

Terms of Reference

Project Evaluation

**Final External Evaluation of
the Poverty Reduction Fund III
(PRFIII 2017-2021)**

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Terms and Abbreviations

CD	Community Development
CDD	Community Driven Development
CFA	Community Force Account
CMS	Community Managed Sub-Projects
DRM	Disaster Risks Management
DSEDP	District Social Economic Development Plan
ESF	Environment Safeguard Framework
FRM	Feedback and Resolution Mechanism
GESI	Gender Equity and Social Inclusion
GOL	Government of Lao PDR
IEC	Information, Education, Communication
KDPs	Kum Ban Development Plans
LN	Livelihood and Nutrition
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MIS	Management information system
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGPES	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy
NT2	Nam Theun 2 Hydro electricity
PDO	Project Development Objective
PRF	Poverty Reduction Fund
PRFI	Poverty Reduction Fund Project I (2003 – 2011)
PRFII	Poverty Reduction Fund Project II (2011 – 2016)
PRFIII	Poverty Reduction Fund Project III (2016 – 2020)
PRFIII AF	Poverty Reduction Fund Project III Additional Financing (2019 – 2024)
POM	Project Operational Manual
PMT	Project Management Team
RMG	Road Maintenance Group
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SHGs	Self Help Groups
#SP	Number of sub-projects
VDP	Village Development Plan
VIT	Village Implementation Team
WB	World Bank

1. Introduction

This document sets out the requirements relating to project evaluation mandate for, the Poverty Reduction Fund III.

This Terms of Reference (ToR) describe the purpose, context, objectives (including guiding indicative evaluation questions), and scope of the evaluation. They further describe the evaluation process and the expected deliverables.

2. Background information and context of the evaluation

The Lao PDR has made significant progress in reducing poverty and increasing access to services over the past 20 years. Poverty has declined steadily from 46% in 1993 to 28.8% in 2012/13 and 18.3% in 2018/9. However, it remains one of the poorest countries in the region with an estimated per capita income of USD 1,840 in 2019. The impressive poverty reduction and welfare improvements at the national level, however, mask significant differences between regions and among socio-economic groups. Poverty stands at 28.6% in rural areas compared to 10% in urban areas. Access to services and markets remains poor in rural areas, approximately 12.6% of rural villages are at least two-hours on foot from the nearest health dispensary (10 km distance). Ethnic groups¹ tend to be significantly poorer than the majority Lao-Tai population². Inequality is rising between 2013 and 2019, the Gini coefficient rose from 38.5% to 56.1%, due to widening consumption gaps within regions³. According to the UN review in 2015, Lao PDR did not meet most of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) criteria to progress from its LDC-state, pushing back the earliest possible graduation date to 2024. At the 2018 triennial review of the list of LDCs, the Lao PDR met two of the three criteria for LDC graduation - Gross National Income (GNI) per capita and the Human Assets Index (HAI), thus becoming eligible for LDC graduation by 2024. However, the Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI), which measures resilience to shocks and stability, is still to be met.

Since 2003, the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) is the key initiative of the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) established by a Prime Ministerial Decree (073/PM) in 2002 to eradicate mass poverty, in line with the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) aiming to lift the country out from the list of Least Developed Country by 2020. PRF is designed with the main goal of improving access to and utilization of key public services, by building critical social and economic infrastructure at the village level within the country's poorest communities. Between 2003 and 2020, the PRF has improved access to basic services for more than 1.3 million people (70% from ethnic groups; 50% women) in rural areas through implementing more than 5,500 community infrastructure projects in more than 2,500 villages in the poor and poorest 56 districts of 12 provinces of Lao PDR.

The Impact Evaluation of the 2nd phase of PRF (PRF II), conducted end of 2015, highlighted that the PRF II has significantly improved villager's access to services where sub-projects were implemented in or near villages, especially for access to water, education and village roads. For instance, water sub-projects have increased access to protected water sources,

¹ Ethnic (minority) groups under PRF as well as other World Bank-financed projects in Laos refer to those who are defined as Indigenous People by the World Bank policy (OP/BP 4.10). These are ethnic groups who are mapped to three out of four ethno-linguistic families, namely Mon-Khmer, Hmong Iewmien and Chino-Tibet.

