



Further Development of Blood Services in Selected Areas of Northern Laos 2015 - 2017



INTERIM EVALUATION

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Report prepared by:
Dr. Marcus E. Quenzel and Dr. Hans J. Ebbing



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Acronyms

BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
BS	Blood Safety
BSU	Blood Storage Unit
CRC	Concentrated Red Cells
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ELISA	Enzyme-Linked Immuno Sorbent Assay
ER	Expected Results
FFP	Fresh Frozen Plasma
GRC	German Red Cross
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HQ	Headquarters
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
LRC	Lao Red Cross
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NBTC	National Blood Transfusion Centre
NS	National Society
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PC	Platelet Concentrate
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
PNS	Partner national society
QC	Quality control
QM	Quality Management
RC	Red Cross
SO	Specific Objective
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
ToR	Terms of Reference
TTI	Transfusion Transmissible Infections
VNRBD	Voluntary Non-Remunerated Blood Donation
WB	Whole Blood
YBDC	Youth Blood Donor Clubs



Executive Summary

Background

Lao People's Democratic Republic is a landlocked country in Southeast Asia with a population estimated at around 6.5 million in 2015. While the country is making good progress in terms of general and economic development health indicators show some of the lowest values for the region. The Lao Red Cross (LRC) was created as a National Society in 1955 and is recognised as the auxiliary humanitarian institution to the government. The LRC implements short and long-term relief and development projects and is mandated by decree to administer the national blood services. The National Blood Transfusion Centre (NBTC) is an individual organisation within the LRC and serves as the secretariat for the National Blood Transfusion Committee. It is charged with organising the national system and providing support to the regional, provincial and district levels. At the same time the NBTC is the central blood centre in the capital Vientiane and has the highest technical standard in country (e.g. separation of blood components).

The German Red Cross (GRC) has been a partner to the LRC and NBTC since 2006 with programmes focused mainly on blood services and donor recruitment. There have been multiple programmatic phases by now and the current project will end in 2017. The programmes are funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Project Overview

Project title	Further Development of Blood Services in Selected Areas of Northern Laos
Country and locations	Lao People's Democratic Republic. The project target area includes 5 provinces and 9 districts in Northern Laos: - Xayabury (Kenthao, Xienghone and Parklai districts), - Oudomxay (Houn district), - Bokeo (Pa Oudom and Ton Pheung districts), - Luang Namtha (Sing district) - Huaphanh (Xiengkhor and Xamtay Districts).
Scope and period of support	Duration of the current project is from 01 January 2015 through 31 December 2017 (3 years).
Partner	The local project partner is the Lao Red Cross (LRC) and the National Blood Transfusion Centre (NBTC).
Overall objective	Contribute to the improvement of the health sector in selected areas of Laos.
Specific objective	The blood programme in at least 5 selected provinces in Laos is improved and sustained in terms of coverage, quantity and quality according to national standards and WHO guidelines within 3 years.
Target groups and beneficiaries	Target group: around 1,291,000 people (= total population of 5 target provinces); out of them 409,000 inhabitants of targeted districts.
Funding	The project is to be financed completely from BMZ funds (790,760 Euro).



Requirement	The interim evaluation is a requirement for both BMZ and GRC
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Evaluation background

This evaluation of the project was commissioned by the GRC as part of the project cycle process and as a requirement stipulated in the proposal to the BMZ. The interim evaluation of the project aims to assess progress and provide guidance for current and future implementation. The evaluation covered the current project time-frame and project locations. The methodology used a mixed method approach to enable the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from different sources and groups of stakeholders. The field mission in Laos was carried out between May 4th and May 16th.

Findings

The evaluation included a full review of technical aspects of blood safety (BS) and quality management (QM). The technical aspects were evaluated using the Manual of the “Global Advisory Panel (GAP) on Corporate Governance and Risk Management of Blood Services in Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies” as a guidance document. Overall it can be said that the systems in place at this point of time are of a reasonable level. However, there are still efforts to be made, especially in terms of quality management and documentation. With improved blood safety in mind, improvements should also focus on testing systems for TTI. The plan to centralize the testing in the provincial blood centres is probably a good way forward. There might be even further centralisation of testing possible with the newly established system of three regional blood centres in the North (Luang Prabang), in central Laos (Vientiane) and in the south (Champasak). At the same time the regional centres would allow for some decentralisation of supervisory tasks currently only available at the NBTC.

In addition to the technical review, an analysis of the collected information using OECD DAC criteria was used to estimate the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the project. While a lot has been achieved in setting up the project and starting the activities, it is clear that the project, and the wider NBTC blood programming, is facing some challenges. There's a clear lack at the higher tiers of the project/NBTC structure to support the lower levels, especially the districts, in all technical and programmatic issues. However, it is equally understood that the country, and with it, the NBTC and the blood programme, has undergone an enormous change process in the recent years and is facing limitations and challenges inherent in such processes. With inadequate funding and therewith restricted staff and capacities, the blood programme is working at its limits. That said the programme in itself is not to be questioned. As the need for safe blood supply and therefore project support is clearly given, the identified issues around cost-effectiveness, implementation and impact can be considered as missed opportunities but do not define the project or the wider blood efforts as failures. It would be beneficial if the project and the larger blood programme could take some steps to improve the performance but this should be done in a planned process. Some of this can be addressed through the following recommendations.



Recommendations

The following recommendations can be drawn from the evaluation results for the remainder of the project time frame and for the larger blood programme in Laos. In addition, some of these recommendations were already stated during a 2014 evaluation and are still valid (marked with *). Others again have been put together by the NBTC (marked with #) during the final workshop at the end of the evaluation mission.

Technical aspects

- Implement the set of technical recommendations as detailed in **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**
- Improve blood safety aspects (VNRBD, centralised testing, cold chain, etc.) #
- Improve quality managements aspects ((Trainings, Monitor staff performance, EQAS and IQC (3 times/year), Internal Audits (3 times/year)) #

Programme Management related aspects

- The walking donor register should be a living document that reflects current donor availability and smaller hospitals require smaller walking donor registers. *
- Youth Donor Clubs should have a distinct identity and specific range of activities rather than a duplication of the 'walking donor' register. *
- District laboratory staff should work at the provincial blood centre regularly for an agreed number of days to help promote skills, understanding and quality. *
- Provincial blood centres should be given further instructions about their responsibilities for supporting district level blood services. *
- Improve general management aspects (recruitment of staff, chain of monitoring & support along the different tiers of the system, etc.) #
- Improve blood donor recruitment aspects (blood donor information, YBDC, use of mass media, etc.) #
- Improve partnerships aspects (Cooperation with sister RCs and other partners)

It will certainly not be possible to implement all listed recommendations at once and at the same time. Equally budget constraints and funding outlook are to be considered when planning the implementation. Therefore the most important recommendation from this evaluation is the request to the NBTC to carry out a detailed review of the listed recommendations and establish a detailed implementation plan with timeline and assigned responsibilities. This will allow to plan, implement and track the improvements through 2017 – and through 2018 to 2020 with the expected new project funding – accordingly.