

**LEARNING WITHIN AND ACROSS INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS: CASE STUDIES  
IN THE HEALTH SECTOR OF LAO PDR**

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**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

<b>Title of Dissertation</b>	Learning Within and Across International Development Projects: Case Studies in the Health Sector of Lao PDR
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Having realized its limited capacity, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) relies on foreign assistance and concessional loans from multilateral and bilateral development agencies to support social development programs. To ensure effectiveness and efficiency of grant fund management, the development partners impose several requirements and conditions for compliance. To satisfy the donor requirements and achieve project goals on time, project learning is highly important and needed. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore firstly the main requirements and conditions imposed by donors for project implementation. Secondly, the study examined the factors which enabled and hindered the learning process of project teams in their attempt to achieve project goals on time and on budget, while satisfying donor requirements. Finally, the study discovered how the project information was shared and used by the project teams within and across the projects.

To answer the research questions, detailed exploration was conducted of three projects specifically selected from a range of international development projects within the health sector of the Lao PDR. These included the World Bank funded project called the Health Services Improvement Project-Additional Financing, and the Global Fund projects for the HIV/AIDS and Malaria components. Multiple methods were used to collect the data from different sources for purposes of triangulation. These included reviews of project documents and records, in-depth interviews, and participant-observations. The data was analyzed in terms of individual cases and cross-cases in order to understand the themes which emerged from individual cases.

The findings of the study showed that the main requirements and conditions for project implementation were imposed for procurement, finance, monitoring, and

reporting of project progress. Firstly, the Global Fund projects were required to develop a project procurement manual, while the World Bank project applied the World Bank procurement guidelines for international procurement and the procurement manual of the Ministry of Finance for the national procurement. Secondly, both the Global Fund and World Bank projects were required to develop a project financial management manual to ensure the accountability and transparency of grant fund management. Also, both projects were required to submit financial reports quarterly and annually, and conduct an audit internally and externally. Finally, all projects were required to conduct regular monitoring and reporting of project progress.

To meet the requirements and implement the project work-plan in a timely manner, all project teams had taken lessons learnt within and across the projects. Within the projects, the project teams had attempted to learn from the donor experts, technical advisors, audits, and annual review meetings. Also, the project teams had learned from other projects or organizations. The cross-project learning occurred through documents of the past and other projects, past project experience, past project team members and the meetings.

Although there were several sources of learning within and across the projects, there were some considerable constraints to project-based learning. These included project uniqueness, time pressure, reluctance to share project information, and a lack of opportunity to learn. Nevertheless, the project information had been shared and used within and across the project at three levels; individual, project and organizational. At individual level, there had been sharing and use of project guidelines and forms with colleagues for application to other projects of the organization as well as the organizational routine. At project level, the project information had been fundamentally shared and used within the project team through the meetings of the project team; ICT tools; regular supervisions, and provision of trainings. At the organizational level, project information had been shared formally during the weekly meetings of the organization, the annual review meetings, and the meetings held by donors such as the meetings for particular technical problems, the meetings to draw lessons learnt from the audits. Additionally, there was sharing of project information across the project within the organization through the arrangement of the supervision teams to follow up the progress of implementing agencies.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>Equivalence</b>
ADB	Asian Development Bank
CCM	Country Coordinating Mechanisms
CMPE	Center of Malariology Parasitology and Entomology
DCDC	Department of Communicable Disease Control
DPIC	Department of Planning and International Cooperation
FDD	Food and Drug Department
FDQCC	Food and Drug Quality Control Center
GFATM	the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria
GOL	Government of Laos
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDA	International Development Association
IDPs	International Development Projects
HIV/AIDS/STI	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome / Sexually Transmitted Infection
HSIP-AF	Health Services Improvement Project – Additional Financing
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
Lao PDR	Lao People’s Democratic Republic
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOH	Ministry of Health
MPSC	Medical Products Supply Centre
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
NPCO	National Project Coordination Office

NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
WHO	World Health Organization

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is a small, land-locked country in Southeast Asia. With approximately 237,000 square kilometers, it shares borders with five countries, namely Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. It has a population of about 6.6 million people, with a large proportion of the population living in rural areas. The country is ethnically diverse, made up of at least 49 distinct ethnic and linguistic groups, and relatively young (World Bank, 2013a; UNDP, 2013: 3). Lao PDR is classified as a Least Developed Country (LDC), with one-quarter of the population living on less than USD 1.25 per day, and 74% below two dollars a day. Poverty rates in rural areas are twice those in urban areas, and the poverty of residents in mountainous and highland areas is particularly severe (ALMEC Corporation, 2014; UNDP, 2013).

Lao PDR is largely mountainous, and such geographic conditions restrict both the quantity and quality of agricultural land and poses difficulties in the development of trade, social infrastructure, and transport and communications links. A highly dispersed and thinly spread population further compounds this (UNCT, 2006: 4). Because of its geographic isolation, dispersed and multi-ethnic population, and low technical and management capacity, Lao PDR is considered to be in a fragile state (Perks et al., 2006). In such a fragile state, although the Government is highly committed, there is little capacity to implement social programs to aid the poor (Alexander, 2004). A number of aid instruments and frameworks have therefore been proposed to help improve the performance of Lao PDR, including pooling donor funds, using social funds, contracting and providing budget support (Department for International Development, 2005).

On the other hand, in a bid to promote sustainable growth and alleviate poverty, the Government of Lao PDR (GOL) laid out its National Social and Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, and to graduate from Least Developed Countries status as national targets by 2020. The aim is to foster economic growth with equity, develop and modernize the country's social and economic infrastructure, and enhance human resource development (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2011). However, having realized its limited capacity, Lao PDR relies heavily on foreign assistance and concessional loans from development partners (e.g. multilateral and bilateral development agencies) that support over 60 percent of the public investment programs (UN, 2006). This is hardly the case in other countries in the South-East Asian subregion (Thome and Pholsena, 2009). According to the NSEDP for the year 2011-2015, the funds needed to achieve MDGs amount to USD 6.3 billion, of which USD 4.4 billion needs to be mobilized from the Official Development Assistance, USD 630 million from Government, and USD 1.27 billion from other parties in the society (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2011: 190).

In fact, public sector development projects or programs of underdeveloped countries are usually financed by development partners and they are known as international development projects (IDPs). The projects are either implemented by recipient governments under a bilateral agreement with the donors, or through an 'implementing partner' of the donor-frequently a non-governmental organization (NGO) or professional contractor (Crawford and Bryce, 2003). The assistance of international donors is usually focused on development in various sectors such as utilities, infrastructure, transportation, health, education, and institutional reform. Accordingly, IDPs have been largely developed and implemented to achieve the MDGs by 2015, as a means to alleviating poverty and helping Lao PDR migrate from the list of least developed countries by 2020 (Government of Lao PDR, 2006). According to the Foreign Aid Implementation Report for the fiscal year 2011-2012, there were 33 development partners, 454 projects and approximately \$2.5 Billion in financial commitments to the Lao PDR by the close of the fiscal year in September 2012 (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2012). These figures have risen in the current fiscal year as five more development partners have been added to the Aid

Management Platform and project level disbursement figures have been updated by existing development partners (Development Gateway, 2013).

According to the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy 2004-2020 framework, the priorities are to enhance growth and development and reduce poverty within four main sectors (agriculture, health, education, and infrastructure) with a particular focus on the 72 poorest districts (from which 47 are priority districts). Therefore, the 7<sup>th</sup> NSEDP identified health development as a major priority towards the achievement of the MDGs by 2015 and the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy by 2020. The health sector has clear specific targets in each period to bring the country out of the under-developed status. For 2015, the Party and State have targets to achieve the MDGs, many of which are public health targets, for which the public health sector will play a role. Its significance is clearly noted by the Ministry of Health (MOH) (2011a: 21) in the directions and duties of the Seventh Five-Year Health Sector Development Plan (2011-2015) as depicted by the following statement:

Health sector is the leading prioritized policies of the Party and the government. Investment into public health activities is not a waste of money but rather an investment in socio-economic development, national security, and public security.

In an effort to achieve the Party and State MDGs, the five-year health sector development plan has been developed. The development plan puts emphasis on equity, accessibility to quality health care services between the urban and the rural, reduction of maternal and child mortality, and reduction of incidence of communicable diseases by increasing availability of health workers in the appropriate quantity and quality, particularly in district and community levels (Ministry of Health, 2011b: 5). Within the seventh five-year health sector development plan (2011-2015), there are altogether 120 projects, of which 89 projects are supported by 41 development partners (Ministry of Health, 2011b: 45; Secretariat for Sector-wide Coordination in Health, 2012).

Over the past years, there have been significant gains in economic growth and social sectors. In 2012, Lao PDR reached a per capita Gross National Income (GNI) of \$1,260; the country moved up from its previous lower income status to become classified as a ‘lower-middle income economy’ (World Bank, 2014). Between 1985 and 2012, the country’s health status has equally improved; life expectancy has increased by 19 years (UNDP, 2013), while the mortality rate has been gradually declined from 530 to 339 per 100,000 live between 2000 and 2008 (target for 2015 is 260 per 100,000), infant mortality from 82 to 55 per 1,000 live (target for 2015 is 45 per 1,000), and under-five mortality from 107 to 75 per 1,000 live between 2000 to 2010 (target for 2015 is 70 per 1,000) (Ministry of Health, 2011a: 8). Consequently, Lao PDR has seen steady improvements in its Human Development Index (HDI) value over time. Overall, Lao PDR’s HDI in the 2012 Human Development Report positions the country at 138 out of 187 countries and territories in the world. This makes Lao PDR one of the HDI growth leaders in the medium human development category (UNDP, 2013).

However, despite these achievements, some areas are still off track. These include malnutrition (40% of children under-five are stunted), measles immunization, maternal mortality rate, skilled birth attendance, and gender equality (World Bank, 2014). Furthermore, although the number of public health facilities has increased due to infrastructure developments and capital expenditure, access to adequate health services remains a primary concern. In general, the healthcare system is underdeveloped and under-funded, and healthcare workers have inadequate skills, both of which directly contribute to quality shortfalls across the healthcare system (UNDP, 2006). Moreover, there has been a decrease in health support from donors, whereas there is no key health donor in Lao PDR. Importantly, there is fragmentation among healthcare programs supported by donors, and a subsequent lack of coordination among them (Perks, Toole and Phouthonsy, 2006: 135). Not only has fragmentation affected the health sector, it has in fact also been the case in other development sectors. Consequently, the GOL and development partners adopted the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (a localized version of the Paris Declaration) in November 2006 in order to strengthen governance, improve development performance, and enhance development outcomes for an effective implementation of the MDGs and NSEDP (Government of Lao PDR, 2006).

Indeed, there is some progress as a result of coordination between the GOL and donors in line with the Paris Declaration and the Vientiane Declaration on aid effectiveness (Thome and Pholsena, 2009). However, according to the Paris Declaration Monitoring Survey in 2011 by the GOL, there exist numerous challenges faced by the GOL and development partners. The survey found that the Government agencies have still been lacking the absorptive capacity to plan, forecast, manage, implement, monitor and insure long-term sustainability of the activities, though it has been recognized and strengthened by the GOL and development partners. In addition to limited capacity, non-systematic communications and adverse incentives have also been a challenge for building stronger and more effective development coordination between GOL and development partners (Inthamith, 2011).

Like other development sectors, these challenges have also been faced by the health sector. As reported by the Secretariat for Sector-wide Coordination in Health (2012) on the Sector Common Work Plan Monitoring Framework for the 10<sup>th</sup> Sector Wide Group Meeting in the period of April-December 2011, there remain several considerable constraints to the implementation of health development projects, despite the remarkable achievements made. The problems that are commonly found include lack of coordination and information sharing, lack of adequate resources, and project funding delays from main donors and the Budget Department. Minimizing these constraints by taking lessons learned would help result in a better performance of IDPs for achieving the MDGs by 2015 and NSEDP in 2020.

## **1.2 Significance of the Problem**

### **1.2.1 Significance of Learning in Project Settings**

Organizations are nowadays increasingly using projects to accomplish specific tasks, and strategic and operational objectives (Brady and Davies, 2004: 1601), or a complex set of organizational goals that would otherwise be completed by a traditional approach (Sense and Antoni, 2001: 1). Projects are taken as strategic processes for survival by mobilizing resources and competencies to create a competitive advantage and other sources of value (Bredillet, 2007: 169). However, in the context of rapid change towards knowledge-based, the role of organizational

learning in general, and learning through and from projects in particular, has increasingly been acknowledged as an important area of focus (Keegan and Turner, 2001; Brady and Davies, 2004: 1601).

Learning from projects has been recognized in both literature and practices as an essential part for effective project management. The demand for learning within and from projects has been increasingly recognized because of the temporary and unique nature of a project itself such as discontinuous personal constellations and work contents, a lack of organizational routines, a short-term orientation and a cross-disciplinary integration of internal and external experts (Prencipe and Tell, 2001; Schindler and Eppler, 2003). Through their interdisciplinary nature, projects can be a privileged place for learning; that is creating knowledge in the context of its application (Gann and Salter, 2000; Sense and Antoni, 2001: 1; Grabher, 2004; Scarbrough et al., 2004). In an effort to achieve project objectives and goals, project teams not only generate information and create knowledge, and then distribute and apply it, but also acquire new knowledge from various sources (Bredillet, 2007: 185; Sense, 2009). Furthermore, given the growth of projects within organizations, they represent an opportunity to learn between or across different projects (Sense and Antoni, 2001: 1). In this light, projects should be conceived as a knowledge process or vehicles or agents to promote organizational learning (Sense, 2011: 986).

Notwithstanding projects being rich with such learning opportunities for improvement of project performance, learning is not actively recognized and deliberately focused as part of the management of the project activities. Learning is presumed to occur randomly and uninhibitedly during the project (Sense and Antoni, 2003: 488). On the other hand, the temporary nature of projects does not always provide structures necessary to ensure learning is captured and applied by the organization to improve project performance (Ekstedt, Zlundin, Soderholm and Wirdenius, 1999). In essence, learning in a project is a complex process that requires deliberate commitment with a systematical management (Ayas, 1996: 131).

### **1.2.2 Learning in the Context of International Development Projects**

In order to manage IDPs effectively and successfully, it is likely that one needs to attempt to continuously learn in dealing with considerable challenges while

meeting the development partners' requirements. On the one hand, public sector development projects or programs of the underdeveloped or least developed countries are usually financed by development partners and known as IDPs. Undoubtedly, these projects are the main instruments of choice for GOL to achieve its MDGs by 2015 and NSEDP by 2020. Yet, the poor performance of projects seems to have been commonly found in contemporary reality (Youker, 1999). This has frequently resulted from a number of managerial and organizational problems such as imperfect project design and plans, poor stakeholder management, delays between project identification and start-up, delays during project implementation, delays caused by bureaucratic administrative systems (approvals, personnel, and release of funds), unclear lines of authority and responsibility, and coordination failure. (Kilby, 2000; Youker, 1999, 2008; Ahsan and Gunawan, 2010). These problems are obviously faced by several IDPs in the health sector of Lao PDR as reported by the Secretariat for Sector-wide Coordination in Health (2012).

On the other hand, unlike other types of projects, IDPs, by their very nature, have to rely on external conditions to survive as they are not internally self-contained. Simply put, IDPs' survival is contingent on external sources. For the project to be effective, IDPs need massive support from many agencies involved. Each agency concerned plays different roles at different project life-cycle stages, and hence their influence on the projects is more likely various. However, among many stakeholders involved, funding agencies or project sponsors appear to play a crucial role in the management of IDPs, provided that funding projects is highly required for the ease of project implementation. Although financial resources may not guarantee success, it can fuel the other inputs of project activities and hence improve the likelihood of implementation success. Accordingly, financial resources are considered by IDPs as an important factor because of dependencies on development partners who have a powerful impact on the management and sustainability of IDPs. According to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978: 27), the extent of external actors' control and influence on the focal organization is dependent on the particularities of the interdependence, the contributions made and the inducements demanded. The challenge is how to deal with these external actors who often have incompatible demands and expectations imposed on organizations (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978: 45; Pfeffer, 1982: 195).

Project sponsors are primarily responsible for providing financial resources for a project (Project Management Institute, 2000: 16; Helm and Remington, 2005: 51). Within the project management literature, however, there is little research on the important role of project sponsors in achieving project success (Kloppenborg et al., 2006: 16; Bryde, 2008: 800; Sense, 2013: 264). Among limited studies, the focus is paid more on identifying the project sponsorship roles and responsibilities, the structural or behavioral characteristics and/or effective factors facilitating project success (see Hall et al., 2003; Helm and Remington, 2005; Englund and Bucero, 2006; Kloppenborg et al., 2006; Bryde, 2008). Despite this limitation, there is a lack of research on the influence of project sponsors on learning in project settings. Up-to-date, there is seemingly only the case study of Sense (2013) whose work investigates longitudinally the impact of project sponsors on learning within projects. The study shows that the role of project sponsors is dynamic and interactive and a dramatic influence on project learning. However, there is a need for further individual and deeper study, as well as other integrative investigations of the project sponsors' interactions with various project phenomena (Sense, 2013: 271). More importantly, it appears that all of these scarce studies view the source of project sponsorship as internally supported. This is completely different in the context of IDPs which are externally funded by international development agencies.

According to Khang and Moe (2008) and Ahsan and Gunawan (2010), funding agencies play a crucial role in each phase of project management. To ensure aid effectiveness, donors, each with its own requirements and conditions, regulate a number of complicated rules and procedures for the disbursement and utilization of development funds such as setting up a new and complex financial reporting system (Biesma et al., 2012). The requirements of sound project governance and functions are partly pointed to the fact that these projects are implemented in developing countries where cases of high-level corruption often take place (Youker, 2003). However, set with similar intention, but by different institutions with different organizational cultures and traditions, these various rules and procedures often contradict each other, raising special and unnecessary difficulties during project implementation (Khang and Moe, 2008: 75). These contradictory and burdensome rules have quite often resulted in time lost in project operations, and eventually

project managers to sacrifice the quality and performance of their projects (Kassel, 2010: 14).

Undoubtedly, financial accountability by the IDP manager and team is considered as exclusively crucial as its responsibility to complete the projects within the time, cost and quality requirements (Khang and Moe (2008: 75). In order to be accountable for the expenditures of funds, IDP managers must maintain strong policies and procedures to ensure efficient and effective operations, accurate financial reporting, and compliance with laws and regulations; that is employing personal integrity in the management and expenditure of funds, while also promoting integrity on the project team (Kassel, 2010: 12). In addition, there is a need for early well-trained staff together with a well-established procurement system for projects (Youker, 2003). Consequently, it is presumed that in managing IDPs, project teams will learn how to effectively implement projects to achieve their goals and objectives, as well as meet the donor's requirements and conditions. Yet, further research is required to unearth how project teams learn within and across IDPs and how they use and share project information. Sharing of project information is specifically important at project-to-organization level as a means to implement other and future projects of an organization.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is first to explore the main requirements and conditions of donors for project implementation. Also, this study attempts to find out the enablers and hinderers of the project teams' learning in an endeavor to complete a project goals on time and on budget as well as comply with the donors' requirements and conditions. In addition, this study examines the project information and lessons gained which are used and shared within and between projects. The questions of the study are as follows:

- 1) What are the main requirements and conditions imposed by donors for project implementation?
- 2) What are the learning mechanisms used by project teams to achieve project goals on time and comply with donor's requirements?

- 3) What are the barriers to their learning?
- 4) How do project teams use and share project information within and between projects?

#### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

This study uses a multiple case study approach to investigate the main requirements and conditions for project implementation, the learning mechanisms of project teams, and the constraints to their learning, as well as the use and sharing of project information. Selection of multiple case studies from all ongoing projects of MOH is purposively made based on the principle that they are typical for unraveling the research questions. In order to achieve rich, detailed information, data is collected from multiple sources, using various methods. The methods include reviews of project-related documents and records, in-depth interviews with project manager and key project team members, and participant observations of the practices of lessons learned. All data collected are filed and organized systematically, and coded categorically as soon as possible to enable data analysis and retrievals when needed. In essence, data collection and analysis are conducted simultaneously. To be more specific, while collecting data in the second set, data collected from the first field interviews is analyzed. Thus, during data analysis, the data is reviewed repeatedly and continually coded and refined. Essentially, the analysis of individual cases is conducted, followed by the cross-case in order to obtain replicative findings.

#### **1.5 Expected Contribution of the Study**

In general, this study will be beneficial to both researchers and practitioners as it will shed light on organizational learning in a project context, especially from IDPs of which it heavily relies on development partners who usually impose stringent requirements and conditions for project implementation. However, the learning mechanisms which project teams use to achieve project goals on time and within budget, while also satisfying donor requirements, have still yet been left unknown. In an effort to uncover the unknown learning mechanisms, this study will offer new

theoretical propositions concerning the project teams' learning efforts within the IDP structures in response to the development partners' requirements and conditions.

For the learning mechanisms, most studies focus on either formal (i.e. post-project reviews or practices of lessons learned) or informal (i.e. personalization and/or socialization) processes for project-based learning-as a subset of organizational learning practices. In other words, there is a lack of studies on both formal and informal approaches. This study will therefore attempt to fill this gap of knowledge through the framework of both formal and informal learning mechanisms being used by the project teams to learn, use and share project information within and across a project.

Also, the study will explore the barriers to learning in IDPs. Understanding this will help maximize the potential benefits of both formal and informal processes for enhancing project-based learning. Even though the formal mechanisms with the support of ICT tools have been found to be less helpful for project-based learning, identification of the barriers to this approach will allow effective improvement to its potential benefits. The contribution will be made by understanding the reasons why the approach is not effective, which in turn will help to consider how it can be made more effective for project learning practices. On the other hand, the notion of social capital, which reflects the processes of social interactions and relationships, will enable further understanding of the project-based learning mechanisms. Particularly, to understand how social relationships facilitate project-based learning, this study will draw upon the theory of social capital, which therefore bridges the gap of learning in the project environment. The study will fill the knowledge body by using the Opportunity, Motivation, and Ability framework introduced by Adler and Kwon (2002) to understand the processes and practices by which project information is used and shared. The findings of this study will offer insights on how social interactions can be leveraged for effective learning in and across project settings, rather than a mere formal approach with the use of ICT tools that has been found to be not very helpful.

In addition, this study will provide practical suggestions for public sector organizations and its project managers, as well as team members in relation to effective learning within and between projects. More specifically, it will help the

implementing agencies and the recipients to improve their current and future projects through project learning practices. Finally, a better understanding and use of lessons learned from IDPs within and between projects may help enhance aid effectiveness, in particular to achieve MDGs by 2015 and effective implementation of the short- and long-term NSEDP in general.

## **1.6 Definition of Terms**

Some of the important terms used in this study are defined below:

Cross-project learning is the combining and sharing of lessons learned across projects to apply and develop new knowledge (Kotnour, 1999: 34, 2000: 395) through the use of various mechanisms such as project reviews, post implementation audits, project histories, after action reviews, learning journals, and social learning events (Wasiyo, 2009: 29).

IDPs are medium-to large-size public projects and/or programs in all sectors of developing countries financed by international development agencies (Youker, 2003, 2008: 98).

Lessons learned are the “learning gained from the process of performing the project” (the Project Management Body of Knowledge Guide, 2004: 363).

Practices of lessons learned are important experiences validated by the project team that can benefit future projects (Garon, 2006; Schindler and Eppler, 2003).

Project-based learning is generally referred to as 1) the creation and acquisition of knowledge within project ventures, and 2) the codification and transfer of this knowledge to an enduring environment (Prencipe and Tell, 2001; Scarbrough et al., 2004; Bakker et al., 2011: 494).

Project Learning Practices are the project learning processes and activities that maturing project teams conduct in order to capture and store lessons learned (von Zedtwitz, 2003; Garon, 2006; Anbari, et al., 2008), and emerging project teams conduct to access, evaluate, and apply lessons learned (Keegan and Turner, 2001).

Within-project learning is the creation and sharing of knowledge within a project (Kotnour, 1999: 34, 2000: 395).

## **1.7 Organization of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter 1 introduces several important points such as the background relevant to the topic, its significance, the objectives and scope of the study, and the research design, as well as the expected benefits from this study. Following this, Chapter 2 provides an overview about the health sector of Lao PDR, followed by a review of the literature on the IDPs in terms of its concepts and processes, as well as the key characteristics that differentiate them from the traditional projects. Next, there are examinations of the formal practices of project learning in terms of the possible learning sources and barriers, before investigating the notion of social capital as a theoretical concept as an informal approach to the project learning practices. Chapter 3 reveals detailed information on research methods which includes the rationale for multiple case study research, project selection, the procedures for collecting and analyzing the data, and verification methods. Chapter 4 presents the findings of individual projects. The results of each project are then compared and contrasted in Chapter 5. Both the individual project and cross-project study are analyzed in accordance with the questions of the study. Lastly, Chapter 6 concludes the main findings, and provides recommendations and suggestions for the health sector of Lao PDR as well as for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Overview of the Health Sector of Lao PDR**

This section will provide an overall background of the MOH of Lao PDR in relation to its directions and duties, policy framework, organizations, and the five-year development plan for the years 2011-2015 according to the direction and duties of the seventh five-year health sector development plan.

##### **2.1.1 Importance of Health and the Health Sector**

Health has long been perceived by the Party and GOL as a valuable capital to each individual, each family, society and the country as a whole. The GOL believes that health is closely linked with war or peace, country stability and social order. Importantly, it relates to poverty when there remains a lack of development, meaning that it is connected to hunger and food shortages, to preventable morbidity, to low stamina for work or study, to illiteracy, to educational levels, to superstition and risky lifestyles. Put simply, health is connected to socio-economic development as this development has brought about changes in the way of living. Given decent health services are humanist activities for providing good quality labor for national defense and development, health is a service target for the health sector, and one of the leading prioritized policies of the Party and the GOL. The significance of health was clearly stressed in the resolution of the Ninth Party Congress as follows:

Together with developing people intellectually, in terms of knowledge, vocationally, and ethically, we must increase our efforts to make Lao people physically strong and healthy. We have to pursue to implement health policies by giving priority to prevention and health promotion, and in the same time, by giving importance to good quality in treatment and the extensive provision of health service coverage. (Ministry of Health, 2011a: 23)

### **2.1.2 Health Policy Framework**

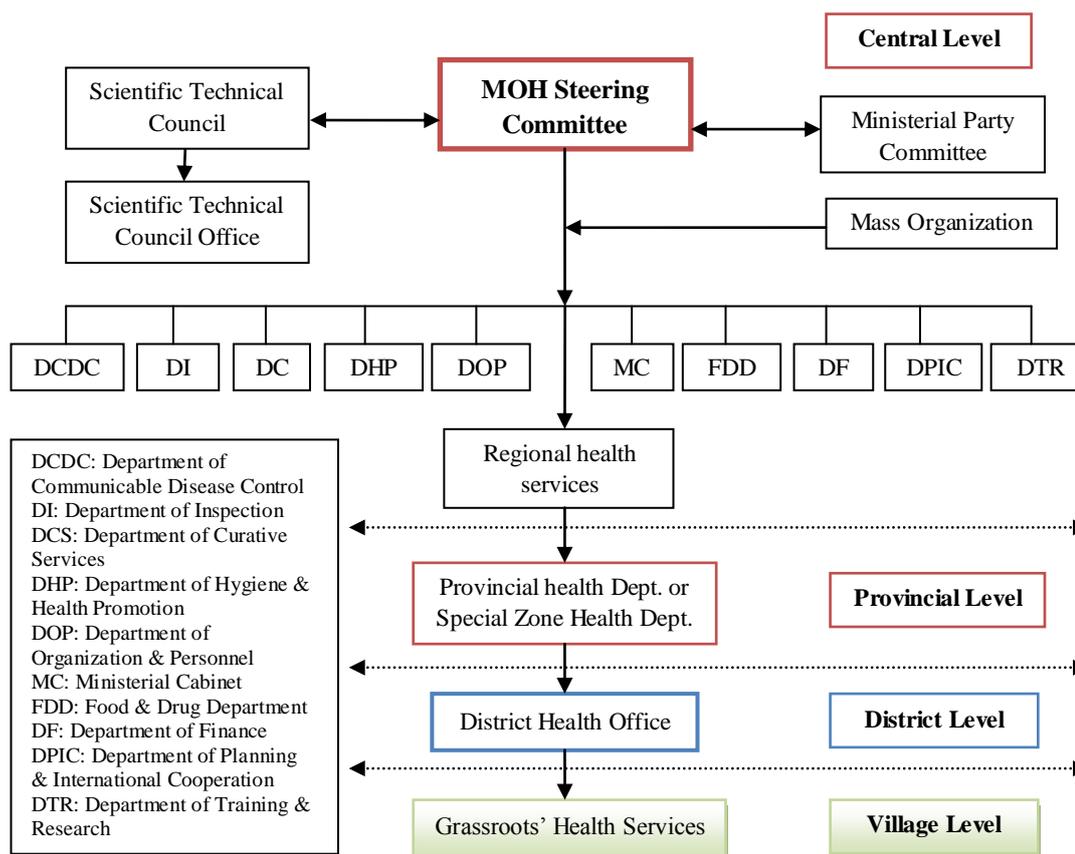
In order to achieve the MDGs by 2015 and bring the country out of its status of an underdeveloped country by 2020, the ninth resolutions of the Party Congress set the following objectives: the four breakthroughs (ideology, human resources, management and assistance for the poor), the fast track change to industrialization and modernization in the direction towards socialism, the development of the health sector, and support to be provided for the achievement of the MDGs in other areas (Ministry of Health, 2011a: 25). Based primarily upon the ninth resolutions and the results of the evaluation of the implementation of the previous five-year plan (2006-2010), MOH (2011a: 27) established the seventh five-year health sector development plan for 2011-2015 in order to achieve a foundation for human resources, finance, technical materials, and conditions necessary for the move towards the industrialization and modernization process. Within the MDGs, there are five of them directly related to the health sector: (MDG#1) eradicate poverty and hunger (nutrition); (MDG#4) reduce child mortality; (MDG#5) improve maternal health; (MDG#6) combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases; and (MDG#7) ensure environmental sustainability (Ministry of Health, 2011a: 27).