² About 40% of Mon Khmer and Hmong ethnic groups are poor, compared to 15% of Lao-Tai people, and ethnic groups account for about two thirds of people without formal education.

³ Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2018-2019 (LECS 6), MPI, 2020.

and road sub-projects have reduced the time to travel to the nearest village in both the rainy and dry seasons. The PRF II has also created the perception of greater voice for communities in decision-making; in particular, their inputs have increased influence on village affairs and decision-making.

The 3rd phase of PRF (PRFIII) has been operational in 43 poor districts of 10 provinces from January 2017 and shall be closed in June 2021. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) execute the project through a team of multi-disciplinary specialists from the central to district levels. PRFIII is co-financed by the Government of Lao PDR (GoL), the World Bank, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

In December 2019, the third batch of The Lao Government co-financing for PRFIII (LAK 13 billion) was approved by the National Assembly to fund the implementation of remaining subprojects in 23 districts which were pre-identified through participatory village planning process. In order to ensure 1) successful completion of these government-funded sub-projects and 2) implement additional PRF activities and sub-projects using the approximately USD 5.4 million saved from SDC contribution to PRF III, the World Bank, SDC and PRF agreed in 2019 to extend the PRF III operational phase from June to December 2020 (administrative closure in June 2021) in six target provinces out of 10. The SDC funds will also cover the operations costs for the government-funded sub-projects.

At the same time a PRFIII Additional Financing (PRFIII AF) was secured by the World Bank in amount US\$ 22.5 million. This additional financing will scale up livelihood and nutrition initiatives into in the four other PRF priority provinces, in 12 districts, where child stunting incidence is found to be high. PRFIII AF was effective in February 2020 and expected to be closed in October 2024.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown between April to June 2020, the PRF has experienced delays in project implementation in the 6 provinces. Therefore, SDC approved a last 6-month extension of the current phase of PRF until December 2021, to allow the realization of the remaining sub-projects/infrastructures and the development and smooth implementation of a sustainable exit strategy.

The PRF III consists of four components, as described below:

- Component 1 – Community Development Sub-Grants designed to support bottom up local development planning and implementation of community driven sub-projects for social development through community sub-grants.
- Component 2 – Local and Community Development Capacity-Building and Learning to support the capacity development of villagers and local government officials to plan and manage local development processes in partnership.
- Component 3 – Project Management which is to finance the costs of implementing PRF III activities, including remuneration of national, provincial and district PRF staff; associated equipment and operating costs; accounting, procurement, financial management, internal controls, auditing, and other specialized areas.
- Component 4 – Nutrition Enhancing Livelihood Development pilot. This component supports the strengthening of the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in 165 villages in 2 pilot provinces (Houaphan and Savannakhet) through the provision of seed funds to: (i) start or further develop eligible pro-nutrition livelihood activities such as the production of small livestock mostly for own consumption; (ii) increase knowledge in livelihood activities including financial literacy and production cycles, and (iii) monitor and evaluate project activities.

In addition to the Impact Evaluation of 2015, **key studies and assessments** on the PRF II and PRF III have been carried out during 2012-2019, which are the following:

PRF II (2012-2016)

- Longitudinal Community Beneficiary Assessment in 2013
- Capacity Building Assessment project year 2012-2013
- PRF's Technical and Cost Effectiveness Study in 2015
- Assessment of Social Inclusion for PRFII
- Technical, Cost Effectiveness and Sustainability Audit in 2016
- PRFII Implementation Completion Report in 2016
- PRFII Impact Evaluation (Baseline and Final Impact Evaluations) 2015

PRF III (2017-2020)

- Technical, Cost Effectiveness and Sustainability Audit in 2018
- Road Maintenance Groups (RMGs) Impact Evaluation 2019
- Community Force Account (CFA) Impact Evaluation 2019
- The Mid-Term Review Mission report 2018

For PRFIII AF (2020-2024), an assessment will be conducted as part of Project Completion Report (PCR) mission by the World Bank at the end of the project. This Project Evaluation is expected to provide useful information and lessons learned from PRFIII implementation for strengthening and monitoring the PRFIII AF.

