access and use the data and information. This is moreover an important **contribution** to the outcome of component 1. Many GoL respondents referred to the time consuming procedure, when letters had to go all the way up and down through the Ministry hierarchies in order to get access to socio-economic data of LSB.

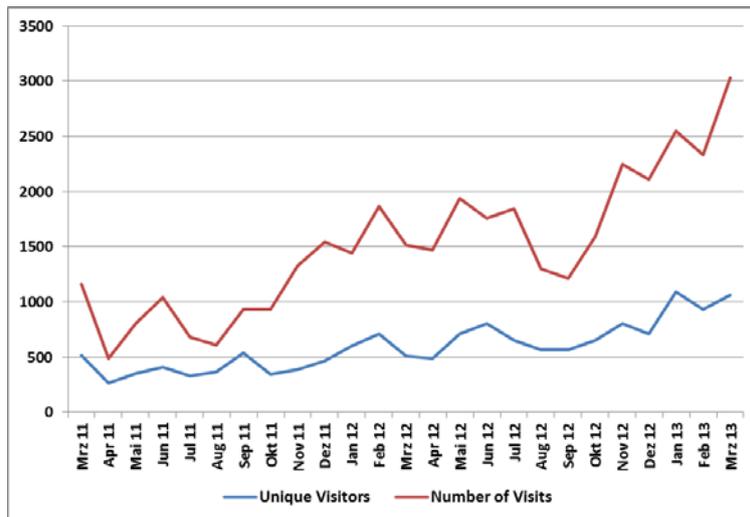
The interviews for the ER (and the MTR before) showed, that **socio-economic information** offered with the Project is crucial for the planning and designing of many development related activities. Not surprisingly most of the respondents find digital spatial socio-economic data (e.g. in Excel, as it is available from the web-based platform) more helpful than the printed Atlas alone. The users also highly depend on the availability and the reliability of such data from LSB and other GoL institutions. They would also prefer to get more frequent updates and an improvement of data reliability. The respondents made it clear, that the **combination with geographic** (or spatial) **reference** makes the data more useful and valuable for their purposes, since it can be overlaid with their own information.

Both online user statistics, as well as a separate user survey indicate that the information and tools developed and provided through the DECIDE info platform are used and appreciated widely, both within the Lao PDR, as well as internationally (Figure 8 and Figure 9). This means that the data and information is much **more extensively being used** for analysis and planning than what it would be **without the efforts** of the project and commitment of the partners.

To date, almost **700 users registered** to accesses the information provided on the online platform. A survey conducted among trainees after the sub-national introductory training campaign indicated both a profound interest in, and an equally great need for further respective capacity building. The implementation of the sub-national training activities also shed light both on the potentials, as well as on the technical limits of using online information systems at province and district levels. Overall, as an important outcome it can be observed that officers at sub-national level are sensitized to the use of spatial and statistical socio-economic information for planning.

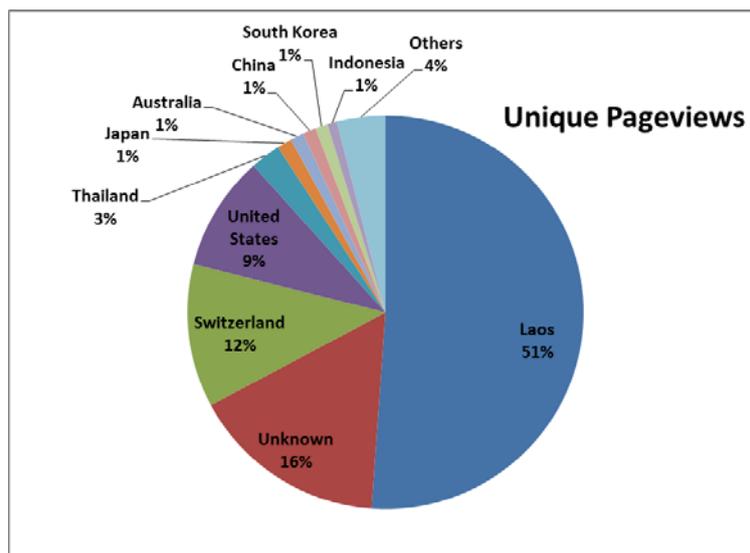


Figure 8: Online User Development of the DECIDE info Web Platform



Source: Online Usage Monitoring by Project team

Figure 9: Online User Access by country to the DECIDE info web platform



Source: Online Usage Monitoring by Project team

The DECIDE info platform has been designed to **provide tools** for a variety of users with different degrees of technical and analytical knowledge. Therefore, while some tools need **to be simple** to use for any user, others demand **more advanced** prior basic knowledge. Nonetheless, efforts are being made **to simplify** the different tools to the maximum extent possible, so that they are accessible to most users. Wizard-like guidance tools are under development and quick-step manual sections are being designed within the extension of Phase II. Video tutorials for DECIDE info tools are under development, and the initial ones shall be available online in the coming months. To propagate these products a DECIDE info site has been set up on Facebook and on YouTube, providing information on project activities, news on past and upcoming events, photos and videos of events, etc.

For users to be able to integrate the DECIDE info map layers with own spatial data layers in common desktop GIS for further analysis and overlay of user-owned data, the DECIDE info data layers have been set up and published using standardized **Web Map Services (WMS)**. A step-by-step guide including screenshots on how to access these layers from a desktop GIS was prepared. The guide covers the applications ESRI ArcGIS and QGIS which are the most widespread GIS applications used in



Laos. Additionally an **offline version of the DECIDE info platform** has been developed and is ready to be distributed on DVD in Lao and English versions. Since user-specific access restrictions cannot be realized on a DVD, the offline version has been developed in two versions: one for broad distribution (with a large range of variables) and one for GoL institutions (with more restricted variables).

The **appropriateness** in the Lao context of such innovative technology and means of user-specific visualization, querying and communication used for DECIDE info could be questioned. However, none of the respondents to the ER and MTR missions or the Project team found the technology unfit for their working environment. On the contrary, this new innovative approach is on the way to reshape the data exchange and distribution policy between stakeholders in Laos. Some respondents immediately mentioned their interest in distributing and presenting their own data in the same way.

The only big question mark is the **sustainability of such an approach** using very new technology for the Project partner LSB. Three formal trainings were conducted on the usage and applications of the online tools with staff of LSB and partners. A dedicated web server has been purchased, set up and put online at STEA. The server is now hosting both the LSB web site and the DECIDE info site. Specialized training sessions were provided for the management of the web server, and training sessions for the user rights management and monitoring system were planned. However, despite the efforts of the Project so far, sustainability remains a **major concern** and needs to be addressed in a possible Phase III.

As mentioned before in the MTR, also the usage of **open source products** for such a platform can be questioned. For open source products the customisation needs rather more knowhow and time than with a commercial software product (where a lot of functions come ready made). Often it is also easier to find training opportunities and exchange information on how to solve problems with the commercial software producers. On the other hand there are no maintenance costs with open source products and solutions of others can be freely integrated and used. Nonetheless it is clear that the **delays experienced** in putting the web-based platform on line and make it more user friendly have to do on one hand with the complexity of the task to rebuild this application and on the other with the limited possibilities of exchange with other programmers in Laos. Going into a **new Phase**, the technical architecture has to be looked into again in detail.

It can be clearly stated, that in this crucial component the Project **reaches the formulated outcome**, but has to address the capacity building issues in LSB and GoL with even more emphasis for the rest of Phase II.

Component 3: Spatial information services at the Department of Statistics

Outcome 3: LSB and other key national government agencies concerned with information development are able to manage spatial socio-economic data and to respond to information requests from a broader public.

Outputs: LSB Database compiled, management tool, GIS and on-the-job training, cross-sectoral national datasets integrated, easy data distribution

The LSB database was compiled and respective **database management tools** were developed and set up. The database and tools are available on a dedicated file server set up at LSB and are operational, making the spatial statistical database available to LSB staff in an comfortable manner. An **easy to use interface** has been developed to speed up the handling of data request at LSB. It also helps to improve the quality of data extractions by the staff and is based on the application used for the web-based platform. On-the-job training and support in handling data requests by third-parties have continuously been provided to LSB staff.

Regarding capacity building at LSB training sessions in the application of GIS software for geo-statistical analysis using LSB owned data with national spatial data sets has been provided. These trainings are supplemented with 4 manuals on different aspects of utilizing and managing the



information system, database and tools. The Project team of LSB draws a lot of its motivation from these trainings and placed requests to continue and expand it in different fields, which surely helps to strengthen the capacity at LSB.

Staff of other key departments at MAF, MoNRE and MPI have received on-the-job training in the management and handling of spatial data, and are now capable of managing and handling spatially augmented national statistical databases of their department's origin. Further practical training on spatial data management for further processing, integration and analysis of the data has been provided to the relevant departments' staff.

During the extension of Phase II new national spatial statistical data sets were supported and developed: the **land concession inventory**, the highly detailed **agricultural census 2011**, the **transport network** and the **market places**. Since all data sets have been geo-referenced at the village level they can be analytically linked to the socioeconomic information available on the DECIDE info platform which **opens the doors widely** for cross-sectoral analysis of the information.

This could only be realized through a major **national GPS data collection campaign**, whereby the geographic coordinates of **each and every village** in the country was measured and recorded using hand-held GPS units. This effort was necessary, because no updated village location information existed in Laos and the "old" village location information of the Household census 2005 was too outdated (given the frequent changes in administrative divisions, and village relocation).

The Project team discussed with both MoNRE and MAF on the possibilities to make key variable sets of some of the respective Ministries' databases accessible on the DECIDE info platform. While **MoNRE** signalled readiness, the current sensitive environment in investment in the Lao PDR means that the Ministry is moving more cautiously on those issues. Currently, the work plan and agreement on future activities is being finalized for signature. On the other hand **MAF** already agreed to make detailed spatial and statistical information of the agricultural census 2011 publically available through the DECIDE info platform. To date, the project has developed a census tabulation CD for distribution at national and at sub-national levels, and has started to integrate variables from the agricultural census into the DECIDE platform.

If the work continues as planned by the Project team, the formulated outcome can **be well reached**. LSB was clearly enabled to respond to information request from the public already in the early stages of Phase II. For the extension of the Phase especially the integration of new cross-sectoral data sets in the DECIDE info platform is a **tremendous achievement**. Here again, the short time at disposition for the Project posed a challenge to strengthen the capacities planned in this component.