To achieve the MDGs by 2015, there are specific directions for the health sector to plan for the seventh five-year plan. These include strengthening the health system, improving organization, improving quality and expanding health service capacities, expanding health sector humanitarian potential, promoting traditional medicine in heritage and rich traditional medicine in Laos, expanding potential and benefits from all economic sectors for health sector development and services, and developing a sustainable financial system (Ministry of Health, 2011a: 25-26). These directions have been implemented through six programs 1) program for hygiene-prevention and health promotion 2) program for curative cure 3) program for food and drug 4) program for human resource development 5) program for health research and 6) program for management, planning, and finance (Ministry of Health, 2011a: 34-44).

### **2.1.3 Health System Organizations**

The health system in Lao PDR is mainly divided under three branches: health

care; prevention, promotion and disease control; and health management and administration traditionally with a strong vertical structure. It is organized at four levels: central, provincial, district and village (Thome and Pholsena 2009: 74). Figure 2.1 illustrates the organizational structure of the health system in Lao PDR.



**Figure 2.1** Organizational Structure of the Ministry of Health, Lao PDR

According to Asante, Hall and Robert (2011: 11), the central level oversees all MOH activities and coordinates multi-sectoral vertical programs run by the ten departments. The provincial health department plans, implements, supervises and monitors Primary Health Care programs run by a Primary Health Care coordination department in each province. The district health office is operated by a district health committee that supervises delivery of health services within the district and oversees village health programs. The district health committees also supervise the district hospitals, who manage budget centers in their own right with annual plans and

performance indicators. The village health centers supervise and monitor village health workers under the supervision of the district health service. Health centers perform functions ranging from disease prevention, health promotion and the diagnosis and treatment of diseases. At the village level, there are village health committees that select and supervise village health volunteers to provide basic curative care and to run the drug revolving funds.

Management and service delivery are still perceived to be strongly vertically organized with the central MOH retaining significant amounts of power. Transfer of responsibilities to provinces and districts is said to be accompanied by clear guidelines from the MOH but there is little flexibility for local government in preparing its health recurrent budgets (Thome and Pholsena, 2009).

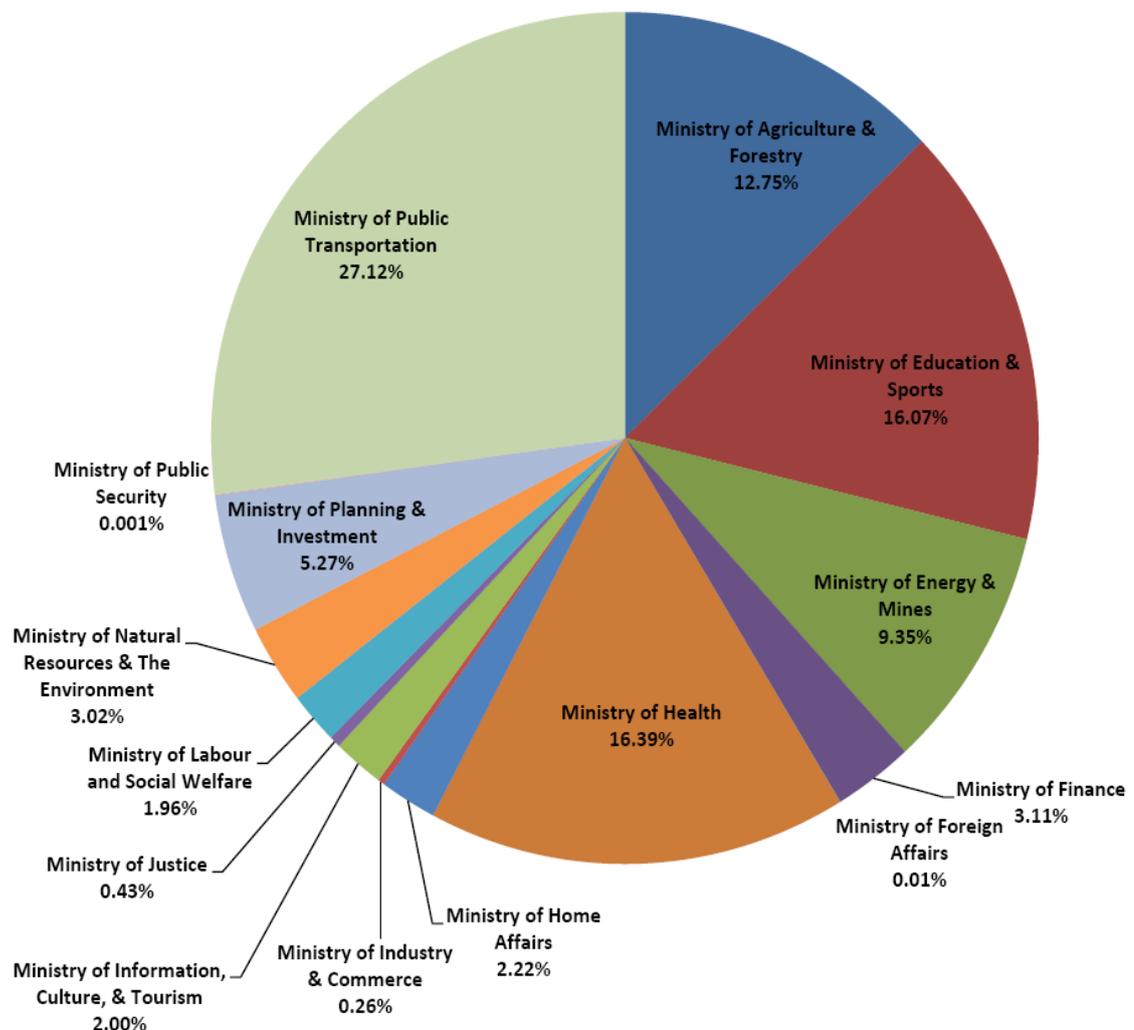
#### **2.1.4 Financing of the Health Sector**

According to Thome and Pholsena (2009: 77), the MOH of Lao PDR has a relatively limited power in the budget planning process. The Ministry of Finance is responsible for the overall fiscal framework and for sector allocations from the recurrent budget. The Committee for Planning and Investment and donors are key players in the allocation of the capital budget. However, the Lao PDR health system is under-funded shown by low per capita health-care spending, and low Government funding (Thome and Pholsena, 2009: 77). For instance, according to the MOH (2011a: 45), there were a total of 120 health projects which cost 9,664 billion Kip (US\$1,208 million) over the seventh five-year period (2011-2015). The specific budget for the five MDGs amounts to 3,554 billion Kip (US\$444.3 million). However, the existing budget from the GOL and donors amounts to only US\$315 million for all health projects, and US\$87 million for the MDGs. Being aware of financial deficiencies, seeking further sources of capital budget from donors or international development agencies is thus highly required, and most often prioritized.

According to the Foreign Aid Implementation Report for the 2011/2012 fiscal year, the MOH, one of the top five recipients of development financing, received over 80 percent of all development finance channeled to Government Ministries of the Lao PDR (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2012: 13). Figure 2.2 shows that the MOH has been able to secure more than 16 percent of the funds, second only to

Ministry of Public Transportation with 27.12 percent. Figure 2.3 displays the actual disbursements by donors of MOH. Figures 2.3 and 2.4 show that the main development partners of MOH are the Global Fund, ADB, Luxembourg, WHO, World Bank and UNICEF.

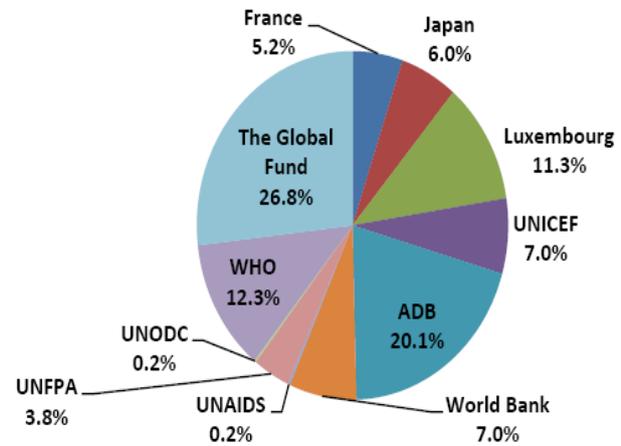
Generally, there are three types of assistance: multilateral, bilateral and international funds. The multilateral aid agencies are ADB, World Bank, UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNODC, WHO. Bilateral agencies include France, Japan, and Luxembourg, while the international fund is the Global Fund (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2012).



**Figure 2.2** Percentages of Disbursements across Line Ministries

**Source:** Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2012: 13.

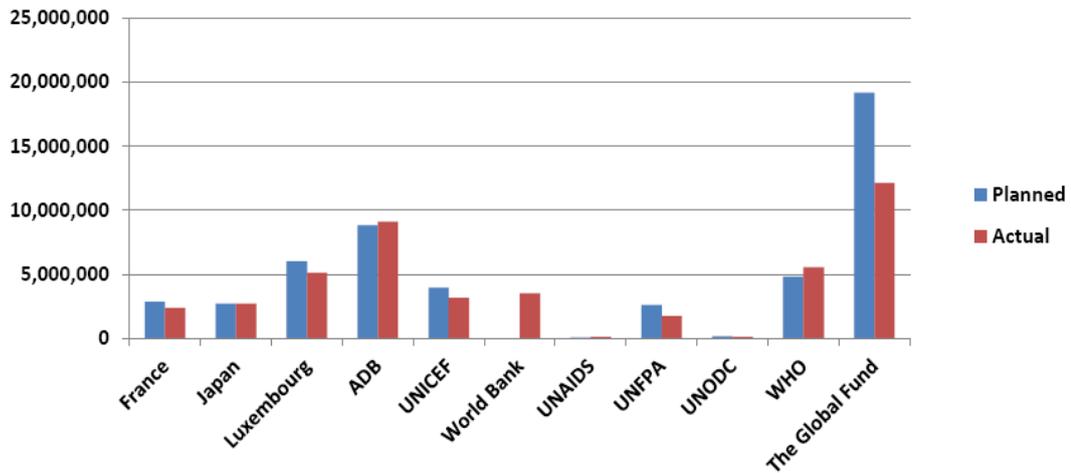
<b>Total number of activities:</b> 46
<b>Total number of development partners:</b> 11
<b>Total planned disbursement FY 2011/12:</b> 51,534,689 USD
<b>Total actual disbursement FY 2011/12:</b> 45,530,835 USD
<b>Average disbursement per activity FY 2011/12:</b> 1,109,450 USD
<b>Actual disbursement/Planned disbursement ratio FY 2011/12:</b> 0.88
<b>Total planned disbursement FY 2012/13:</b> 36,031,139 USD



Development partners	Number of activities	Total Disbursement		
		FY 2011/ 12		FY 2012/ 13
		Planned	Actual	Planned
France	3	2,857,441	2,356,180	1,081,504
Japan	4	2,717,284	2,698,402	3,540,931
Luxembourg	1	5,986,569	5,114,608	2,485,014
ADB	4	9,300,000	9,100,548	8,800,000
UNICEF	9	3,940,764	3,156,451	5,254,353
World Bank	2	0.00	3,496,892	0.00
UNAIDS	1	48,000	98,400	97,760
UNFPA	3	2,589,523	1,737,884	2,013,840
UNODC	1	142,230	90,183	142,230
WHO	14	4,793,875	5,556,024	6,166,500
The Global Fund	4	19,159,003	12,125,264	6,449,008
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>51,534,689</b>	<b>45,530,835</b>	<b>36,031,139</b>

**Figure 2.3** Actual Disbursements by Donors of MOH

**Source:** Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2012: 19.



**Figure 2.4** Planned vs. Actual Disbursements by Donors of MOH

**Source:** Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2012: 19.

To enhance coordination in the sector between development assistance agencies as to be in line with the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the GOL and donors are now meeting more frequently, under auspices of the MOH, WHO and JICA. As a result, a number Development partners are also moving away from the use of separate so-called Project Management Units and increasingly relying on existing government structures for implementation. Still, in order to effectively manage the influx of aid from different donors, there is a need for better understanding about those projects supported by the international development agencies, or the so-called IDPs. Therefore, the following sections will review the notion of IDPs in relation to its concepts, characteristics, and processes.

## 2.2 Overview of International Development Projects

IDPs are different from for-profit projects. These projects are a special type of project that aims to assist socio-economic development of developing countries or least developed countries. Understanding of these projects will have strong impacts on the way to manage and evaluate the projects. This section will therefore provide an overview about IDPs in order to understand how they are distinct from other projects. The review will cover definition, characteristics, life cycle or processes, and classification of IDPs.

### **2.2.1 Definition of IDPs**

Youker (2003, 2008: 98) refers to IDPs as medium- to large-size public projects and/or programs in all sectors of developing countries financed by multilateral development banks (e.g. World Bank, ADB, etc.), the United Nations associated agencies (UNDP, UNIDO, WHO, FAO, etc.), bilateral agencies (USAID, EU, JICA, etc.), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies. By definition, IDPs involve a number of different actors including donor agencies, government organizations at several levels, consultants, contractors, trainers, evaluators, researchers, and local beneficiaries including local organizations (Youker, 2003, 2008: 98).

### **2.2.2 Characteristics of IDPs**

IDPs have several characteristics which are different from other types of projects. Firstly, different from industrial or commercial projects, all IDPs, which are in developing countries and, at least partially, are externally financed, are not concerned with profitability and do not have a business focus. By definition, the purpose of IDPs is to reduce poverty and improve living conditions, to protect the environment and basic human rights, to assist victims of natural or human-induced disasters, to build capacity, and to develop basic physical and social infrastructure. In other words, project goals and objectives are delicate since most of them frequently deal with economic and social transformation, human development and poverty reduction (Crawford and Bryce, 2003: 364; Youker, 2003, 2008; Diallo and Thuillier, 2004, 2005; Khang and Moe, 2008: 74; Ika, Lavagnon, Diallo and Thuillier, 2005: 63). IDPs, by their very nature, are then divergent from the “hard systems” focus of many other project-driven industries such as construction or manufacturing (Crawford and Bryce, 2003: 364). The assistance for least developed countries is usually regarded as “soft issues”, and although aid projects also have hard elements, it is normally viewed as a means to some developmental ends (Crawford and Bryce, 2003: 364). Essentially, the objectives of these soft issues are much less visible and measurable compared to industrial and commercial projects. The intangibility of IDP objectives and deliverables raise a special challenge in managing and evaluating projects that require adaptation of the existing project management body of knowledge (Khang and Moe, 2008: 74).

Secondly, one important characteristic of the IDPs is the involvement of a variety of interested parties or stakeholders. According to Diallo and Thuillier (2004: 19-20, 2005: 239), the stakeholders of IDPs include the national project coordinator (or project manager), the task manager (or project supervisors), the national supervisor (a high-ranking civil servant or the Minister himself), the project team, a steering committee, subcontractors, suppliers of goods and services, beneficiaries, and the population at large. But in general, there are at least three separate key stakeholders, namely the funding agency, the implementing unit, and the target beneficiaries. On the contrary, industrial and commercial projects have usually two key stakeholders: the client and the contractor or implementing unit (Youker, 2003; Ahsan and Gunawan, 2010).

Thirdly, because of the obvious social, economic and ecological impacts of aid interventions, projects are inherently political, and as such attract a wide range of stakeholders who demand high levels of accountability from implementing agencies. On the other hand, there are various burdensome rules and procedures from different institutions to be complied to. However, they are often contradictory to each other, resulting in special and unnecessary difficulties for the project management team. This is manifested in stringent reporting requirements and an industry imperative for agencies to be “learning organizations” (Crawford and Bryce, 2003: 364).

Finally, environments in developing countries are varied (Youker, 2008: 99), but often the operating environment and culture of the host country make IDPs different from traditional business projects and make traditional project management tools in the developed world less appropriate (Cusworth and Fanks, 1993). These challenges are difficult environments (often lack of infrastructure and resources: human, financial or material), different value structures and cultures, different systems between the donors and recipient countries (Youker, 2003), wide geographic and cultural separation between project actors, competing objectives between partners, technologically challenged operating conditions and unpredictable socio-political environments (Crawford and Bryce, 2003: 364).

In general, with the unique environment of IDPs, project managers have to deal with complexity, resistance to change, competing agendas of a large number of stakeholders, and diverse and even contradictory expectations that render

compromises very difficult to reach (Crawford and Bryce, 2003; Diallo and Thuillier, 2004, 2005; Khang and Moe, 2008). In addition, each country has its own systems in place, and each donor may have its own systems; all may have key differences (Youker, 2008: 99). As a result of these distinct characteristics, effective project managers will need to be able to move beyond understanding and analysis of the environment, to develop approaches for establishing supportive linkages with their project (Cusworth and Fanks, 1993: 25), and the approach to management and implementation must be tailored to local situations (Youker, 2003, 2008: 97).

The main characteristics of IDPs which are distinguished from the traditional projects can be summarized in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1** Comparison of Characteristics between IDPs and Traditional Projects

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>IDPs</b>	<b>Traditional projects</b>
Project purpose	Not-for-profit / poverty reduction	Profit-seeking
Project finance	Primarily based on external sources	Internal sources
Project type	Soft project	Hard project (e.g. industrial and commercial projects)
Objectives and deliverables	Intangible /Less tangible	Tangible
Stakeholders	At least three: funding agency, implementing unit, and target beneficiaries	Client and contractor
Environmental influences	Subject to environmental manipulations (e.g. social, cultural, political, etc.)	Not subject to political manipulations

### **2.2.3 Classification of IDPs**

Arguably, the approach to management of a particular project is best based on its type. It appears that there are a wide variety of ways to classify projects. For instance, some are based on such features as size, application area, priority, degree of risk, cash flow, technology, business experiences, and deliverables. Others are based on typical characteristics of the project itself such as product projects, service projects, and continuous improvement projects (Ahsan and Gunawan, 2010: 71).

The same could also be applied to categorize IDPs. However, since the goal of IDPs is to reduce poverty that covers several sectors, two main types can be generally classified: hard and soft projects. Hard projects are those construction projects for infrastructure development such as railroads, ports, dams and power plants. These projects have clear goals and could be contracted out to large experienced firms, and hence are more likely tangible and measurable. On the other hand, soft projects are more or less related to human development and/or institutional development such as resettlement, basic health care, education, social welfare and capacity building (Youker, 1999, 2003, 2008; Khang and Moe, 2008). Size of the project, according to Youker (2003, 2008: 99), can also be used to differentiate project types. Furthermore, it is distinguished in terms of dollar value, duration, and number of people, or a combination of the three. In addition, IDPs are sometimes classified based on priorities such as humanitarian need, emergency situation, or socio-economic needs (Youker 2003, 2008: 99). In general, IDP deliverables are goods and services with not-for-profit purposes.

Regardless of the type and size or application area, IDPs are ultimately served as soft goals which always have a priority in sustainable social and economic development (Youker, 1999; Khang and Moe, 2008: 74). Quite often, these development goals are intangible - more difficult to define and measure than hard objectives. Additionally, they require greater involvement of local stakeholders and hence raise a special challenge in managing and evaluating development projects (Youker, 2008: 99). This requires adaptation of the existing project management body of knowledge and adopting new tools and concepts to define, monitor and measure the extent that the development projects achieve these objectives (Khang and Moe, 2008: 74).

### **2.3 Project-Based Learning**

Research on project-based learning has increasingly gained rapid importance in the project management literature (Bakker, Cambre, Korlaar and Raab, 2011: 494). Cooke-Davis (2002) finds one of twelve key success factors in project-oriented organizations to be “an effective means of learning from experience on projects,

which combines explicit knowledge with tacit knowledge in a way that encourages people to learn and to embed that learning into continuous improvement of Project Management processes and practices.” This finding is consistent with the study of Owen, Burstein and Mitchell (2004) who find that exploiting knowledge gained on past projects and building on the experiences of project members to continuously improve performance has the potential to improve the project quality, cost constraints, and schedule expectations, thereby improving the organization’s survival. Learning from projects has thus been considered as an essential part for effective project management.

The following sections will thus seek to come to a deeper understanding of the project learning paradox in terms of the learning mechanisms, its actual practices, as well as relative barriers.

### **2.3.1 Sources of Project-Based Learning**

Projects have been increasingly recognized as important sites for learning. Learning in project environments can generally be made through two main sources: one is within the project itself, another is from other projects. Therefore, project-based learning here is defined as encompassing both within-and cross-project learning. Within each source, there are several mechanisms used for learning as well as remarkable obstructions to its learning and use. The following sections investigate how project teams can actually learn within and across projects, and what the potential barriers are to their learning in an endeavor to continuously improve project performance.

#### 2.3.1.1 Within-Project Learning

##### 1) Definition

Within-project learning-also termed “intra-project learning”-refers to the creation and sharing of knowledge within a project. This learning focuses on tasks within a single project and supports the delivery of a successful project by identifying problems and solving them during the project (Kotnour, 1999: 34, 2000: 395; Law and Chuah, 2004: 180).

##### 2) Learning Mechanisms

Regardless of the position, all project team members involved

can directly learn within a project individually and collectively. At an individual level, each project team member will learn project management skills from what they are doing on the job. Peters and Homer (1996: 3) assert that people learn best by doing - by struggling. Kotnour (1999: 34, 2000: 395) and Law and Chuah (2004) also state that learning can take place when project team members discuss approaches for completing the tasks, especially when they attempt to resolve problems encountered, either individually or collectively, throughout the project. In other words, learning can take place through identifying and resolving problems that occur in the execution of daily work routines (Koskinen, 2012: 310). The changes made to remove recurrent problems will lead to new procedures, and hence becoming new knowledge and improved skills (Koskinen, 2012: 310). The project knowledge and experience acquired gradually accumulate in the individual heads and eventually in the form of individual expertise (Cacciatori, 2008: 1591). The process of problem-solving can thus be considered as an important mechanism for individual and collective learning.

#### (1) Practices of Lessons Learned

According to Busby (1999), the project learning practices are highly required because 1) people do not always automatically learn from their professional experiences, so the learning exercise needs to be prompted and structured to be meaningful and useful to most people, 2) the knowledge of what occurred in a project is usually dispersed among several people, and 3) it is essential to disseminate project management experiences and lessons learned within an organization to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

The practices of lessons learned are thus taken as a formally reflective mechanism that encourages people to analyze and learn from past and ongoing projects (Carrilo, 2005: 237; Garon, 2006) or project events by measuring the objectives set at the beginning of each project against the results (Kotnour, 1999: 35). However, A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge emphasizes the need to take lessons learned by recording, not only the events that occur within and across the projects, but also the management actions taken as a result, and the reasons for those actions (Project Management Institute, 2000, 2004).

The formal processes and practices include various terms such as experience retention, debriefing, post-project review, post project appraisal,

after action review, reflection, project postmortem review, and post implementation evaluation. However, the term “lessons learned” is frequently used to reflect on such project review processes and practices (Disterer, 2002; Brady and Davies, 2004: 1607; Kotnour and Vergopia, 2005; Newell et al., 2006; Anbari, Caryannisb and Voetsch, 2008).

Most of the literature and discussions indicate that project closing is the most important phase to identify and capture project knowledge and experiences for the next projects (Disterere, 2002: 517). The practices enable the individuals involved to learn what happened, why it happened, what needs improvements and what lessons can be learned from the experience (Carrilo, 2005: 237). Given the practice of lessons learned enables understanding of the causes of what went well or wrong, they provide vital ideas for problem solving during the project life-cycle to support continuous improvements in project management and valuable inputs for newly set-up projects (Garon, 2006). In this process, formal learning processes are developed to capture and secure knowledge and experiences of project team members by codifying it and making it available to other project teams. They are thus important to the improvement of future project performance by avoiding the repetition of past mistakes (Kotnour, 1999: 35, 2000; Disterer, 2002; Kotnour and Vergopia, 2005; Newell et al., 2006; Anbari et al., 2008; Newell and Edelman, 2008; Mckay, 2012: 6).

However, the effort of lessons-learned documentation in previous projects is valuable only if they are effectively used to enhance the performance of current and future projects and ultimately the entire organization (Zollo and Winter, 2002: 342; Anbari et al., 2008: 636). As Roberson and Williams (2006: 69) shortly note, “reviewing projects is essential if the organization is to learn how to better conduct projects in future.” That is, there is a use of past project learning experiences to support future projects for better planning and management (Birk, Dingsoyr and Stalhane, 2002; von Zedtwitz, 2003; Garon, 2006). To enable effective use, the lessons learned should be well documented and stored in a database for retrieval by future project teams to avoid reinvention (Kotnour, 2000; Newell et al., 2006).As it is evident in Besner and Hobbs’ study (2006), a database of lessons learned, lessons learned/post mortem, and a database of historical data are identified as the tools with the greatest potential to improve project performance.

#### a) Challenges of Lessons-Learned Practices

Several studies reveal that there are numerous challenges to learning in the project structures (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Gann and Salter, 2000; Keegan and Turner, 2001; Prencipe and Tell, 2001; Schindler and Eppler, 2003; Newell et al., 2006; Julian, 2008a: 43; Barsch, Ebers and Maurer, 2013: 9). Firstly, the temporary and unique characteristics of projects themselves are perceived as a major barrier to organizational learning (Hanisch, Lindner, Mueller and Wald, 2009: 151). It is argued that unlike permanent organizations where departments and divisions act as knowledge silos, projects rarely generate routines and organizational memory. The main concern in project-based learning is that of the risk of losing knowledge generated once the project is dissolved after the task completion (Keegan and Turner, 2001: 94; Kasvi, Vastiainen and Hailikari, 2003: 571; Lindner and Wald, 2011: 885). This is owing to the fact that the project team disbands and members return to their line function or move to other projects after finishing their tasks (Gann and Salter, 2000; Keegan and Turner, 2001: 78; Prencipe and Tell, 2001; Disterer, 2002: 512; Schindler and Eppler, 2003: 220; Grabher, 2004). The result is that documents and contact persons are hard to access after the project ends (Disterer, 2002). Therefore, discontinuous working constellations result in a dispersion of individuals and knowledge (Prencipe and Tell, 2001; Disterer, 2002: 512; Kasvi et al. 2003: 571).

Furthermore, most organizations invest more in innovative project work, but nothing in evaluating and learning from it, and hence they are not able to evaluate projects and learn from them (Disterer, 2002: 513). Many organizations thus fail to learn from their past project experiences regardless of the remarkable advantages (Newell and Edelman, 2008: 568). On the other hand, there is a lack of proper mechanisms for securing learning gained for following projects and for organizational learning (Disterer 2002; Prencipe and Tell, 2001; Sydow, Lindkvist and DeFillippi, 2004), and hence making it difficult to transfer knowledge and experiences from one project to the other (Lindner and Wald, 2011: 878). In this situation, experiences of working together remain hidden in the head of some project team members, and are not identified, evaluated, and disseminated in a systematic way. The knowledge emerged from project ventures is most likely fragmented once

the project is dissolved. In this manner, temporary organization of projects may impede organizational learning (Bresnen et al. 2003; Grabher, 2004; Ibert, 2004; Scarbrough, Swan, Laurent and Bresnen, 2004; Cacciatori, 2008) rather than promoting it. Accordingly, to avoid the repeated mistakes, there is a need for harvesting project learning and make use of it for future projects.

Within the existing literature, the demand to perform a more detailed analysis at project end and to document the positive and negative experiences is manifest in the sense of a 'project post-mortem' or the so called 'lessons learned' (Disterer, 2002; Kotnour and Vergopia, 2005; Newell et al., 2006). The lessons learned practices are used as a process for capturing information through the reflection of project team members on what went well or wrong in order to improve future project performance (Disterer, 2002; Kotnour and Vergopia, 2005; Newell et al., 2006; Tan et al., 2006; Anbari et al., 2008; Newell and Edelman, 2008; Udejaja et al., 2008; Wasiyo, 2009: 9; Mckay, 2012: 6). Practically, if drawing lessons learned is really done, it is most often drawn at the end of the project. However, for project efficiency and effectiveness, continuous learning and improvement across the project has been suggested (Kotnour, 2000; Robertson and Williams, 2006).