3. Objective, scope and focus of the evaluation

3.1. Evaluation object

The evaluation object consists of the “Poverty Reduction Fund III” project.

3.2. Purpose and objectives

The main purposes of this **Final External Evaluation** (FEE) are both (institutional) learning and accountability.

The objective of this Final External Evaluation is to evaluate PRFIII's results and achievements, based on the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact according to OECD/DAC criteria (www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation), and draw the main lessons learned. The evaluation should bring to light the main factors having contributed to success or failure, and assess the sustainability potential of results and impacts beyond the project duration.

3.3. Scope

The breadth and depth of the evaluation will be informed by the indicative evaluation questions that the evaluation seeks to answer (see chapter below). The evaluation should build on existing studies and assessments and further investigate developments occurred during the PRF III implementation period from January 2017 to March 2021 (including the period extension financed by SDC but excluding the interventions financed under the PRF III Additional Financing). The geographical scope include the province of Luang Namtha, Luang Prabang, Oudomxay, Phongsaly, Xieng Khuang, Huaphanh, Savannakhet, Saravan, Sekong and Attapeu. The Evaluation team field mission shall take place in 4 provinces to be identified during the preparation of the Inception report.

3.4. Indicative evaluation questions / key focus area

During the inception phase, the evaluator(s), in consultation with the PRF, SDC and World Bank, should further refine and prioritise the questions that are structured according to the OECD DAC-Criteria. The bidder is also expected to consider these questions for the technical bid.

Relevance	<p>The extent to which the PRFIII project is aligned with the priorities and policies of the Lao Government, and responds to the needs of end beneficiaries. The following questions will be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does project objectives respond to the needs and priorities of the target communities, especially women and the ethnic groups in the 10 provinces? • Do the core design elements of the project (such as structure of the project components, project modality and approaches) adequately reflect the needs and priorities of the target communities, especially women and the ethnic groups? • Has the project been pro-actively addressing emerging demands and opportunities during the project implementation, adapting its objectives and approach to respond to changes in the country context and stakeholder landscape, including changing national priorities, institutional structures, legislative and policy updates?
Coherence	<p>The extent to which PRFIII project is compatible with other interventions promoting rural development/poverty reduction and citizen participation in the selected provinces of Lao PDR.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal and external coherence: the extent to which the PRFIII project is compatible with other interventions of the Lao Government and development partners (including WB and SDC) in the same provinces or districts and thematic field (consistency, complementarity and synergies).
Effectiveness	<p>The extent to which the PRFIII achieved its objectives, and the results, including any variations in results across groups.</p> <p>The following questions will be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are the projects' main objectives (Intermediary results and Project Development Objectives) achieved? • What are the major factors which have influenced the achievement of the objectives? • To what extent has the project achieved its intended results related to transversal themes such as social inclusion, gender equality and (ethnicity) inclusion, Disaster Risk Management, and community participation?
Efficiency	<p>The extent to which PRFIII delivers, results in an economic and timely way inputs. The following questions will be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To which extend the project has delivered the results (outputs, outcomes) cost-effectively, including specific instruments introduced under PRFIII, such as the Community Force Account (CFA) approach? • To which extend the project has delivered the results (outputs, outcome) in a timely manner (within the intended timeframe or reasonably adjusted timeframe)? • How the management, monitoring and steering mechanisms has supported efficient implementation?