Component 4: Remote access of socioeconomic information

Outcome 4: Remote users across sectors have improved knowledge about and access to adequate socio-economic information through new communication channels.

Outputs: Need assessment, CD-Rom with focus on province and district level, socio-economic profiles, experimental mobile phone system, metadata database

A **needs assessment** has been conducted by the Project team among various stakeholders at national and sub-national levels. Based on the feedback, a questionnaire for assessing data and information usage and needs for socio-economic situation analysis and planning at sub-national levels has been designed and translated into Lao. Using the questionnaire the needs and the **related challenges** faced by MPI staff of all provincial and district offices have been analysed, and data formatting needs have been identified. As a consequence the project developed and finalized products for offline dissemination of the online toolbox on DVD, along with the relevant data and information.

Furthermore, a draft version of an **experimental mobile phone** based system for augmented reality has been developed and is being tested by CDE. The system should allow users equipped with mobile phones with the necessary technical specifications (camera, a GPS receiver, and a compass) to



instantly access socio-economic information on villages that are within a user-specified radius and view-angle of the present position via mobile internet on their mobile phone. A less sophisticated version of the system could be envisaged for the future.

Additionally an initial **national metadata platform** has been established, which is based on the commonly used GeoNetwork standards. The platform is currently hosting the evolving national metadata database. The necessary capacities for proper systematic documentation and entering of metadata are continuously being developed through technical on-the-job support of relevant government staff. A first 3-day national cross-sectoral training workshop on national metadata has been implemented successfully and on-the job trainings on entering metadata into a national metadata database have been provided to staff of the partner institutions. A substantial number of entries in the multi-sector metadata database on spatial and statistical information has been co-produced by the different national partner institutions of the GOL, and is currently available on the DECIDE info servers.

If the work continues as planned by the Project team, the formulated outcome can also **be reached** to a good extent until the end of Phase II. Again, the short time at disposition for the Project posed a challenge.

Component 5: Integration of spatial analysis in education system

Outcome 5: Spatial analysis methodology is integrated in the Lao research and education system.

Outputs: didactic concept, BSc university course with materials, Flyer

The main achievements of this component are the integration of the products and knowledge generated with the socio-economic Atlas in the regular **higher educational system** of Laos. A didactically sound comprehensive BSc level university **course** has been developed in collaboration with the Faculty of Environmental Sciences of the National University of Laos (NUoL) and should enhance the understanding at NUoL on poverty relates issues. It includes a complete course reader, PowerPoint presentations, exercises, and suggestions for field excursions, along with the accompanying teaching materials. A **flyer** highlighting the material of the course has also been established and printed.

The Project partner of NUoL found the course very **useful and important**. It was clarified that the translation into Lao of the course material is still pending, but the necessary steps for approval by the faculty and the Ministry of Education have been made to integrate the course into the regular curriculum of NUoL.

In this component the formulated outcome can be reached until the end of Phase II.

Component 6: Contribution to development knowledge and discourse

Outcome 6: Development discourse and policy making processes at national level are nourished by evidence-based research based on the content of the socio-economic Atlas and other key national databases

Outputs: intensive networking, direct project support, maps and analysis

According to the consultants observations and interviews with the senior experts of CDE **various and diverse activities** have been undertaken within the frame of this component in Phase II. Building up on the long and visible CDE presence in the region, the network of their experts today is very extended and **yields excellent opportunities** for the dissemination of results and analysis in connection with DECIDE info (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Activities carried out under component 6

What	With	When	Output
Chapter Environmental Outlook	WREA, UNEP	2010	Chapter in Lao Environmental Outlook report
Spatially analyze and present socio-economic data and satellite images for SDC field mission	SDC	2. 2010	Maps on socio-economic situation and land cover for selected districts in Sayaboury Province
NUOL leaflet	NUOL	1.-3. 2010	NUOL poverty course flyer
Prepare maps presenting and contextualizing PRF activities	PRF	3.-4. 2010	Maps with PRF activities and s-e context for PRF districts
Nam Theun 2 evaluation support	WB	5. 2010	Spatial visualization of NT2 village monitoring data, and analysis of census data
Support of program targeting of the World Bank-supported Community Nutrition Project	WB	6.-7. 2010	Selection, characterization, and analysis of control and treatment communities Calculation of treatment catchments
Support of health care program targeting	WB, Min. of Health	6.-8. 2010	Socio-economic statistics for selected control and treatment villages & hospital catchments
Contribution to the World Bank's report Natural Resources, Poverty, Food and Nutrition in Lao PDR	WB	2010	Maps published in Lao PDR Development Report 2010
Support to the implementation of the Agricultural Census 2011	MAF	9. 2010 - 3. 2011	Input to discussion on questionnaire, GPS training and GPS survey plan
Support to SDC project design on biodiversity in Laos & Vietnam	SDC, J. Folley	3.2011	Maps and analysis of villages in and around protected areas in Laos and Vietnam
Support Phase II targeting	PRF	1.-4. 2011	Khum Ban level poverty estimates and poverty maps
Mapping NRDPEP, 3S etc.	SDC	10.2012	National, Provincial and District maps contextualizing NRDPEP, 3S, and PRF project plans and activities
AusAID sector-specific project mapping	AusAID	10-12.2012	National maps contextualizing current and planned AusAID project support by sectors
Context-specific spatial analysis and maps	IUCN	11.2012	Maps for state of the basin report for the Sekong basin.
Cross-sectorial spatial data visualizations	National Assembly	9.2012 – 2.2013	Cross-sectoral contextualization on maps
Inputs to national land policy expert committee	National Assembly	1.2013	Drafting of article on Land Information System and data sharing
National consultation workshop	MoNRE	1.2013	Dissemination of analysis results of the national land concession inventory
Key inputs to Development Partner Meeting	UNDP	2.2013	Key input presentations
World Bank management meeting	WB	2.2013	Key input presentations
Socio-economic spatial contextualization of Soum Son Seun Jai – Community-based Food Security and Economic Opportunities Programme	IFAD	3.-4.2013	SSSJ project contextualization maps

Source: Records of CDE



So the visualization of **possible incoherencies** in terms of spatial planning among different sectors was presented and discussed with the President of the Economic, Planning and Finance Committee of the National Assembly. As a reaction to these results, she stated for example to question the illusionary 70% forest policy of the Lao PDR publically.

Again, DECIDE info staff was called onto the expert committee of the Lao National Assembly for the elaboration of the first **National Land Policy**. Through this, several significant inputs were made to feed into the land policy elaboration process. This included, for example, the drafting of an article on *Land Information System and data sharing* which was to enhance cross-sectorial data exchange. The basic notion of this article (to form a respective institutional basis and to make data available publically) has been adopted by the GoL in the current version of the draft land policy.

At different high level events, the challenges and possible approaches to resolve **incoherent spatial planning**, with a special focus on **land governance** in the Lao PDR, were presented and discussed. This, among others, included: the Development Partner Meeting organized by the UN, the World Bank management meeting, and different meetings with representatives of the National Assembly. As a result of different development agencies (e.g. the Government of Finland, the German BMZ, the EU, UNDP, and The World Bank) sought the advice of DECIDE info in relation to the strategy of their development support.

The **quality and the professionalism** of the CDE outputs are generally **very high**. Especially the map products with their analysis and interpretation (e.g. used in the project documents of PRF or reports of the World Bank) the reports and policy briefs are of excellent quality. Most of the time they integrate, analyse and display rarely used data before the Project came along. The combination of socio-economic data with spatial reference is here creating a big additional benefit for the users too.

Despite the overall and touchable success of the activities under this component, the **sheer amount** of smaller and bigger activities in this component bears the danger of stretching the resources of CDE. However, the interviews with the **very committed team** showed that they are aware of it and take the necessary precautions. The CDE team assured, that the resources for more time consuming outputs (e.g. policy briefs) are also addressed. However, the perception and intention of this component seems to differ slightly between SDC and CDE. While SDC seems to prefer outputs mainly agreed by them and directed towards their Laos strategy, CDE interprets the mandate in a way to contribute additionally to different projects and seize opportunities in the view of propagating DECIDE info. It is probably necessary that these differences are looked into.

It can be clearly stated, that the aim of a better informed targeting of national and international development programs through advisory support using spatial socio-economic data **can be achieved** and has been supported substantially by this component. The latest results also show that the socio-economic information produced by the Project is taken up by the development discourse at national level and helps to **address gender and ethnicity dimensions** (like in the Policy brief on Poverty). According to the planned activities by the Project team a **very significant contribution** of the Project to the formulated outcome can surely be reached until the end of Phase II.

Component 7: Geographic Knowledge on Commercial Land Concessions

Outcome 7: Knowledge on the geographic extent and dimensions of commercial concessions on land has been increased

Outputs: national concession inventory, on-the-job training, maps and analysis, report, policy brief national workshop

Based on the national land concession inventory developed by LNRRIC and with support of GIZ, a nationally **comprehensive, geo-references database** has been developed. The data has been geo-referenced at the village level, and has been analytically linked to the socioeconomic information available on the DECIDE info platform. Different avenues for institutionalizing the processes for



updating, verifying, and improving the concession inventory are under exploration, or readied for pilot testing.

A dedicated file server with **spatial data management tools** has been set up at the LNRRIC, and the consolidated spatial database has been installed and documented. LNRRIC staff is receiving on-the-job training in the management of the server, as well as the professional use of the spatial database for spatial analytical purposes.

A detailed analysis based on the inventory, in combination with spatial socio-economic information, has been conducted and results (report, policy brief) were compiled and published. A national workshop with around 100 participants from the Lao government, the private sector, from research and education, as well as from the international community, was held in Vientiane in January 2013, in order to widely disseminate and publicize the results of the analysis.

In this component the formulated outcome **will be reached** until the end of Phase II.

3.3 Review of the Overall Progress of Project Implementation

The interviews for the ER and the available documents **illustrate the progress** of the Project so far. While most of the components seem to be well on course to achieve the anticipated results (e.g. components 2, 5, 6 and 7) until the end of Phase II, some have to be the focus of the remaining time of the extension of the Project.