Lessons learned are usually documented and stored in a database (Newell et al., 2006), that is through the use of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure as a formal approach to capturing and transferring project information and lessons learned. However, although the reviews of lessons learned at the end of a project are acknowledged as essential to the project and organization, the practices tend not to be limited (Keegan and Turner, 2001; Disterer, 2002; von Zedtwitz, 2003; Newell, 2004: 16). Even though there are lessons-learned policies in place, many studies find that the post-project review is often not conducted, and even more seldom is a ever report written (Keegan and Turner, 2001; Disterer, 2002; Antoni, Nilsson-Witell and Dahlgard, 2005: 887). Consistent with these studies, von Zedtwitz (2003), conducting a survey of 62 managers from over 20 R&D organizations in the United States, Europe, and Japan, finds that 80 percent of all projects were not reviewed at all after completion, while the remaining were reviewed without the use of a formally structured process.

Many studies also find that documentation of project learning is not always well conducted for subsequent use, and even when they are, they are most often done superficially, and go unused (Keegan and Turner, 2001; Prencipe and Tell, 2001; Disterer, 2002; Bresnen et al., 2003; Schindler and Eppler, 2003; Newell, 2004; Newell et al., 2006; Antoni et al., 2005; Jugdev, 2012: 13). In attempting to explore knowledge management and knowledge competencies in three project cases, Kasvi et al. (2003: 576) discover that knowledge is not systematically managed and stored, and even worse there is no archival system or appropriate procedures and tools to systematically manage documents. Even though they are well documented and easy to locate, the lessons learned are not accepted as valuable knowledge by others (Schindler and Eppler, 2003: 221). As found by Newell and Edelman (2008: 586), none of the project teams read or use these documents. These practices can result in increased project costs, extended schedules, considerable rework and costly mistakes (Jugdev, 2012: 13). Hence, the practices of lessons learned need to be reconsidered (Newell et al., 2006: 170).

The reasons for not eliciting and documenting lessons learned are related to such issues as lack of time, data, discipline, skills, and motivation (Kotnour, 1999, 2000; Keegan and Turner, 2001; Disterer, 2002; Kasvi et al., 2003; Schindler and Eppler, 2003; Newell et al., 2006; Newell and Edelman, 2008; Hanisch et al., 2009; Swan, Scarbrough and Newell, 2010).

According to Disterer (2002: 516), due to restricted project schedules, budgets and time, there is no room for project team members to capture and document project knowledge and experiences for later usage. Indeed, the issue of time pressure has been empirically evident in several studies. For example, Kotnour's (2000: 395) study on the organizational learning practices in a project management environment indicates that although most of the project managers view producing lessons learned as a valuable and important exercise, they do not have time to complete a formal lessons learned process due to time pressure. Also, Newell et al. (2006: 180), using data from 13 projects in six organizations to explore why sharing knowledge across projects fails, discovered that the team was less motivated to think about what they had learned because of time pressure to meet the project end-dates. Similar findings are also evident in the inductive study of Hanisch et al. (2009) on

knowledge management within and between projects. Based on 27 expert interviews in different corporations located in Germany, the results show that lessons learned practices are unable to be conducted due to time pressure, and hence are based on the project close-out reports instead.

Still, even though the lessons learned exercises take place at the end of a project, there are inadequate project learning practices due to insufficient time and attention. This issue is apparent in the study of Keegan and Turner (2001: 92) who find that time pressures reduce the effectiveness of lessons learned practices to retain what has been learned from projects. Even worse, project members express clear dissatisfaction with the process. And even if a project is reviewed, it is often not done systematically and properly (Newell et al., 2006: 168).

Furthermore, there is a lack of awareness about the importance of learning from projects. The project teams may not realize the value of project learning generation and storage for subsequent projects (Newell and Edelman, 2008: 585). As evident in the study of Kasvi et al. (2003: 580), documenting and reporting is often not considered to be one of them. The problem may result from the perception that the project is too specific and unique to be relevant to other projects, and others could not learn from the experience (Cooper, Lyneis and Bryant, 2002; Newell, 2004; Newell et al., 2006: 175; Robertson and Williams, 2006; Newell and Edelman, 2008: 587). On the other hand, it is difficult to motivate people to capture project knowledge if the knowledge content is highly structured, given that it requires appropriate keywords and other meta-data to their documents (Kasvi et al., 2003: 580). Additionally, the review and documentation processes are largely seen as a distraction or a waste of time. The consequence is that no or little attempt is made to try to capture and document lessons for the next projects (Cooper et al., 2002; Newell et al., 2006: 175; Robertson and Williams, 2006), even when the reviews and documentations of learning are mandated (Newell and Edelman, 2008: 585).

Another substantial constraint is cited to individual and social barriers to articulating and documenting individual knowledge and experiences (Disterer, 2002). This particularly relates to the analysis of failures and mistakes which are more likely avoided due to the fear of negative effects or sanctions, and therefore there is insufficient willingness for learning from mistakes (Disterer, 2002;

Schindler and Eppler, 2003: 221). At the same time, while lacking enforcement of the review and use procedures in the project manuals (Schindler and Eppler, 2003: 221; Newell and Edelman, 2008: 586), there are lack of incentives or little recognition and appreciation to documentation by most organizations (Disterer, 2002; Newell and Edelman, 2008: 586).

Apart from these, there is also a considerable problem from the centralization of the learning processes, which is the responsibility of a few, but not the entire organization (Keegan and Turner, 2001: 94). The problem of this practice is manifest in simple summaries and poorly maintained databases that few people have the time to use.

In essence, practices of project reviews have been done superficially and often focused more on the success of project milestones rather than the processes (Schindler and Eppler, 2003: 220; Newell et al., 2006: 168), such as lessons learned on effective problem-solving or failure (Schindler and Eppler, 2003: 220). The result is that the complexity of interactions of project team members in a learning situation is unable to capture and transfer for later usage (Keegan and Turner, 2001: 94). The end of a project is consequently the end of collective learning (Schindler and Eppler, 2003).

All of these impediments will result in a loss of knowledge and experiences gained by project teams as Keegan and Turner (2001: 94) note:

Without adequate time for reflection on the outcomes of actions, or adequate attention to feedback and alignment mechanisms within the project teams, the lessons emerging from the collective actions of these teams are lost. They do not become part of the organizational memory and learning.

More importantly, it can result in a repetition of bad decisions and errors, and therefore increased project costs, extended schedules, considerable rework and costly mistakes (Keegan and Turner, 2001; Disterer, 2002: 513; Jugdev, 2012:13). There is thus a need for reconsideration of the actual practices of lessons learned (Newell et al., 2006: 170).

(a) The Need for Continual Learning

Normally, the gathering of knowledge and experiences is theoretically and practically demanded at a project's end (Schindler and Eppler, 2003: 224). Empirically, it is also found that the majority of project managers produced lessons learned at the end of their project cycles, while only a few produced them throughout their projects (Kotnour, 1999: 34). Producing lessons learned at a project's end, however, will defer a team member's memory to recall accurately the lessons on what happened, how, why and what might be improved (Keegan and Turner, 2001: 94). This will particularly be the case of long term projects, say over five years, which can make it difficult for project team members to remember precisely problems from the beginning (Antoni et al., 2005: 878). This is empirically evident in the study on learning from post-project reviews by Koners and Goffin (2007), who contend that key learning points will have been forgotten if post-project reviews are held too late. Hence, project learning practices should be undertaken continuously throughout the project process through a routine reporting cycle such as weekly or monthly status reports and review meetings, project deliverables, or major occurrences in the project (Kotnour, 1999: 34, 2000: 395).

According to Schindler and Eppler (2003: 224), continuous project learning through periodic reviews during a project's progress will offer a number of advantages. Primarily, a regular gathering of key experiences provides most relevant lessons, while positively impacts on both the motivation of the team (who could directly profit from the lessons learned) and on the quality of the gathered insights. Specifically, project teams are able to recall their memory more easily and precisely as the events are still recent. This is especially meaningful for long-term projects, where procedural knowledge could easily be forgotten due to a large time delay. In addition, capturing knowledge and experiences during a project's course is potentially able to benefit from the entire team, whereas at the project's end it is more difficult to reconfigure the team, particularly the outsiders (e.g. management consultants). Therefore, in order for continuous project learning, there is a high demand for regular reviews with the entire project team of the most important project experiences directly after important milestones are reached (Schindler and Eppler, 2003: 227).

Likewise, Newell and Edelman (2008: 569) also note that project learning practices involve undertaking regular project reviews and maintaining project documentations. These reviews also occur when a project has met a series of predetermined milestones, not only at the end of the project. Specifically, project management planning and control tools provide a foundation for learning. The planning is not only to help with executing the project as planned, but also to support learning by providing a mechanism for planning, communicating expectations, and recognizing the deviations or successes of the project; whereas the tools aid the project manager and team by providing the data and information to continually ask and answer a set of questions to guide learning.

Accordingly, producing lessons learned through regular reviews during project implementation will benefit the project itself, whereas at the end of the project will be more useful to subsequent projects (Kotnour, 1999: 36, 2000). This is supported by Robertson and Williams (2006: 69), who recommend that learning be incorporated continuously throughout the project process, at regular intervals, and following significant events.

#### 2.3.1.2 Cross-Project Learning

##### 1) Definition

Cross-project learning is described as the combining and sharing of lessons learned across projects to apply and develop new knowledge. The term “inter-project learning” is generally well-known for learning across projects (Kotnour, 1999: 34, 2000: 395; Law and Chuah, 2004: 180). The goal is to transfer project experiences from one project to another to continuously build the organization’s capability to execute project management, product, and learning processes (Kotnour, 2000: 395).

##### 2) Cross-Project Learning Mechanisms

###### (1) Use of Project Experience

According to Newell and Edelman (2008: 570), cross-project learning occurs through, first, the use of individual team members’ experiences acquired from previous projects. As Law and Chuah, (2004: 180) state, project teams learn through projects and experiences, and then bring along those lessons learned to new projects. Newell and Edelman (2008: 570) also stress that

project team members, who may be moving project to project, use their accumulated experiences to improve the practice in an incremental fashion. In particular, where learning from the previous experiences was relevant, it is then applicable in the context of the new project. In this relation, experience accumulation is likely to enhance learning across projects; that is through the sharing of individual experiences from past projects (Newell and Edelman, 2008: 570).

#### (2) Use of Past and Other Project Documents

In the context of learning across projects, the past project information, in particular of a unique project, seems to have a limited value to other projects as it focuses only on what was achieved (Newell, 2004: 18). Still, past project information derived from several process areas provides critical inputs to current and future projects, such as for project plan development, scope definition, activity definition, activity duration estimating, resource planning, cost estimating, risk identification, and risk analysis (Anbari et al., 2008: 640). In addition, there will be learning from other projects' lessons that have been derived about procedures or processes that are found to be helpful in solving particular types of problems. This is particularly the case where existing problems cannot be solved (Newell, 2004: 18) that is, other or past project lessons will be sought and taken into consideration only if it is applicable to the present problems. Therefore, the way in which project lessons are represented and documented is central to the extent it will be brought to bear on present or future projects (Cacciatori, 2008: 1594).

#### 3) Challenges of Cross-Project Learning Practices

Apart from the problems of taking lessons learned within a project, prior studies on cross-project learning show that attempts to create, share and use past project knowledge in subsequent projects are also a big challenge. Although knowledge gained from past projects have been created, they are rarely shared and used during the early phase of an emerging project, and if reviewed at all, lessons learned tend to be hard to apply to subsequent projects (von Zedtwitz, 2002; Bresnen et al., 2003; Newell, 2004; Owen et al., 2004; Newell et al., 2006; Newell and Edelman, 2008). Furthermore, it is argued that, rather than learning from past experiences of previous projects within the same organization, project teams often start solving problems anew (Scarborough et al., 2004: 88). Despite that fact, the

challenges to sharing and using lessons learned have yet to be fully addressed (Newell, 2004; Besner and Hobbs, 2006).

Due to the less effectiveness of formal approach to learning within and between projects, many scholars have suggested social structures as an informal approach to capturing project knowledge. Indeed, numerous researchers acknowledge that processes of learning in project settings rely more upon social patterns, practices, and processes rather than ICT (i.e. Prencipe and Tell, 2001; Bresnen et al., 2003; Newell, 2004; Antoni et al., 2005; Newell et al., 2006); that is through the social interactions and relationships which exist or emerge in social structures (like projects, organizations, and organizational networks) through interactions between members (Adler and Kwon, 2002). In fact, even though the importance of social capital to effective knowledge management has been well recognized, it is not fully explored in the project context (Brookes, Morton, Dainty and Burns 2006). Little is known about how social mechanisms support knowledge sharing and use across projects (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Bhandar, Pan and Tan, 2007). Consequently, it is important to understand how social processes enable learning in the project context.

Nevertheless, some knowledge can be possibly transferred by using ICT tools for codification, while other knowledge will rely more on the process of personalization (Newell et al., 2006: 170). In other words, learning can occur in formal and informal procedures, structures, and methods. This study will thus investigate both approaches rather than focusing on only one. The underlying assumptions are that two views of knowledge are mutually compatible rather than mutually exclusive (Cook and Brown, 1999; Antoni et al., 2005). However, although both strategies are recognized as essential and necessary to learning in project settings, it is still left with an open question of how and when they are actually employed. Consequently, several researchers acknowledge the need to understand what project learning has captured, how it can be effectively captured, accessed, shared and used (Kotnour, 2000: 393; Disterer, 2002; Schindler and Eppler, 2003; Newell, 2004; Antoni et al., 2005), and what the obstacles are to learning in the project environments.

Several recent studies on learning in project settings have emphasized its challenges (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Gann and Salter, 2000; Prencipe and Tell, 2001; Newell et al., 2006; Julian, 2008a: 43; Barsch et al., 2012: 9). The reasons for not sharing and using lessons learned from other projects appear to be various. The constraints to cross-project learning can generally be divided into three different levels: individual, project, and organizational.

#### (1) Individual Factors

The factors of individuals include reluctance to share (Swan et al., 2010; Ghareibeh, 2011) and a lack of ability to capture and access lessons learned (Von Zedtwitz, 2003; Newell et al., 2006; Bartsch et al., 2013). The reluctance to share knowledge with other projects is reflected in the study of Swan, Scarbrough and Newell (2010: 340) who attempt to explain when learning occurs in projects, and when organizations do and do not learn from their projects. Their findings indicate that, even though knowledge sharing is encouraged, there is little transfer of learning. The unwillingness to transfer learning is to hoard their own learning and gain a performance advantage over the others (Swan et al., 2010: 340).

On the other hand, although there is an effort to learn from other projects, the ability to capture and access existing project knowledge stored by previous or other projects is considered as an important factor to project-based learning. A lack of necessary abilities, especially relative technical and professional abilities, will likely limit the understanding of others' project knowledge and experiences. As asserted by many studies, due to its specific and technical nature, project knowledge generated may not be able to be understood and applied by other project teams who lack the absorptive capacity (Tsai, 2001; Newell et al., 2006; Bakker et al., 2011; Bartsch et al., 2013).

#### (2) Project Factors

In addition to the individual level, the nature of the project itself is considered as another important barrier to learning across projects. The most commonly found is the belief in project uniqueness. Arguably, cross-project learning is very limited due to a strong tendency to believe that each project is unique and so has nothing to learn from what has gone on before. The more a project is perceived as unique, the less likely are project teams to try and learn from others (Newell, 2004:

17). Thus, many believe that the unique nature of projects makes it difficult for project teams to learn from other project experiences within the same organization (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Gann and Salter, 2000; Prencipe and Tell, 2001; Newell, 2004; Scarbrough et al., 2004; Newell et al., 2006; Robertson and Williams, 2006; Newell and Edelman, 2008; Swan et al., 2010; Bartsch et al., 2013). Also, due to the unique nature of the project, learning from product knowledge is very limited or less likely if the recipient lacks absorptive capacity. Furthermore, due to time pressure, project teams lack opportunities to share lessons with colleagues outside the project (Keegan and Turner, 2001; Disterer, 2002; Newell et al., 2006; Robertson and Williams, 2006; Hanisch et al., 2009).

On the other hand, although project lessons learned, as well as time, are available, the extent that they are actually used is still very limited (Kotnour, 1999; Newell and Edelman, 2008: 579). One of the main reasons is that the contents of project learning and knowledge are less useful and applicable. As Newell and Edelman (2008: 579) assert, despite the existence of database systems to capture project knowledge, its use is less likely successful because of the sheer volume of information they contain. In the meantime, compiling with the specific and technical content, the knowledge stored in the database is only about product rather than procedural knowledge (Newell et al., 2006: 180). This is because most projects spend time in capturing what has been done or achieved, rather than the useful lessons on how and why these achievements have been come about (Newell, 2004: 16).

### (3) Organizational Factors

The organizational barriers stem from a lack of mechanisms for capturing project learning, or a lack of support by the organizational structure, and a lack of integration of separate information flows (Disterer, 2002; Bresnen et al., 2003: 162; Carrillo, 2005; Newell et al., 2006; Hanisch et al., 2009), and lack of leadership (Hanisch et al., 2009).

The supportive culture is identified by Hanisch et al. (2009) as a key success factor for managing project knowledge, particularly for enhancing interdisciplinary cooperation and knowledge exchange of project teams. However, there are considerable constraints to cross-project learning. Certainly, knowledge management infrastructures can effectively facilitate project-based learning. Still,

even though ICT tools are beneficial, they may not be fully employed to systematically manage documents. As apparent in the findings of Kasvi et al. (2003: 574), there is no particular document management or groupware systems, especially for computer files. Instead, the storage of knowledge learned relies on reports that project contracts require such as reports of the project results and reports of the project accounts. As a result, only a few people can access the files and work reports (Kasvi et al., 2003: 579). Without appropriate procedures and tools or effective ICT systems to manage lessons learned, the lessons captured and stored are thus difficult to find (Newell et al., 2006: 180). On the other hand, even the best possible ICT support is not sufficient if the corporate culture does not encourage the use of the provided software and application devices. Learning from other project experiences is likely impeded because of poor communication and a reluctance to blame others (von Zedtwitz, 2003). Hence, there is a need to focus on the people and their acceptance of the tools to be used (Hanisch et al., 2009: 155).

In addition, even though project learning is supported and placed on databases or intranet sites, it is done with no consideration of who might use this information or how it might be used, and hence the end result is that it is not used (Newell, 2004: 16). This issue is also noted by Julian (2008b: 144) who noted that it is unclear whether project managers and teams utilize project knowledge resulting from lessons learned sessions, and in what ways. There is a lack of motivation to capture project experiences for future projects due to 1) the structural position of projects in an organization and their local dispersion, 2) the benefits of knowledge exchange are unclear, and 3) a lack of incentives and formal structures to encourage learning across project boundaries (Ekstedt et al., 1999). All of these reflect in a lack of organizational policies to encourage the review of lessons learned and documentation to illustrate the value of learning from other projects, and to provide incentives for the learning practices (Newell and Edelman, 2008). In this situation, organizational support by top management is highly needed (Hanisch et al., 2009). It is thus important to understand how these impediments to learning from projects can be overcome (Lindner and Wald, 2011).

In general, the most commonly found factors that impede effective learning within and from other projects can be summarized in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2** Barriers to Project-Based Learning

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Brief explanation</b>	<b>Scholars/Researchers</b>
<b>Individual Factors</b>		
Reluctance to share	Unwilling to share knowledge with others	Swan et al. (2010); Ghareibeh (2011)
Ability to learn	unable to learn and access to the knowledge stored by other projects	Keegan and Turner (2001); Tsai (2001); Schindler and Eppler (2003); von Zedtwitz (2003); Newell et al. (2006); Bakker et al. (2011); Bartsch et al. (2013)
Lack of awareness	unaware that knowledge exploitation or transfer is important and needed	Schindler and Eppler (2003); Kasvi and colleagues (2003); Newell, 2004; Newell et al. (2006); Newell and Edelman (2008); Bartsch et al. (2013)
<b>Project Factors</b>		
Project uniqueness	unable/limited potential to exploit or transfer knowledge from and to other projects	DeFillippi and Arthur (1998); Kotnour (1999); Gann and Salter (2000); Prencipe and Tell (2001); Disterer (2002); Bresnen et al. (2003); Schindler and Eppler, (2003); von Zedtwitz (2003); Scarbrough et al. (2004); Newell, 2004; Newell et al. (2006); Robertson and Williams (2006); Newell and Edelman (2008); Edmondson and Nembhard (2009); Swan et al. (2010); Bartsch et al. (2013)
Time pressures	that reduce or eliminate formal time for learning and practices	Kotnour (2000); Keegan and Turner (2001); Prencipe and Tell (2001); Disterer (2002); Bresnen et al. (2003); Schindler and Eppler (2003); von Zedtwitz (2003); Newell et al. (2006); Robertson and Williams (2006); Newell and Edelman (2008); Hanisch et al. (2009); Swan et al. (2010)
Contents of project knowledge stored	1) the contents of knowledge stored are less helpful and inapplicable 2) sheer volume of the information content	Newell, 2004; Newell et al. (2006); Newell and Edelman (2008)

**Table 2.2** (Continued)

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Brief explanation</b>	<b>Scholars/Researchers</b>
<b>Organizational Factors</b>		
Leadership	lack of role model function of top-management supporting project-based learning	Hanisch et al. (2009)
Weak systems/mechanisms	no concrete or systematic approach (with any real emphasis)	Keegan and Turner (2001); Bresnen et al. (2003); Schindler and Eppler (2003); Carrillo (2005); Newell et al. (2006); Hanisch et al. (2009)
Organizational culture	to enhance interdisciplinary cooperation and knowledge exchange of project teams	Disterer (2002); vonZedtwitz (2003); Anbari et al. (2008); Newell and Edelman (2008); Hanisch et al. (2009)
Organizational policies	to encourage the reviews of lessons learned, and to provide incentives for the learning practices	Ekstedt et al. (1999); Keegan and Turner (2001); Schindler and Eppler (2003); Newell and Edelman (2008); Swan et al. (2010)

### 2.3.1.3 Use of ICT Infrastructure

Advanced ICT infrastructure is relatively considered as an important factor for managing project knowledge effectively (Karlsen and Gottschalk, 2004; Hanisch et al., 2009; Lindner and Wald, 2011: 886). ICT systems are used for recognizing, documenting, storing, organizing, validating, and making available lessons learned on prior projects (Hanisch, et al., 2009). Notwithstanding the advantages of ICT infrastructure to facilitate project learning practices, this approach to capturing and sharing project learning in or across an organization is unsuccessful. The limited use was found by Newell (2004: 16) who conducted multiple case studies to identify the barriers and facilitators to cross-project learning. He discovered that the project learning documented by other projects was used, but only when the project teams came across a problem that could not be solved by the existing knowledge and expertise within the project team. In other words, they would use then when they

needed to; they did not deliberately search out the other learning experiences to be useful in their current projects. This means that the learning information often goes unused (Newell, 2004: 16). Existing studies also indicate that lessons learned, which are conducted and stored by other projects, are rarely used as guiding for initiating new projects (Kasvi et al., 2003: 578; Newell, 2004: 16; Antoni et al., 2005: 887; Besner and Hobbs, 2006; Newell et al., 2006: 174; Newell and Edelman, 2008).

There are considerable obstacles to the use of electronic means. These include a lack of standardization of the system, practical difficulties in accessing the intranet and websites from site offices, a lack of incentives to use and update information on the websites, and a lack of resources to keep the websites up-to-date and accurate (Bresnen et al., 2003: 162). In this relation, it can be said that the mere existence and appropriation of an ICT system does not always guarantee an effective support of knowledge management activities (Lindner and Wald, 2011: 881).

Due to the limitations and constraints of formal strategies for sharing the process knowledge and lessons learned within and between projects, attention has increasingly shifted towards examining the role of social interactions as an informal strategy to promote knowledge retention and transfer (Brown and Duguid, 2001). The informal strategy is specifically required for the process lessons which reside in the head of individuals, and hence better shared directly with the people involved (Newell et al., 2006). Indeed, the role of social networks has been accepted as an effective strategy for transferring project learning (Huang and Newell, 2003; Newell, 2004: 16). A number of conceptual and empirical studies have argued that social capital facilitates the exchange of resources, especially knowledge, among different organizational units (Kostova and Roth, 2002; Li, 2005), business units (Hansen, 1999), and projects (Bresnen et al., 2003; Chen, Chang and Hung, 2008; Maurer, Bartsch and Ebers, 2011). Therefore, it seems appropriate to consider how the social context may enhance learning in project environments (Bartsch et al., 2013: 241). The following section will thus investigate this relationship.

## **2.4 Social Capital and Project-Based Learning**

### **2.4.1 Definition of Social Capital**

Social capital has gained interests by social scientists in the past decade as a paradigm to understand a wide variety of individual and collective behaviors contributing to the social elements (Lin, 2011a: 1). The concept of social capital has been increasingly used in many disciplines of the social sciences, with varying definitions and conceptualizations (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Hitt, Lee and Yucel, 2002; Castiglione, van Deth and Wolleb, 2008: 1), and different levels of analysis (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998; Kang, Morris and Snell, 2007), in diverse social phenomena (e.g. projects, organizations, nations, and communities) (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Adler and Kwon, 2002). Expanding in various arenas and applications, the conception and operationalization of social capital has now become very diverse and multi-dimensional (Lin, 2011a:1). However, its exact meaning is hotly disputed (Castiglione et al., 2008: 1) and hence there is no consensus on how to define social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998: 243).

Among various definitions, Adler and Kwon (2002: 19) state that they are broadly similar but different in terms of their focus such as on 1) bonds-the internal relationships of actors within a collectivity, 2) bridges-the external relations an actor maintains with other actors, or 3) both types of linkages. Firstly, the bonding aspect is based on the collective relationships between a defined group (Coleman, 1988). Social capital relates to the internal structure and relationships within this collective. It specifically emphasizes those features that give the collectivity cohesiveness and thereby facilitates the pursuit of collective goals (Adler and Kwon, 2002: 21).

In contrast to this view, the bridging aspect focuses on a resource that an actor can access based on direct or indirect personal relationships with others in the social network (Adler and Kwon, 2002: 19). In other words, it focuses on how networks provide an individual to access or bridge to the information of others. The resources are obtained through individuals who play a brokerage role in bridging across divided communities (Bhandar et al., 2007).

The last group of definitions is the internal and external views which argue that the behavior of a collective actor, such as an organization, is influenced, both by

its external linkages to other organizations, and institutions, and by the fabric of its internal linkages. This means that its capacity for effective action is typically a function of both (Adler and Kwon, 2002: 21). Table 2.3 summarizes the definitions of social capital based on their focus of relationships.

**Table 2.3** Definitions of Social Capital

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
<b>Focus on internal relationships</b>	
Coleman (1988)	Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspects of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions or actors-whether persons or corporate actor-within the structure.
Putnam (1995: 67)	Features of social organizations such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.
Tsai and Ghoshal (1998)	Norms and values associated with relationships.
Leana and van Buren (1999: 538)	An asset that benefits both the organization and its members through collective goal orientation and shared trust which create value by facilitating collective actions.
<b>Focus on external relationships</b>	
Bourdieu (1985: 248)	The aggregate of actual or potential resources that are linked to the actors of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.
Baker (1990: 619)	A resource that actors derive from specific social structures and then use to pursue their interests; it is created by changes in the relationships among actors.
Burt (1992:9)	Friends, colleagues, and more general contacts through which you receive opportunities to use your financial and human capital.
Portes (1998:6)	The ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social actors' resources.
Esser (2008: 23)	All those resources that an actor can mobilize and/or profit from because of his embeddedness in a network of relationships with other actors.
<b>Focus on both internal and external relationships</b>	
Schiff (1992: 161)	The set of elements of the social structures that affects relations among people and are inputs or arguments of the production and/or utility function.
Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998: 243)	The sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available in, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit.
Hitt et al. (2002: 354)	The relationships between individuals and organizations that facilitate actions and thereby create value.
Adler and Kwon (2002: 23)	The goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor's social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence and solidarity it makes available to the actor.

Based upon the definitions illustrated in Table 2.5, though defined differently for diverse purposes, social capital can be broadly defined as an asset that resides in social relationships, (Walker, Kogut and Shan, 1997) and that exists or emerges in social structures (like families, organizations, and organizational networks) through interactions between members (Adler and Kwon, 2002). Put simply, social capital is defined as the resources accumulated through the relationships among people (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998) or belonging to a group (Bourdieu, 1985). It is called a resource or asset because, by manifesting itself in forms such as trust, norms, information benefits, and power, it can be beneficial to the structure and its members (Bhandar et al., 2007: 264).

#### **2.4.2 The Role of Social Capital in Project-Based Learning**

Traditionally, management of project knowledge has been approached by cognitive processes which focus on codification of knowledge, its retention and dispersal via the use of ICT systems (Brookes et al., 2006: 475). However, this approach tends to be problematic when it comes to codification of the soft process lessons which lie in the heads of individuals. Arguably, the lessons are better shared informally and directly with the people involved (Newell et al., 2006). To capture and store this kind of personalized knowledge and experience, it needs different procedures like personal interactions, dialogues and workshops (Kasvi et al., 2003: 579). As Hansen, Nohria and Tierney, (1999: 113) emphasize, “the documents could not convey the richness of the knowledge or the logic that had been applied to reach solutions-that understanding has to be communicated from one person to another.” As a consequence, the informal procedures of social interactions have increasingly been opted for (Brown and Duguid, 2001).