Impact	<p>The extent to which the PRF has generated significant positive or negative, intended or unintended 'higher-level effects' as defined in the design document of the project. The following questions will be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent has the project contributed to poverty reduction in the target districts/provinces? • How have the lives of the beneficiaries and competence of communities and local authorities changed as a result of PRF III support? • How has the project contribution to improve access to public services and infrastructure (e.g. health services, water supply, electricity, education) affected each household (time saving; health impacts, student's attendance)? • How have these changes differed among men, women and children, the poorest and less poor? • Have new or improved roads facilitated access to other economic and social infrastructure like markets, schools, clinics, agricultural areas? • Have the facilities influenced how schools are used for additional purposes such as community meeting centers or emergency shelters? • To which extent did the project have an influence on national policies, for instance on poverty reduction and decentralization (e.g. Sam Sang,) as well as five years (socio-economic development) plans at national and provincial levels?
Sustainability	<p>The extent to which the benefits and modality (CDD approach) of the PRF are likely to continue and sustain after the external/donor funding has phased out. The following questions will be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal: are the existing relevant national policy (e.g. Decentralization/Sam Sang, MOF's guideline for budget implementation) in place supporting and providing a conducive environment for continuation and up scaling PRF approaches/modality. In other words, are PRF approaches/modality in line with and adopted by the national policy? • Institutional and Social: who/which ministry will take over, sustain and scale up the PRF initiatives. If MAF (e.g. through its DRDC) would, do they have sufficient capacity and mechanism in place to deliver and coordinate the PRF/RD program with other line ministries/sectors since PRF/RD program involves multi-sectoral investments. Are the local community and their organizations (CBOs) sufficiently capable and confident to take control and undertake development activities on their own or with minimal external support? • Technical: are PRF approaches/modality adoptable and implementable for the government agencies especially at the local level and for the local community (CBOs)? Is technical quality of sub-projects implemented by the local community (e.g. through CFA) acceptable and durable particularly under the circumstance of more frequently happening natural disaster • Financial: would the local community have financial resources to continue their development activities without external (GoL and international financiers)' support? If not, would the GoL have enough funds to continue financing CDD activities without financiers' support? Are there any other potential sources of funds (e.g. other development partners, private sector, Nam Theun 2 Hydropower revenue).

4. Evaluation process and methods

4.1. Evaluation methodology

In order to achieve the above objectives, the evaluator(s) will:

- review related project documents (including annual reports) and previous assessments,
- use available projects and country data/reports (PRF has a well-developed M&E systems, which monitor project's projects development objectives' and intermediate results' indicators on a yearly basis)
- and complement with focus group discussions and interviews, with key project stakeholders, and some data collection in selected provinces/districts

The evaluators will develop a detailed methodology based on the OECD criteria/rating including the indicative evaluation questions (above). The methodology should allow to generate data disaggregated by gender and ethnicity. The detailed methodology will be developed in the frame of the inception report.

4.2. Roles and responsibilities of the evaluator(s)

The evaluation will be conducted by a team composed of one International Team Leader, accompanied by a team of local experts/consultants. The overall responsibility will lie with the Team Leader. The International Team leader will have a contract with the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) and in the capacity of team leader, will sub-contract the local consultant(s). The International Team Leader will report to the PRF, SDC and the World Bank office, in Vientiane Capital.

The primary contact persons for the Evaluation Team is the PRF Executive Director/Deputy Director.

Support the mission coordination: PRF Deputy Director.

Other logistics: PRF Head Office.

An Evaluation Lead Group (ELG), which consists of PRF Management Team (PMT) which includes the PRF Director, and representatives from SDC and World Bank, will be following closely the process and be responsible to review and accept the draft and final inception and evaluation reports.

4.3. Evaluation process and timeframe

The following work plan provides suggested dates, responsibilities and resources needed for the various activities of the evaluation process. This work plan will eventually be adapted by the Evaluation Lead Group during the inception phase.

