

ONE VILLAGE TRANSFORMED (OVT) EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

Identifying the Most Strategic Province and Interventions Needed in Laos: Basis in Developing Project Proposals

1. BACKGROUND

World Concern has had a presence in Lao PDR since 1983 and operates under an agreed framework with the government of Lao PDR (GoL). World Concern Laos (WCL) started its initiatives on disaster relief in Luang Nam Tha Province to local flooding in 1983. This work paved the way for more substantial projects focusing on sustainable development. Since then, WCL has expanded its interventions from disaster response to holistic community development. These include microfinance, livelihoods, agriculture, education, health, nutrition, and capacity development interventions. The year 2020 was a turning point for WCL because of the significant reduction in budgets brought by the economic impact of COVID-19 (C-19). These brought tremendous effects to WCL, such as cutting 60% of its staff and halted One Village Transformed (OVT)¹ projects in Soukhoumma and Phonthong districts under the memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Provincial Health Office of the Ministry of Health.

Even faced with several challenges, WCL remains steadfast in its vision, mission, and direction in the next five years, looking at opportunities to respond to the needs of the most deprived, excluded and vulnerable Lao population in an ever-changing global situation. Thus, this exploratory research will help WCL determine and identify the most strategic provinces and interventions needed in Laos. The findings of this exploratory research will inform the development of the OVT project proposals and other grant-funded proposals in the future.

2. PURPOSE OF THE EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

In order to identify the most strategic location and describe the most appropriate interventions needed for the next OVT project proposals and other grant-funded proposals in the future, the conduct of this exploratory research is essential. Specifically, the following questions should be explored:

Specific Objectives:

1. Identify the provinces and districts with topmost development issues, emphasizing education, health, water sanitation and hygiene (WaSH), protection and food security.

Focused Questions:

a) Education:

- What provinces and districts have the lowest enrollment rate in early childhood development (ECD) for 3-4 years old?
- What are provinces and districts that have the lowest transition rates of primary to lower secondary?
- What are provinces and districts that have the lowest technical vocational education and training (TVET) participation rate among 15-24 years old?

¹ The OVT project is deeply rooted in the principles of holistic, inclusive, reproducing, empowering and sustaining community development.

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- What are the access and learning challenges and experiences in schools, households, and communities in the provinces and districts with the lowest ECD enrollment, primary to secondary transition and TVET participation rates?
 - Who are the most excluded groups of children and youth when accessing ECD, basic education and TVET? What are their general experiences?
 - Are there any local, cultural and religious practices affecting ECD, basic education and TVET for children and youth, both boys and girls?
- b) Health/ Maternal-Child Health and Nutrition:
- What provinces and districts have the highest prevalence of child stunting and underweight (0-2 years old)?
 - What provinces and districts have the highest prevalence of infant mortality, under-five mortality and maternal mortality?
 - What are the issues in access to health facilities? What are the general health issues of pregnant and lactating mothers, infants and young children? What are the prevalent health issues among these groups? Are there health services targeted for each group, is this enough and appropriate?
 - Are there any local, cultural and religious practices affecting the health of pregnant and lactating mothers and infants and young children?
- c) Water, Sanitation and Hygiene:
- What provinces and districts have the highest prevalence of open defecation among its proportion of the population?
 - What provinces and districts have the poorest situation of handwashing and latrine facilities in primary and secondary schools?
 - What are the issues in access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in the community, including households and schools?
 - Are there any local, cultural and religious practices affecting the sanitation and hygiene of boys, girls, women and men?
- d) Protection:
- What provinces and districts have had the highest incidence of trafficking in the last 5 years?
 - What are the protection systems and mechanisms available at the ministry, province, district and village levels? Are they functioning? What are their roles in referral and their challenges in handling protection cases or issues?
 - Who are the various actual and potential actors/ agencies in the village, district, province and ministry levels that can address protection issues? How do they address these issues?
 - What are the issues in access to protection services such as referral and reporting?
 - Are there any local, cultural and religious practices affecting reporting of protection cases or incidences?
- e) Food Security and Livelihoods:
- What provinces and districts have the highest poverty prevalence?
 - What provinces and districts have the highest unemployment rate?
 - What provinces and districts are usually affected by natural disasters?
 - What provinces and districts have the highest report of land degradation in the villages?