While the formal methods of ICT-based knowledge management have been challenged because of their emphasis on explicit knowledge, the informal approach of the social model focuses instead upon the tacit knowledge which exists only in the minds of people. According to the social perspective, learning foremost is a social process in which individuals and groups augment their knowledge (Bartsch et al., 2013: 241). Without these practices, sharing learning across projects is not possible (Newell, et al., 2006: 168). Put differently, tacit knowledge or experiences are only

accessible and made explicit through the surrounding workgroups or informal networks (Ayas, 1996: 134; Schindler and Eppler, 2003). Hence, success in capturing tacit knowledge depends crucially on interpersonal and social aspects, rather than technological or procedural mechanisms (Hansen et al., 1999).

Apparently, several researchers have employed the facets of social capital theory to study the notion of knowledge sharing and use in the project environment. Indeed, social capital has been well recognized as an important vehicle learning within and across projects (see Huang and Newell, 2003; Kasvi et al., 2003; Newell et al. 2006; Bresnen et al., 2005; Brookes et al. 2006; Swan et al., 2010). The important role of social capital as a key enabler of cross-project learning is recently evident in the study of Julian (2008b: 144) on the role of Project Management Officers facilitating cross-project learning. The study indicates that, due to the lack of a direct line of authority over project participants, the project management officer leaders use social relationships to gain legitimacy to facilitate cross-project learning.

Drawing upon five case studies from the construction industry in the United Kingdom, Bresnen et al. (2003: 165) find that social patterns, practices and processes (i.e. personal social contacts and informal networks) are the key enablers to effectively capture and transfer learning in project settings. Also, the findings show the difficulties, challenges and limitations of attempting to capture and codify project learning via the use of technological mechanisms.

Consistent with Bresnen et al.'s findings, many researchers (such as Huang and Newell, 2003; Newell, 2004; Newell et al., 2006: 174; Newell and Edelman, 2008: 579) also discover that learning from other projects relied heavily on social patterns, practices and processes, rather than ICT. According to Antoni et al.'s (2005) study of two product development organizations, the results show that a "people-centered" approach is more preferable by engineers than post-project reviews which are centered upon report processes as the traditional practices of lessons learned. Also, Newell's (2004: 16-17) study on cross-project learning indicates that, rather than search out lessons in the databases, project team members more often used, either their personal networks to seek out individuals whom they thought may have some answers to their problems, or a process of learning-by-doing.

According to Newell et al. (2006: 174), project learning is transferred through individual project team members moving to other projects, and through project managers talking to each other about their project issues. A similar finding is also apparent in the study of Swan et al. (2010) who qualitatively examine enablers of project learning through a review of 13 projects across six organizations. In their findings, they concluded that project learning is transferred, either by the movement of knowledgeable individuals, or by accessing other knowledgeable individuals; that is, transferring through personal interactions or networking (Swan et al., 2010: 340).

This suggests that, in the context of the sharing of project-based learning, the social structured approach or personalized strategy (Hansen et al., 1999) is more useful than the ICT-based approach or codification strategy (Newell, 2004: 17). Newell et al. (2006: 170) assert that there is a need for reconsideration of social network ties in facilitating and overcoming the barriers to the actual practices of project learning. They claim that cross-project learning initiatives are less effective, probably because it is often taken-for-granted that project learning can be readily transferred to others in textual form. This ignores the embedded, tacit nature of knowledge that manifests itself in practice (Newell et al., 2006: 170). In order for effective sharing and use of project learning, which is deeply embedded in practice, social relationships are necessary. There is a need to develop knowledge interventions based on the social processes, practices and patterns within an organization (Brookes et al., 2006: 474).

At this point, it is evident that learning in project environments is increasingly acknowledged as a crucial source of knowledge creation, but faces substantial challenges (Keegan and Turner, 2001; Scarbrough et al., 2004). The challenges are apparent when it comes to transferring learning, in particular the embedded, tacit dimension, across projects (Bresnen et al., 2003). Given these challenges, the importance of social practices in project-based learning has been conceptually introduced and empirically confirmed by many studies. Still, there are more studies on the format and process of drawing lessons learned within-project learning (Carrillo, 2005; Newell et al., 2006), but less on how project learning is shared and used in subsequent projects (Wayosi, 2009: 69) -that is cross-project learning. As Newell (2004: 12) notes, “the problem of cross-project learning has been recognized in both

the academic and practitioner literature, but there have been relatively little research to date that attempt to understand the problem of sharing learning across projects.” Hence, there is a need for a more systematic process of how to capture and disseminate lessons learned across projects (Cooper et al., 2002: 213).

This study will, therefore, explore whether social capital has essentially facilitated knowledge sharing across IDPs. The roles of social capital enabling cross-project learning will specifically be examined through Adler and Kwon’s (2002) model in the next section.

### **2.4.3 The Opportunity, Motivation and Ability View of Social Capital in Project Learning**

Arguably, project learning processes and practices can be influenced by social relationships which exist through three sources: opportunity, motivation, and ability (Adler and Kwon, 2002: 24; Bhandar et al., 2007; Bartsch et al., 2013). That is to say, social capital exists in a structure where the members have an opportunity, are motivated, and possess the ability to engage in social capital transactions.

#### **2.4.3.1 Opportunity**

The actors’ network of social ties provides an opportunity to gain access to social capital transactions (Adler and Kwon, 2002: 24; Bhandar et al., 2007: 265). On the one hand, internal social ties create the opportunity to act together. On the other hand, external social ties with others give actors an opportunity to leverage their contacts’ resources (Adler and Kwon, 2002: 24). Projects, particularly in the case where project team members are from different functions, or even from different organizations, foster the development of social ties. The project then links actors across different organizational units through social interactions (Hansen, 2002). The connections among project team members and their intra-organizational colleagues are important because they provide a structure and an opportunity for the teams to learn and exchange knowledge (Grant, 1996). They present channels for information or knowledge sharing (McFadyen and Cannella, 2004) that is unevenly distributed within and across organizations (Burt, 1992). The connections establish opportunities for sharing project knowledge despite local, temporal, or topical dispersion of different projects (Bartsch et al., 2013: 243).

#### 2.4.3.2 Motivation

Adler and Kwon (2002: 25) theorize that social ties exist with the presence of norms and trust within the structure as a key motivational source. The norms and trust are developed through a history of interactions and relationships such as respect and friendship (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998:243). The assets created and leveraged through ongoing personal relationships are thus referred to as “relational embeddedness” (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998:243). However, Bhandar et al. (2007: 265) assert that motivation may depend on perception of benefits from being involved in a project and a perception of costs reduction. This is similar to Lin’s (2011b: 78) explanation that involvement and investment in social relationships, individually or collectively, are deliberately made with expected returns or to produce profits. In this light, the motivation for project team members to be involved in social relationships resulting from working in IDPs is to obtain something in return. The expected returns can be information, influence, social credential or reinforcement. These resources, embedded in social networks, will enhance the outcomes of actions (Lin, 2011b: 78).

According to Bartschet al. (2013: 243), strong ties among project team members, and their intra-organizational colleagues outside the project, present further opportunities for sharing knowledge across project boundaries. Strong ties, due to their closeness and intimacy, motivate both project team members and their intra-organizational colleagues to assist each other and share knowledge, although this may require some extra effort on either side (Hansen, 1999; McFadyen and Cannella, 2004). Moreover, strong ties imply a high quality and reliability of the transferred knowledge (Fischer and Pollock, 2004) and, therefore, increase motivation to retain and use project knowledge outside the project.

#### 2.4.3.3 Ability

Adler and Kwon (2002: 26) refer to this element of social capital as the resources and competencies that actors possess to potentially mobilize via their social relationships. Adler and Kwon (2002: 26) contend that ‘the share of those potentially mobilizable resources they receive depends on their contacts’ motivation, and the total amount actually mobilized depends also on the opportunity created by the number of these contacts.’ Associability through shared jargon and beliefs is thus essential for actors to comprehend each other’s requirements and hence help each other (Nahapiet

and Ghoshal, 1998; Adler and Kwon, 2002). The shared common language and codes, and the shared narratives, will create shared meanings within a social group (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998: 244). The shared meanings or goal congruence between project team members and their intra-organizational colleagues outside the project may motivate project teams to share their knowledge deliberately in order to implement it outside the project and support common goals (Inkpen and Tsang, 2005). In the context of IDPs, the ability may arise from the human resources that each member has, and also from their ability to understand the technical knowledge, and hence contribute to the process of knowledge sharing and use.

Based upon the concept introduced by Adler and Kwon (2002), and empirical studies (see Bhandar et al., 2007; Bartsch et al., 2013), the presence of social capital plays a crucial role in facilitating learning across project boundaries. Though working in a project organization, project team members-consisting of different expertise, abilities, knowledge and experience-have established relationships. The pattern of linkages and the relationships built through exchanges are the foundation for social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998: 250). In this light, it is presumed that the project team's social interactions within and across projects (in other projects or line functions of the organization or even other organizations) can provide them with the opportunities, motivation, and ability to create, transfer, and use project knowledge.

However, within existing social relationships, opportunities, motivation and ability are available only where there are ongoing social interactions, shared understanding and meanings, and strong norms of trust and reciprocity which have been developed over time through strong and multiple linkages (Bresnen et al., 2005: 241; Chen et al., 2008). Arguably, close social interactions provide the opportunity for project teams to know more about each other, and hence likely to motivate them to share important information. Meanwhile, it also permits project teams to create a common understanding related to task issues or goals, and to gain access to others' resources. In other words, project teams with more social interactions with one another will be more likely to get information and resources, and to exchange opinions related to task issues (Chen et al., 2008: 23).

Indeed, the existence of social interactions and relationships, especially through the view of opportunity, motivation and ability, has been empirically found to contribute to knowledge acquisition and transfer in a project organization. This is apparent in the recent study of Bartsch et al. (2013), who empirically examine how project teams' internal social capital affects organization-level learning outcomes that are crucial for organizational performance. By employing the opportunity, motivation and ability concept of social capital, the results demonstrate that project teams' intra-organizational social capital, enhances the opportunities, motivation, and ability to transfer and share knowledge from the project to the project-based organization as a whole. Similarly, Bhandar et al. (2007: 272) also use the opportunity, motivation and ability framework to explicate the roles played by social capital in integrating project knowledge by conducting a case study of a collaborative information system project embarked upon by three organizations. Their study shows that the roles of social capital tends to be various (e.g. as a motivator, an integrator, and a facilitator) depending on task requirements of each phase of the project. This implies that different phases of the project require distinct management strategies. The value of social capital is thus contingent on the project phases (Bhandar et al., 2007: 272).

This study will, therefore, unearth the specific roles through which social capital influences cross-project learning in each phase of the project processes. In an attempt to do so, social capital is viewed in this study as the resources that exist or emerge in a structure due to the presence of opportunity, motivation and ability in a project team's social ties, and that facilitates action towards the goals of the structure. This view helps to answer the question of how (through what roles) social capital influences project-based learning.

#### **2.4.4 Challenges of Social Capital in Project-based Learning**

Since social capital, derived from the network of social relationships, essentially enables knowledge creation and sharing within and across projects, it has thus increasingly been seen as a valuable resource for organizational survival (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Yet, there remain many barriers in any attempt to exploit the knowledge in this way (Bresnen et al., 2005). Similar to the mechanistic approach, the constraints of project-based learning through social capital fundamentally

arise from the characteristics of the project itself as aforementioned. These include the variability and unique nature of project tasks, the cross-disciplinary working environment, and the discontinuous inflow of resources, information and personnel (Prencipe and Tell, 2001; Bresnen et al., 2003). Such constraints ‘not only make it difficult to transfer learning from one project to the next, but also to develop and sustain the social networks on which social capital depends’ (Bresnen et al., 2005: 238).

In addition, Newell (2004: 18) notes that sharing of learning or knowledge can occur only when there is some common or overlapping knowledge between the two people (two project teams). That is, the recipient of knowledge should have the absorptive capacity to take in and use that knowledge. However, as the projects are often unique in terms of their focus and context, sharing learning and knowledge across projects is very limited or less likely. Particularly, for those projects which involve individuals from diverse professional and knowledge backgrounds, it is not likely to be easily understood by others or those not involved in the project. This means that knowledge about what was actually done on a project-or referred to as product knowledge-will have limited value to other projects due to a lack of capacity to absorb this knowledge (Newell, 2004: 18).

Although previous research has recognized the positive influence of social capital, a resource based on social relationships, on knowledge management, the processes of how social capital, especially through the opportunity, motivation and ability features, facilitates learning across project boundaries is still incomplete and requires further research (Bresnen et al., 2005). Given that social networks and social capital have not been fully explored in a project context, in particular the dynamic nature of the social interactions which have been unclear (Brookes et al., 2006: 476).Further, there is also a need for further in-depth research on the various roles in distinct contexts and events so as to identify the contingencies of social capital’s influence (Bhandar et al., 2007: 273). Inkpen and Tsang (2005) suggest the need to examine social capital independently in different contexts and illustrate how its effect on knowledge transfer differs in different network types.

## 2.5 Formal and Informal Approaches to Project-Based Learning

Apparently, there are two main approaches to learning in project environments: formal and informal, or codification and personalization. Generally, project learning practices are used as a formal process to codify project lessons learned for future projects with the use of advanced ICT systems to generate, store, and retrieve project information. ICT infrastructure appears, in fact, to be a precondition for effective management of project learning (Karlsen and Gottschalk, 2004; Hanisch et al., 2009; Lindner and Wald, 2011: 886). However, there are a wide range of constraints with regards to the formal procedures leading to consideration of alternative approaches to effective project-based learning. In addition, advanced ICT systems alone are not sufficient for ensuring the effective sharing of project learning, especially for those of tacit and personalized knowledge and experience (Hanisch et al., 2009; Lindner and Wald, 2011: 886). As evident in many studies, personal experience, which is difficult to codify, can be transferred only through personal contacts or social relationships. In the same token, reliance merely on informal approaches cannot guarantee the effective use and sharing of knowledge, given that there is also a great difficulty of accessing previous experience through personal networks (Swan et al., 2010: 341). There must be a complement of ICT systems to effectively support communication and the storage and retrieval of project information (Hansen et al., 1999; Hanisch et al., 2009; Swan et al., 2010: 341; Lindner and Wald, 2011: 887).

As some knowledge learned can easily be codified and stored through the use of ICT infrastructure, while other knowledge is mainly tied to personal interactions (Newell et al., 2006: 170), there is a need for both approaches. The demand for both approaches is also noted by Antoni et al. (2005: 880) that “knowledge can be transferred mainly through the axis of code and the axis of people, i.e. through people and through documents.” Learning from and between projects can partly be made through documents such as blueprints, process descriptions, commented software codes, post-project reports, or other documents. On the other hand, learning can occur through the people-relatedness in a project context, in particular for the transfer of tacit knowledge (Antoni et al., 2005: 880). Similarly, introducing the concept of a

project memory system, Kasvi et al. (2003: 581) identify paper documents and interaction with colleagues as the most important sources of learning. That is, both codification and personalization strategies are used. They explain that it is not enough to capture only documents; there also needs to be an understanding of the contexts and processes behind the documents of what happened and why.

This is consistent with the two concepts-codification and personalization-of knowledge management introduced by Hansen et al. (1999). Codification is a people-to-document approach for generating and sharing learning through an electronic document system. This strategy makes the most sense for explicit knowledge as it can be codified. Certainly, ICT systems are the main tools for codifying, storing, and retrieving the project learning produced. By contrast, personalization is a person-to-person approach by developing networks to enable sharing of tacit knowledge. Unlike explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge is difficult to articulate in writing and is acquired through personal experience. It includes scientific expertise, operational know-how, insights about an industry, business judgment, and technological expertise. The tacit knowledge is most often used for solving problems, and the person-to-person approach works best. Only used for the codification model, advanced ICT is also used in order to make the personalization strategies work effectively, that is building networks of people, given that project learning is shared, not only via face-to-face, but also telephone, e-mail, and video-conference. Hence, it is noticed that although the two strategies employ ICT systems, they require different infrastructure, as well as different levels of supports. In the codification model, ICT tools support search engines that allow people to find and use documents when they need. In the personalization model, it is most important to have a system that allows people to find other people (Hansen et al., 1999: 114).

In general, it can be said that ICT tools are primarily used for explicit knowledge, whereas person-to-person contacts are for tacit knowledge. Even though these two approaches of learning have different focuses, they are intrinsically intertwined. Both approaches are used, but the extent of usage is context-dependent; effective organizations pursue one strategy predominantly, and use another as a supporting role (Cook and Brown, 1999; Hansen et al., 1999: 109; Antoni et al., 2005: 881). This is also empirically found by Hanisch et al., (2009), who conducted an

exploratory study to understand the enablers and impediments to the success of knowledge management in projects, and their impacts to project success. They report that there is a use for both codification and personalization for sharing lessons learned, but the majority opts for a personalization strategy, in particular for highly specialized knowledge.

However, the support by ICT tools has also proven to be necessary. Without pertinent support by ICT-tools, it is difficult to manage previous project information for later use (Hanisch et al., 2009: 154). In short, there is a need for both codification and personalization approaches to facilitating learning of distinct types of knowledge. But the approach that is likely to be most appropriate depends on the context and the type of learning being shared (Nahapiet and Ghospal, 1998; Newell, 2004: 13). In order to allow a project to distil results and lessons from one project and deliver them into another, systematic management of both substance and context knowledge throughout the whole project process is thus needed (Kasviet al., 2003: 581).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This chapter describes the methods to be used to investigate the main requirements and conditions set by donors during project execution, the enablers as well as barriers to the project-based learning, and the use and sharing of project information within and across the project. The chapter covers the following areas:

1) the rationale for case studies 2) selection of cases 3) methods for data collection 4) methods for data analysis; and 5) methods for verification or the issues of trustworthiness.

#### **3.1 Rationale for Case Studies**

This study employs the descriptive case research strategy to unearth the research questions. A case study is briefly defined by Merriam (2009: 40) as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system.” The case study method is well suited for 1) ‘how’ and/or ‘why’ questions that are being posed about a contemporary set of events, 2) over which the researcher has no control, and 3) a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 2009: 2, 2012; Gray, 2009: 247). The case study approach allows researchers to systematically gather rich, detailed information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group by one or more cases over time, through a number of sources and methods, including observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports (Cresswell, 2007: 73). As Thomas (2010: 4) states, looking at the subject from many and varied angles enables us to get closer to the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ and hence to see something in its completeness. The closeness of a case study to real-life situations and its multiple wealth of details are important for the development of a nuanced view of reality (Flyvbjerg, 2007: 392). In other words, relying heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources is particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and holistic, and thus enables us to fully understand human behavior and lived experiences in the social context (Berg, 1998:

212; Creswell, 2007: 73; Willis, 2007: 240; Merriam, 2009: 43; Thomas, 2010: 23). In brief, the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2009: 4). The case investigation is appropriate for this particular study given that it will enable us to unravel the mechanisms by which project teams have actually used to learn, create and transfer lessons learned within and between projects. That is, it allows us to illuminate and understand the cases being studied (Hays, 2004: 218).

## **3.2 Selection of Case Studies**

### **3.2.1 Selection Criteria**

In order to obtain the greatest possible amount of in-depth information, three case studies have been purposefully chosen. The aim here is not to increase the sample size, but to replicate the findings of one case across a number of cases to lend compelling support for an initial set of propositions (Gray, 2009: 257). Merriam (2009: 49) contends that “the more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be.” Cross-case comparison enables us to understand a case finding, grounding it by specifying how, where and, if possible, why it carries on as it does; that is, it provides more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). In short, multicase research enables a better understanding about a particular phenomenon (Stake, 2006: 14).

To specifically study project-based learning in IDPs, the cases were purposively selected from IDPs of the Lao MOH. That is to say, individual project is the unit of analysis of this study. The purposeful selection of particular settings, persons, or activities will provide information that is relevant to the particular research questions and goals (Maxwell, 2013: 97). As Patton (2002: 230) states:

the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for studying in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling.

The cases selected thus focus more on those which seem to potentially offer the opportunity to learn about their activities and situation in order to come to understand the phenomenon better (Stake, 2006: 25). Furthermore, the more cases that can be arrayed in a similar replicative fashion, the stronger the aggregate evidence in support of analytic conclusions and the broader theory (Yin, 2009: 61).

Three cases have been purposefully selected based to enable an in-depth understanding about the project-based learning. The projects studied meet the following criteria:

- 1) A three-to five-year project of the 2011-2015 NESDPs that is currently being implemented, which permits the researcher to know about the mechanisms by which the project teams learn within the project during project implementation;
- 2) Continuing from the past project. This criterion will provide information about application of past project lessons learned for the current project;
- 3) Managed by health staff and by different project teams or organizations with diverse context, which will enrich analytical insights of the case study research; and/or
- 4) Supported by different donors, given each donor has its own policy and goals in assistance, it will enable understanding of the extent donors' requirements and conditions influence learning of project teams.

In general, the underlying assumption of these criteria is that of the typical projects reflect the average situation, or instance of IDP-based learning.

### **3.2.2 Project Studies Selected**

3.2.2.1 Based upon the criteria, three project cases chosen are as follows.

- 1) Background of Project A Health System Strengthening Program-Round 8
- 2) The Global Fund to fight Aids, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (GFATM) was created to dramatically increase resources to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and to direct those resources to areas of greatest need. Its stated purpose is to attract, manage and disburse resources to fight these three diseases

(GFATM, 2006). The Global Fund is one of the main development partners in the health sector of Lao PDR. With a total of US\$122,051,091 approved to MOH, 45% is for Malaria, 38% for HIV/AIDS, and 16% for Tuberculosis. There are altogether 13 Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) Program Grants; one of which is the Program titled: “Scaling up HIV and AIDS Prevention, Care and Treatment in Lao PDR,” coded ‘LAO-809-G11-H’ (GFATM, 2013a). The HSS Program in Round 8 was granted for a total of US\$1,544,092 to the Food and Drug Department (FDD), and the Food and Drug Quality Control Centre (FDQCC) from 2009-2014. The program was divided into two phases: phase 1 was from November 1, 2009 to July 21, 2012, while phase 2 will end on October 31, 2014 (GFATM, 2009a).

The goal of the Round 8 program is to improve efficiencies of quality assurance (registration, inspection, sampling and testing, good manufacturing, storage, distribution and pharmacy practices, and regulatory processes) related to the successful treatment of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. It continued and expanded activities that had been initiated via Round 6 to improve regulatory controls, rational use of medicines, educate health providers and the general public about the dangers of counterfeit medicines, and reduce and/or eliminate the sale and distribution of counterfeit medicines (anti-malarial and antibiotics) (GFATM, 2009a).

### 3) Health System Strengthening Program-Single Stream of Funding Round

In November 2010, the Round 8 HIV/AIDS Grant Agreement had been consolidated with the grant made for the proposal entitled “Scaling up HIV and AIDS Prevention, Care and Treatment and Strengthening Management, Increasing Demand and Ensuring Quality of HIV/AIDS Interventions in Lao PDR.” The resulting Single Stream of Funding Grant Agreement number was “LAO-S11-G12-H” (GFATM, 2011b). The Grant Number, however, was changed to “LAO-H-GFMOH” on May 26, 2011 (GFATM, 2011c). According to the Grant Performance Report dated August 23, 2013, the project starting date was November 01, 2010, while the ending date will be December 31, 2015 (GFATM, 2013b).

#### 3.2.2.2 Background of Project B

The World Bank lends money to low and middle-income countries to support development and change. Development projects are implemented by

borrowing countries following certain rules and procedures to guarantee that the money reaches its intended target (World Bank, 2013b). Lao PDR, like other least developed countries, has been supported by the World Bank in several sectors, one of which is the health sector. In fact, the World Bank is one of the main development partners of MOH (as listed in Table 2.1 above). The Health Services Improvement Projects or HSIP, coded “P074027,” was supported by the World Bank from 2006 to 2011 through the MOH for the implementation of the project, with a total amount of US\$15 million. The Project development objective was to assist the Lao PDR to improve the health status of its population, particularly the poor and rural population, in project provinces (namely Attapu, Bolikhamxai, Champasak, Khammouane, Salavan, Savanakheth, Special Region Xaisomboun and Xekong) by (1) expanding access to, and improving the quality of a core package of health services in eight Southern and Central provinces, (2) building capacity, both technical and managerial, in the health workforce at all levels in order to improve health outcomes, and (3) improving the management of health expenditures and making basic health services affordable for the poor (De La Pena and Lourdes, 2005; World Bank, 2004).

In May 2011, with the approval of a new policy to provide free services to pregnant women and children under five, the GOL had requested additional financing to the Health Services Improvement Projects to expand the scope of the free delivery pilot, while also introducing financing for child health services, and continuing support to human resource development and service delivery capacity (World Bank, 2011a; 2011b). Therefore, the project objective was revised from “to assist the Lao PDR to improve the health status of its population, particularly the poor and rural population, in Project Provinces”, to “assist the Lao PDR to increase utilization and quality of health services for poor women and children, in particular in rural areas in Project Provinces.” This revision was made to relate the objective to measurable outcomes (Levesque, 2011; World Bank, 2011a: 23; 2011b).

Generally, the additional financing supports additional and expanded activities that scale up the impacts and development effectiveness of the original project. The project consisted of three main components: 1) Improving the Quality and Utilization of Health Services 2) Strengthening Institutional Capacity for Health Services Provision; and 3) Improving Equity, Efficiency and Sustainability of Health Financing (National Project Coordination Office, 2013).

The coverage had been reduced from eight to five provinces due to the subsequent merging of two provinces and the initiation of support from Lux-Development to the central provinces. Project support was re-focused and centered on 42 districts in five Southern provinces: Savanakhet, Champasack, Salavan, Xekong, and Attapeu (World Bank, 2011a). The original grant was extended by 36 months in line with the closing date proposed for the additional financing (World Bank, 2011b); that is the closing date of the original Grant was extended by one year from June 30, 2011 to June 30, 2012, while the project duration has been extended to 30 June 2014. The Project had received additional financing from the World Bank on October 11, 2011, amounting to US\$10,000,000 (Levesque, 2011).

### 3.2.2.3 Background of Project C

Malaria is the main public health problem in Lao PDR and approximately two-thirds of the population lives in areas where they are at risk of the disease for most of the year. The program seeks to improve the health of the Lao people through a variety of prevention and treatment strategies. The existing malaria control program will expand to cover 100 percent of the population at risk. Strategies include early diagnosis and appropriate treatment, distribution of insecticide-treated nets, surveillance, and social marketing (GFATM, 2013e).

In the last 10 years, GFATM has been the principal source of funding for the program through several rounds. Firstly, Round 1, with the grant number 'LAO-102-G02-M-00', was titled "Prevention & Control of Malaria in the Lao P.D.R." It was funded with a total amount of US\$ 12,709,087, starting from May 01, 2003 to May 31, 2008. Secondly, the grant number 'LAO-405-G05-M' of Round 4 was granted with a total of US\$14,502,222, under the program titled "Scaling up the Fight Against HIV/AIDS/STI, TB, and Malaria in the Lao P.D.R. (Malaria component)." The program period was from July 01, 2005 to June 30, 2010. Thirdly, the grant number 'LAO-708-G09-M' of Round 7 was funded with an amount of US\$21,346,787. The program under the title "Sustaining Malaria control in Lao PDR, focusing on Malaria vulnerable population through multisectorial approach" was implemented from July 01, 2008 to June 30, 2013 (GFATM, 2013f).

Upon completion of Round 7 in mid-2013, it appeared that the CMPE goals and strategies towards 2015 still remain unachieved. Accordingly, Round 7 has

been extended for another two years, from July 01, 2013 till June 30, 2015. Under the same program title, the extended round was financed through the Transition Funding Mechanism or TFM, and hence coded ‘LAO-708-G09-M TFM Funding,’ with a grant fund of US\$5,843,774. The goals were 1) to reduce total malaria annual case incidence (or ACI) and annual parasite incidence (or API) by 20% from the 2011 baseline by the end of 2014, and 2) to maintain at least 85% coverage with Long Lasting Insecticide Nets (or LLINs) of the population at risk. The program focuses on four main categories of people affected by malaria in Lao PDR: ethnic minority groups, forest fringe inhabitants, temporary migrants and seasonal workers, and new forest settlers. The focus is specifically on the southern part of the country where malaria incidence is highest, accounting for 90% of all cases reported since 2008 (GFATM, 2013g).

The GFATM-funded programs to CMPE are summarized in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1** GFATM-Assisted Programs to CMPE

<b>Round</b>	<b>Program Title</b>	<b>Starting date</b>	<b>Ending date</b>	<b>Grant Funds (US\$)</b>
LAO-102-G02-M-00 (Round 1)	Prevention & Control of Malaria in the Lao P.D.R.	01 May 2003	31 May 2008	12,709,087
LAO-405-G05-M (Round 4)	Scaling up the Fight Against HIV/AIDS/STI, TB, and Malaria in the Lao P.D.R. (Malaria Component)	01 July 2005	30 June 2010	14,502,222
LAO-708-G09-M (Round 7)	Sustaining Malaria Control in Lao PDR, Focusing on Malaria Vulnerable Population Through Multisectorial Approach	01 July 2008	30 June 2013	21,346,787
LAO-708-G09-M TFM Funding	Sustaining Malaria Control in Lao PDR, Focusing on Malaria Vulnerable Population through Multisectorial Approach	01 July 2013	30 June 2015	5,843,774

Among the three projects selected, there are similarities and differences in several areas. Firstly, for the project period, all three projects are on-going and long-term projects ranging from three to five years, of which one is to be completed in 2015, the other two in 2014. Secondly, the three project cases are from three different organizations and managed by health officials. Although Project A and C have been supported by the same donor (the Global Fund), both are managed by different organizations with different goals and objectives. Additionally, all three projects have been extended from the previous projects. It is believed that the differences will potentially offer diverse contexts of learning in project settings. Importantly, although being extended from the previous projects, Project A is managed by a different project team, while Project B and C are comprised of some past project team members (see Tables 3.4-3.6 for list of interviewees in section 3.3.3 In-depth Interview).