Activity	Date	Responsibilities
Kick-off meeting with evaluation team and Evaluation Lead Group.	20 April 2021	PRF; Consultancy firm
Interviews with stakeholders, partners, desk study	25 – 25 April 2021	Consultancy Firm
Preparation of the Inception Report: evaluation objectives and questions, evaluation design, methodology	25 – 25 April 2021	Consultancy Firm
Draft Inception Report	29 April 2021	Consultancy Firm
Feedback on the Inception Report by the ELG, PRF Head Office	2 May 2021	Evaluation Lead Group
Finalisation of the Inception Report (incorporation of comments)	5-6 May 2021	Consultancy Firm
Final Inception Report	6 May 2021	Consultancy Firm
Logistical and administrative preparation for data collection, evaluation workshops, field visits, etc.	7-9 May 2021	Consultancy Firm; PRF
Field mission in selected 4 provinces, with data collection, interviews, evaluation workshops, etc.	May and June	Consultancy Firm

Debriefing at PRF Head Office, Vientiane Capital	Beginning June 2021	Consultancy Firm
Data analysis and preparation of Draft Evaluation Report	May and June	Consultancy Firm
Draft Evaluation Report	26 June 2021	Consultancy Firm
Debriefing/presentation at PRF Head Office, Vientiane Capital with the Evaluation Lead Group	07 July 2021	Consultancy Firm
Feedback on the Draft Evaluation Report by the Evaluation Lead Group.	12 July 2021	Evaluation Lead Group
Final Evaluation Report	17 July 2021	Consultancy Firm
PRF Management Response	24 July 2021	Evaluation Lead Group
Dissemination of the Final Evaluation Report : to the PRF Board, and all concerned departments, including the 10 provinces and districts target by PRF.	End of July 2021	PRF Executive Director

Timeframe to be discussed with consultant(s), but the work will be undertaken over a timeline of approximately four months.

5. Deliverables

The following deliverables are expected to be submitted by the evaluator(s):

- Inception Report
- Draft Evaluation Report
- Final Evaluation Report, and a power point presentation presenting the most important findings and lessons learned
- The Assessment Grid for project evaluation for the DAC Criteria (Annex X) must be completed by the evaluator(s) and attached to the final evaluation report
- List of interviewed persons; minutes of workshops; slides used for debriefing; videos; leaflets; case studies; etc.
- Analysis of the intervention logic (Results Framework): extent to which objectives have been achieved

The report should be in English language, logically structured, contain evidence-based findings, conclusions, lessons and recommendations and their correlations. All information that is not relevant to the overall analysis can be included in the annexes. The report should respond in detail to the evaluation questions and key focus areas.

The evaluation report should not exceed 20 pages, including an executive summary (2-3 pages), but excluding the cover page, table of contents, acronyms and acknowledgments and annexes. The report should contain clear references to important information/data available in the annexes.

Proposed structure of the evaluation report:

Cover page

Table of contents

Acronyms and abbreviations

Acknowledgments

- Executive summary
- Introduction
- Description of the [project/programme]
- Findings, incl. results
- Conclusions
- Recommendations and lessons learnt

Annexes (compulsory)

- Terms of reference
- Filled out Assessment Grid for project evaluation for the DAC Criteria
- Complete list of stakeholders and others consulted and interviewed
- Detailed description of the review process, including data sources and possible methodological weaknesses and limitations
- Analysis of the intervention logic (Results framework): extent to which objectives have been achieved
- Other deliverables that were requested in the ToR

6. Reference Documents

After signing the contract the PRF Executive Director will share the following documents with the evaluator(s) for the evaluator's first desk review:

- PRFIII Project Appraisal Document (PAD)
- PRFIII Operational Manuals
- PRFIII Annual and semi-Annual reports
- PRF III Financial reports
- PRF III Mid-Term Review Report
- PRFII Implementation Completion Report in 2016
- PRFII Impact Evaluation (Baseline and Final Impact Evaluations) 2015
- Technical, Cost Effectiveness and Sustainability Audit in 2018
- Road Maintenance Groups (RMGs) Impact Evaluation 2019
- Community Force Account (CFA) Impact Evaluation 2019
- The Mid-Term Review Mission report 2018
- Decree No. 73/PM when PRF was established in May 2002
- Decree No. 10/PM, Revised version of PRF's Decree (10 January 2010)
- Decree No. 99/PM, transitioned PRF to MAF (March 2017)
- Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2018-2019, LECS 6, 2020

7. Competency profile of the evaluator(s)

The evaluator(s) is/are expected to bring along the following evaluation and thematic expertise and experience.