Many important activities (e.g. of component 2, 3 and 4) are just now getting on the way. As it was mentioned before, one focus in the remaining time for the Phase must lie on the **training** and **capacity building of GoL personnel** in the analysis of spatial socio-economic data and usage the web interface as well as the off-line DVD (component 1 and 4). As another focus the Project team plans to increase **promotion and visibility** of outputs, as well as the improvement of the **usability** and the **user friendliness** of the web interface. As mentioned in the MTR, there is still a clearly formulated need by LSB to define the relationship between LaoINFO and DECIDE info and find the means to bring them **closer together**.

The big changes in the Project implementation plan between the main phase and the extension period make it **difficult** for the consultants to assess the overall progress in accordance to the partially newly formulated aims and envisaged outcomes. According to the Project documents and based on the interviews with the Project team the **implementation schedule** is **still valid** and will bring activities to the finishing line at the end of the Phase. Seeing the progress so far and the results achieved in all the main components, the consultants are **positive**, that the defined outputs can be reached with only some exceptions.

The exceptions are mainly caused by a **rather ambitious formulation** of some the outcomes in the Project Documents (e.g. outcome 1, 2 3). Especially the postulation, that Province and Districts Officers of MPI and other Governmental Agencies use DECIDE info in their planning and decision-making, does not seem realistic during Phase II.

3.4 Current Project Management and Implementation Arrangements

The interviews and discussion with the Project team or the observations of the consultants did **not reveal bigger obstacles** to the current Project management or the implementation of the Project activities. The project organisation between LSB and CDE for the institutionally more complex components 1 to 4 seems to work **without bigger problems**. While the Steering Committee was meeting only twice up to date (and possible dates for meetings are extremely difficult to find), the Project Board held many meeting to discuss policy issues, the aims of the Project and its implementation. Here the consultant observed the readiness of the members of the Project Board to put priority on such meetings. So far the other Project partners from MAF and MoNRE are **not represented** in the Project Board, which is surely a point to correct for the next Phase.



However, there are apparently phases when the **collaboration** between LSB and CDE is **not optimal** and expectations from all sides are not met. But both partners came a long way and the overall successes of the Project are remarkable. This is also reflected in the positive feedbacks from the ER interviews, where the respondents gave very high marks to the Project team and the management. The ground breaking **new data policy** and data distribution for example is widely acknowledged and also attributed to the good collaboration between LSB and CDE.

The success of the implementation arrangements depends much on the **partner's personnel capacity**. It was mentioned in the interviews of the ER that LSB had limited personnel resources for capacity building activities, while some of the other partner institutions are more flexible there. However, LSB mentioned that over 50 more staff were recruited in the last year, which should certainly improve the staff assignment to the Project. Nevertheless, it was already important that the staff of LSB and other GoL key partners gained increased awareness about the importance of spatial aspects of socio-economic development planning and how to use it during the Project Phase II.

3.5 Cost-effectiveness Analysis

The financial reports of the Project cover the implementation period from July 2009 to December 2012. As of 31 December 2012, the Project spent the total amount of **CHF 1'083'257** (CHF 832'760 until March 2013 and CHF 250'497 in the extension of the Phase). This means, that 69% of the total budget for the extension were still available in January 2013. The discussion with the Project leader of CDE showed that sufficient funds are there to carry out the Project activities until end of Phase II.

The distribution of the funds to the components was only made as a provision for budgeting. The project accounting does not follow strictly these component lines. Therefore it is not possible for the consultants to attribute the money spent so far to the different Project components. Without this information only a very **broad analysis** of the cost effectiveness of the Project is possible.

The outputs reached and the Project funds spent so far are in a **good relation** according to the consultant's experience. It is even evident, that many high quality outputs have been reached (e.g. MSc course for NUOL) through synergies of CDE (e.g. input of a volunteer) and with minimal input of Project funds.

4. Assessment of the Lao DECIDE Info Project Phase II

Right from the start of the ER the consultants encountered an **open and constructive working atmosphere** within the team of the Lao DECIDE Info Project. The staff of LSB and the other Project partners from different Ministries all seem highly motivated and interested in the progress and success of the Project. This is also true for the team of CDE, which seems highly dedicated and committed to reach the Project aims. The consultants had the impression that the work on the Project activity lines, under these conditions, can continue very well.

4.1 Tentative SWOT Analysis of the Project Phase II

Based on the interviews of the ER as well as the MTR, the consulted documents and own observations a tentative SWOT analysis was carried out by the consultants.

The **weaknesses and threats** side shows, that the remaining time of the Project should be used to explore and address the issues raised above and find mutually satisfying solutions. This is especially true for the institutional set up and the training and capacity building of LSB and other partners. The Project team has already started the necessary actions (e.g. organising training courses, strengthen the documentation of the web application, dissemination of promotion material etc.).



Figure 11: SWOT Analysis of the Lao DECIDE Info Project Phase II

Strengths:	Weaknesses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground breaking new data policy and data distribution towards the users • Introduction of new datasets for cross-sectoral information analysis • Successful integration of key knowledge in national planning and policy-making • Technologically leading WEB interface for viewing, analysis and distribution of data • Extended training of GoL personnel in spatial data handling and analysis • Intensive collaboration between LSB, different institutions from MAF, MoNRE and CDE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slightly ambitious project design for the time and resources at disposition • Short time and resources at disposition for institutional setup in LSB and other partners • Certain doubts about sustainability of the Project outputs without continuation in a next Phase • Weaker capacity building efforts than expected by partners • Difficult differentiation between LaoINFO and DECIDE Info for users
Opportunities:	Threats:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing demand for spatially referenced socio-economic and other important data • Visualization of possible incoherencies in terms of spatial planning among different sectors • Clearly displayed motivation of key GoL institutions and partners to share their data • Pending implementation of the new statistic law and the draft land policy • Increase of the visibility of LSB and CDE and their services and competences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capability of GoL staff at all levels to use the web platform despite initial training • Technical limits of using online information systems at province and district levels • Scarce personnel resources with technical know-how working for LSB and other partners • Difficulty to satisfy demand for services by LSB and CDE • Limited visibility of the DECIDE Info products

Source: ER and MTR interviews and own observations

On the other side **the strengths and opportunities** have to be analysed in detail and brought into the context of a possible next phase of the Project. The good examples of **addressing gender and ethnicity** dimensions within the project activities, one of the core issues of SDC' development interventions can be further improved.

4.2 Key Lessons and Issues to Be Considered

According to the consultants appraisal the Project is well under way and geared to attain the goals and aims formulated in the Project documents. There is no obvious or bigger mistake in the design or the implementation of the Project observable. With the knowledge of the ER today, certain adjustments in the **Project design** and the **formulation of the outcomes** could have been highly advantageous (e.g. a longer time frame, more resources to address the institutional build up etc.).

One of the key lessons from the Project is the importance to bring time schedule, resources, outputs and outcomes in **accordance in the design phase**. For DECIDE Info some outcomes were formulated a bit too ambitious for the time frame or their reaching is difficult to prove (e.g. in component 1). While the approach of working with staff from District and Province institutions is surely necessary and appropriate, the **limited time** and the **technology problems** (internet access, computer know how etc.) made it a very difficult undertaking. Despite that, the work with these GoL levels has to be continued in the next phase. An additional difficulty was the change of Project **outcomes** and aims, as well as the Project **partners** for the extension of Phase II. However, in the consultant's opinion these discrepancies do not diminish the overall success story of the Project so far.

Another key lesson is the need to assess the **risks of implementation delays** in more detail when dealing with new technologies for the implementing staff. This is true for the application of GIS



analysis in LSB and especially for the development and adaption of a technologically leading web-based platform. Despite all precautions building such a technologically new application leads more often than not to increased time budgets and (if the organisation is small) to delays in delivery. Since for outsiders the complexity is often not visible, the delays are difficult to communicate. Also here the delays experienced in the past do not influence the overall success story of the Project.

Another point is the increase of **visibility of the Project's products**. If people do not know what products are available, they most certainly also do not use them. The communication of the work done has to be intensified and the use of the products has to be promoted even more. The widely publicised launch of the Report on Land concession was a good example, since it made its way into the newspapers. In the consultant's opinion that increasing the visibility will enhance the overall success story of the Project.

Another key lesson is the adjustment of the Project approach by CDE to the **felt relevance** of the Project by the partner organisation LSB. It can be assumed, that DECIDE Info was in the beginning and in the extension of the phase not perceived as the key project within LSB by the management. This had the advantage of **reducing the expectations**, easing collaboration and bringing only minor adjustments to the LSB's organisation. Certainly DECIDE Info reached its goal much better by producing **excellent results in a quiet way** than with a bulldozer approach, where as a start the whole partner organisation and its policy etc. is changed and regrouped. In the consultant's opinion the chosen Project approach (lead by example and outputs) steered directly to the success story of the Project today.

A last point concerns the project approach of having **7 components** working with **four different partners** which was surely **not making** the work of the Project team any **easier**. But the consultants saw **no signs**, that this setup was affecting the results negatively. The aim to foster cross-sectoral information sharing also implies that there is a bigger number of partners to handle and integrate in the Project activities. A more serious need for correction of the approach lies in the **limited felt ownership** of the Project by the local partners. Due to the limited time at disposition for Phase II the issue of sustainability could not be solved satisfactorily. For the next Phase the Project should change and aim at a joint organisation (e.g. a Lao counterpart for the Chief technical advisor from CDE).

4.3 Key Measures and Recommendations

The institutional set up and the organisational arrangements of the Project so far seem sound in the Lao context, as they lead to measurable and well received results of excellent quality. Therefore there is **no need for additional recommendations** for the rest of Phase II, besides addressing threats and weaknesses mentioned in the SWOT analysis. According to the consultant's appraisal and based on the already planned activities the Project can continue for the rest of its time **without bigger modifications**.

5. Possible Phase III of the Lao DECIDE Info Project

It is the strong conviction of the consultants that **a next phase** (Phase III) to the Lao DECIDE Info Project should be foreseen. On one side to build up on the good results of the Project and on the other side to enhance the usage and sustainability of the Project outputs.

In the following paragraphs possible project aims, outcomes and organisation for Phase III are introduced. They were developed based on the interviews from the ER and MTR, strategy papers of the CDE Project team, intensive discussions with SDC and CDE as well as the consultants' experiences. However, due to **limited time at disposition**, especially the outcomes and outputs, but also the institutional setup have to be refined and discussed in detail with the partner institutions.