Table 3.2 summarizes the three projects with regards to the project name, development partners, brief outline of the project and project goals.

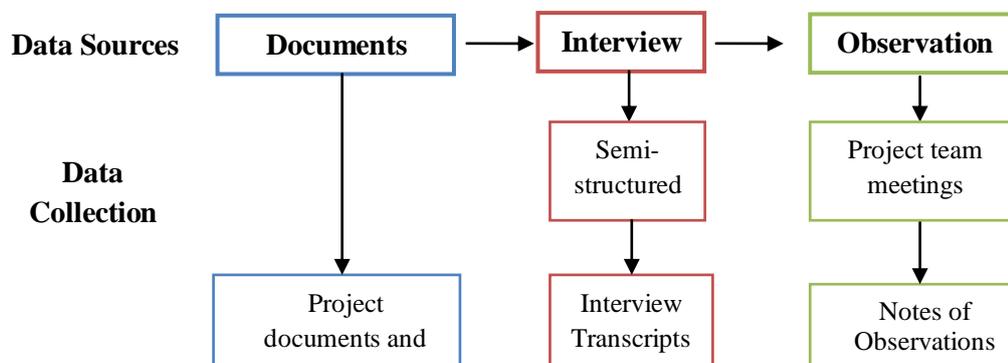
**Table 3.2** Summary of Three Projects Selected

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Development Partners</b>	<b>Outline of the Project</b>	<b>Project Goals</b>
<b>Project A</b> Scaling up HIV & AIDS Prevention, Care and Treatment in Lao PDR (Bureau of Food and Drug Inspection, FDD)	Global Fund	1) Period of assistance: 2010-2014 2) Total budget: US\$ 1,544,092 3) Geographical coverage: across country	To improve efficiency of quality assurance related to the successful treatment of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis
<b>Project B</b> Health Service Improvement Project (Department of Planning and International Cooperation)	World Bank	1) Period of assistance: 2012-2014 2) Total budget: US\$ 10 million Geographical coverage: Savanakhet, Champasack, Salavan, Xekong, and Attapeu	To assist the Lao PDR to improve the health status of its population, particularly the poor and rural population, in Project Provinces
<b>Project C</b> Sustaining Malaria Control in Lao PDR, Focusing on Malaria Vulnerable Population through Multisectorial approach (Center of Malariology, Parasitology, Entomology)	Global Fund	1) Period of assistance: 2013-2015 2) Total budget: US\$ 5,843,774 3) Geographical coverage: across the country	To reduce total malaria annual case incidence and annual parasite incidence by 20% from 2011 baseline by the end of 2014. To maintain at least 85% coverage with long lasting insecticide nets of the population at risk.

### 3.3 Data Collection

In order to gain a deep understanding, data was collected from a number of different sources by using various methods as a major strength of case studies for triangulation (Bailey, 2007: 77; Gray, 2009: 252; Yin, 2009). The aim of triangulation is to check and assure that the right information and interpretations have been obtained—that is all support a single conclusion (Stake, 2006: 35; Maxwell, 2013: 102). It reduces the risks of being biased to a specific method, and allows us to gain a more secure understanding of the issues being studied. Furthermore, it provides information about different aspects of the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013: 102). The various perspectives from multiple data sources and methods make case study findings not only more comprehensive, but also more complicated (Hays, 2004: 228)—that is, to obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality, a richer, more complete array of symbols and theoretical concepts, and a means of verifying many of these elements (Berg, 1998: 5). In short, triangulation generally serves as a process to clarify meaning by identifying different ways a case is being seen (Stake, 2006: 35).

In order for triangulation, this study employed three of the most common sources of evidence, namely reviews of documents and archival records, in-depth interviews, and participant-observations. Data collection first commenced with the reviews of documents, followed by in-depth interviews, and lastly observations. Details of each method used for collecting data are described in the following sections. The sequence and methods of data collection are depicted in Figure 3.1 below:



**Figure 3.1** Sequence and Methods of Data Collection

The sources of data and methods to be used for each research question are illustrated in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3** Research Questions and Data Collection Methods

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Data Collection Methods</b>
1. What are the main requirements and conditions imposed by donors for project implementation?	Review related documents Interview key project team members
2. What are the learning mechanisms used by the project teams to achieve the project goals on time and satisfy the donor's requirements?	Review the project-related documents Interview key project team members Observe the practices of lessons learned
3. What are the barriers to their learning?	Interview project team members
4. How do project team use and share the project information within and across the project?	Interview project team members Examine information management systems (i.e. policies) and infrastructure (i.e. database)

According to Bailey (2007: 66) and Gray (2009: 410), gaining entrée by negotiating with gatekeepers is a vitally important process, and one that affects the rest of the study. Therefore, prior to collecting data, official permission of access to the research settings was needed, and the Request Letter was submitted to the organizations concerned.

### **3.3.1 Gaining Permission for Project Case Study**

Project documents and records are important to understanding of the project context. For Project A, the researcher submitted the request to the Bureau of Food and Drug Inspections (BFDI) in early April, 2013. Unfortunately, due to the Lao New Year period, there was no progress of approval, and the request was missed; hence, another request was submitted. It took one month and a half to get approval, from early April till the end of May. At this point, it was obvious that obtaining official approval from the Board of Directors was very time-consuming.

Likewise, to obtain approval for Project B, the researcher prepared an official request to the Department of Planning and International Cooperation (DPIC). After the submission in mid-July, the researcher contacted the Administrative Division of the Department at least twice a week to follow up on the approval. In mid-August, the researcher decided to go to the Department and asked for the progress of the request directly. Having received the Project Manager's phone number, the researcher tried to make an appointment. It was not until the week after (August 23, 2013) before the researcher was able to meet the Project Manager and obtain project documents sent via e-mail.

In attempting to study Project C, the researcher had submitted the request to the Center of Malariology, Parasitology and Entomology (CMPE) where there was an on-going Global Fund-assisted project in early October, 2013. It took two weeks before the researcher was informed that the request was approved. Despite the approval, the researcher was required to further clarify the study process and the information required to the General Director. It was not until the end of the month before the researcher was able to meet the General Director.

### **3.3.2 Project Documents and Records**

Document analysis is a helpful precursor to observing and interviewing. Documents are a ready-made sources of data easily accessible for investigation. Documents or archival data are information stored in existing channels such as electronic records, libraries, and old-fashioned (paper) files (Yin, 2012: 13). Even though most documentary data have not been developed for research purposes, they can furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories and hypotheses, and offer historical understanding, track change and development, (Merriam, 2009: 155). Hence, it may be useful to explore the case and to provide a context for interpretation of interview and observation data (Simons, 2009: 64).

Secondary data related to the project was first gathered and used as a basis for collecting data from interviews and observations as well as for substantiating the emerging findings. These include all project-related documents such as meeting minutes, grant agreements, work-plans and progress reports. In addition, the reviews

of documents and physical artifacts such as computers were taken into consideration whether or not they were used as a means to learn project knowledge, in particular explicit knowledge.

#### 3.3.2.1 Project A

In order to have a fundamental understanding about the project, some project documents and records need to be obtained, such as program proposal, program agreement, minutes of the meeting, and project progress reports. In fact, the project documents were available at the Global Fund website, but mainly the agreement between the Global Fund and the Principal Recipient. The agreement contained the requirements and conditions for the Principal Recipient to be conformed with, hence not for, the Sub-Recipients. Nevertheless, the information from the website provided some fundamental understanding about the Global Fund-assisted projects as well as its policies, procedures and guidelines.

For the filing system of Project A, it appeared that individual team members and implementing units kept all documents and records relating to their own tasks. For instance, the procurement unit kept the documents and records relating to the program procurement. Likewise, the accountant kept all documents and records relevant to project revenues and expenses, such as the program budget and disbursement requests.

#### 3.3.2.2 Project B

Like other programs, project documents are important and necessary for, at least, understanding its background, goals and objectives. However, given that the current project was extended from the last round, understanding of the initial project was necessary. The project documents and reports are in fact available at the World Bank website. These include project papers, environmental assessments, and Indigenous Peoples plan. In essence, not only all documents of the original project since initial stage until the additional financing stage, other important information was also provided. These included the processes and procedures of the project cycle, procurement and finance. In this regard, the World Bank website was certainly one main source of project data and information.

Like Project A, Project B maintained project documents and records separately by each unit in the National Project Coordination Office (NPCO). This means that each unit managed the documents and records relevant to their own work.

### 3.3.2.3 Project C

As project documents were not available on the website of the Global Fund, the only way to access them was from the CMPE. Given that the Project Coordinator left for a meeting aboard, it was not until the second week of November before the researcher was able to secure a meeting. For the project documents, the researcher was advised to contact the project Secretariat Unit. Still, it was the following week (the third week of November) before the researcher was able to obtain the Program Grant Agreement between the Principal Recipient and CMPE.

Like Project A and B, each unit of Project C maintained its own project documents and records. For instance, the Financial Unit kept all relevant financial documents and records, such as disbursement requests and financial reports; the Administration or Secretariat Unit maintained all project documents and records relevant to administrative work, such as program agreements or contracts, implementation letter from the Principal Recipient, project requests to the Principal Recipient, project progress reports, notices to the provinces, and minutes of the meeting.

### **3.3.3 In-depth Interviews**

In-depth interviews are one of the richest sources of data in a case study, and usually the most important type of data to be collected because most case studies are about human affairs (Hays, 2004: 229; Yin, 2009). The in-depth aspect fundamentally provides a detailed insight into the research issues from the perspective of the study participants themselves (Hennink et al., 2011: 109; Maxwell, 2013: 102). They are thus frequently used to capture people's individual voices and stories, as well as the context surrounding people's lives (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011: 109).

Specifically, in-depth interviews using semi-structured questions are the favored approach where there is a need to attain highly personalized data, and where opportunities for probing are required. The semi-structured interview permits for probing of views and opinions where it is desirable for respondents to expand on their answers (Gray, 2009: 371). In other words, it allows the ordering of the questions to be employed more flexibly to take account of the priority accorded to each topic by the interviewee (Barbour, 2008). Furthermore, it is necessary for unobservable

behavior and feelings, or for understanding the processes of contextual interpretation (Creswell, 2009: 179; Merriam, 2009: 88). While providing additional information that may be missed in observation, it also can be used to check the accuracy of the observations (Maxwell, 2013: 103). That is, in-depth interviewing can help ensure the credibility of findings, which includes issues of validity and reliability (Gray, 2009: 375). An in-depth interview was therefore primarily used through semi-structured questions in order to better gain a detailed insight into the mechanisms in which project teams used to create and transfer knowledge and lessons learned for future projects within and across the organizations.

The interview questions were developed based on a detailed literature review. Interviews followed a pre-designed interview schedule that included questions about 1) the donor's requirements and conditions for project implementation, 2) the learning mechanisms, as well as its impediments within and between projects, 3) the types of knowledge gained, and 4) the use and transfer of project knowledge (see Appendix A for details of the semi-structured interview questions).

In order to achieve accurate answers, the interview questions were pretested by two steps. First, the questions were critically examined by experts in the study's subject area. Doing so facilitated the identification of poorly worded questions, questions with offensive or emotion-laden wording, or questions revealing the researchers' own biases, personal values, or blind spots (Berg, 1998: 71). The second step of pretesting was conducting interviews with three interviewees currently holding different positions in distinct IDPs. The pilot-testing helped assess how effectively the interview would work, and whether the type of information being sought would actually be obtained (Berg, 1998: 71). Following the pilot interviews, and before the real study, necessary revisions of the interview schedule were made for further clarification.

Key informants of the study were those who were directly involved in the management of IDPs. These included project managers and key project team members such as project managers, project coordinators, and technical staff of such units as financial, procurement, monitoring and evaluation, and administration. In order to maintain the identity of the interviewees, the English Alphabet was used to code and cite. For example, Project A, used code A1 for the first person and A2 for

the second. The interviews were conducted face to face, lasting for approximately 45-60 minutes.

In addition to the interview, the author's notes, observations, reflections, and other information collected during the interviews were also used to enrich the data. Merriam (2009: 110) says that these notes allow the investigator to monitor the process of data collection, as well as begin to analyze the information itself. For each interview, the rough notes and reflections in the personal notebook were rewritten properly right after the interview, or at least within the next day in order to avoid memory loss. In doing so, the researcher found that it was indeed very useful to the study as recommended by numerous qualitative scholars. Each interview recorded was then transcribed.

Ideally, verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provides the best database for analysis, but the quality of the data obtained will also need to be assessed (Merriam, 2009: 114). The process of transcription was quite time-consuming. According to qualitative researchers, one hour of interview may take approximately 6-7 hours for transcribing. In reality, the transcripts took over 8 hours, while some even lasted for 10 hours. On the one hand, it was because some interviews were longer than others. On the other hand, it was because the speed of the researcher's typing in Lao language was quite slow. Having recognizing that fact, and in order to save the time, the researcher tried to delegate others to transcribe the interview records. However, it turned out to be even worse because of mistyping and also misunderstanding of the context. Hence, most of the interview records were transcribed by the researcher. The good part of doing this was that the researcher was able to reflect and understand better about the information obtained.

Following this, each transcript was coded by the ATLAS.ti program which facilitates the analysis of qualitative data, specifically because it contains the essential processes of coding, memo writing, data retrieval, building networks and creating reports (Friese, 2013: 9). The interview transcripts were then translated from Lao to English for the quotes that would be used in the dissertation.

#### 3.3.3.1 HIV/AIDS Project (Project A)

In an endeavor to collect data from in-depth interviews, the researcher had first attempted to identify the team members in early June, 2013. From altogether

nine team members, seven of them were from FDD, and only some of them were familiar to the researcher. Thus, the researcher felt worried about those interviewees who the researcher has never met before. The concerns with these people were, not only about making appointments for interviews, but also the extent of information disclosed; that is whether the interviewees would be willing to unveil the information needed. It was assumed that those who are familiar with the researcher might be more open than those who were not.

In making the appointments via the telephone, some tended to be very welcome to the interview, and even arranged sometime in the next day or next week. On the other hand, others were quite difficult to make appointments with, and hence several phone calls had to be attempted each week; some took several weeks to get interviews. This was understandable for some of them were very busy and always travelling to work in the field or abroad. However, it turned out that the first two appointments were from the unknown interviewees-one in the morning and another in the afternoon in the same day of early June. In the following week, the researcher was able to conduct only one interview. The interviews were then discontinued due to the annual review meeting held in Bolikhamxay Province on June 17-18, given all team members were busy.

After the meeting, the researcher tried to make appointments for interviewing other team members. However, it was not until the end of June and early July before the next three interviews were able to be conducted. There were then two more important team members needed to be interviewed. Unfortunately, although the researcher had tried several times, only one interview was undertaken in the end of July. For the last member who was the most difficult to interview, the researcher had contacted him since early June, but it was not until mid-November, 2013 that the interview was conducted.

For the length of interviews, some took only 45 minutes, while others lasted for over 60 minutes. Most of the interviews were conducted only one time, except for two interviews that needed follow-up for additional clarification. In addition, there was the use of e-mail to ask for clarification, and also to obtain the documents which were mentioned by the interviewee but not available during the interview.

For the interviewees' background, it appears that all of the project team members were government officials, except the financial specialist who was contracted staff. For the government officials, many of them had project responsibility different from their routine work in the organization. However, most of them had worked for IDPs funded by different development partners (e.g. ADB, WB, WHO, UNIDO, SIDA, UNICEF, etc.), and hence have had experiences to a certain level. On the other hand, few of them have had limited knowledge about IDPs, while few of them had just worked for the GFATM project for the first time (see Appendix C for List of Interviewees). In this situation, project knowledge had become new to them. Details of the interviewees' backgrounds, codes and lengths of interviews are summarized in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4** List of Project A's Interviewees

No	Code	Project Responsibility	Employment Status/Position	IDP experience	Length of Interview (mn)
1.	A1	Accountant	Accountant, FDA	SIDA, UNIDO, WHO, UNFPA	57
2.	A2	Financial Specialist	contract	SIDA, Handicap, and UXO	60 (1 <sup>st</sup> ), 15 (2 <sup>nd</sup> via telephone)
3.	A3	Project Coordinator	Deputy Director of BFDI	SIDA, USP DQI, WHO, etc.	61
4.	A4	Secretary	Technical staff, Administrative Division, FDA	None	48+e-mail
5.	A5	M&E and Assistant to Project Coordinator	Chief of the Herbal Pharmaceutical Division, FDA	SIDA, UNICEF, ADB, WB, & Swiss Red Cross	50
6.	A6	Procurement Assistant	Chief of Drug Division, FDQCC	SIDA, USP DQI, GF Round 6	68
7.	A7	M&E Assistant	Deputy Chief of Quality Assurance Division, FDQCC	JICA, WHO, UNIDO, UNDP	45 (1 <sup>st</sup> ), 20 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
8.	A8	Cashier	Technical staff, Administrative Division, FDA	ADB	55
9.	A9	Procurement and logistic	Technical staff of the drug, medical and cosmetic products' unit, BFDI	WHO, USP DQI, GF R6	56

### 3.3.3.2 HSIP-AF Project (Project B)

In order to collect data from in-depth interviews, the researcher requested for a list of project team members, together with their contact numbers, on August 21, 2013. The list of team members was obtained from the administrative team three days later. After having reviewed the project documents and reports for two weeks, appointments for interviewing were arranged in mid-September.

Building rapport seemed to be highly needed for this particular project because all the NPCO team members were unknown to the researcher. This included the attempt to introduce the researcher's individual background and the purpose of interview via phone calls in order to get the interview appointments. But the effective mechanism that had been helpful to the rapport building was attending the weekly meetings and the researcher's presence at the NPCO office regularly. Being familiar to most of the NPCO team was expected to help obtain interview appointments easier. Indeed, some project team members accepted to provide interviews immediately after being contacted. Accordingly, the first three interviews were able to be conducted in mid-September, 2013. Then, four more interviews were conducted in the first two weeks of October. It was not until early November that further interviews were completed. However, others were not easy to make appointments with. This was understandable given that some of them were busy with monitoring of implementing agencies at the sites, whereas some may not have been easy to access due to their personalities. As a result, the researcher had to wait until the end of November before being able to secure appointments for two interviews, while another two interviews were conducted in early December, 2013.

For Project B, 12 interviews were conducted altogether. The length of the interviews varied, ranging from 45 to 62 minutes. Most of the interviews were conducted only once. However, there were two interviews that needed further clarification-one via telephone, another by e-mail.

With regards to the interviewees' background, most of them were contract staff that always moved from one project to another, while only four of them were government officials. The experience of informants was various. Some had worked and were involved in the IDPs for quite a long time, while others had just worked for the current project as their very first time. The inexperienced ones tended

to be those who were still young. In addition, some had never worked for IDPs, rather only NGO-assisted projects. Table 3.5 summarizes the interviewees' background and lengths of interviews.

**Table 3.5** List of Project B's Interviewees

No	Code	Project Responsibility	Employment Status /Position	IDP Experience	Length of Interview (mn)
1.	B1	Procurement Specialist	Technical staff, DPIC	JICA, ADB, Lux-Development, World Bank, etc.	57+e-mail
2.	B2	Program Manager	Technical staff, DPIC	World Bank since 1996-present	54 (1 <sup>st</sup> ), 10 (2 <sup>nd</sup> -telephone)
3.	B3	Procurement Assistant (2012-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	None	45
4.	B4	Project Assistant to support DHC (2013-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	Japan Heart	47
5.	B5	Assistant to Chief of Finance (2012-present)	Accounting staff, an accounting and consulting firm	ADB (2007-2012)	61
6.	B6	Assistant to Project manager (2013-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	Education for Development Fund	59
7.	B7	DHC Coordinator Assistant	Technical staff, Division of traditional Medicine Administration, DHC	None	52
8.	B8	Procurement Assistant (2011-present)	Technical staff, Procurement Unit, MPSC	World Bank (2001-2010), ADB	51
9.	B9	DMCH Project Assistant (2013-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	UNDP, ADF-Lao, WHO	62
10.	B10	DHHP Project Assistant (2013-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	UNICEF	58
11.	B11	DTR Project Assistant (2013-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	Norway	50
12.	B12	DF Project Assistant (2013-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	EU, FAO, France	48

### 3.3.3.3 Malaria Project (Project C)

Conducting interviews for this project appeared to be quite challenging. Even though the structure of CMPE's SR was provided together with the name of project team members, there was no personal contact numbers or e-mail addresses of the individual members. The interviews were mainly arranged by the project team upon the research's request of who to interview. Based on the project structure, the researcher sent the Secretary the list of project team members to be interviewed on November 20. A week later, the researcher was informed that conducting interviews during this time was unlikely possible as they were all busy with preparation for the procurement meeting to be held at the end of November, while the annual malaria meeting was to be held on December 4-6 at Thalad, Vientiane Province.

After the meetings, only one interview was conducted in December. There were no interviews in January 2014 because the project team was busy with preparations for the LFA audits, which would be conducted from the end of February to early March. It was not until early March that the researcher was able to conduct two interviews. The next three interviews were conducted in the following week. It was not until the end of March before another two interviews were conducted because of the audits, while the next two interviews were carried out in early April, 2014. The last interview was at the end of April.

From the 11 interviewees, three needed additional interviews. Most of the interviews lasted for over 40 minutes.

The interviewees' background were very various as in Project A and B. Some had been working for CMPE for several years. Significantly, it appeared that most of the project team members had been responsible for work which was similar to their routine jobs in the organization. For instance, the Logistic, Procurement and Supplies Management Unit was the responsibility of the Division of Logistic and Procurement. This was given to the fact that the Grant Funds were to support CMPE to achieve its goals-that is the National Malaria Control Program. Furthermore, some had been working for the Global Fund-assisted project for several rounds or at least one round. Moreover, some had also been working for other IDPs. On the other hand, some were new staff and had been working for the Global Fund project only a few years. Hence, they had limited knowledge and experience about the work under their

responsibility. Table 3.6 illustrates the interviewees' background and lengths of interviews.

**Table 3.6** List of Project C's Interviewees

No	Code	Project Responsibility	Employment Status /Position	IDP Experience	Length of Interview (mn)
1.	C1	Assistant to the Public & Private Mixed Group	Technical staff, Administration Section	GFATM Round VII (Jan-Jun 2013)	45
2.	C2	Chief of Technical Working Groups for Malaria IEC and for Malaria EMGs	Vice Chief of the Training-Health Education Section, CMPE	World Bank, EU, JICA, GFATM (R 1,4,7 & TFM)	59
3.	C3	Chief of Quality Assurance Group	Technical staff, Laboratory and Treatment Section	GFATM R7 &TFM (2012-present)	48
4.	C4	Admin./Secretariat Unit	Technical staff, Administration Division	GFATM R4,7 & TFM (2006-present)	47
5.	C5	Project Coordinator	Chief of Epidemiology Section	Canada, WHO, Aus-Aid, Vietnam, GFATM R1,4,7 &TFM	55 (1 <sup>st</sup> ), 20 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
6.	C6	M&E Assistant	Technical staff, Epidemiology Section	GFATM R7 &TFM (2012-present)	54
7.	C7	Logistic Assistant	Technical staff, Logistic Unit	GFATM R7 (2013-present)	48 (1 <sup>st</sup> ), 20 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
8.	C8	Procurement Assistant	Contract staff (Outsourced)	GFATM R7&TFM (2009-present)	46
9.	C9	Logistic Assistant	Technical staff, Logistic Unit	GFATM R7 &TFM (2012-present)	54
10.	C10	Public-Private Mixed Technical Working Group	Technical Advisor	JICA, ADB, GFATM R 4,7 & TFM (2008-present)	61 (1 <sup>st</sup> ), 10 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
11.	C11	Financial Assistant	Technical staff, Administration Section	GFATM R 1,4,7 & TFM	51

### 3.3.4 Observations

Observations are another important source of information as supplementary data to other research methods, especially the interview in case studies (Hays, 2004: 229; Simon, 2009: 55; Merriam, 2009: 117; Thomas, 2010: 165; Hennink et al., 2011: 172). Observation involves the systematic viewing of people's actions and the

recording, analysis and interpretation of their behavior and interactions (Gray, 2009: 397; Hennink et al., 2011: 170). It thus allows investigators to obtain a detailed description of social settings, activities or events in order to understand and interpret people's behaviors within their own socio-cultural contexts (Hennink et al., 2011: 170)-that is discovering complex interactions in natural social settings (Barbour, 2008; Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 140).

Even though observations are often used to describe settings, behaviors, and events, it provides several relative advantages (Simon, 2009: 55; Maxwell, 2013: 102). Firstly, observations provide us with a comprehensive picture of the site, which cannot be obtained solely by speaking with people. Secondly, documenting observed incidents and events provides 'rich description' and a basis for further analysis and interpretation. Thirdly, observations enable us to discover the norms and values which are a part of a project's culture. Finally, observations provide a cross-check on data obtained in interviews and documents to triangulate the emerging findings (Merriam, 2009: 119; Simon, 2009: 55; Hennink et al., 2011: 170). In essence, observations can enable us to draw inferences about the perspectives that cannot be obtained by relying exclusively on interview data (Maxwell, 2013: 103). A combination of both observation and interviews will provide a different perspective on the issues and situate the behavior within a larger social or physical setting (Hennink et al., 2011: 172). Observation, however, is a helpful research tool when it systematically addresses a specific research question, and when it is subject to the checks and balances in producing trustworthy results (Merriam, 2009: 118).

Observations are especially needed for the purpose of this study given that it allows us to observe the actual learning processes of project team members during their practices of lessons learned. To obtain such information, an endeavor of participant observations (participant as observer) in the project meetings (e.g. regular meetings to follow up the project progress, and the annual review meetings) was conducted. This method allows the researcher to gather data through observing and listening to people in their natural settings, and to discover their social meanings and interpretations of their own activities-that is to understand their situation by experiencing it (Gray, 2009: 399).

Collection of observational data was extensively based on the detailed writing of field notes. According to Bailey (2007), field notes are ‘the backbone of collecting and analyzing field data.’ They are absolutely essential to the success of fieldwork, and comprise everything the fieldwork believes to be of importance. In this regard, detailed field notes (highly descriptive and reflective) was written up immediately during the intent observation, with an attempt to mentally capture and remember as much detail as possible (Bailey, 2007; Merriam, 2009; 129). This is because, the more complete the recording, the easier it is to analyze the data (Merriam, 2009; 128).

To collect data from observations, the researcher attended the lesson learned practices of three projects. For Project A, the researcher attended the annual review meeting in Bolikhamxay Province on July 17-18, 2013. Bolikhamxay Province is located in central Laos, within the narrow neck, approximately 150 Km from the Capitol, Vientiane (see Figure 3.2 for a Map of Provinces in Lao PDR). For Project B, the researcher was able to attend a weekly meeting and the annual review meeting. The researcher attended the weekly meetings held at the meeting room of the project office on Monday morning of September 30, 2013, while the annual review meeting was at Thalad District of Vientiane Province on December 17-18, 2013. Project C held the annual review meeting at the meeting room of the Lao Electric Club (Thalad), Keo-oudome District, Vientiane Province on December 04-06, 2013.



**Figure 3.2** A Map of Provinces in Lao PDR

### 3.4 Data Analysis

To fully understand the cases, the data was analyzed through the description of individual cases, and their themes and cross-case themes (Creswell, 2007: 75). In other words, two stages of analysis were conducted: within- and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2009: 204).

For the within-case analysis, each case was first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself. All the information about the case was brought together—interview logs or transcripts, field notes, reports, records, the researcher’s own documents, and reflective memos—to enable understanding as much about the contextual variables as possible. All of this data was organized systematically and logically ordered in the database so that it was easily retrievable as needed in both the analysis and the write-up of findings (Merriam, 2009: 203). This presentable database

also allows other researchers and interested parties to evaluate the data or to replicate it, and hence increase the reliability of the case studies (Gray, 2009: 254).