Essential qualities are:

- Professional experience and skills in robust evaluation methodologies and in evaluating strategies, projects, programmes and institutional processes/change.
- Confirmed experience in the management of an evaluation team comparable in size, composition and scope.
- Confirmed experience in evaluating a similar development intervention.
- Knowledge of the regional, local, social, cultural, political context.
- Ability to apply the [DAC/OECD](https://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/qualitystandards.pdf)⁴ and [SEVAL](https://www.seval.ch/app/uploads/2018/01/SEVAL-Standards-2016_d.pdf)⁵ evaluation standards
- Strong analytical and editorial skills, ability to synthesise and write intelligibly for different audiences.
- Substantial working experience in the Lao PDR or in the Mekong Region.
- Experience in multilateral and bilateral development cooperation and proven knowledge of the international multilateral system.

⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/qualitystandards.pdf>

⁵ https://www.seval.ch/app/uploads/2018/01/SEVAL-Standards-2016_d.pdf

- Competency with gender, governance and 'leave no one behind (LNOB)' issues (application of gender and governance sensitive evaluation methodologies).
- Proficient ability to work and communicate (speaking, writing and presenting) in English language; Ability to work and communicate in Lao language.

Desired qualities are:

- Ability to steer complex processes involving a multiplicity of stakeholders through participatory methods.
- Knowledge of the World Bank and of the Swiss development cooperation system
- Social competence including intercultural sensitivity and ability to work with a range of stakeholders.
- Ability to work in ethnic languages of Lao PDR

8. Reporting

The evaluator(s) will report to the PRF Executive Director and/or PRF Deputy Director, in Vientiane Capital for the entire duration of the assignment. Operational support will be provided by the PRF Head offices and the PRF Head of Units (PRF PMT) in Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR.

9. Application procedure

The procurement procedure for selection shall comply with the Law on Public Procurement of Lao PDR No. 30/NA (National Assembly), dated 2 November 2017 and Instruction on Implementation of Law on Public Procurement No. 0477/MOF (Ministry of Finance), dated 13 February 2019.

Consultant Qualification Selection (CQS) method of selection will be used by Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) for PRF III Final Evaluation, since the procurement method threshold is less than USD 200,000.

The Request for Proposals (RFP) will be addressed to the first ranked firm in the shortlisting that is qualified and has the related experience in the same kind of assignment, and would be inclusive of: invitation, instruction to firm, a simplified Technical Proposal format form and a Financial Proposal standard form.

The technical and financial proposal should be submitted by hand to the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) Head Office in Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR, by 16:00 hours local time, within 10 days after receipt of the RFP documents from PRF.

The technical proposal should outline the service provider's:

1. Understanding of the assignment;
2. Approach to and methodology for the assignment;
3. Experience with similar assignments (incl. CVs of all key staff);
4. Draft evaluation work plan;
5. Draft report outline.

The financial proposal should clearly outline the daily rates in United States Dollars (USD) and the prices should be reasonable and consistent with market rates for tasks of a similar nature.

Contract negotiation will be conducted before awarding the contract. Negotiations may involve technical approach, methodology, work plan, staffing, key staff rates/day, reimbursable expenses, payment conditions, taxes payable, insurance, contract effectiveness, and settlement of disputes.

10. Contracting

Consultant Qualification Selection (CQS) method of selection will be used by Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) for PRF III Final Evaluation.

11. Annex

- 1) Assessment Grid for the DAC Criteria
- 2) PRF III Project Appraisal documents
- 3) PRF Operational manuals