5.1 Proposed Aim and Cornerstones for Phase III

The Project aims in Phase III primarily at fostering information sharing for improved evidence based planning and decision-making in the Lao PDR. It proposes to **expand** respective efforts beyond the main partners of Phases I and II towards a multi-sector data analysis and information exchange, engaging institutions of various key Ministries of different sectors.

The Project aim for Phase III is evolving from the prior ones and could be as follows:

Foster cross-sectoral information exchange and analysis towards integrated and evidence-based planning processes and knowledge based policy-making

For Phase III of the Lao DECIDE info, based on papers of the Project team, a number of cornerstones can be defined:

1. Support the planning and design of the next **population census 2015** towards a solid new basis for poverty mapping by including:
 - a) a high-quality spatial dimension, and
 - b) necessary design for high-quality poverty estimation update
2. Information integration and usage **across institutional and sectoral boundaries** is to be institutionalized and operationalized
3. Data and information from across key ministries shall be **integrated and disseminated** to allow for holistic development planning across sectors and administrative levels in the Lao PDR
4. Enhance the capacities for **spatial analysis and planning** of key ministries:
 - a) developing, operationalizing and institutionalising of land investment and land concession monitoring tools and processes in relevant institutions at the national level
 - b) enhancing and operationalizing a monitoring system for the trends and results of the agriculture census
5. Analysis and mapping as well as communication of agricultural census, market network, data and information on investment (particularly in land), etc. is geared towards **providing key policy inputs**.

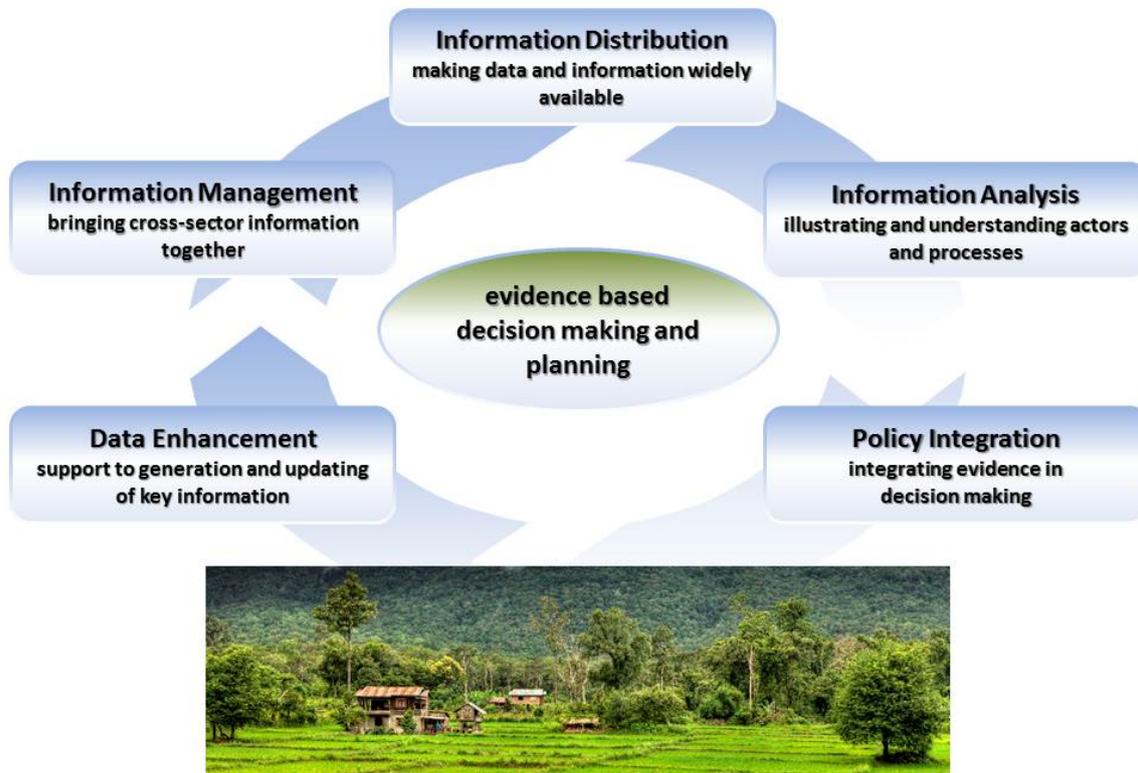
These cornerstones for Phase III can be brought into a conceptual context by introducing a **knowledge (enhancement) cycle** for the DECIDE info Project (Figure 12). The cycle helps to realise the relationship between planned interventions and to understand the future situation of the Project in Phase III. The partners of the different GoL institutions can be at **different stages** in the cycle over time and can also have varying level of detail or amount of information at disposition. E.g. MAF Departments can be mainly in a stage, where they need support in information analysis, while some of MoNRE's Departments need advice on data generation and enhancement. As a consequence the intervention of the implementing institution therefore has to be quite **flexible** and tuned to the specific needs of the different partners within GoL.

5.2 Proposed Outcomes for Phase III

During Phase 1 and 2 of the Lao DECIDE info Project SDC was financing two Partial Actions under the title **Laos Poverty mapping and Socio-economic Atlas**: the *Lao DECIDE info* Project and the *Lao agricultural census*. In a possible next phase this activities should be integrated into a broader designed Lao DECIDE info Project.



Figure 12: Knowledge Enhancement Cycle of Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III



Keeping this in mind, **five project outcomes** are proposed for Phase III to reach the main project aim of *fostering cross-sectoral information exchange and analysis towards integrated and evidence-based planning processes and knowledge based policy-making*. These outcomes are **mostly not new**, but were implemented under different titles or groupings during Phase II of the Project. This guarantees that the well-designed inputs in the Project frame so far **are continued** and give the opportunity to **monitor the Project progress** over all the phases, past and future.

Most of the changes in the outcomes, compared to the formulated outcomes from Phase 1 and 2, are based on the findings of the Mid-term and the External Reviews and the experiences of the implementing institutions. Especially the interviews with Lao Government institutions (on national, provincial and District level) and donor agencies, as well as the user survey of the DECIDE info Platform, called for some changes in the outcome formulation.

Component 1: Data Enhancement

Outcome 1: Key GoL institutions have improved capacities to design and implement harmonised national data collection campaigns with a geographic reference to facilitate cross-sectoral integration

The following outputs are envisaged:

- *The population and housing census 2015 allows detailed poverty mapping and analysis based on geographical reference*
- *The generation of key thematic datasets by institutions of various Ministries is supported and spatially enhanced*
- *The variables of data collection campaigns are coherently defined*



This component takes into account, that there is still a big need to **support** GoL institutions in their mandate to generate and update key data sets needed for **their administrative processes**. Especially the introduction of spatial reference and quality conditions in these key data sets (e.g. population census 2015, land concession data) is envisaged, in order to overlay information and enhance overall evidence based decision making.

The upcoming Population and Housing Census 2015 will offer the next possible opportunity for an updated detailed **poverty mapping analysis**. Given the high demand for such updated information, such an opportunity should certainly not be missed. This will require concrete inputs to the design of the questionnaires, in order to make sure the necessary questions are included. They have to be drafted in the correct way to be used in the poverty mapping analysis. Close coordination and exchange with the Census committee will be essential already in the early planning stages.

Figure 13: Possible Datasets to be enhanced under Lao DECIDE info Project Phase II

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE)	
Land classification and allocation data	Department of Land Allocation and Development
Land concession data, including quality of investment proxy indicators	Natural Resources and Environment Data and Information Centre
Improved delineation of national protected areas (with TABI)	Department of Forestry Resources Management
Land registration data (only communal land titles, not private)	Department of Land Management
Location of environmental and social impact assessments	Department of Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF)	
Land Use planning data (link to LUP platform)	Department of Agricultural Land Management and Development
Forest Cover data 2012	Department of Forestry
Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI)	
Public investment planning	
Road and transportation network	Department of public work
Ministry of Energy and Mining (MEM)	
Location of existing / planned hydropower projects	
Mining concessions	

Source: ER interviews and CDE Project team

Additionally, it will be important to plan well from early on the proper implementation of a **GPS location enumeration** during the census to allow for a facilitated, more accurate spatial referencing, integration, analysis, and representation of the census results. This again will require close cooperation with the census planning and implementation teams, already from an early stage onwards.

Besides the population and the agriculture census **several other thematic datasets** from various Ministries could be supported and enhanced while they are being generated by the Departments in charge (Figure 13). The support of the Project team will allow the integration of these **new thematic datasets** into the DECIDE info platform in Phase III. The information at disposition on the web platform will contribute **significantly** to the project aim.



As a last output the improving of the **quality of the data**, the coherence and consistency of datasets will be addressed by the Project team. Since today data is collected in a more casual way, often the variables do not match, cannot be linked to each other or are not clearly defined.

Component 2: Information Management

Outcome 2: Thematic data bases of key GoL institutions on national level have a spatial component and follow agreed upon standards to facilitate integration across sectors

The following outputs are envisaged:

- *Key thematic datasets of different Ministries allow spatial analysis across sectors*
- *Structured, standardised and documented data models are introduced in key Ministries*
- *Dissemination of data modelling methods in key institutions of GoL is initialised*

This component concentrates on the **necessary technical assistance** and capacity building in the partner institutions to bring cross-sector information together and promote the **sharing** of information between the different GoL institutions.

Starting with single key datasets in each key institution (initially focusing on MAF, MPI and MoNRE, with possible extensions to e.g. MEM, MoH, MoE, etc.), value-adding through potential cleaning, geo-referencing, and systematic structuring with **data models** shall be achieved in close collaboration with the data owners and technical support by the Project team. Concrete products will be developed and published to add visibility to the information bases, while supporting the broader integration and availing of the information through the DECIDE platform.

Currently, the national land concession inventory is a snapshot of the situation of 2009/10, with no routines in place for regular updating. Furthermore, the current inventory lacks proper **documentation**, e.g. information on the spatial extent of what is actually implemented, as well as often the spatial extent of the granted area. The project is currently exploring avenues for the updating, refinement, and potential future integration of the national land concession inventory of the Lao PDR into the DECIDE info platform. In selected pilot studies, through two distinctive avenues, approaches and methodologies for updating land concession inventories are tested. Through systematic evaluation of the results of the two pilot updating approaches, the respectively identified required adjustments to the methodological approaches shall help to support the development, **operationalization and institutionalization** of a national updating process that yields the necessary statistical, thematic and spatial information for monitoring of land concession developments and promoting quality investments in land.