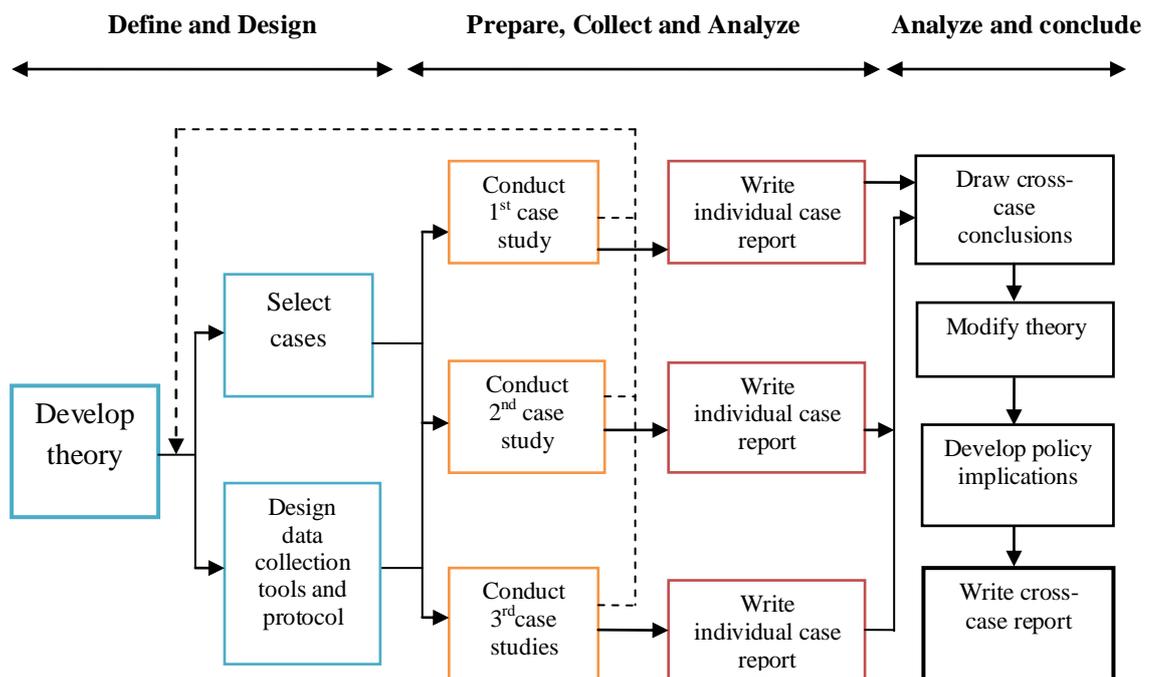
All the case data was coded in order to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or thematic ideas and patterns. A tentative coding theme was developed based on the review of literature (see Appendix E for the Initial Coding). However, since the number of codes can accumulate quite quickly and change as analysis progresses, the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), such as ATLAS.ti, was used to efficiently store, organize, manage and reconfigure the coded data (Saldana, 2013: 9). Using CAQDAS can make qualitative analysis easier, more accurate, more reliable and more transparent (Gibbs, 2007: 106). In addition, CAQDAS, unlike the human mind, can maintain and permit researchers to organize evolving and potentially complex coding systems into such formats as hierarchies and networks (Saldana, 2013: 31).

After coding the first case, as the representative, the tentative themes, hunches, and ideas from the coding process were developed and then compared to see whether it helped to tell the story. A distinction of codes generated from the literature and those generated via open coding procedures were conducted to use for developing findings and conclusions of each case. Doing so was to help improve the coding tactics and hence led to a revision of the coding approach. As a result, things to be further asked, observed, or looked for in the next round of data collection were noted. The revised coding schemes were then employed to the remaining interviews. The sorting and resorting, organizing and reorganizing, and labeling and relabeling of data led to a set of categories that helped answer the research questions in a meaningful, thick description that provides a summarization (Hays, 2004: 232).

Nevertheless, one important thing to be mentioned here is that data collection and analysis was conducted simultaneously. Merriam (2009: 171) suggests that data analysis should be simultaneously conducted with data collection as the much preferred way in a qualitative study. Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of materials that need to be processed. Stated succinctly, data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating (Merriam, 2009: 171). Thus, some basic analysis is done during the process of collecting data. That is, data analysis was

conducted immediately after finishing the first interview or observation, and continued along the data collection in the field.

Once the analysis of each case was completed, cross-case analysis was conducted to enable generalization. The overall sequence of research process for the multiple case study method is demonstrated in Figure 3.3.



**Figure 3.3** Sequential Process of Multiple Case Study Method

Source: Yin, 2009: 57.

### 3.5 Issues of Trustworthiness

The issues of validity, reliability, and generalizability are probably of particular importance for the case study method because of the reliance on data that is generated from either limited or particular samples or situations (Gray, 2009: 260). Nonetheless, those issues can be avoided by several strategies as explained in the following sections.

### **3.5.1 Internal Validity or Credibility**

Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality (Merriam, 2009: 213). In other words, it refers to the extent answers to study questions are considered to be accurate representatives of the cases (Hays, 2004: 230). The issues of internal validity can be addressed by several strategies. Firstly, findings in case studies are more likely to be trusted as true because of the use of triangulation of methods and sources (Hays, 2004: 230; Creswell, 2009: 191). In fact, triangulation is the most well-known strategy to shore up the internal validity of a study (Merriam, 2009: 215). This triangulation, as an essential prerequisite for using the case study approach (Thomas, 2010: 68), can thus be used to address any problems with construct validity (Yin, 2009: 42). Triangulation using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people (Merriam, 2009: 216). More importantly, in order to obtain the accurate answers, attempts should be made to ensure that the content of the interview questions directly concentrate on the research objectives (Gray, 2009: 375).

A second common strategy for internal validity or credibility is member checks - also called respondent validation or key informants' review (Creswell, 2009: 191; Merriam, 2009: 215; Yin, 2009: 42). The idea here is to obtain the feedback on emerging findings from some interviewees. The process involved in member checks is to take the preliminary analysis back to some of the participants to determine the accuracy of the interpretation in the final report, specific descriptions or themes (Creswell, 2009: 191; Merriam, 2009: 219).

Adequate engagement in data collection is a third strategy when the researcher is trying to get as close as possible to the participants' understanding of a phenomenon. Adequate time spent collecting data should also be coupled with purposefully looking for variation in the understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009: 219).

In addition, in order to ensure integrity, the researchers need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken. Such a clarification allows the reader to better understand how the individual researcher

might have arrived at a particular interpretation of the data. Another strategy is peer examination or peer review. A thorough peer examination would involve asking a colleague to scan some of the raw data and assess whether the findings are plausible based on that data (Creswell, 2009: 192; Merriam, 2009: 219).

### **3.5.2 Reliability or Consistency**

Reliability is concerned with the extent to which research findings can be replicated (Merriam, 2009: 220). In other words, if the findings of one researcher can be replicated by another researcher doing the same case study, it is considered as reliable (Gray, 2009: 263). Generally, the goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study (Yin, 2009: 45). However, Merriam (2009: 221) notes that reliability of research in the social sciences is problematic “simply because human behavior is never static, nor is what many experience necessarily more reliable than what one person experiences.” He further points out that all reports of personal experiences are not necessary unreliable, any more than all reports of events witnessed by a large number of people are reliable. Rather than based on replication, qualitative research relies more on consistency of the findings with the data presented (Merriam, 2009: 222).

Strategies to ensure for consistency and dependability or reliability are triangulation, peer examination, investigator’s position, and the audit trail (Merriam, 2009: 222). For instance, triangulation, using multiple methods of collecting data, can be seen as a strategy for obtaining consistent and dependable data, and thereby reduces sources of error (Gray, 2009: 417; Merriam, 2009: 222). However, the issue of research reliability exists if using a number of inappropriate data gathering methods. Therefore, using multiple methods still requires making them congruent with the research questions being asked (Gray, 2009: 417), and collecting data that are most congruent with reality as understood by the participants (Merriam, 2009: 222). An audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry. In order to construct this trail, the researcher has to keep a research journal or record memos on the process of conducting the research as it is being undertaken (Merriam, 2009: 222). Gray (2009: 417) suggests that reliability will be increased by a more structured process such as the recording of data through an exact notation system.

This can only be achieved through the use of a case study protocol and the development of a case study database (Yin, 2009: 45).

### **3.5.3 External Validity or Transferability**

External validity refers to the extent to which the findings of one study can be transferred or generalized to other situations (Merriam, 2009: 223). According to Yin (2009: 15, 2012: 6), case study findings can be generalized to other situations through analytic generalization with systematic data collection and analysis procedures. The goal of case study research is to expand and generalize a particular set of results to some broader theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization). In other words, case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes (Yin, 2009: 15).

Merriam (2009: 223) argues that generalization of a qualitative study's results can be enhanced by several strategies. The most commonly mentioned is the use of rich, thick descriptions. This strategy enables transferability through a description of the settings and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews, field notes, and documents (Creswell, 2009: 191; Merriam, 2009: 219).

Another strategy for strengthening transferability is to select the case study sample with great care. Maximum variation in the sample, whether be it the sites for a study or the participants interviewed, allows for the possibility of a greater range of application by readers or consumers of the research. Apart from the sampling strategy of maximum variation, a purposeful selection of a typical sample can be used to enhance transferability. In the typical sampling, there is a description of how typical the program, event, or individual is compared with others in the same class, so that users can make comparisons with their own situations (Merriam, 2009: 228). In general, a careful selection of cases can be made based on their potential for being representative of the population, similar to cases in another, or a series of longitudinal studies. In addition, the external validity or generalizability of research findings can be enhanced by the use of multiple cases (Merriam, 2009: 50). In other words, cross-case studies can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings (Miles et al., 2014).

In summary, the issues of validity, reliability, and generalizability can be enhanced by several strategies as summarized in Table 3.7 below.

**Table 3.7** Strategies for Enhancing Validity, Reliability, and Transferability

<b>Tests</b>	<b>Case study tactics/ strategies</b>	<b>Phase of research</b>
Internal validity	1) Doing pattern matching	- Data analysis
	2) Triangulation- using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings.	- Data collection
	3) Member checks-have key informants review draft case study report	- Data analysis
	4) Peer review/examination-discussions with colleagues regarding the process of study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations.	- Data analysis
	5) Adequate engagement in data collection-adequate time spent collecting data such that the data become “saturated.”	- Data collection
External validity (transferability)	1) Using replication logic	- Research design
	2) Rich, thick descriptions-providing enough description to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situations match the research context, and, hence, whether findings can be transferred.	- Data analysis
	3) Maximum variation-purposefully seeking variation or diversity in sample selection to allow for a greater range of application of the findings by consumers of the research.	- Research design
Reliability	1) Using case study protocol	- Data collection
	2) Developing case study databases	- Data collection
	3) Triangulation-using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings.	- Data collection
	4) Audit trail-a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying interpretations.	- Data analysis
	5) Peer review/examination-discussions with colleagues regarding the process of study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations.	- Data analysis
	6) Researcher’s position or reflexivity-critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation.	- Whole process

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CASE STUDY FINDINGS**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of three health projects on learning within and from IDPs in the health sector of Lao PDR. The findings derived from document reviews, interviews and participant observations are presented based on the research questions. These include the main requirements and conditions set by donors for compliance during project execution, the learning mechanisms used by the project teams to achieve the project goals on time and comply with the development partners' requirements and conditions, the constraints to their learning in the IDP context, and the use and sharing of the project information and lessons learned within and across the projects.

#### **4.1 HIV/AIDS Project (Project A)**

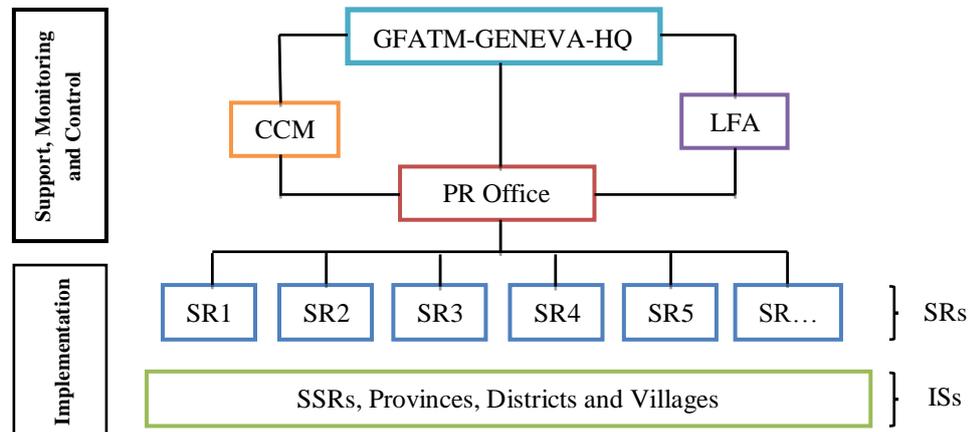
##### **4.1.1 Requirements and Conditions for Project Implementation**

When the grant is approved by the Global Fund Board, it entered into the grant negotiation stage and preparation for project implementation such as arrangement of project structure and grant agreement which specified requirements and conditions for compliance. The following section will thus present the organization of project structure and main requirements and conditions specified in the grant agreement. Prior to doing so, the roles of main stakeholders are overviewed.

###### **4.1.1.1 Project Organizational Structure and Stakeholders**

The Principal Recipient, a legally accountable entity to the Global Fund in Lao PDR, manages the grants through the Department of Communicable Disease Control (DCDC). The Principal Recipient is responsible to the Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCM) and to the Global Fund for delivering agreed programmatic and financial results. Several MOH partners (Sub-Recipients)

implement activities under the grants. Some of these activities are implemented at provincial, district or community levels (Implementing Sites or ISs) (MOH, 2006a: 1). The organizational structure of the Global Fund is shown in Figure 4.1 below:



**Figure 4.1** Project Organizational Structure and Stakeholders

**Source:** Ministry of Health, 2011c: 3.

#### 1) Country Coordinating Mechanism

The country coordinating mechanism is central to the Global Fund's commitment to local ownership and participatory decision-making. The country coordinating mechanism is the country-level multi-stakeholder partnerships which include representatives from Government, multilateral or bilateral agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, private businesses and people living with the diseases. These country-level multi-stakeholder partnerships develop and submit grant proposals to the Global Fund based on priority needs at the national level. After grant approval, they oversee progress during implementation (GFATM, 2013c).

#### 2) Local Fund Agent

The Global Fund does not have a country-level presence outside of its offices in Geneva, Switzerland. Instead, it hires Local Fund Agents to oversee, verify and report on grant performance. The LFAs are selected through a competitive bidding process. The Global Fund normally has one local fund agent, which could be either a local or international agent, in each country where it has

approved a grant (GFATM, 2013a). The LFAs perform assessments of the Principal Recipients' capacity to implement a program and manage grant funds before grant signing, assist in grant negotiations, monitor implementation by the Principal Recipient after grant signing or verify the Principal Recipients' progress towards the objectives of the Consolidated Program, use of Grant funds and compliance with the terms and conditions of the Agreement, and assist in grant closure and provide advice to the Global Fund as required (GFATM, 2009b; 2006).

### 3) Principal Recipient

The Global Fund signs a legal grant agreement with a Principal Recipient, which is designated by the country coordinating mechanism. The Principal Recipient receives Global Fund financing directly, and then uses it to implement prevention, care and treatment programs, or passes it on to other organizations (Sub-Recipients) who provide those services. The Principal Recipient also makes regular requests for additional disbursements from the Global Fund based on demonstrated progress towards the intended results (MOH, 2011c: 5).

### 4) Sub-Recipients

The Sub-recipients are candidates from government sectors, NGOs, and local associations who respond to a call for expression of interest published by the country coordinating mechanism. The country coordinating mechanism then selects a proposal based on various criteria including adequacy of the proposal, experience in the field and others as appropriate. Once selected, the Sub-Recipient's capacity in finance, monitoring and evaluation, procurement and logistics is assessed by the Principal Recipient Office to confirm that the Sub-Recipient is able to implement the Global Fund grant. After the grant is signed by the Global Fund and the Principal Recipient Office, the Principal Recipient signs a contract with each Sub-Recipient describing their roles and responsibilities, as well as the budget and procurement figures.

### 5) Sub-Sub-Recipients

Sub-Recipients have the option to implement their activities with other partners. Those partners are selected and contracted by the Sub-Recipient and are called Sub-Sub-Recipients. They receive part of the grant from the Sub-Recipient. As such they are bound to comply with the Global Fund's conditions

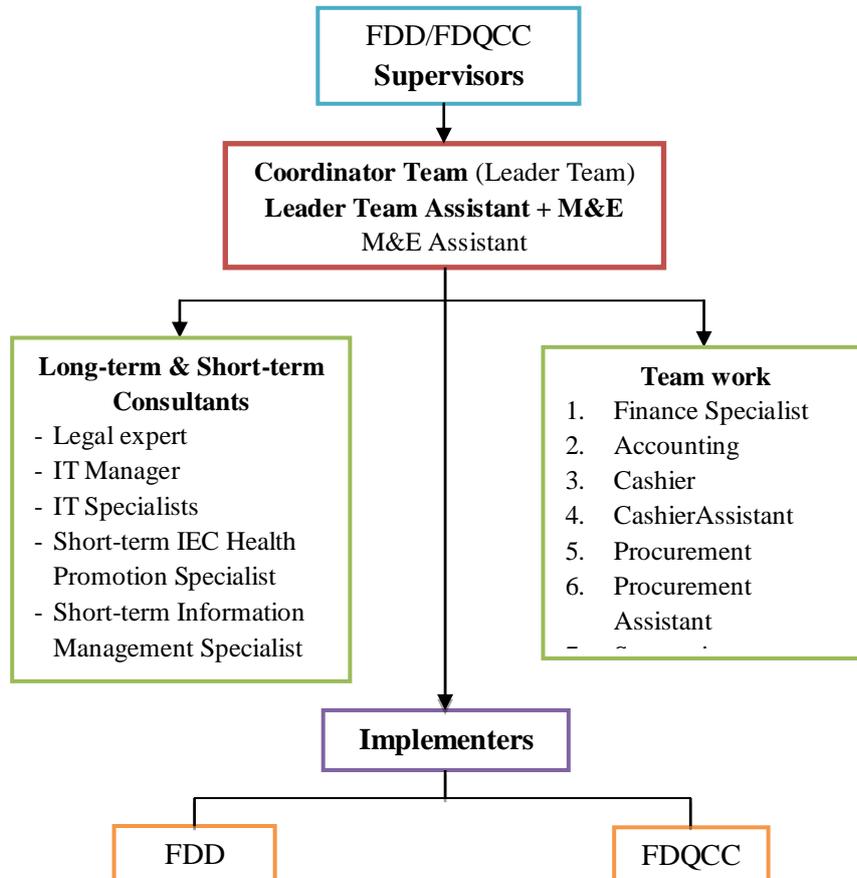
regarding financial and accounting management. Sub-Sub-Recipients are under the direction of Sub-Recipients and report to them. In terms of finance and accounting, Sub-Recipients are like Global Fund grant beneficiaries. The Global Fund and Principal Recipient financial management rules apply to them. The Sub-Recipients ensure compliance with the rules.

#### 6) Implementation Sites

Implementation Sites are operational branches of Sub-Recipients at the provincial level. Sub-Recipients implement their program activities through implementation sites. Implementation Sites are under the direction of the Sub-Recipients and report to them. No specific contract is signed between Sub-Recipients and implementation Sites. It is understood that Sub-Recipients' contract obligations (such as accounting records, asset management, etc.) apply equally to the implementation Sites. The Sub-Recipient ensures that the obligations are followed (MOH, 2011c: 6).

##### 4.1.1.2 Program Structure of FDD/FDQCC Sub-Recipient

In order for the effective management of the project, a project team was formed consisting of nine members who are responsible for coordination, accounting, cashier, procurement, monitoring and evaluation, and secretary. In order to set out the clear roles and responsibilities of each staff member, there were a terms of reference set for each position (GFATM, 2011a). There were also long-term and short-term IT consultants to the project. In addition, the program team was supervised by the Directors of FDD and FDQCC (see Figure 4.2 for the program organization of the FDD/FDQCC Sub-Recipient). Importantly, all of these team members were FDD and FDQCC staff (see Table 3.4 for List of Interviewees).



**Figure 4.2** Program Organization of the FDD/FDQCC Sub-Recipient

#### 4.1.1.3 Standard Terms and Conditions

When funding was provided for the proposed activities, the grant was signed with the Principal Recipient and entered into the implementation stage (GFATM, 2011d: 7). However, prior to program implementation, there also was a Program Grant Agreement signed between the Principal Recipient and Sub-Recipient which consists of 38 articles for the standard terms and conditions to be complied with. The main requirements were generally for finance and procurement, and monitoring and evaluation. The three were inter-connected-could not be divorced from each other; if one unit was in trouble, the other two were also affected. The main processes and procedures of the three tasks are described in the following sectors:

##### 1) Procurement Management

According to the Program Grant Agreement between the Global Fund and Principal Recipient, the Principal Recipient must coordinate, develop, and

implement Standard Operating Procedures satisfactory to the Global Fund in connection with the procurement process regarding the program including the following: management of procurement agents; invitation of bids/request for quotations; receipt and handling of bids; examination of bids; evaluation of bids; and evaluation of suppliers and supplier performance (GFATM, 2011b: 8). In response to such requirements, the MOH has specifically developed a manual for the procurement of goods, pharmaceutical and other health products, works, maintenance and services used for the Global Fund project. The Manual is used as guidance for staff responsible for the procurement of the Principal Recipient Office and other procurement units to implement for transparency, efficiency, economy, accountability and ethical standards (MOH, 2009). The Manual had been further modified and improved in 2012. Hence, the Principal Recipient held a three-day training on the modifications.

For the Sub-Recipients to easily understand the procurement procedures, the Principal Recipient summarized the main procedures and threshold values for each procurement method in a table format. Firstly, the threshold values for each procurement method table provided the information about how much money the Principal Recipient, SRs, SSRs, and Provincial Procurement Units could procure and by which method. From the table, goods and services could be purchased domestically and/or internationally. Fundamentally, the Sub-Recipient could procure any health products directly if the procurement budget is lower than or equivalent to one million LAK (Lao Kip) (approximately US\$ 125.00), but if it is over a million LAK to less than LAK 30 million (approximately US\$ 3,750.00), the Sub-Recipient was required to comply with the requirements specified in the Manual. Details of the threshold values for each procurement method are illustrated in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1** Threshold Values for Each Procurement Method

Method of Procurement	PR Procurement Unit	SR Procurement Unit	SSR, Provincial
<b>Direct Procurement - Direct Purchase/Direct Contracting</b>	<i>Old: ≤ 3,000,000</i> <b>New: ≤ 1,000,000</b>	<i>Old: ≤ 3,000,000</i> <b>New: ≤ 1,000,000</b>	<i>Old: ≤ 2,000,000</i> <b>New: ≤ 1,000,000</b>
<b>Direct Procurement - Direct Purchase/Direct Contracting</b> (Approval on a case by case basis)	<i>Old: &gt; 3,000,000</i> <b>New: &gt; 1,000,000 to ≤ 300,000,000*</b>	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: &gt; 1,000,000 to ≤ 50,000,000*</b>	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: N/A</b>
<b>Direct Procurement - Direct Purchase/Direct Contracting</b> (Through International Procurement Agency)	<i>Old: No Specific Amount</i> <b>New: No Specific Amount</b>	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: N/A</b>	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: N/A</b>
<b>Shopping (National) - Request for Quotation (RFQ) by Simple Way</b>	<i>Old: &gt; 3 million to ≤ 30 million</i> <b>New: ≤ 30,000,000</b>	<i>Old: &gt; 3 million to ≤ 30 million</i> <b>New: ≤ 30,000,000</b>	<i>Old: &gt; 2 million to ≤ 5 million</i> <b>New: ≤ 30,000,000</b>
<i>Shopping (National) - Request For Quotation (RFQ) (No Contract) Not In the New Version</i>	<i>Old: &gt; 30 million to ≤ 100 million</i> <b>New: N/A</b>	<i>Old: &gt; 30 million to ≤ 100 million</i> <b>New: N/A</b>	<i>Old: &gt; 5 million to ≤ 20 million</i> <b>New: N/A</b>
<b>Shopping (National) - Request For Quotation (RFQ)</b>	<i>Old: &gt; 100 million to ≤ 300 million</i> <b>New: ≤ 300,000,000</b>	<i>Old: &gt; 100 million to ≤ 300 million</i> <b>New: ≤ 300,000,000</b>	<i>Old: &gt; 20 million to ≤ 50 million</i> <b>New: ≤ 300,000,000</b>
<b>Shopping (International) - Request For Quotation (RFQ)</b>	<i>Old: Depend on budget</i> <b>New: ≤ 300,000,000</b>	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: N/A</b>	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: N/A</b>
<b>Limited International Bidding (LIB)</b> (not in the previous guideline)	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>No Specific Amount**</b>	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: N/A</b>	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: N/A</b>
<b>National Competitive Bidding (NCB)</b>	<i>Old: &gt; 300 million to ≤ 5,000 million (Med. Equip.)</i> <b>New: ≤ 1,000,000,000</b>	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: N/A</b>	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: N/A</b>
<b>International Competitive Bidding (ICB)</b> (not in the previous guideline)	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: No Specific Amount</b>	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: N/A</b>	<i>Old: N/A</i> <b>New: N/A</b>

\* SR needs only approval from the MOH/PR Procurement Unit up 50'000'000. If direct procurement is higher than this amount, MOH/PR Procurement Unit needs the approval of The Global Fund Secretariat (Please refer to the Table 2.1.3.1a).

\*\* MOH/PR Procurement Unit needs the approval of The Global Fund Secretariat if they intend to use this procurement methodology (Please refer to the point 2.1.3.3).

For the steps involved in procurement, the types of documents required by each method of procurement are specified. For instance, the Principal Recipient validation procurement is required for the direct procurement with the

amount not more than LAK 1 million. But it is not necessary if the Sub-Recipients conduct procurement themselves (see Table 4.2 for the Steps Involved in Procurement).

**Table 4.2** Step of Procurement Procedure

No	Documents	Direct Procurement Amount not more than 1,000,000 Kip	National Shopping Request for Quotation by Simple way Amount not more than 30,000,000 kip	National Shopping Request for Quotation Amount not more than 300,000,000 kip	Request For Expression for Interest Consultant (National and International)
1	PR Validation Procurement	√=> Not requested if SR do Procurement by themselves	√=> Not requested if SR do Procurement by themselves	√=> Not requested if SR do Procurement by themselves <b>However PR will participated at the selection committee</b>	√=> Not requested if SR do Procurement by themselves <b>However PR will participated at the selection committee</b>
2	SR Validation Procurement	√	√	√	√
3	Advertisement	No need	No need	√ (2 Languages)	√ (2 Languages + Website according category of Consultancy needed)
4	Invitation	No need	√	√	√
5	RFQ form	√	√	√	√
6	Individual RFQ sending to Supplier	No need	√	√	No need
7	Monitoring of RFQ sending to Supplier	No need	√	√	No need
8	Individual received quotation from Supplier	No need	√	√	√
9	Monitoring of received quotation from Supplier	No need	√	√	√
10	Quotation/Bid Opening	No need	No need	√	No need
11	Evaluation of Quotation/Bid	No need	√	√	√ (2 formats - CV Evaluation and Interview evaluation)
12	Notification of award	No need	√	√	√
13	Contract	No need	Not an obligation but will be good for the rehabilitation and civil work.	√	√

In addition, several procurement forms were introduced as annexes to the procurement procedures such as Annex 4.1 Shopping Simple Way (11 forms coded 'RFQSW'), Annex 4.2 Shopping National Goods (13 forms coded 'RFQNG'), Annex 4.3 Shopping National Work (13 forms coded 'RFQNW'), Annex 4.4 Bid Documents (13 forms coded 'Bidding') (such as Advertisement or Invitation to Bid for Procurement, Invitation of Tender of Procurement, Bidding Documents for Procurement, etc.), Annex 4.5 Consultant (seven forms coded 'Consult'; (e.g. Invitation or Request for Expression of Interest, Term of Reference Notice, Monitoring Sheet of Receiving Expression of Interest Letter from Consultant, and etc.). Nonetheless, any payment for goods and/or services had to be made in accordance with the Financial Guidelines.

Certainly, the detailed procedures, as well as forms, were a means to ensure the accountability and transparency of the grant fund management. Indeed, A6, a procurement staff, accepted that these practices were helpful when it came to the audit by local fund agents:

When comparing to other projects, this one (the Global Fund) is the toughest one. It's tough but it helps protect us very well for this one because it's strict. There are no gaps. There are documents and evidences. There is transparency about financial management.

#### 1) Financial Management

For the effective utilization of grant funds, the grant recipients are required to assure an effective flow of funds to all implementing parties with appropriate accountability arrangements, and provide adequate and transparent reporting of programmatic results and financial accountability. Accordingly, the Financial Guidelines have been developed for use by the Principal Recipient Office, MOH, as well as the approved Sub-Recipients. The Guidelines are intended to assist designated finance staff and managers' tasks, safeguard their accountability, ensure that the correct financial procedures have been applied, and ensure that transparency has been demonstrated. The Guidelines consist of 19 chapters such as General Principles/Financial Approval, Budgeting, Advance Process, Program Incomes, and etc. (MOH, 2011c). Also, a number of accounting forms, designed by the Principal Recipient Office, have been included in the Financial Guidelines that are intended to facilitate financial reporting by the Sub-Recipients to the Principal Recipient (MOH, 2011c). Some of the forms are 'Bank Account Book in USD coded F1, Request for Reprogramming-compulsory coded F17a, Activity Expenses Request coded F18, Activity Expenses Report coded F19, and PR/SR check-list-monthly accounting control-compulsory coded F23a. There are altogether 60 forms (MOH, 2011c).

Meanwhile, a computerized accounting system had been specifically developed to incorporate financial information from all Cost Centers of the project and ultimately consolidate them into a common set of financial statements (MOH, 2006a: 2). Essentially, the Principal Recipient as attempted to improve

financial management through the training, account monitoring and supervision, and computerized accounting report format to Sub-Recipients from time to time. Specifically, the Principal Recipient provided the monitoring and/or refresher training in a quarterly basis or more frequently to provide effective accounting assistance to all Sub-Recipients with weak financial management (MOH, 2011c: 8).