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- Are there any local, cultural and religious practices affecting access to livelihoods, employment and financial or savings institution for youth and adults, men and women?
2. Identify the safety and security situation of the provinces and districts with the topmost development issues.
Focus Questions:
 - a) What are the existing and previous (in the most recent 10 years) disasters, both natural and man-made and their risk and impact on the population, especially vulnerable communities, to include Unexploded Ordnance or UXO?
 - b) What are the general disaster risk resiliency and description of hazard vulnerabilities and disaster preparedness of the provinces and districts?
 - c) How many communities are geographically isolated? What are the modes of transportation and access considerations such as security clearances, coordination and local customs?
 3. Identify partners and allies to work within the provinces and districts with the topmost development issues.
Focus Questions:
 - a) Are there international and local non-government organizations and civil society organizations in the provinces and districts? What are their focus programs and plans related to education, maternal-child health and nutrition, water sanitation and hygiene (WaSH), protection and food security and livelihoods?
 - b) Are there local churches, and religious groups in the provinces and districts? What are their focus programs and plans related to education, maternal-child health and nutrition, water sanitation and hygiene (WaSH), protection and food security and livelihoods?
 - c) Are there private organizations or business entities in the provinces and districts? What are their focus programs and plans related to education, maternal-child health and nutrition, water sanitation and hygiene (WaSH), protection and food security and livelihoods?
 4. Identify the prevailing interventions needed in the provinces and districts with the topmost development issues focusing on education, maternal-child health and nutrition, water sanitation and hygiene (WaSH), protection and food security and livelihoods.

3. METHODOLOGIES

This study is anchored on the concept of exploratory research. Exploratory research is defined as flexible and unstructured research used to investigate a problem that is not clearly defined. It is conducted to understand the existing problem better but will not provide conclusive results. This starts with a general idea to identify issues, which can focus on future in-depth studies².

Specifically, the study team is recommended to conduct primary and secondary data gathering through key informant interviews, focused-group discussion, desk reviews and literary research, which shall engage the following necessary departments, agencies, networks, or organizations at the minimum;

- Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare
- Ministry of Education and Sports
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry

² <https://www.questionpro.com/blog/exploratory-research/>

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- Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
- Ministry of Home Affairs
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Lao Front for National Development
- Lao Women's Union
- Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union
- UN Agencies in Laos (UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, FAO, WHO)
- International Network of NGOs in Lao PDR
- Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance (SUN CSA) Laos
- Lao Non-Profit Association Network (LNN)
- Lao Civil Society Organization Network
- Churches: Lao Evangelical Church, Seventh-day Adventist, Apostolic Vicariate of Laos, Lao Samphan Methodist Church, etc.

4. SCOPE OF WORK

Under the overall guidance of the Country Program Representative of WCL and in conjunction with technical advisors in headquarters, the duties and responsibilities of the Consultant/s are as follows:

- Conduct the research using an agreed-upon tool and methodologies to collect data and information considering the three specific objectives mentioned in Section 2 of this TOR.
- Ensure necessary communication and coordination with the ministries, agencies, departments, networks, organizations and churches while adhering to WCL data protection and confidentiality, safeguarding policies and code of conduct.
- Identify and recommend other important government agencies or departments, INGOs, private sector, civil societies and churches as key informants.
- Hire, train, and manage study teams or local researchers or enumerators if necessary and ensure their preparedness, professionalism, and safety and security to gather primary data, such as interviews and FGDs.
- Conduct primary data collection in the targeted ministries, agencies, departments, networks, organizations and churches mentioned in section 3 of this TOR.
- Research, collect and analyze the most recent and up-to-date secondary data related to the research objectives mentioned in Section 2 of this TOR.
- Write, draft, consolidate, analyze, package and finalize the research report, 1-pager infographic leaflet and Powerpoint presentation both in Lao and English languages.
- Share the updates, analysis, findings and insights with WCL promptly and work on the suggestions, inputs and revisions if necessary.
- Protect personal identification access information, storing data under Lao data and information privacy and protection laws and WCL safeguarding policies.

5. DELIVERABLES

In accordance with the timetable, the consultant will produce:

- A draft inception report corresponds to the research objectives, scope of work, methodologies, and detailed work plan.
- A draft budget plan based on the detailed work plan with a breakdown of costs to complete the study.
- A comprehensive draft report in English, including a clear set of recommendations.

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- A final study report (submitted in Lao and English) with recommendations to include 5 results framework.
- 1-pager info-graphic leaflet of the study results lay-outed in Lao and English.
- Powerpoint presentation presenting the salient results of the study in Lao and English.