The necessity for structured, standardised and documented **data models** has to be introduced in a step-by-step approach in the Lao context. Possible connections to evolving standards on data handling and management in the Lao **e-Government context** will be explored.

Component 3: Information Distribution

Outcome 3: Key information from across different thematic databases is accessed through an information platform and used by GoL institutions and national and international development partners

The following outputs are envisaged:

- *The web-platform is thematically broadened and easy accessible*
- *The web-platform and its off-line products are well known and widely used in key GoL institutions*
- *The organisation and IT architecture of DECIDE info database and web-platform is conceptualised and established*



This component continues the development of the DECIDE info web platform and drives at the **distribution and usage** of the information in a user friendly form on all GoL level (national to local) and by development partners (like UNDP, GiZ, WorldBank, etc.). It was getting clear from ER interviews and the user surveys that the data distribution should mainly be geared towards **GoL administration** and **development partners** because of different obstacles. However, access by public users to strengthen transparency of on-going processes is still encouraged.

A user survey of the current DECIDE info platform revealed two main needs for the future: For one, **more assistance** for users in the usage of the platform was desired, which can include both more training (both formal, as well as through tutorials and manuals), as well as improved user-friendliness of the provided tools. Secondly, the **range and recentness** of the provided data was perceived as unsatisfactory by some users.

Figure 14: Planned new Web Interface for Lao DECIDE info Project Phase



While each data owning institution will **retain control** of the data on a server of their respective institutions and respective user rights management, the technical environment of the platform will allow for **seamless integration** of the data from the different institution's servers on a single DECIDE platform. Such an integrating platform will need to be hosted outside a particular ministry to avoid one-sided ownership, and will require institutionalization in the medium term.

Component 4: Information Analysis

Outcome 4: Planning processes of GoL institutions are improved by enhanced capacities for spatial integrated cross-sector analysis

The following outputs are envisaged:

- *The capacity of key GoL institutions to analyse cross-sectoral information is enhanced*
- *Key GoL institutions generate maps and planning references with cross-sectoral information*
- *Key GoL institutions exchange their experiences and results of spatial integrated cross-sector analysis*

This component concentrates on the **necessary capacity building** in the partner institutions for them to be able to use the information at disposition from different Government sources. At the same



time **know-how exchange** and **transfer** on spatial integrated cross-sector analysis are encouraged, with workshops are held in regular intervals to present best practice cases from key GoL institutions.

While the agricultural census data has now been compiled and partly released, remarkably **little analytical efforts** were so far put into that key national dataset. On **its own**, but particularly in **combination** with additional datasets such as the socio-economic information on the DECIDE info platform, the geographic dimension of the agricultural census, as well as the additional information on markets for agricultural in- and outputs, along with the national transport information, the **database** provides a treasure-trove of information for policy-guiding analysis awaiting to be undertaken. It is a key element of this component, to enable GoL staff to do such spatial analysis and produce maps and other planning references to be used in their own organisation.

Equally, the to-be updated and refined information on **investments in land** will allow for additional and new insights into the vastly under-researched thematic. The support of such type of analysis done by key partners will influence the planning processes of the respective partners in a very positive way.

Component 5: Policy Integration

Outcome 5: Development discourse and policy making processes at national level are nourished by cross-sectoral research results

The following outputs are envisaged:

- *Key national development issues are analysed*
- *Individual and contextual analysis are made and result in specific planning and policy advisory*
- *Gained insights are fed into the national policy discourse and decision-making process*

This component aims at the **continuation** of the quite successful initiatives to bring analysis and research findings in the last phases into the political processes in Laos. Like in Phase II this component should be implemented **directly** between CDE and SDC. However, regular meetings will assure that the outputs are produced according to the expectations of both partners. It will be CDE's job to include other GoL or international institutions into the production of outputs and to enhance **sustainability** of the activities. Possible local partners could be the National University of Laos (NUoL) or one of the more application oriented research institutions in the GoL, like the National Economic Research Institute (NERI) of MPI.

The outputs of this component are planned to **contribute pro-actively** on policy discussions and key national development issues, like socio-economic development and poverty, commercial pressure on land, agricultural transition and market integration. The interviews of the ER also showed that **land ownership issues** could get a very important topic in the next few years, since there is only a **shockingly rudimentary** land register system under development and implementation within GoL.

A more **detailed picture** of the envisaged outcomes and outputs of the proposed Phase 3 of the Project can be found in the draft logframe in Annex 4.

To make the Project approach a bit simpler for decision makers and GoL partners, the **components** could be **reduced to four or only three** by grouping components 1 and 2, or as well as 3 and 4 together and joining the respective outputs. However, this regrouping could reduce the **clarity** of the approach (and the reference to the knowledge enhancement cycle) and poses the danger that the outcomes have to be formulated in a much **generalised manner**. But as long as the Project can take into account and address the issue, that the different Project partners (like MAF and MoNRE) are at different positions in the knowledge cycle, the approach will also be promising with four or three components.



6. Possible Organisation for Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III

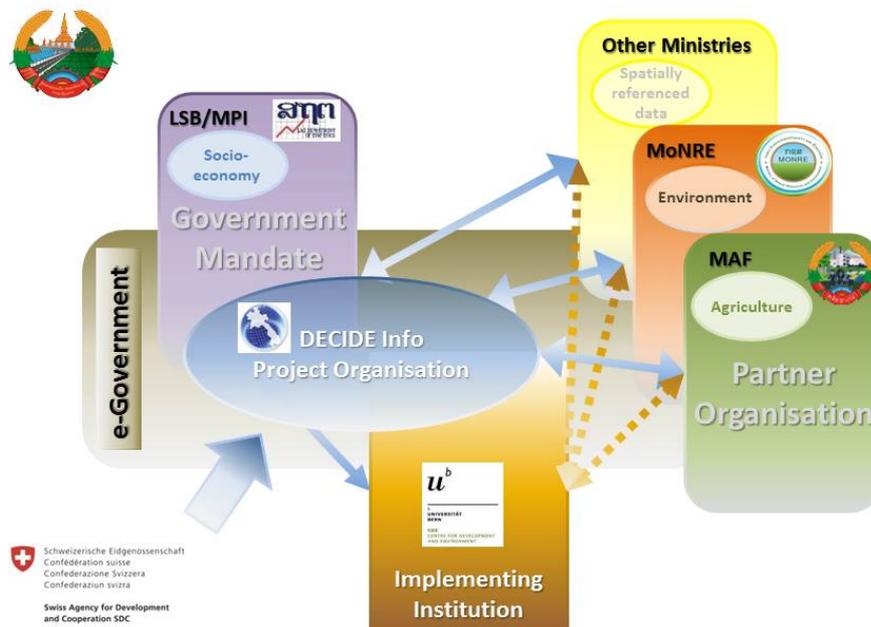
For Phase III of the Lao DECIDE info Project the organisation has to be **adapted** to include the envisaged changes in focus. The cross-sectoral data integration calls for an **inclusion** of the newly participating GoL institutions (e.g. MAF and MoNRE) in the project activities and the planning.

6.1. Possible Project Implementation Organisation

It is surely an advantage, that there are **different possibilities** for partner organisations for Phase III. To get a good idea of the **opinions** in the key institutional partners the interviews of the ER focused on this issue. On national level the opinions were rather clear: either **Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB)** was named as the place to organise and host a **cross-sectoral approach** or then, to a much lesser extent, the **National Geographic Department (NGD)** (see Annex 3). Other possibilities like the National Assembly, the Prime Minister’s office or the e-Government Centre were rather ruled out because of the requirement of having a mandate for the job or the necessity to build up a totally new structure.

Main partner for the next phase should therefore still be **LSB**. The collaboration has been very good so far, though there were some minor misunderstandings in the last phase. The focus of this close collaboration between LSB and the Project team lies on the preparation of the next population census (e.g. strengthen the geographical referencing) and capacity enhancement (e.g. information analysis). Additionally LSB has a GoL mandate with the Statistic Law to bring together cross-sectorial information (though originally focussing on statistical data).

Figure 15: Lao DECIDE info Project organization



In order to learn from Phase II and to make the **approach more sustainable** there should be a well-defined DECIDE info **Project organisation**. There should be a Chief technical advisor (of CDE) and a Lao GoL counterpart (approached/recruited by CDE), 1 – 2 Lao staff (in each key partner institution) with a more technical education and 1 – 2 experience experts (of CDE) for information integration, but especially also for producing outputs towards policy making. It is highly recommended that the Lao counterpart to the CTA is a well-trained and high level GoL staff recruited and paid by the Project, but on a **secondment** from GoL. CDE knows such arrangement from Kenya or Ethiopia,



where the counterparts are local experts and get remuneration according to donor regulations for local experts.

Yet, since the bringing together and sharing of specific cross-sector information has been identified as one of the main targets of the new phase, the new Project organisation has to be extended to **accommodate the new partner organisations**. Currently the collaboration with MAF and MoNRE has already taken off and first products can soon be met at disposal on the DECIDE info platform.