According to the Program Grant Agreement, the Sub-Recipient was fundamentally required to provide reports to the Principal Recipient: Period Reports by using the form of Progress Reports, and Annual Progress Reports. The Progress Report is both a progress report on the latest completed period of program implementation, and a request for funds for the following period of implementation. Its purpose is to provide an update of the programmatic and financial progress of a Global Fund-financed grant, as well as an update on the fulfillment of conditions precedent, management actions and other requirements (GFATM, 2013c). According to the Financial Guidelines, however, the Sub-Recipient is required to submit three reports to the Principal Recipient: monthly, every 6-month, and annually. In fact, the Guidelines clearly define who should submit what and when. For instance, 30 days after the end of each semester, Sub-Recipients are required to send a progress update and disbursement request to the Principal Recipient Office based on the control checklist as displayed in Figure 4.3 below.

<p><b>Progress Update and Disbursement Request from SR to PR Office</b></p> <p><i>Deadline: Semester+30</i></p> <p>PR or SR:</p> <p>Control checklist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report templates (Annex 1-A, 1-B, 1-C, 1-D, 1-E, 1-F, 1-G) Statement of Fund Balance, Statement of Receipts and Disbursements (Annex 2A+2B)</li> <li>• Latest approved detailed Workplan and Budget</li> <li>• General ledger in Excel format for the period classified according to the budget categories</li> <li>• Budget follow-up extracted from the SR/PR accounting software (see Annex 3)</li> <li>• Procurement control book, if any (Form F27)</li> <li>• Sales revenue/Income report (see Form F21), cumulative for six months</li> <li>• Revised detailed workplan (without any reprogramming) but showing carry forward activities</li> <li>• Bank statements + bank reconciliation (see Form F5)</li> <li>• Petty cash reconciliation (see Form F9)</li> <li>• Advance outstanding statements PR and SRs (see Annexes, Form 11B)</li> <li>• Supporting documents for accounts receivable and payable</li> <li>• Evidence of the exchange rate,</li> <li>• Invoices for pharmaceutical and health products and equipment that need to be entered in the PQR system.</li> </ul>
---

**Figure 4.3** A Control Checklist for Submission of the Progress Update and Disbursement Request to the Principal Recipient Office

**Source:** MOH, 2011c: 54.

From the control checklist, it appears that the period reports consist of several forms to be filled. In essence, some forms need detailed data and information, and are hence time-consuming (See Table 4.3 for a sample of the PU/DR form). The challenges in filling the forms were noted by A2, the accountant:

Each donor has their own ways or formats of reporting, but the Global Fund tends to have more details than others, as to my experience. There are reporting forms which are principally challenging, other forms are OK. Such as the Progress Update and Disbursement Reports, the short word is PU/DR, has to be conducted every six-months; from January to June. In the past, it's from January to March, but they've just changed it because it's too difficult. And for the details, it has 10 sheets, in the Excel, to be filled in. and it's very detailed, and has to explain in details for each.

**Table 4.3** A Sample of the PU/DR Form**On-going Progress Update and Disbursement Request**

## GENERAL GRANT INFORMATION

<b>Country:</b>	
<b>Disease:</b>	Select
<b>Grant Number:</b>	
<b>Principal Recipient:</b>	
<b>Program Start Date:</b>	
<b>Currency:</b>	Select

## PROGRESS UPDATE

<b>Progress Update - Reporting Period:</b>	<b>Cycle:</b>	Select	<b>Number:</b>	
<b>Progress Update - Period Covered:</b>	<b>Beginning Date:</b>		<b>End Date:</b>	
<b>Progress Update - Number:</b>				

## DISBURSEMENT REQUEST

<b>Disbursement Request - Disbursement Period:</b>	<b>Cycle:</b>	Select	<b>Number:</b>	
<b>Disbursement Request - Period Covered:</b>	<b>Beginning Date:</b>		<b>End Date:</b>	
<b>Disbursement Request - Number:</b>				

**Section 1: Programmatic Progress**

Note: The table below should contain those Impact/Outcome indicators that are (1) due for reporting during the current year of a grant and (2) those reporting on which is overdue from the previous periods.

A. Impact / Outcome Indicators									
Impact / Outcome	Indicator Description	Baseline (if applicable)		Year of Target	Intended Target	Report Due Date	Actual Result	Data Source of Results	Comments on results on Impact/Outcome indicators and data sources, and any other comments
		Value	Year						
Select		-	-	-	-	-	-	Select	
Select		-	-	-	-	-	-	Select	
Select		-	-	-	-	-	-	Select	

Source: GFATM, 2013c.

To ensure on-time submission of the reports, the deadlines for each level were specified. This is because if the implementers do not submit the financial reports within the specified dates, the project financial reports cannot be submitted to the Principal Recipient on time. In the same token, a delayed report will affect the Principal Recipient's report submitted to the Global Fund. That is, there is a chain effect resulting from a delayed report from the bottom-up. Thus, to ensure on-

time submissions, it is used as an indicator of project performance rating. A1, the accountant, explains the importance of this requirement as follows:

Supposed that the report was not on time, OK! When the auditors come, they'll check based on the Global Fund's Manual which specified that you have to report every 10<sup>th</sup> day of the next month, and supposed that you submitted (the report) late, they'll note that you reported late.

The type of reports to be submitted by each level and their deadlines are summarized in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4** Type of Financial Reports Required and Deadlines for Submission

	<b>Type of Reports</b>	<b>Deadlines</b>
From implementing sites or Sub-sub recipients to Sub-recipient	Monthly report: 8 forms (e.g. Bank book, bank statement, bank conciliation, advance control book, etc.+ submission of a soft copy of file exported from the accounting software)	5 <sup>th</sup> of next month
From Sub-recipient to Principal Recipient	Monthly report of implementing sites or Sub-sub recipients	10 <sup>th</sup> of next month
	Monthly report: 8 forms	20 <sup>th</sup> of next month
	On-going progress updates and disbursement reports (PU/DRs): based on control checklists	30 days after each semester
	Enhanced financial report (EFR): form F25 which consists of presenting the actual and cumulative expenditures under the category format, objectives, service delivery area format and justification of variances + statement of receipts and disbursements and general ledger with similar classification	30 days after the end of the yearly period

The frequency of report submissions was later shifted from monthly to quarterly. However, the Sub-Recipient shall provide to the Principal

Recipient and Global Fund such other information and reports at such times as the Global Fund may request (GFATM, 2011a). Apart from the periodic reports, the Sub-Recipient is to submit to the Principal Recipient, not later than 16 months after the Phase 1 Starting Date, and on an annual basis thereafter, in form and substance satisfactory to the Principal Recipient, an Annual Progress Report covering programmatic progress during the Sub-Recipient's preceding programmatic or fiscal year (GFATM, 2009a: 10).

During project implementation, the Sub-Recipient's skills and capacity to manage the financial aspects was monitored by the Principal Recipient through the quality of the monthly accounting reports as well as adhering to deadlines; On-going Progress Update and Disbursement Request and attention to timeliness; the Principal Recipient written reports after the on-site visit once every semester (either at Central or Implementing Sites); general feedback in a day-to-day financial management; Sub-Recipient actions and follow-up to deal with the audits' findings. Based on the monitoring and supervision results, the Principal Recipient provided the refresher training in a quarterly basis or more frequently to provide effective accounting assistance to all Sub-Recipients with weak financial management (MOH, 2011c: 8).

#### Audits and Records

According to the Program Grant Agreement, revenue and expenditure of the Principal Recipient and Sub-Recipients have to be audited annually by an independent external auditing firm. The Principal Recipient was required to perform internal audits and/or, to conduct a financial review, forensic audit or evaluation, or to take any other actions that it deemed necessary to ensure the accountability of the Sub-Recipient and Sub-Sub-Recipients for grant funds, and to monitor compliance by the Sub-Recipient with the terms of the Agreement. The Principal Recipient shall provide adequate notice for the inspections within a reasonable timeframe in advance of the inspection. Thus, all financial staff of all cost centers have to prepare and arrange all financial statements with supporting documents and all relevant accompanying notes and details to facilitate the audit. Any lack of proper documentation (for example, receipts without full information, lack of attendance lists, original contents modified, and so forth), or discrepancies between

workplan and expenditure, may disqualify the expense claims and could lead to a refund of this expense to the Principal Recipient Office (GFATM, 2011a; 2009a; MOH, 2011c: 57).

In this regard, to ensure their accountability and transparency, as well as readiness for the audit, proper archiving and filing of project documents and records are highly required. The importance of a proper filing and storage system of these documents and records was highlighted by the accountants as follows:

I must organize them (the financial documents) systematically because when the auditors came and asked where the supporting documents were I have to quickly provide them. Supposed you disbursed the fund for travelling to Bolikhamxay province, where the document was (the auditors asked), so I have to keep it in a folder properly. (A1)

Everything has to be in order. If I don't organize it in order, I'll die when the auditors come to audit us. If I have nothing to show them, I'll be in trouble. So, everything has to be well organized and in order. (A2)

According to the Financial Guidelines, agreements, books, records and other related financial documents shall be maintained by the various cost centers (Principal Recipient, Sub-Recipients, Sub-Sub-Recipients, Implementing Sites) at least five years beyond the date of final completion of the GFATM related activities (end of the grant). Within the Financial Guidelines, Chapter 14 details procedures for retention/protection of financial records and documents such as 1) period of retention of financial records, 2) physical filing, 3) physical keeping of documents, and 4) backup of accounting data. For the physical filing, it specifies that the filing of hardcopies of documents should be maintained per disease and per round. Furthermore, each type of document should be filed in a relevant folder such as Bank Payment Voucher, Bank Receipt Voucher, Bank Book, and Bank Statement. In addition, it provides examples in a table format on how to file the documents. All documents should be kept out of reach of rodents, either kept in plastic or in metallic locked containers, with a labeled description of their contents being stuck on. Thus,

the PR and SRs have to consider this filing as a part of the project activities, and should include it in their budget if the procurement of filing cupboards/boxes is needed.

Practically, the financial unit had indeed maintained its documents and records properly. However, others had not systematically filed and retained their documents. In fact, it was quite messy and difficult to find the documents when needed. For example, when this researcher asked for the Manual and supporting documents, it took some time to find them, while some documents could not be found, though they had attempted and hence promised to send them to the researcher later. This shows the obvious lack of a proper filing systems as specified in the Agreement.

For the electronic accounting and financial data, it is compulsory to back up for all finance and accounting units. In addition, it requires that all Global Fund-supported entities should develop procedures on backing-up (MOH, 2011c: 49-50). Indeed, there is usage of ICT infrastructure to share program information. For instance, the program coordinator distributed the program budget and work plan to each unit involved in each quarter via e-mail.

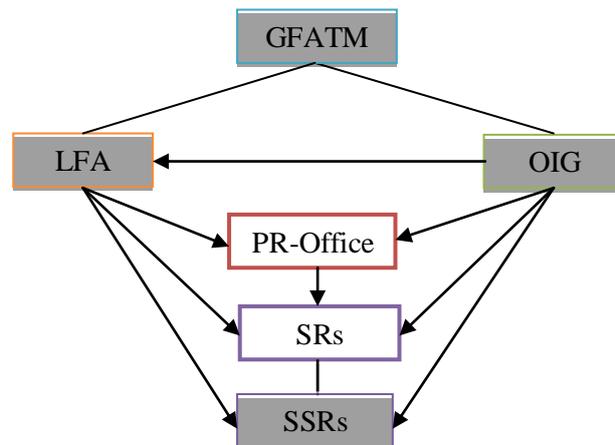
According to the Financial Guidelines, the Principal Recipient Office is required to furnish to the Global Fund an audit report for each audit arranged by the Principal Recipient Office within six months after the end of the period under audit. The audit report should include financial statements and a management letter. The management letter would give an opinion and highlight the lack or disregard of procedures and will recommend some corrective actions. Based on this management letter, the Principal Recipient and Sub-Recipients have to prepare and share a detailed action plan on how to solve the identified difficulties. The Principal Recipient is in charge of consolidating the action plans, and of submitting them to the Local Fund Agents and Global Fund for review. The Principal Recipient and Sub-Recipients are responsible for follow up on the action plan and to update it every six months with the specific activities being implemented (MOH, 2011c: 58).

Not only audits by the local fund agents, the Global Fund may also perform, at any time, audits to conduct a financial review, forensic audit or evaluation, or to take any other actions that it deems necessary to ensure the

accountability of Sub-Recipients of grant funds, and to monitor compliance by the Sub-Recipient with the terms of the Agreement (GFATM, 2011a; 2009b).

Principally, the audit is conducted by the Office of Inspector General or OIG. Audits cover all aspects of the Global Fund's activities including those carried out by its program recipients, partners and suppliers. They cover all systems, processes, operations, functions and activities involving the Global Fund. The OIG conducts country audits that cover the use of Global Fund resources at a country level. Hence, all facilities, property, personnel and records of any other entity relating to grants funded by the Global Fund, whether maintained by the Principal Recipient, Sub-Recipients, or local fund agents, are accessible to the OIG (GFATM, 2010).

In conclusion, the auditing processes and structure are summarized in Figure 4.4.



**Figure 4.4** Audit Processes and Structure

## 2) Monitoring and Reporting of Project Progress

### (1) Regular Meetings

Like other projects, regular meetings are perceived as an important tool to review the progress and challenges of the project implementation, and also to take lessons learned for the remaining work plan. As a consequence, the project team and the board of management initially agreed to hold regular meetings every Saturday. However, as not every single one was able to come on Saturday, it

had been then organized monthly. Still, since 2012-2013, the monthly meetings were not being held as planned. The meetings were held only when there were problems which needed to be solved or simply as necessary.

Since the researcher was allowed access only to the minutes, they were thus the only source used as evidence reflecting on their lessons learned practices. As evident in the meeting minutes, in the year 2010, a monthly meeting was held only in November, while for 2011, a meeting was held nearly every month, except for the first two months. That is, the monthly meetings started from March until December. In the following years, the meetings tended to be less-seven in 2012, and four in 2013. Part of the reason was because the activities had been lessening in 2013.

According to the secretary, every meeting would be conducted in the same manner with objectives, progress reports, discussion on resolutions, and conclusion. Likewise, the meeting minutes were documented in the same sequence. The monthly meeting minutes consisted of the following headings: Title of the Meeting; Objectives of the Meeting; Agenda of the Meeting; The Meeting Results (i.e. the progress and challenges, issue by issue); and Suggestions or Recommendations (for those issues raised).

For the minutes of the monthly meetings, it appears that there was no fixed form; some were documented in textual format, while others in a combination of both table and textual formats. According to the project secretary, the minutes were captured based on content of the discussion. The table format was used if the issues discussed were mainly based on the work-plan, whereas the textual one was for general issues which were not specifically based on the workplan. In comparison, those minutes that used the table to elaborate project progress seem to be easier to understand given that they contained important information. In essence, the content documented in the table was in English language. The content recorded were based on such headings as Reference No., Objective/Activity, Budget (USD), Responsibility (e.g. procurement, finance, monitoring and evaluation, consultants), and Results of Meeting (the project progress and challenges). However, most minutes were documented in the textual format.

When reviewing the content of the textual minutes, the issues were documented separately by numerating or bulleting. In some minutes, the issues were described in details concerning the progress and challenges which enabled the readers to understand the context. For example, within the meeting results dated 25 May 2011, the minutes recorded that “for selection of a long-term consultant to the project, there were 13 applicants who were cut to 5 then 3 and then to 1 based on the Global Fund form.” However, the recommendations or solutions to the issues raised were documented separately. For instance, the minutes recorded that “interviews of the consultant should be conducted within Friday May 27.” Despite detailed records of the project progress, challenges and recommendations, it seems to be a bit difficult to link the whole story of a particular issue, given they were recorded separately. Thus, it may be more useful if the project progress, and its challenges and solutions, were presented in the table format.

However, not all minutes were documented in details. Some issues raised were recorded very briefly and were ambiguous. Also, although the recommendations were sometimes quite clear on who should do what and how, there was no mention on when it should be done so that it could be followed up in the future. Nonetheless, the minutes were generally provided to the readers or others to know what had been done, what difficulties emerged, and how they were solved during a particular period of time. All of these practices reflected their efforts to solve the problems in a timely fashion to meet the project goals within budget and time.

## (2) Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are indispensable learning and management tools for improving current and future program planning, implementation and decision-making (GFATM, 2011d: 6). To meet the goals and targets of these needs, strong monitoring and evaluation systems are needed to report accurate, timely and comparable data that can be used to strengthen programs and gain financial support (GFATM, 2011d: 5). During the course of program implementation, the Sub-Recipients were required to monitor and evaluate the project progress toward its objectives, in accordance with the monitoring and evaluation plan. The Monitoring and Evaluation Unit needs to regularly monitor and evaluate the financial, procurement, and project progress and reports to the Principal Recipient within

specified dates. Thus, to ascertain their compliance, the project team had to follow the guidelines strictly:

In the past, what I used to do I'll do that way. But for this one (the Global Fund project), it's not like that. It's like a framework that we need to follow. Like, which one needed to be followed up and how to report, something like that. (A5)

For the Global Fund, it needs to understand that evaluation of each point needs to be conducted correctly. The financial unit has to be in the scope when evaluating. For the M&E (monitoring and evaluation), for instance, now three months have to report. For the progress report, for example the training, the conditions of Global Fund will require that you need to have pre-test, post-test. How pre-test and post-test relate and how to draft reports, it needs to follow their Guidelines. (A3)

Practically, the performance was monitored and evaluated by the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit. Monitoring and evaluation was conducted quarterly or every six months or yearly based on the indicators set in the Performance Framework. The monitoring and evaluation results obtaining from each implementing unit were reported in Excel form provided by the Principal Recipient (see Table 4.5 for a sample of the monitoring and evaluation report form).

In addition to the project performance assessment, performance of the team members was also monitored monthly via a timesheet report provided by the Principal Recipient. By the end of each month, each was requested to report his/her performance in the Summary of the Month form (see Figure 4.5 for the Summary of the Month Form) and working days (see Table 4.6 for the Timesheet).

**Table 4.5** A Sample of Monitoring and Evaluation Report Form

Objective No.	Service delivery area	Indicator Formulation	Baseline (if applicable)				Targets directly tied (Y/N)2	Targets cumulative Y-over program term (Y-cumulative annually)	Actual Result	Reasons for programmatic deviation from intended target	Comments
			Value	Year	Source	Baselines included in the targets					
Select	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Select	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	

**Summary of the month**  
 Month ..... Year .....

Name and surname	
Program	HSS
Round	SSF
Quarter	4

**Activities achieved**

1. ....
2. ....

Date .....

**Certified by** **Reporter**

**Figure 4.5** A Sample of the Summary of Monthly Performance

**Table 4.6** A Sample of the Timesheet

Ministry of Health  
 Global Fund to Fight AIDS/Tuberculosis/Malaria

**Timesheet**  
 Month: ..... Year .....

Name: ..... Position: .....

Date of the month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Description																														
Office work																														
Take home work																														
Annual leave																														
Sick leave																														
Travel/field work in country																														
Travel/out of country																														
Public holiday																														
Absence with reason*																														
Weekend meeting																														

**Remark:** .....

**Certified by** **Prepared by**

It appears that each work area consisted of several requirements and conditions for conforming. To ensure conformance of the Global Fund requirements, the Principal Recipient office had thus specifically developed the guidelines and manuals for finance and procurement management. Also, there were a number of specific reporting forms serving the operating procedures of those guidelines. In addition, the reports need to be submitted on time with accurate and complete contents. Due to timeline pressure, project team members had become more disciplined in their work by setting individual work-plan, better time management, and improvement of individual work (such as by creating a standard operating procedure):

I had to do within the timeline. So, it needs to plan in advance. It's the rules, I would say. It's not like our routine work. It needs to be done and then reported on that particular dates, how to report, how the format is, something like that. I would say it makes me become more disciplined in working. This has made me to have discipline in planning. Also, I've learned how to manage the time for family, government's work, and project work. Because sometimes I had not enough time (during weekdays), so I have to work on Saturday and Sunday. (A5)

I have to be more disciplined with myself. It's the rules that force us to work internationally. This is the main thing. But time management is highly important. Because of the time constraints, I have to find out how the document flow could be better. So, I've written down the operating procedures. That means the route where I should go, to whom first, from this point to this point, in order to avoid mistakes and time-delay. For this one, I've made it as an SOP (Standard Operating Procedures). (A4)

However, although most of the project team members had had certain experiences about IDPs, they were still new to the Global Fund project (see Table 3.4 for IDP experience of individual team members). In this situation, they

had to learn from several sources while attempting to meet project goals within the timeline and budget. The sources of learning are therefore presented in the following sections.

#### **4.1.2 Sources of Project Learning**

Project learning can be categorized into two main sources: within and across projects as follows.

##### **4.1.2.1 Within-Project Learning**

Arguably, individuals and project teams will learn from what they are doing and struggling with as an effort to complete the job on time and on budget. The learning mechanisms which the individuals and project teams had taken are presented below.

##### **1) Learning from the Principal Recipient**

Ostensibly, the Principal Recipient played a key role in facilitating the project-based learning. Prior to project implementation, the Principal Recipient held a three-day training on the use of Project Guidelines and Manuals for Procurement and Finance Management, monitoring and evaluation, and overall project management for all Sub-Recipients. This was to ensure that the Sub-Recipients understand the operating procedures and forms to be filled. During the training, the Principal Recipient directly used the forms that serve the guidelines to explain and train the Sub-Recipients. These included forms of the on-going progress updates and disbursement reports (see Program Progress Reports for more details), the monitoring and evaluation reporting forms (see Table 4.5), the threshold values for each procurement method (see Table 4.1), and the steps of procurement procedures (see Table 4.2). Also, the soft files of important guidelines and related forms were provided to the Sub-Recipients to use as references and guidance for project implementation.

Within the short period of training, most project team members were seemingly able to understand what the main operating process and procedures were, what forms needed to be used, and what information needed to be filled in general. However, since the forms had not been applied in the actual context, it might have been difficult for those who had limited or no experience about the Global Fund project to fully understand or figure out the use of those forms. When it came to

practices, some still faced difficulties in the application of the forms as A2, an accountant who has had some IDP experience except for Global Fund projects, pointed out:

Mostly in general, only in general (the training held). Supposed that there are forms, they said like this and that, sometimes I cannot figure out... cannot imagine that they said something like this. At that time, I simply listened, I cannot catch. To ask, I don't know what to ask. Only when working, is there's anything that is still unclear, I go to ask them (the Principal Recipient). Like this and that it's correct or not. If incorrect, do I need to do like this? I have to go there many times before it's done, it's quite tough at the beginning.

Due to the short training period, while lacking experience in management of the Global Fund project, many members needed further clarification and instructions during the early phase of project implementation. These included the instructions or advice for reporting, budget planning, procurement, reprogramming and reallocation of money, among others. Therefore, to ensure conformance, most of them approached the Principal Recipient directly. For instance, A9 pointed out the reason why he needed advice from the Principal Recipient as follows:

At the initial state, despite the Manual, there're some points that I still don't deeply understand. I need to discuss and ask for advice or something is like I've never done before with the project. The thing that needs us to discuss like what should I do. I go to ask them about the procurement, like how to set specification and how to get comparison price. I need their help to check whether it's conforming to the regulations and the Manual or not. Like the procurement unit, the financial unit also goes there because they have individual units like us.

More importantly, given that part of the Principal Recipient's roles is to provide the Sub-Recipients with advice and instructions when needed, they

were equipped with experts in procurement, finance, and monitoring and evaluation. As a result, approaches to the Principal Recipient were preferred over others by most of team members as A7 pointed out:

I didn't ask others because asking the PR is easier, because they know better than others. They are the leader, so they know well. They'll provide us better solutions so I ask them.

In addition, rather than learning from other Sub-Recipients, some preferred to discuss with the Principal Recipient as they were the one who could provide definite decisions to all issues as A9 noted:

Personally, I only contact with the PR directly. Because if I discuss with them, supposed that they said it's incorrect, so I go to where the decision could be made. Because for each SR, if they suggested us and I followed but incorrect, it's not done. So I better go to where thing gets done.

To solve the problems in a timely manner, several channels of communication were used such as face-to-face, phone calls and e-mails. The choice of communication channels taken was dependent on the nature of work or problems needed to be solved. It appears that the face-to-face consultation was preferred when further clarification of particular issues was required. Direct phone calls were made for minor problems that might not need written documents as evidence from the Principal Recipient. Conversely, e-mails were opted for those issues that needed the Principal Recipient's comments and advice officially for implementation. The advice was also used as evidence when being asked as A2, an accountant, cited:

Call and ask for the issue that doesn't need their comments, written documents as evidence. Because every time we need to have evidence for those that are big issues. Like, those that need to have clear documents. Now, show me the message who advises you. But if it's a general issue, we can simply call them, no problem.

But the face-to-face consultation was preferred when further clarification of particular issues and confirmation of operating procedures were required:

There're some major problems that they (the Principal Recipient) can't figure out, so I have to take my computer there to ask them. Like this like that it's correct or not, I understood like this correct or not. Sometimes what I understand is not always like that. So, to catch up with the deadline, I go to ask them directly and they also advised me immediately. (A2)

Usually, the Principal Recipient provided advice and solutions to individual cases if the problems were unique or minor. Conversely, if common or major problems in a particular area (e.g. financial, procurement and monitoring and evaluation) were found, the Principal Recipient would hold a meeting to solve the problems collectively. Also, during the course of project implementation, there were additional trainings after having found some limitations relating to the use of the Guidelines and Manuals, and hence leading to further improvements and modifications. A9, a procurement staff member, explained the additional training held by the Principal Recipient following the audits:

Initially, there was training on the use of Manuals prior to project implementation. After having implemented and being audited, there were some problems relating to the use of the Manuals. Hence, they (the Principal Recipient) held additional trainings each year.

## 2) Learning from Problems

During the course of project operations, there were several problems emerging. The attempts to solve the problems encountered became one main source of learning. One example of the effort to solve the problems was the attempt to reprogram and reallocate the money for some activities that could not be implemented. The fact is that the project proposal had been developed before the completion of

Round 6 (previous project), while some activities of the work-plan had been expanded from Round 6. However, when it came to implementation, some planned activities were unable to be implemented, and hence needed to be reprogrammed and the money reallocated to meet the actual needs. A2 elaborated the need to reprogram because of the inability to implement some activities as follows:

The five-year work-plan (the proposal) was prepared by the former-westerner consultant. But the proposal was written long time ago, so it needs to be changed. So, we need to update. During project implementation, we've found some problems. Because when we operated in reality, we've learned that some (planned activities) are impossible, it's like a dream. Some are unable to implement, we need to adapt for some and ask for reprogramming, relocating the money. So, Dr. Sack (project coordinator) recommended for developing the new activities apart from the one developed by the ex-consultant. So, I developed new activities and explained why we need such activities.

### 3) Learning from the Audits

Audits were another crucial source of learning for project teams during their attempts to complete the jobs on time. As aforementioned in the Audit section, the Global Fund projects are normally audited internally by the Principal Recipient, and externally by an independent agent called the Local Fund Agent. In addition to those audits, the project may be audited by the Global Fund as well. To be ready for the audits, the project team had to prepare all necessary and supporting documents to safeguard their accountability.

Learning from the audit was first through the internal audit of the Principal Recipient. The internal audit findings and comments enabled the project team to improve their weaknesses and be well prepared for the external audit. This is owing to the fact that the external audit was conducted one month after the internal audit.

During the audit, project team members could take lessons learned from the particular points being questioned by the auditors. One example of

learning from the audit was from the case of A2, the accounting specialist. To catch up with the deadline, the related financial documents submitted by the implementers were only checked in general, such as signature of the payer and receiver. However, the content of expenses was not carefully checked. When it came to the audit, several gaps were found by the auditors. For instance, the repeated number of receipts, no telephone number of the shop, and different price for the same goods. Accordingly, to prevent repetition of mistakes in the future, the receipts of expenses on activity implementation were checked carefully, such as the content and unit costs of expenses, and numbers of the receipt. The lessons learned from audit were described in details by A2 as follows:

They (the auditors) checked very thorough. I didn't have time to check the documents thoroughly like them. Sometimes, I want to finish it on time, so I only check in general. I didn't check in details like them. I only check the signature of payer and receiver, it's correct or not. Now, they checked thoroughly, they even asked what kind of documents the photocopy is for. What? I didn't ask. So now I give them (the implementers) comments, when they submit me the receipt, they have to explain what kind of documents they photo copy, because I've already met this problem the year before.

I need to be stricter with the staff. Sometime, like I think it's alright, be compromised. The bill (receipt) like this is ok. Now, I've started to be stricter. In the past, I didn't do as thorough as the auditors. Now, I've learned from them (the auditors). Learned from what? Sometimes they (the implementers) wrote the bill, this bill is numbered 1, 2, 3, and this is also the same number. How can it be? I was stuck when they (the auditors) asked. I've learned. When there are people spending the money and submit the bill to me, I've started to observe the bill, its number, or whether the bill is similar, the market bill, type of bills... I've become more careful.

The attempts were primarily to minimize mistakes which would in turn demonstrate the extent of accountability and transparency.

