

## Integrated Rural Development in Poverty Regions of Laos (NU-IRDP)

### Programme Development

#### 1. Content and Goal

The Northern Uplands Development Programme (NUDP) is a programmatic approach of the Government of Laos to promote rural development in some of the remote, mountainous, and poor areas of Laos. The NU-IRDP is embedded in this overall programmatic approach, basing its contribution on the comprehensive development concept developed by concerned Ministries and interested Development Partners (donors). The NUDP intends to coordinate and harmonize a wide range of development interventions aimed at promoting improved agriculture practices, reducing poverty and improving livelihoods and opportunities. It also intends to provide the institutional framework for improved inter-ministerial coordination as well as donors' alignment. The NU-IRDP – as the German contribution to the NUDP - is intended to strengthen required support mechanisms such as systematic and effective local development and land use planning and improvement of development management capacities. The ultimate goal of the Government of Laos is to strengthen its own governance and development capacities in such a way that it reduces its reliance on external aid and that its management capacities for remaining financial assistance would allow for budget support.

#### 2. Approach, method, scale

The NU-IRDP is a programme in itself, designed along the lines of the modality of Technical Cooperation, which basically supports joint efforts for Lao capacity development through advisory services and some operational funds and investments, in addition to the Government of Laos' own inputs. Joint assessments of needs, agreements regarding planning, training, implementation and evaluation activities, the conceptual and organizational integration into the overall NUDP, and improved management capacities stand at the centre of the NU-IRDP's Capacity Development approach.

While coordinating with the Lead-Ministry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and also providing some services in the field of Food Security, the NU-IRDP operationally and conceptually supports the issues Land Management, i.e. Land Use Planning and Land Registration (MAF and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE)) and Local Governance and Development Planning (National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (NCRDPE) and Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI)). Managerially the NU-IRDP cooperates with the NUDP National Programme Coordination Office (NPCO) at the national level, and associated consultants who implement agricultural development activities in the areas in which the NUDP operates.

Implementation responsibilities are increasingly shared with the partner institutions' staff and local planning and implementation capacities are developed through the training of activity/-project planning as well as finance administration and performance evaluations. While developing technical subject matter and management capacities the responsible handling of

finances provided through financing contracts and the accounting for the use of funds is increasingly gaining in importance.

Particularly the joint observation and analysis of programme planning procedures, financing mechanisms, staff capabilities, communication flows and decision making, as well as attitudes of ownership and accountability aim at strengthening the required capacities and individual capabilities over time.

### **3. Impacts**

To design and run an integrated rural development programme, and to manage a larger number of stakeholders – ministries, institutional levels, various target groups, a number of donors, different consultants – as well as the resource flows, is an extremely challenging task. In this early stage of programme development impacts are still diffuse:

- Increasing awareness of the complexity of the task and the institutional arrangements, i.e. the challenge of a Programme Based Approach.
- Improved understanding of different levels of programmatic institutional integration, i.e. the multiple-stakeholder approach.
- Better focussed and prioritized technical interventions are under way, based on a growing understanding of social and cultural as well as economic and environmental systems, and lead to a better understanding of prerequisite “key-interventions” with an effective leverage.
- Further developed concept and understanding of a Programme Based Approach, i.e. the significance of different coordinated inputs and modalities, the importance of a comprehensive strategic concept and of a policy orientation for guidance.
- An enhanced understanding of the implications of operating in remote areas in terms of logistics, communications and cost.
- Increasing evidence of the key-need for a systematic management of data, documents and knowledge in terms of an M&E-system, a management information system (MIS) and an evaluation and research approach, and a continuous self-improvement mechanism through “lessons learnt workshops, etc.
- Clearer understanding of the prerequisites for budget support, i.e. the required legal and regulatory frame conditions, the individual and institutional capacities as well as the political preconditions. It may well be that other stakeholders and partners observe other impacts and assess different impacts differently. We love to share their assessments.