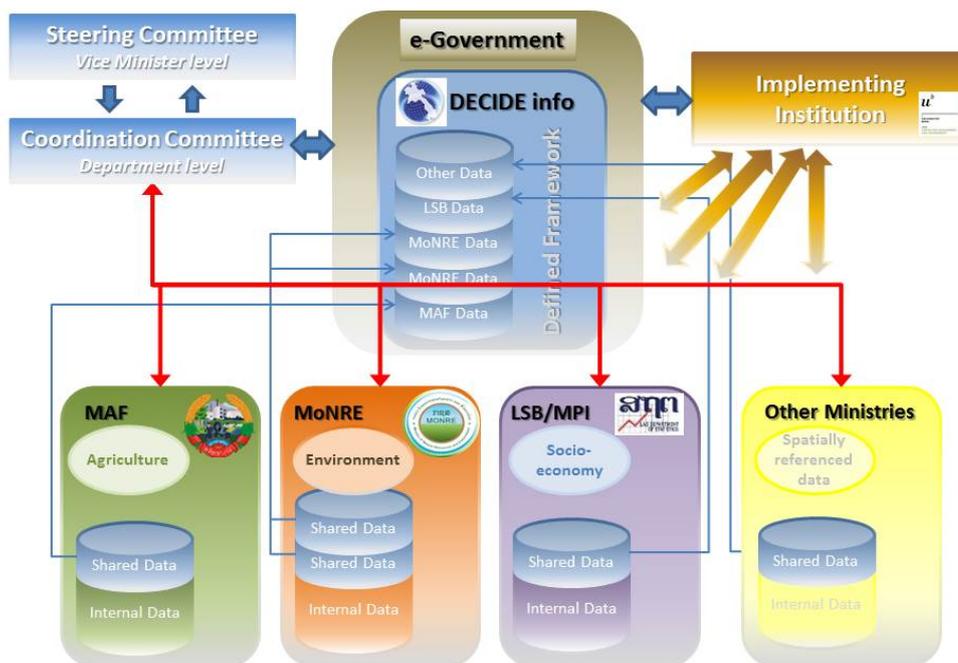
So far **no other data sharing practices or rules** have been established in Laos, which the Project could lean upon and utilise. Today scepticism and negative reactions to open data sharing seems to be very common among decision makers and data owners. As in other countries (e.g. Switzerland) such information sharing efforts are undertaken under the umbrella of **e-Government**, thereby relying on tested e-Government procedures and standards. Also if it seems maybe a little farfetched right now, it is proposed to integrate the DECIDE info Project into the e-Government Laos framework.

6.2 Possible Organisation of cross-sectoral Information Sharing

In order to analyse cross-sectoral information (component 4) and produce policy inputs (component 5), the technical and organisational infrastructure need to be addressed. Information is produced and updated on the **budgets of line Ministries** and therefore free data sharing is rather the exception than the rule. However, as the current Project phase demonstrates, a close collaboration of different Ministries to reach the **common goal** of enhancing evidence based decision making is possible. Today LSB, MAF and MoNRE show their willingness to share key data like population census, agricultural census or land concession data with other GoL institutions.

With the new Phase III the organisational setup for **information sharing** has to be defined. In order not to alienate one of the partners, an equal role for all of them is foreseen. To ensure high level support to the information sharing endeavour a steering committee consisting of the Vice-Ministers of the participating Ministries and the head of SDC's Coordination Office in Laos is envisaged.

Figure 16: Lao DECIDE info Information Sharing Organization





Within a defined framework like e-Government, the information of each Ministry earmarked for sharing on the DECIDE info platform is **brought together** for faster and more reliable information distribution over the DECIDE info website. However, the data ownership and user restrictions of the producing GoL institution are not changed. If this important information sharing **mechanisms** and its architecture cannot be implemented, the production of policy inputs and their success will be impaired.

6.3 Tentative SWOT Analysis of Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III

The analysis of strength and weaknesses, opportunities and threats for Phase III has obviously **many similarities** to the SWOT analysis for the implementation of Phase II. The focus of this SWOT lies more on the implementation than on the expected outcomes.

On the **weaknesses and threats** side the focus of the Project Phase III should be laid on establishing **solid working relations** with the partner institutions, but especially with LSB. Therefore the institutional set up (e.g. establishing a project organisation with a Lao counterpart) and the training and capacity building of LSB and other partners have to be treated and solved to every partner's satisfaction. The propagation and strengthening of e-Government in Laos as well as the promotion of DECIDE info are also a very important tasks.

On the other side the **strengths and opportunities** should lead to positive result in the expected Project outcomes in Phase III.

Figure 17: SWOT Analysis of the Lao DECIDE Info Project Phase III

Strengths:	Weaknesses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of new datasets enabling cross-sectoral information analysis • Strengthening collaboration between LSB, institutions from MAF, MoNRE and CDE • Successful integration of key knowledge in national planning and policy-making • Introduction of new standardised and structured data management practices • Extended training of GoL personnel in spatial data handling and analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build-up of a new Project organisation with Lao counterparts • Scarce personnel resources with technical know-how working in Laos • Slightly ambitious project design for the Lao context • E-Government framework in Laos still under development • Technical standards for web platform and data sharing architecture under development
Opportunities:	Threats:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing demand for spatially referenced socio-economic and other important data • Visualization of possible incoherencies in terms of spatial planning among different sectors • Clearly displayed motivation of key GoL institutions and partners to share their data • Declared support of the Project approach by high-level GoL officials • Increasing cross sectoral know-how exchange and transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited finances and/or short time frame foreseen by SDC to reach the project goals • Very limited interest for cross-sectoral Project approach by LSB • Increasing scepticism towards data sharing by key partners • Capabilities and technical limits of GoL staff at all levels to use the web platform

Source: ER interviews and own observations



7. Estimation of Finances for Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III

The estimation of the finances to be set aside for the Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III can only be **estimated** at this stage of Project planning. Many of the outputs and activities and their respective needs in terms of resources and funding are not clarified yet. However, a few indications can be given.

7.1. Foreseen Costs for some Activities for Phase III

It is very clearly coming out from the ER results and the Project strategy that the **organisational structure** should be **changed**. In Phase II the Project was relying mainly on expatriate expertise for the management and running of the activities, because on one hand there was insecurity on the continuation of the Project and on the other hand there was limited provision in the budgets even for a technical advisor (only a 60% position in most of Phase II).

As pointed out earlier there should be a distinct **DECIDE info Project organisation** with its own staff, partly from GoL and partly from CDE to enhance the sustainability of the Project approach. The costs for such a proposed organisation could reach as high as CHF 600'000 per year (equally divided amongst the components). It is the consultants opinion, that this costs are well justified.

7.2. Preliminary Budget for Phase III

To give an idea on the **preferences in implementation** a tentative budget is proposed in a minimal and a maximal version (Figure 17). The mentioned budgets per outcome already include the costs of the new proposed Project organisation.

Figure 18: Possible average yearly Budgets for the Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III

Outcomes and Budget	Minimal in CHF	Maximal in CHF
Outcome 1: Key GoL institutions have improved capacities to design and implement harmonised national data collection campaigns with a geographic reference to facilitate cross-sectoral integration	200'000	300'000
Outcome 2: Thematic data bases of key GoL institutions on national level have a spatial component and follow agreed upon standards to facilitate integration across sectors	150'000	300'000
Outcome 3: Key information from across different thematic databases is accessed through an information platform and used by GoL institutions and national and international development partners	120'000	250'000
Outcome 4: Planning processes of GoL institutions are improved by enhanced capacities for spatial integrated cross-sector analysis	130'000	250'000
Outcome 5: Development discourse and policy making processes at national level are nourished by cross-sectoral research results	300'000	400'000
Grand Total	900'000	1'500'000

Source: Project documents of DECIDE Info and own estimations

The estimated cost of the DECIDE info **Project organisation** (of ca. CHF 600'000) are included in the amounts shown in Figure 18, leaving either CHF 300'000 (minimal scenario) or CHF 900'000 (maximal scenario) for other project activities. It has to be taken into account while budgeting, that the support of the upcoming **Population and Housing Census** might well need funds in the range of CHF



500'- 700'000 based on first estimates. So the minimal budget scenario **will not allow** a lot of activities besides financing the Project organisation and the Census support.

8. Recommendations for Lao DECIDE info Project Phase III

In conclusion of the External Review of the Project a few **recommendations** are made concerning on one hand the collaboration between SDC and CDE and on the other hand some general points.

8.1 Recommendation for Project Handling between SDC and CDE

Several discussions during this ER mission (as well as the MTR mission) show that the **involvement** of the SDC representatives in Laos in the Project **could be enhanced**. It is not meant to be a critical assessment of the Project team or its activities and outputs so far, but as a **missed opportunity** to keep SDC up to date with planned and on-going activities. The consultants therefore suggest:

- **Regular quarterly meetings** between SDC and CDE to exchange information and, more importantly, to discuss politically interesting topics, policy issues and key elements to SDC's strategy in the region
- **Proactive and timely information** of SDC on upcoming events and activities regarding DECIDE info and other projects with CDE involvement
- **Adjustment of the contract** between CDE and SDC to reflect the needs for SDC for reporting and submission of financial statements

CDE, on the other hand, could be **reinforced** in their overall (from the consultants' perspective) **excellent work** and **resource intensive activities** in Laos by a more long term oriented allocation of project funds. The DECIDE info **history of Project phases** (e.g. prolongation or extension for only one year), for example, makes the planning of activities and especially the build-up and support of a GoL partner and a sustainable project organisation a **very difficult task**. The consultants therefore suggest:

- **Provision of a four year Phase** for Lao DECIDE info Project with sufficient funds to build up a GoL institution as a valid partner
- **Arrangement of funds and support** to allow a **joined Project organisation** consisting of GoL seconded and CDE staff defined in the Project mandate between SDC and CDE

As difficulty for both SDC and CDE the **steering of inputs** in funds, man power and other resources regarding the different outputs of a Project is not possible today, since the reporting **does not follow** up the different outcomes or components. It could greatly enhance the transparency, monitoring, controlling of the Project activities, as well as an **evaluation**. The consultants therefore suggest:

- **Finances, inputs of human and other resources** are from now on **budgeted and reported** according to outcomes (or project activities) defined in the Project Documents

8.2. General Recommendations

The institutional set up and the organisational arrangements of the Project so far seem sound in the Lao context, as they lead to measurable and well received results of excellent quality. However, the **sustainability** poses a certain risk to date. The consultants therefore suggest:

- **The Project organisation** has to bring together **innovative GoL officials** of the different Ministries ("early adapters of innovation") to promote the **acceptance** of the cross-sectoral data sharing and to create an **innovation friendly environment** for the Project



- A **Lao counterpart** to the CTA has to be selected/recruited and paid according to local experts standards of international organisations by CDE, preferably a well-trained and high level GoL official on a secondment from GoL should be chosen
- To promote the know how sharing and transfer between GoL institutions a **yearly competition** in the form of a workshop should be held to **honour best practices** in spatial information analysis and give visibility to the partner institutions
- Since the availability of GoL staff to be trained can be limited due to other commitments, the **time schedule** and the **scope of trainings** should to be **fixed early** with the annual work plan. At the same time some innovative incentives could be used to reduce a possible high turnover of GoL technical staff attached to the Project
- Because the products of the Project are not very well known so far, activities to strengthen and increase the **visibility of the products** should be continued and enhanced (as it is planned for the remaining time of Phase II)

The Project needs to explain the necessity to introduce structured, standardised and documented **data models** to its key partners. This is **not** an **easy undertaking** and has to be done in a step-by-step approach in the Lao context. To support the process the consultants suggest:

- In order to learn from experiences in other countries a workshop with **international speakers and resource persons** could be organised to promote the advantages of data models and share the experiences to get to a National Geodata Infrastructure in different places

On a more technical side the question of using **open source products** for the proposed data sharing architecture could be raised. Going into a new Phase and taking the software used in Laos into account (e.g. NGD uses commercial software like ArcGIS Server), the **technical architecture** has to be looked into again in detail and the pros and cons of open source versus commercial software in the Lao context and the respective use cases of commercial and open source products have to be defined. That does not mean that the existing work for the DECIDE info platform will be questioned, since the investment was quite high and it works well. However, the software needs e.g. for the planned centralised database or for the automated transfer of data between servers should be looked into. The consultants therefore suggest:

- In the light of the **cross-sectoral approach** and the **data sharing infrastructure a baseline paper** with pro and cons on the use of open source against commercial software and the respective use cases of the two has to be **developed** and **discussed** with key partners.