6. TIMEFRAME

The study team/ consultant will be required to undertake the exercise within 56 working days (at the maximum) after signing the agreement. The timetable is as follows:

Task	Number of working days needed	Start date	End date
Develop an inception report that corresponds to the research objectives, the scope of work, methodologies, and detailed work plan.	5	Oct 18	Oct 22
Develop a draft budget plan based on the detailed work plan with a breakdown of costs to complete the study.			
Start-up meeting with WCL.	1	Oct 25	Oct 25
Conduct secondary data gathering (desk research, literary reviews, etc.)	5	Oct 26	Nov 1
Conduct primary data collection in targeted key informants (KII, FGD)	20	Nov 2	Nov 29
Write, consolidate and draft report in English, including a clear set of recommendations.	6	Nov 29	Dec 7
Progress update meeting with WCL	1	Dec 8	Dec 8
Write the final study report (submitted in Lao and English) incorporating feedback from World Concern.	12	Dec 9	Dec 27
Develop 1-pager info-graphic leaflet of the study results lay-outed in Lao and English.	5	Dec 28	Jan 3
Develop a Powerpoint presentation presenting the salient results of the study in Lao and English.			
Final meeting with WCL	1	Jan 4	Jan 4

7. MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION

The consultancy will be overseen by WCL, with support from headquarters' technical advisors in Seattle, WA. WCL will oversee the process, provide approval of the implementation plan, be responsible for accountability and guidance throughout all execution phases, and approve all deliverables.

8. CONSULTANT'S QUALIFICATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

The consultant should be an expert in research, baseline assessment, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) methodologies, with knowledge of sustainable community development. S/he should possess solid work experience in Laos and or have worked for regional/international organizations, preferably on education, maternal-child health and nutrition, water sanitation and hygiene (WaSH), protection and food security and livelihoods. Preference will be given to individuals or firms with proven relevant experience in undertaking a task of similar magnitude and shall have the following qualifications and experience:

- An advanced degree in social science, social work, community development, or international development.
- At least 7 years of professional experience, preferably in Laos, working on education, maternal-child health and nutrition, water sanitation and hygiene (WaSH), protection and food security and livelihoods programs, with adequate experience in monitoring and evaluation.
- Strong professional experience in conducting baseline/impact assessments in Laos.
- Deep understanding of trends in development issues challenges in the context of Laos.
- Excellent knowledge and understanding of research methodologies and processes.
- Experience in gathering and systematizing large amounts of data
- Fluency in Laos and English is required.
- Strong computer skills and analytical skills with ability to write and review technical reports required.
- Proven work record in a multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary environment is necessary.
- Valid permits (for firms).

9. EXPLORATORY RESEARCH TEMPLATE

The study report (excluding appendices) shall not less be than 19 pages and not more than 27 pages with the following components at the minimum;

- I. INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND and OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY - 1- 2 pages
- II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – 1 page
- III. DEFINITION OF TERMS – 1 page
- IV. METHODOLOGY – 1 page
 - A. Data Collection Procedure
 - B. Data Processing and Analysis
- V. STUDY RESULTS and KEY FINDINGS – 10 to 15 pages
 - A. Provinces and Districts with the Topmost Development Challenges
 - i. Education
 - Early Childhood Education*
 - Basic Education*
 - TVET*
 - ii. Maternal-Child Health and Nutrition
 - Child Malnutrition*
 - Infant and Maternal Mortality*
 - iii. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)
 - WASH in the Communities*
 - WASH in Schools*

- iv. Protection
 - Unsafe Migration and Trafficking Referral Mechanisms*
- v. Food Security and Livelihoods:
 - Poverty and Unemployment*
 - Agricultural Resilience*
- B. Safety and Security Situation
 - i. Natural Disasters:
 - ii. Man-made Disasters and UXO.
 - iii. Accessibility
- C. List of Potential Partners and Allies
 - i. International NGOs
 - ii. Local NGOs and CSOs
 - iii. Private Sector
 - iv. Church
- VI. RECOMMENDATIONS – 4 - 6 pages
 - A. Topmost Provinces and Districts to Focus On
 - B. Prevailing Interventions Needed
 - C. Suggested Results Framework
 - i. Education
 - ii. Maternal-Child Health and Nutrition
 - iii. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)
 - iv. Protection
 - v. Food Security and Livelihoods
- VII. REFERENCES – 1 page
- VIII. APPENDICES

10. EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

The expression of interest must include the following:

- Letter of Intent
- Updated CV of the applicant/consultant/ team leader
- Company/business profile (for consulting groups)
- Technical Proposal outlining the proposed budget and methodologies of the study.
- Sample of research works on the subject of interest

Deadline for submission is on 17 October 2021. Proposals should be addressed to Mr. Jude Ryan B. Seares, Country Program Representative and emailed to saythalat@worldconcern.org, copy joshuap@worldconcern.org and juderyans@worldconcern.org. The selected consultant/firm will be hired using a standard consulting agreement which complies with World Concern Laos policies and standards.