Luzern, 29.04.13



Annexes

Annex 1: Terms of Reference for the External Review

Contract no. 81017216 (Mandate type A) - Lao DECIDE INFO Project - External Review

1. Background

The Lao's People Democratic Republic places a high priority on reducing poverty and hunger. The country is committed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and to gradually exit from the LDC by the year 2020. Until recently, the main source of information on poverty in the country heavily relied on raw data produced by the Department of Statistic of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), which covers a wide range of topics related to household livelihood. Although the necessary baseline data often exists, it can rarely be used for evidence-based socio-economic situation analysis, decision-making and planning. The main reasons for this phenomenon comprise poor access to data, inadequate information derived from those data, and lacking dissemination across different administrative levels of Laos. With the aim of contributing to improve evidence-based, informed decision and policy making on socio-economic issues in Laos, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) supported the development of the Lao Poverty Mapping and Socio-economic Atlas project between 2007 and 2008.

The Socio-economic Atlas project helped to demonstrate the value of making detailed socio-economic information widely available, and thereby increased the interest and demand for access to such information. Challenges therefore remain in the field of disseminating and processing the wealth of information contained in the Atlas in additional formats that allow for flexible queries and individual analysis, and in formats that are adequate for remote access and use. Building upon the achievements of the Lao Poverty Mapping and Socio-Economic Atlas (Phase 1), SDC launched the "Lao Decide-INFO" project in 2009 (Phase 2) to contribute in filling this gap.

2. Introduction to the Lao Decide Info project

The Lao Decide-INFO project is implemented by the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern, in collaboration and under an agreement with the Lao Statistic Bureau-LSB (formally the Lao Department of Statistics - DoS) of the Ministry of Planning and Investment. This SDC's funded project covers the period from July 2009 until August 2013.

The overall Project Goal is that *"in Lao PDR policies and decisions are made utilizing the best available knowledge on socio-economic disparities in order to improve economic and social equity including gender and ethnicity dimensions"*. The Project Objective is *"to foster evidence based decision making by enhancing the adequate availability and accessibility of socio-economic information and knowledge"*.

To realize this objective the project has six interrelated components: 1) dissemination of the Socio-economic Atlas data at national and sub-national levels, 2) development of a coherent national spatial socio-economic database accessible online by a broad public, 3) strengthening Government capacities to process and analyze socio-economic data, 4) design of a scheme for remote access to socio-economic information, 5) introduction of spatial analysis for planning within the regular higher education system of Laos, and 6) contribution to informed decision-making process by the production of thematic analysis on key development issues.

The Lao Decide-INFO project phase was initially planned to be completed by March 2012. However, in order to take the opportunity of the availability of new information sources to broaden the analysis base covering additional thematic fields – such as the SDC-funded Lao Agriculture Census 2011 data and the National Land Concession Inventory, while the current data on the DECIDE info platform are predominantly of a socio-economic nature – SDC approved in July 2012 an extension of the current project phase with an additional budget covering the period up to August 2013. During this period, activities related to the preparation of a subsequent phase (Phase 3) are also expected to take place, including an External Review in 2013, testing of new approaches and initiations of new partnerships and collaborations, with the aim to support greater multi-sectorial data and information exchanges in Laos in the future.

The overall aim of the project extension is thereby to foster cross-sectoral information exchange and analytical use towards more integrated and evidence-based planning processes, and to extract and communicate key knowledge for better informed national planning and policy-making.



The following main concrete project results are expected to be produced under the original six project components (specified earlier) and corresponding outcomes with the additional budget:

- **Outcome 1:** National, Province and Districts Officers of the Ministry of Planning and Investment and other Governmental Agencies use the data and maps of the Socio-economic Atlas in their planning and decision-making.

Additional expected result: The user base of the Decide Info Web-Platform will be broadened and users are better informed about the possibilities and benefits offered by the platform.

- **Outcome 2:** A wider public uses evidence based socio-economic information for development related analysis and planning activities.

Additional expected result: A broad range of analysts and planners can better access national information available on Decide Info Web-Platform and are better able to make productive use of the information for planning and decision-making.

- **Outcome 3:** LSB (formally DoS) and other key national government agencies concerned with information development are able to manage spatial socio-economic data and to respond to information requests from a broader public.

Additional expected result: At least three new key national information bases, covering socio-economic development, agricultural transition and land investment (mainly FDI), and market integration aspects, are developed and prepared for cross-sectoral information integration and analysis.

- **Outcome 4:** Remote users across sectors have improved knowledge about and access to adequate socio-economic information through new communication channels.

Additional expected result: A broadened partner base for proactive information exchange and use is established, and new partners have an increased openness for data and information exchange among stakeholders in planning for coherent cross-sectoral and evidence-based planning, and an increased readiness to work towards an institutionalization of information exchange and cross-sectoral analysis for policy making is evident;

- **Outcome 5:** Spatial analysis methodology is integrated in the Lao research and education system.

Additional expected result: Staff of national analysis bodies have improved skills in development-relevant data and information analysis, and are able to analyse sector-specific national information.

- **Expected Outcome 6:** Development discourse and policy making processes at national level are nourished by evidence-based research based on the content of the Socio-economic Atlas and other key national databases.

Additional expected result: Key national development issues, including issues related to commercial pressure on land, agricultural commercialization and market integration, as well as poverty targeting and socio-economic development, are analyzed based on the developed information bases, and findings are communicated broadly and insights are fed targeted into the national policy discourse. The concerned ministries (Ministry of Planning & Investment MPI, Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry MAF) National Assembly have taken up the knowledge inputs and are guided by those insights in their planning and decision-making.

Significant results have been achieved during the present phase of the Lao Decide-INFO project. It has increased the availability and accessibility of the data from the Socio-Economic Atlas. In addition, the project has fostered an increased readiness and willingness among institutions in Lao PDR to actively make data and information publicly available.

In the project's lifetime so far, the Socio-Economic Atlas has been circulated widely in Laos; more than 200 government staff at national, province, and district levels have been trained and equipped with materials, enabling them to better use socio-economic data in analysis and planning. Furthermore, products and knowledge generated through the use of the Socio-economic Atlas have been integrated with the higher educational system in Lao PDR. A course on socio-economic spatial data has been held at the National University of Laos and relevant materials have been distributed. Finally, the biggest achievement of the project to date, the data that the atlas comprises has been made available online in a socio-economic spatial database, which is a pioneer in Lao PDR in its form. Detailed spatial and statistical data for more than 10,000 villages is now freely available online. To date, almost 700 users have registered on the site (www.decide.la).



3. Objectives of the External Review

The objectives of the External Review (ER) are as follows:

1. Assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the project in terms of achieving defined outcomes and results (OECD/DAC evaluation criteria);
2. Provide detailed recommendations and a draft logframe showing possible directions for the project continuation towards the institutionalization of cross-sectoral integrated planning and decision-making in the Lao PDR, in view of the planning for the next phase of the project.

3.1. Assessment Elements

In order to complete the assessment and formulate recommendations, the External Review (ER) team will review related project documents, interview key project stakeholders and conduct field visits. More detailed information on evaluation criteria can be found on the OECD-DAC website: www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation.

In relation to the above-mentioned aspects, the ER team will pay particular attention to the following project issues:

- a) Dissemination and utilization of the Socio-Economic Atlas: the outreach and the use of the data and maps of the Atlas by the national and local government staff for their planning and decision-making.
- b) Development of the national spatial Socio-Economic database “DECIDE Info Web-based platform”: the accessibility, availability, and the actual use of information to direct and indirect beneficiaries at national and local level (including women and ethnic groups) as a result of development of a platform containing the database and maps of the Socio-Economic Atlas.
- c) Improve remote access to socio-economic information: the appropriateness of innovative means of user specific visualization, querying and communication of the spatial national socio-economic information developed by the project team.
- d) Development discourse and policy-making processes at national level: the contribution to development knowledge and discourse, the usefulness of policy briefs for the development and policy dialogue, and assess how they support the national development agenda.

3.2. Recommendations and draft Logframe

In addition to above mentioned tasks, the ER team will make recommendations for:

- i. Realistic scenarios for institutionalization of cross-sectoral/cross-ministerial integrated information exchange, analysis and planning.
- ii. Changes that are needed in any of the following aspects to help the project achieve its overall objectives to improve evidence-based, cross-sectorally integrated decision and policy-making on development issues in Lao PDR: a) the project outcome and outputs, b) the strategy and implementing approach, and c) the areas of focus and priorities.
- iii. Key measures to tackle possible weaknesses or inconsistencies of the current management and implementation arrangements with clear recommendations on how to improve future management structure and partnership arrangements including the choice for core implementing partners and implementation arrangements at the central and local level.
- iv. Key lessons and issues to be considered by SDC and CDE during the design of future phase, subsequent projects and/or related projects and programmes that aims to improve evidence-based decision-making by enhancing the adequate availability and accessibility of socio-economic information and knowledge in Lao PDR.
- v. Specific recommendations for further improvement in addressing gender and ethnicity dimensions within the project intervention.
- vi. Concrete areas of focus and activities for a new phase, in the form of a draft Logframe.

4. Methodology

This External Review will be carried out by a Team of 2 persons composed of one international consultant and one national consultant. The international consultant is the team leader and is overall responsible to produce the deliverables. The External Review team will undertake document reviews, project stakeholder interviews, including beneficiaries, and report preparation and presentation.



The External Review Team is responsible for designing methodologies and selecting assessment techniques that will ensure fulfilling the purpose of these Terms of Reference (ToRs). The use of a survey questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and other participatory methods are recommended as information gathering tools. Particular attention will need to be paid to evaluating the level of commitment and capacity on the part of all project implementing partners to faithfully execute the project as designed and as adjusted through annual reviews and plans.

5. Deliverables and mission framework

The mandate for the External Review will cover the period between 19th March and 16th April 2013. The in-country work, which includes a maximum of 3 days/2 nights for field visits, will take place between 28th March and 12th April 2013.

Mission framework

Time allowed (for each consultant)	Specific tasks	Remarks
3 days	Preparation, documentation reading	Out of country
1 day	Inception report (2-3 pages)	Out of country
9 days	Evaluation work including field visits, briefing and debriefing with SDC	In Vientiane and Luang Prabang province
2 days	Report drafting	In Vientiane
1 day	Preparation of the findings workshop	In Vientiane
1 day	Participation and presentation in the findings workshop	In Vientiane
3 days	Redaction and finalization of ER report + redaction of a text of max. 1000 words for a post of SDC-blog	In Vientiane / or out of country
Total 20 days		

Timing of deliverables is as follows:

Monday 25 March 2013:	Inception report sent to SDC and CDE
Thursday 28 March 2013:	Briefing with SDC and CDE at SDC's Office in Vientiane
Monday 08 April 2013:	Draft evaluation report, including draft logframe
Wed 10 April 2013:	Debriefing / presentation workshop to SDC, CDE and key government partners (comments to be noted by consultants and integrated in the Final Review report)
Tuesday 16th April 2013:	Final External Review report (including logframe);text for the blog-post.

The Review Report will not exceed 15-20 pages of main text and must contain, excluding annexes:

- i. Executive Summary (according to the OECD/DAC criteria and summary);
- ii. Analysis of outcomes achieved, including effects of the project with regard to the reduction of inequalities between men and women, and between ethnicity;
- iii. Analysis of the main outputs and outreach of the project, analysis of the efficiency as well as changes of context during the project phase and possible implications;
- iv. Analysis of lessons learned and consequences; and
- v. Recommendations, including exit strategy and draft logframe.

The report should briefly, but clearly indicate the methods employed in gathering information and developing the assessments and recommendations. Annexes should include any forms, outlines, or formats used for information gathering. All documents shall be written in English language. Translation of the summary and recommendations into Lao language will be arranged by CDE.

6. Coordination and management arrangements

The Team Leader will be responsible for presenting the final report to SDC according to the agreed schedule. In Vientiane, the External Review team will report to the SDC Head of Governance



Programme. CDE will be responsible for preparing a draft of the mission program and for managing all preparations and arrangements once the program is approved by SDC and the Team Leader. These arrangements include accommodation, domestic transport (if required), etc. CDE will also be responsible for confirming all meetings and visits. A draft program will be submitted to SDC and the Team Leader at least 8 days prior to the start of the mission.

7. Available documents

- Project documents including project logframe and budget
- Interim Reports and Progress Reports
- Lao Decide-INFO Mid-term Evaluation report (2011)
- Project products: Socio-Economic Atlas, Poverty Mapping Analysis, Map-reading guide, training materials, website, Lao DECIDE INFO web-based platform, CDs, and etc.
- SDC Mekong Region Strategy 2007-2012
- SDC Mekong Region Strategy 2013-2017
- SDC Governance Domain factsheet
- PEA on Governance Trends in the Lao PDR (2012)
- Lao Agricultural Census 2010/11
- National Land Concession Inventory Analysis (2012)

8. Expertise required for the External Review Team

International team leader:

- 15 years of experience in the review of development programmes in information sector or in other related sectors.
- Substantive experience with the formulation of donor supported programmes and the management, monitoring and evaluation of multi-donor supported programmes
- Experience in South East Asia – experience in Lao PDR is considered as an asset.
- Experience with programmes with multiple levels of government (national, local e.g. province, district).
- Understanding of exchange mechanisms and obstacles in government systems of the developing world.
- Understanding of the value of cross-sectorial data and information exchange for integrated decision-making.
- Sound knowledge and experience in gender mainstreaming approach.

National consultant:

- 10 years of experience in the review of development programmes in information sector or in other related sectors.
- Substantive experience with the formulation of donor supported programmes and the management, monitoring and evaluation of multi-donor supported programmes.
- Good knowledge of the Lao Government structures and understanding of its planning and decision-making processes.
- Familiarity with national information systems for planning support.
- Experience with programmes with multiple levels of government (national, local e.g. province, district).
- Understanding of the value of cross-sectorial data and information exchange for integrated decision-making.
- Sound knowledge and experience in gender mainstreaming approach.
- Fluency in both written and spoken English. Strong oral and written communication skills - use of simple and clear language.



Annex 2: Persons visited for ER and Summary of interviews

Thursday 28. 03. 13		
1	Ms. Vesna Roch	SDC
2	Ms. Nitsa Vongphanakhone	SDC
Friday 29. 03. 13		
3	Dr. Andreas Heinimann	TABI
4	Mr. Chanthaviphone	MoNRE
5	Dr. Michael Epprecht	CDE
6	Dr. Cornelia Hett	CDE
Monday 01. 04. 13		
7	Mr. Choy	TABI LPB, NIRAS
8	Ms. Soudalath Keobualapha	PAFO agricultural section administration
9	Dr. Bounthan	DDG of PAFO
10	Mr. Phonedeth Sisaath	Head of Planning Section of LPB PAFO
11	Mr. Soubandith Sangaphone	PoNRE
12	Mr. Somnuck Phanthavong	Deputy head of information unit of PoNRE
13	Mr. Xayxana Xaykeyachongtua	Head of statistics
14	Mr. Houphan	Head of Agricultural Land Management Division, LPB DAFO
Tuesday 02. 04. 13		
15	Mr. Somphong	DG of LPB Provincial Industrial and Commerce
Wednesday 03. 04. 13		
16	Dr. Bounkeua	Deputy Director of NRE Information Center
17	Mr. Ekvinai	Head of Land Statistics Division
18	Mr. Stefan Sylla	TA for database and mapping division
19	Mr. Sounthaly	Deputy Head of Database and Mapping
20	Mr. Frank Siegmund	GIZ/MPI DoP
21	Mr. Okumura	PCAP III, MPI
22	Mr. Ingo Wiederhofer	WB
Thursday 04. 04. 13		
23	Mr. Singsavanh	EMSP, MoNRE
24	Mr. Peter Jensen	EMSP, MoNRE
25	Mr. Antti Inkinen	Finnish Embassy
Friday 05. 04. 13		
26	Dr. Alounydeh	Deputy Head of the Aid-Effectiveness Division, DIC, MPI
27	Mr. Andrew Scott	TA of AMP, DIC, MPI
28	Mr. Alounxay Onta	Deputy Director of Center for Agricultural Statistics, MAF
29	Ms. Phonesaly	Director of Social Statistics Department, LSB
30	Ms. Thirakha	Director of Economic Statistics Department, LSB
31	Ms. Soulaphan	Director of Database and Service Department, LSB
32	Mr. Phonkham	LSB technician
33	Mr. Phetsavanh	LSB technician
34	Mr. Valaxay Dalaloy	DDG of E-Government Center
Tuesday 09. 04. 13		
35	Mr. Gnägi	SDC
36	Mr. Janne	NGD, Finnmap



Annex 3: Summary of interviews

The consultants visited over 21 institutions from different agencies of GoL on National, Province and District level, International Government Organisations (IGO) (World Bank, GiZ) and NGOs. Different questions regarding the Project outputs were discussed with a total of 36 people (see Annex 3).

Institution and hierarchy	Main information use of DECIDE info platform	Main products needed	Limitation to usage of DECIDE info	Expectations on future data sharing	Institutional setup DECIDE info in future
MAF					
Central	- Integrated spatial/area based/watershed planning - Strategic Plan formulation	- DECIDE Web - Printed map - CD	- Analytical capacity	- Cross-sectorial data sharing	- LSB - ARD SWG
Provincial	- Provincial Strategic Development plan - Action plan - Prioritization focal area	- Printed map - CD	- Internet speed - Analytical capacity	- No willingness to share	- PAFO
District	- District Strategic Development plan - Prioritization focus activities	- CD - Printed map	- No internet access - Analytical capacity	- No willingness to share	- District Governor Office
MoNRE					
Central	- Strategic Plan formulation - Integrated Spatial Planning	- DECIDE web - Printed map - CD	- Internet speed - Analytical capacity	- Cross-sectorial data sharing	- LSB - NGD
Provincial	- Planning PIP project proposal - Action plan - Prioritization focal area	- Printed map - CD	- Internet speed - Analytical capacity	- No willingness to share	- PoNRE IC
District	<i>Not surveyed</i>				- DoNRE
MPI					
Central	- Strategic plan formulation - PIP/ODA project planning and monitoring	- DECIDE web - Printed map - CD	- Internet speed - Analytical capacity	- Cross-sectorial data sharing	- LSB
Provincial	<i>Not surveyed</i>				- Provincial Governor Office
District	<i>Not surveyed</i>				
LSB					
Central	- Poverty analysis - Socio- economic planning	- DECIDE web - CD - Printed map	- Internet speed - Analytical capacity	- Cross-sectorial data sharing	- LSB
Provincial	<i>Not surveyed</i>				
District	<i>Not surveyed</i>				
IGO					
Central	- Integrated Spatial Planning - Formulation project proposal - Prioritization focal area	- DECIDE web - Printed map - CD		- Cross-sectorial data sharing	- LSB - NGD
Provincial	<i>Not surveyed</i>				
District	<i>Not surveyed</i>				
NGO					
Central	- Formulation project proposal - Prioritization focal area	- DECIDE web - Printed map - CD		- Cross-sectorial data sharing	- LSB - NGD
Provincial	<i>Not surveyed</i>				
District	<i>Not surveyed</i>				
SDC					
Central	- Formulation project proposal - Prioritization focal area	- DECIDE web - Printed map - CD		- Cross-sectorial data sharing	- LSB - NGD



Annex 4: Draft Logframe for Phase III