After the audit, auditors' findings and comments could be lessons learned as well. The learning occurred during the meeting held at the Principal Recipient Office. After having received the external audit results, the Principal Recipient invited all Sub-Recipients to attend the meeting in order to unveil the audit results. During the meeting, the auditors' comments were raised and asked for clarification from the Sub-Recipients concerned. In doing so, other Sub-Recipients could also take lessons learned. Significantly, to avoid repeated mistakes, lessons learned were shared and were drawn collectively, while recommendations for future improvements were also provided by the Principal Recipient. A9 described how lessons learned from the audit occurred during the meeting at the Principal Recipient Office as follows:

When they (auditors) sent the audit results to the PR, the PR invited all SRs (Sub-recipients) to listen together. At that time, we'll know what our problems are, and what others' problems are. That means we know that this one they did incorrectly. In the meeting, the PR will organize... they will solve collectively. That is we gain lessons learned together with each SR. For instance, we perform well, but others did not or ours are not good, others are. There will be drawing of lessons there...in the future what we should do in order to avoid what the auditors commented.

The meeting provided lessons learned practices to occur at both individual (for each member of the unit) and collective levels (the Sub-Recipient or project). This is because the auditors' comments were reported separately by work areas such as financial, procurement, and programmatic progress. The audit findings were indeed acknowledged as highly important by the project team in order to improve their weaknesses as a means to demonstrate their accountability for grant funds and compliance with the requirements. The importance of audit results as lessons learned for future improvements was highlighted by A9 as follows:

For the audit, they audited my procurement unit, and other centers. What the problems are, they (the PR) will report in the meeting. They'll take lessons learned further because of the audit (results). It's important because what I've done and already followed the Manuals but when the auditors come they still have comments every time. It's the thing that helps me to improve myself more.

#### 4) Annual Review Meeting

Within the project, the annual review meetings were the formal practices of lessons learned. Some evidence of the lessons learned practices were presented below.

From the beginning of the program in late 2009 until 2013, there were three annual review meetings altogether. The first annual review meeting for 2010 performance was held on August 31, 2010 at Thalad, Vientiane Province, whereas the second time it was held on December 23-24, 2011 at Bolikhamxay Province, and the 2012 review meeting on June 17-18, 2013. It could be noticed that the 2012 review meeting was held very late due to financial issues of the Global Fund. As a consequence, the review for the first six-months of the year 2013 was also included. However, due to the financial constraints, there were no more annual review meetings after the 2012 review meeting. Another reason was that, since the meetings had already been held regularly by the project team, and since the progress reports had been submitted to the Principal Recipient regularly, hence it was unnecessary to further hold annual meetings.

The annual review meeting was organized at the meeting room of the Provincial Health Authority, Bolikhamxay Province on December 17-18, 2013. The meeting was attended by the Deputy Director of FDD, Director of FDQCC, Head of the Provincial Health Authority, project team members, representatives from Savannakhet, Champasack, and Attapeua provinces, and the Principal Recipient Office, with a total of 30 participants. The agenda of the review meeting was arranged as follows: opening ceremony, progress reports of each unit, discussion and solutions, and concluding and closing.

The progress reports were presented in the following sequence: the project progress, budget and financial, procurement, FDQCC, Good Manufacturing Practice audit and training, ICT, and Principal Recipient Office. From the participant observation, most of the presentations contained such contents as project progress, challenges, solutions and next steps. For instance, the project progress presented what activities were completed and how many percentages had been achieved compared to the indicators set, how much money the project had received and spent on each activity compared to the budget plan, materials and tools which had been procured and distributed to the targets, and the GMP instructors' training being held. The progress information provided all involved to learn the extent of project achievement against its indicators.

For the project challenges, each presentation mostly raised its related problems seeking for solutions and taking lessons-learned from the meeting. For example, following the presentation on the indicator achievements and progress, the issues of indicator measurements were raised for consideration due to budget reduction. As two out of four activities (the drug registration monitoring at pharmacy and dispensing database) could not be fully implemented as planned, the indicators used to measure the performance needed to be reconsidered or removed after discussion with the Principal Recipient experts. The reprogramming and reallocation showed their problem-solving attempts over a period of time during project implementation for effectiveness and efficiency of grant funds. These included the reprogramming of some activities which had been extended from the previous project and the reallocation of funds as a result of budget reduction. Still, other problems of indicator measurement (e.g. the meaning of cumulative or non-cumulative indicator) existed and hence were raised for discussion and clarification from the Principal Recipient. In response to the inquiries posed by the project team, the Principal Recipient's representative not only presented the progress results as evaluated by the donor, but also clarified all confusions of the indicator measurements. Furthermore, he raised a few questions as examples of how to evaluate the progress.

For the financial challenges, the presentation included the external audit's results which still had some problems to be solved, and some important financial rules to be complied with such as 1) no use of liquid paper to erase

the errors in the documents, 2) the receipt of petrol with telephone numbers of the petrol or gas station, and 3) on-time submissions of the financial reports. The receipt issues are seemingly repeated mistakes which were documented in the past minutes. Furthermore, although the hand-out was distributed to all participants, it was still questionable whether these suggestions would be paid attention to and followed strictly by the implementers; that is taking lessons learned to avoid repetition of those mistakes.

Similarly, the reports on other activities (e.g. procurement, GMP inspector training, drug registration survey, and IT) mainly focused on the difficulties in implementing and hence sought for solutions from the meeting. For example, the procurement report, though short, was very specific and focused mainly on the incomplete activities and causes of failure. In addition, the challenges of procurement (e.g. procurement of IEC expert, software development, and the loss of computer in the Friendship Hospital) were raised and sought for solutions from the meeting. For the issue of computer loss, the hospital is fully responsible for this, because according to the Grant Agreement, all project assets must be maintained properly and any lost or damage to the project assets shall be the responsibility of the recipients. This case will undoubtedly become a good lesson for others as a whole.

Indeed, the meeting attempted to seek solutions for the issues raised. For instance, due to the unsuccessful recruitment of an IEC expert, some recommended for reprogram and reallocation of the money for other activities. However, the Principal Recipient considered this solution to be too risky and unacceptable by the Global Fund. Thus, he suggested other options such as advertising through various sources (e.g. newspapers, internet, etc.), and the use of part-time services. As a result, the chairman recommended the person concerned to reconsider or adapt the terms of reference (TOR) as soon as possible.

However, it appeared that there was no presentation on monitoring and evaluation progress and challenges which there should have been. Indeed, the monitoring and evaluation had had certain problems needed to be solved such as the late and irregular submission of monitoring and evaluation reports to the Principal Recipient. The issue was raised by the Principal Recipient and hence recommended for further improvement of the monitoring and evaluation report

systems. Following the Principal Recipient's recommendations, the issues were clarified by the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit for the cause of late submission such as sending the report to the Project Coordinator for consideration before submission to the Principal Recipient, lack of assistants, and too many tasks to be complete. To help solve the problems, many participants suggested possible solutions such as a direct report to the Principal Recipient office to meet the deadline, getting more assistants, and arranging additional training if needed. The Chairman finally suggested the project team to discuss this issue further after the meeting in order to look for effective solutions. The monitoring and evaluation issue obviously shows the collective effort to solve the problems; that is on time submissions of the reports as specified by the Principal Recipient.

In addition, it could be observed that the issues raised from each presentation were discussed and solved one by one. In a bid to solve the problems, the issues were vigorously discussed and tracked for the root cause of the problems, while the possible solutions were suggested by participants. One important point to note here was that of the Chairman's role. It appeared that the chairman had followed and controlled the discussion closely. This included encouraging participants to provide suggestions to the solutions. With regards to the solutions to the issues raised, however, it seems that only some issues were addressed, and most of them were recommended to be discussed further within the project team (e.g. improvement of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, IEC expert's recruitment).

All of these practices had obviously shown their attempts to draw lessons learned in order to meet project goals set on time and within budget as well as satisfy the donors' requirements. Importantly, the practices provided opportunities for all involved to learn throughout the process. They could learn what had and had not yet been achieved (e.g. the project progress reports), what went well or wrong (e.g. the challenges), what actions had been and/or should be taken to solve the problems (the solutions proposed or suggested), and what should be done or adapted in the future as a result of budget reduction (future work-plan).

Not only the meeting, the minutes of the meeting which were distributed to all concerned could have been used as lessons learned for improving future work-plan and projects.

Having been allowed to access the minutes, the researcher therefore reviewed how useful the minutes were as lessons learned for project teams as well as for other projects.

In general, the minutes of the annual review meeting were documented with the following headings: 1) Title of the Meeting; 2) References (to activities of the workplan); 3) Objectives of the Meeting; 4) Participants; 5) The Meeting; 6) The Presentation of the Progress Reports – as presented in the meeting; 7) The Issues Raised in the Meeting; 8) Proposals to the Meeting; 9) Agreement of the Meeting.

For the contents under each heading, numbering and bulleting was used for each issue. However, individual issues recorded appeared to be very short and hence lacked detailed information. For instance, in the heading of 'The Issues Raised in the Meeting', the issues raised were documented separately by numbers as follows: 1) the Phase 2 project progress resulting from indicator adaptation; 2) IEC expert recruitment; 3) how to solve the computer loss of the Friendship Hospital; 4) no progress on the online drug registration system; 5) how to reduce the process and time for monitoring of unregistered drugs; 6) IT work-plan for installation of dispensing database, and 7) barcode systems.

On the other hand, the contents under the Proposal heading were recorded quite in detail. The contents included the suggestions or opinions on particular issues proposed by participants during the meeting. Each proposal was documented in detail and separated by bullets. For example, after having received the funds, the activities should be implemented immediately; after being implemented, all expenses should be summarized and reported within seven days. Other proposals were the activities should be implemented according to the quarter plan strictly in order to complete as scheduled under the budget approved; improvement of the monitoring and evaluation unit and more staff to assist the Unit; the Principal Recipient's comments on the Friendship Hospital's computer loss; and etc. In fact, all proposals during the meeting were documented.

For the meeting agreement, all the suggestions or recommendations provided by the Chairman and the Principal Recipient were documented. The minutes clarified which issues the recommendations were for. For

instance, the meeting recommended for further improvements to the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit in order to complete the job effectively as planned. This was directly recommendation for the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit. However, some were ambiguous as to which issues the recommendations were for. For example, the project team had to draft an official report to the Principal Recipient and there needed to be confirmation from the police for the loss of the computer; the drug department worked in collaboration with the information technology expert to search for solutions. Furthermore, when reviewing the detailed content of the challenges, there were no details of some issues, such as what was wrong with the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit that led to the need for further improvements and more assistants. Also, there was no record on how the issue with the dispensing database was solved. In this regard, only those who were directly involved were able to understand the context of the minutes.

In addition, there was a repetition of some documented problems in the minutes. The same problems which were documented in the past were found in the current minutes, such as the issues of consultant recruitment, and the deletion of mistakes or the use of liquid eraser to cover the mistakes without signature. In this situation, it is questionable why such problems were still occurring repeatedly.

#### 4.1.2.2 Cross-Project Learning

##### 1) Use of Past Project Experience

The experiences accumulated from past and other projects had been generally perceived as being useful to the current project. For instance, project experience had facilitated development of the project proposal, monitoring and evaluation of project performance, and understanding of the operating procedures and forms to be applied. The usefulness of past project experience was pointed out by some informants as follows:

The knowledge from other projects helps me in evaluating the activities. I implement this activity. The target to achieve is this. Every project is like this. It (project knowledge accumulated) helps, especially for the quality of activity set-up, it helps a lot. For example, for WHO, I set up the activity, I know that what is the purpose of this activity and

achievement target of the activity is for what. This is a fundamental assistance. But the Global Fund needs more details, like I said, it uses indicators to evaluate. (A3)

The past project experience helps me to read the work plan and read implementation, evaluation, outcomes of the work. The financial expenses are worth or not and it is correspondent or not. I know the reporting systems it's implemented as according to the objectives set. We set like this and do like that, then summarize. But sometimes it's incorrect. So I can identify them all. I can use the experience, just have a look a little bit, I know where it's right or wrong. (A5)

It's useful, but only enables the understanding of forms. Nevertheless, if we have no experience, it could be confusing in dealing with such big forms. (A2)

Not only project experience, but related work experience had also been accepted as being useful in completing the project tasks. For instance, given that organizational work relates to procurement, A9, a procurement staff member, was able to understand the Procurement Guidelines faster, while A6 was able to procure chemicals for the project:

Because I'm a committee of product receiving, I know the procurement system which needs to have contract, the committees to check, and what to check. Now, when I read the Manual just a little bit, I'm able to understand its system (the Global Fund's system). (A9)

It helps my work easier because I've had experience, because I've procured the Minilab and chemical for the Center as well as the spare parts. (A6)

In this respect, past experience is helpful to the current project execution. However, the extent of its usefulness is dependent on individual work experience and the job responsibility within the project. If the work experience is similar to the current responsibility, it is more useful.

## 2) Learning from Past Project Teams and Documents

Learning from past projects was seemingly various. Firstly, like other projects, there was the use of past project limitations for developing the project proposal. During project implementation, some used past project documents as examples. For instance, there was the use of Round 6 meeting minutes as an example of how to document the minutes, as A4 said:

I've learned from Round 6; meaning that this project is also a Global Fund project it has its own format. So, I take lessons. I've learned from those who learned before.

Another example was the use of past project audit results as lessons learned in order to minimize mistakes. The lessons were taken by both soft and hard copies. The importance of learning from past project documents was cited by A1 as follows:

It's helpful for Round 6's documents that they did as they took lessons before. I choose the one that has less weakness, look for those good lessons only. I have a look at it (and I realize that) they had many weaknesses. So, I use them (as lessons learned) like this one is their weaknesses, I'll try to minimize the weaknesses.

Not only learning from the past project documents, but some project team members also attempted to learn particular lessons from past project team members. These included the lessons of how to write reports, how to set specifications for procurement, how to solve financial problems, and others:

Mostly I walk to Mr. Boon's room and ask him like, now there are problems like this, how to solve them. In the past, how Round 6 solved this problem? I go to ask something like this. (A1)

I looked at what they (past project team's documents) had done in the past and what we are going to do because they had experience before us so we need to ask them. Like this one how they do it. For example, it relates to a small repair. For the small repair, they compared the price and set spec. (specifications). So, how did they set the specification? (A9)

In addition to learning by asking, there was also learning by seeing. An example of this was that of learning from a past project team member about how to keep documents properly so that it could help facilitate audits when the local fund agents asked about any supporting documents. The learning attempt of filing systems was to ensure compliance with the requirement in the Grant Agreement and Financial Guidelines (more details in Audits and Records, Program Financial Management, section 4.1.1.3 Program Implementation). A1, the accountant, explained how she learned from a past project team member about filing systems:

For the lessons that I've learned from Mr. Boon (a past project team member), I even go to see the place where he kept the documents. At first, I don't know how they archived the documents. So, I go to see how he kept the documents, how he filed them.

The most important thing was that some past project team members were cooperative and willing to share their lessons learned for the present project. Certainly, access to information or lessons needed from the past project team was easy because they were all working in the same organization. Thus, whenever they needed any past project documents and forms in both soft and hard files as examples and lessons, as well as when they needed explanation or consultation, they could ask the past project team directly. An informant's statement that indicates this was

I need to ask for some documents. Some is needed to be discussed verbally. They (the past project team) are cooperative because we are officials of the same organization (A8).

However, access to the resources needed was only from those team members that they had a close relationship with. Nevertheless, the past project team had facilitated project-based learning to occur. In addition to learning from past project documents, there was also learning from other sources such as internet and available documents. This was reflected in A6's statements:

I need to look at the documents that they provided, like the X company, they provide information about the issue I need. Sometimes I also search internet. It doesn't mean that we have the manual and we'll use it forever. In the manual, it mentions about the website, so we need to search from the internet to see where it's been updated to. We need to know this as well.

Thus, in a bid to complete the job, project teams might have to rely on resources from several sources. These included past project documents and teams, present project documents, especially project guidelines and manuals, documents from other organizations, information from the internet, and others.

### 3) Learning from Other Projects and Organizations

Not only prior Global Fund experience, but the proposal also made use of successful donor funded projects such as WHO - Essential Medicines and National Policy Program, the Expanded Program on Immunization, the United States Pharmacopoeia Drug Quality and Information project (USP-DQI), the JICA Pharmaceutical Management Project, the Kontraktsfinansierade Tekniska Samarbetets (KTS) Project which was designed to help implement the Lao National Medicines Policy and funded via the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), and the HIV/AIDS projects run by Medicines Sans Frontier (or MSF, Switzerland). In addition, the goal and objectives needed to be in line with the Health Master Plan 2020 and the Lao PDR Revised National Medicine Policy, and they supported the FDD's Strategic Plan 2006-2010 (GFATM, 2009b).

In addition to learning from documents, there was learning from other people outside the project such as from other Sub-Recipients, other project team members, and friends from other organizations. Firstly, learning from other Sub-Recipients had occurred as a result of the meeting held at the Principal Recipient Office. The meetings at the Principal Recipient office were held quite often for various purposes such as to solve the problems faced by the Sub-Recipients, to inform of any changes to the standards and conditions for implementation, to define specification for procurement, to conduct bidding for goods and products, and to unveil the audit results. Within each meeting, the project team members concerned from all Sub-Recipients were invited to participate. During the meeting at the Principal Recipient Office, the Sub-Recipients shared and took lessons learned on the issues raised with each other. For example, individual Sub-Recipients might raise problems that they face, and asked for solutions used by other Sub-Recipients during the financial meeting at the Principal Recipient Office. A2 unveiled how the lessons were shared among accountants from each Sub-Recipient as follows:

When coming for the meeting, we exchange each other lessons. Like, the program used, we used the ACCPAC program. Some centers have this problem, other have that problem. So we're sharing each other, like, I found this problem how to solve it.

Furthermore, during the meeting, the Principal Recipient also asked all Sub-Recipients to draw lessons from each other. One obvious example of collective learning occurring during the meeting was the attempt to take lessons learned from the audit results (as mentioned in the section Learning from the Audit above). In essence, the good practices of any Sub-Recipient were used as examples for others to learn from as noted by A1:

During the meeting, the PR raised that look, here and there performed well, why you don't take lessons learned from them. Something like that.

Doing so had provided an opportunity for each Sub-Recipient to exchange or share lessons learned with each other later. To access lessons learned from each other, the Sub-Recipients exchanged their personal contacts during the meeting. Indeed, the Sub-Recipients shared personal problem-solving methods after the meeting. However, the sharing was only for those minor problems and in an informal manner. For instance, there was an effort to learn how Sub-Recipients solved similar problems:

I used to ask the Department of Hygiene who has similar problems like us because it's the same project and the principles are the same. They also have weaknesses. I didn't ask them formally. I saw them on the road and asked them directly that how did you do, it's like this how did you solve it. (A1)

On the other hand, some members of other HIV-project Sub-Recipients had attempted to learn problem-solving methods from the project team:

They (other SRs) ask the procedures for reporting, for disbursement, how do you do. They ask something like this. (A1)

Mostly, I'll exchange during the meeting. For personal exchange, it's just a little bit like those that are not big problems they'll call and ask me that you've encountered such problems how do you solve it, which one do you use. (A2)

While some attempted to learn from other Sub-Recipients, others approached other sources such as colleagues or experts of other organizations. For instance, some members discussed with WHO experts who used to be their former lecturers at the university, while others made use of bridging persons to access information needed. Due to lack of knowledge about the waste management system, seeking help from the experts in that area was attempted. To obtain the information needed, there was the use of a close relationship with the analytical institute in Hanoi

playing a brokerage role for connecting with the company who has expertise in that area. A6 pointed out how information needed was acquired:

For the expert on disposal management, I asked for assistance from the analytical institute in Hanoi who has had the waste disposal system and got ISO 17025. Because when we attended the training there (in Hanoi), I asked for information about waste disposal systems and go to see the site. So I asked for the address of the company in Vietnam (who built the waste management system) in order for them to design for us. I also asked for the specifications from them (the company).

This obviously showed the use of social relationships to get information needed from others. The close relationship to an organization had provided them opportunities to access information from other organizations.

#### **4.1.3 Barriers to Project Learning**

To meet the requirements and conditions, the project team had attempted to learn from several mechanisms. Despite such useful mechanisms, there existed some constraints to cross-project learning. Among the barriers, project differences were commonly cited by most members. Like many project management researchers noted, due to project uniqueness, there was no attempt to take lessons learned from past and/or other projects. The fact is that, although the current project had been continued from the previous project (Round 6), there were some differences in project objectives, one of which was the recruitment of technical advisors or consultants as noted by A9:

There was sharing of ideas with Round 6, but only very few because it was different. Round 6 was focused on pharmaceutical products, while our work stressed on recruitment of TA (Technical Advisors).

Furthermore, there were differences in the use of reporting procedures and forms which were introduced due to the shift of financial systems. Meanwhile, there

were changes in the accounting program which was different from the past project. As a result, learning from the past project team was opted for. For example, when being asked whether the past project team was ever asked or discussed with, A2 asserted that:

I used to ask (the past project team), but it's dissimilar. So, the best is to ask PR directly. Though, they'd done before, but the forms were not the same. They (the Global Fund) change the forms. Initial forms were similar, but when I asked more it becomes different. This is because the system is different. The operating system, their work's focus was also different.

With regards to the learning from other Sub-Recipients, even though being supported by the same donor, most of them did not attempt to learn from the other projects due to the belief of project differences. They contended that each Sub-Recipient had different objectives and hence different approaches to the implementation of activities. The fact is that the Global Fund-assisted projects had been divided into three main components: HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria; and hence there were three main components of Sub-Recipients.

Apart from project uniqueness, some argued that asking other Sub-Recipients might be difficult because they were very busy with their own projects; and thereby, it was better to ask the Principal Recipient experts directly:

They are very busy; it's difficult to disturb them. It's better to ask only the PR. go to them, I feel not good. I'm telling you honestly. (A2)

I think that it's difficult. I think that it's difficult if it's other organizations. One is they have no time, they will try to refuse. (A1)

In addition, learning from other Sub-Recipients was not preferred by some due to the assumption that all Sub-Recipients were in the same situation. That is the level of understanding of the new formats might not be much different between Sub-

Recipients. Therefore, it was better to ask the Principal Recipient's expert who could make definite decisions to the problems directly:

I'm not consulting with others because everyone is the same, know at the same time. The best is the decision-maker, ask the PR directly. Because if we are wrong or we do something wrong, it's them who passed. (A2)

For procurement, I didn't ask others because if there're problems, I'll ask the PR directly. Because other projects may have its own regulations, it may be different. But if I discuss with the PR experts, it's done. (A9)

On the other hand, although some were willing to learn from others, their willingness was unsuccessful. This is owing to the fact that some were willing to share their lessons learned with other people, but others might not have been willing as *A4* stated:

Not everyone is willing to share and cooperate when asking. This is understandable because of individual personality.

Therefore, rather than learning from others, most of the team members preferred to ask the Principal Recipient experts who could provide definite instructions and decision to their problems. Despite that fact, other project team members may have had experiences that could be useful and taken as lessons learned.

#### **4.1.4 Use and Sharing of Project Information**

Certainly, a number of requirements and conditions had been imposed to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of grant funds. The project team had indeed acknowledged that the strict requirements were extremely helpful. Its usefulness was specifically derived from their compliance attempts through the use of forms. For instance, there was the use of individual performance forms (see Figure 4.5 for the

sample of the Summary of the Month forms and Table 4.6 for the Timesheet) to assess whether individuals completed their job as specified in the Terms of Reference (or TOR) or not. The forms had indeed been helpful, not only for the assessment of individual team members' performance, but also for self-assessment. A5, a monitoring and evaluation staff member, described how useful the forms were:

In the past, I didn't follow up whether the specialists work or not. But now I've learned. For example, there was a use of timesheet to follow up individuals' works. Like, the specialists come or absent, what they've done each day, and also assess their performance against the TOR. This is an important issue like we've specified what their responsibilities are and what to be complete during a period of time.

In the past, it's only reported in general. But now, I have to strictly monitor whether they (the specialist) really perform their work and work effectively as what they're supposed to do. I also assess my own work, the thing that I've done. I've realized that it's very important to do self-assessment. Like, what I've planned, I gonna do this and that, I can achieve it or not. If achieved, how many percentages were achieved. Why achieved, not achieved. This is self-assessment which I think it's a good lesson.

Also, having recognized its usefulness, the FDQCC used the Timesheet and Monthly Summary forms to monitor the staffs' working days and performance. While some forms could be applied to the organizational routine directly, others needed to be adapted. For instance, the project financial report forms were adapted for the organizational routine. Not only the forms, but the project procedures had also been applied to the organizational routine. A6 pointed out how he used project procurement lessons to his own work in the organization:

I use the project lessons to procure the chemical for the Center, especially the Drug division. And also for the instrument calibration, I've learned which instruments need to be calibrated. I've learned now that we calibrate, we have to procure the company that is credible (meet the criteria).

In addition, the project procurement guidelines and forms were shared with colleagues for applying to other projects with the organization. A6 described how he shared the project information with colleagues in order for them to understand and be able to apply them:

For this work (procurement), I've transferred them to colleagues, especially the Administrative Division. I gave them the information about training or Guidelines on procurement. I shared with them (the colleagues), especially the warehouse (storage) systems. I went to see the actual site, what to adjust and how. I taught them how to receive chemicals, how to check in reality, the committees, and stock-in, stock-out cards, etc. I gave them the format, the Excel in soft files for them to use, and follow up their use.

Thus, the project procedures and forms had been used not only at the individual level, but organizational level as well.

#### **4.1.5 Conclusion**

For the Global Fund projects, there are a number of requirements and conditions specified in the Program Grant Agreement. The requirements and conditions are mainly set for effective management of procurement and finance, and the regular monitoring and reporting of project progress. In response to this, the Principal Recipient had specifically developed the Project Procurement Guidelines and Finance Management Manual. The Guidelines and Manual provide operating procedures in detail, as well as several forms to serve the procedures. For instance, there are five main groups of the procurement forms, each of which consisted of

several forms for compliance. Likewise, there are 60 forms for the operating procedures of the Financial Guidelines. Some forms require detailed and accurate information and hence could be time-consuming. But the most important thing is the submission of the accurate and complete reports within specified dates. In addition, proper archiving and filing of project documents and records were also required to ascertain the accountability and transparency of grant fund management.

To ensure that the Sub-Recipients understand the operating procedures and forms, the Principal Recipient held a three-day training prior to project implementation. However, due to the short period of training and lack of experience, most project team members could understand the operating procedures and forms only in general. Thus, when it came to practice, further instructions from the Principal Recipient were highly demanded. These included the instructions for reporting, budget plan, procurement, reprogramming and reallocation of money, and others.

During the course of project implementation, several problems emerged. To solve the problems on time, most members discussed minor problems with their supervisors. For major problems, they were raised for discussions during the regular meetings. Their problem-solving attempts were indeed shown in the meeting minutes which documented separately the project progress, challenges and recommendations for solutions. However, it seems difficult to connect the context of individual issues from the separate headings. In addition, since there was no fixed format, some minutes were in the textual or table formats, or a mix of both. The table tended to be easier to understand given it contained such important headings as Reference No., Objective/Activity, Budget (USD), Responsible (e.g. procurement, finance, monitoring and evaluation, consultants), and Results of the Meeting (the project progress and challenges).

Audits were another good source of learning for the project team. Learning from the audit occurred during the audit process itself provided that the flaws (e.g. the repeated number of receipt, different price of the same goods in different receipts, etc.) being questioned by the auditors had become lessons learned for future improvements in order to avoid repeated mistakes. Also, the meeting on audit results at the Principal Recipient Office was a good learning mechanism for all Sub-Recipients. During the meeting, there were not only lessons from the auditors'

comments on individual Sub-Recipients (e.g. who did well or not well in which area), but the attempts to draw lessons learned with each other to minimize mistakes in the future (e.g. what should be done).

The annual meeting was a formal practices for lessons learned, that is to review the project performance and draw lessons learned for the future. The meeting provided for learning to occur throughout the process. The first lessons were from the project reports on what had or had not been achieved in each area (e.g. the project performance as a whole, project budget and finance, procurement, etc.) and why. That is the lessons of what went well or wrong such as the challenges which were raised for discussion. The second source of lessons was derived from the attempts to seek for solutions which were not only suggested by the persons concerned, but the participants as well. Lastly, the recommendations of what should be done and how were also lessons for the project team. For example, to solve the issue of no applicants for the long-term consultant, the Principal Recipient and participants suggested several possible options for the project team to take into account. Another example of the problem-solving effort was the reprogram and reallocation of some planned activities which were unable to be implemented due to budget reduction.

Not only within-project learning, but there was learning across projects as well. Cross-project learning first occurred through the use of past project and work experience for the present project, such as for development of the project proposal, understanding of the operating procedures and forms, project monitoring and evaluation, and development of the procurement plan. The second source of cross-project learning was the use of past project documents as examples and lessons learned, such as the use of past project's audit results as lessons learned to minimize mistakes, and the use of the meeting minutes as examples for documenting the meeting. Also, some approached the past project team members to learn how to file the documents systematically to facilitate the retrieval, especially during the audits. Furthermore, there was the personal exchange of lessons learned among Sub-recipients as a result of the Principal Recipient's recommendations for the sharing of lessons learned. In addition, some had used the connections with one organization to obtain information needed from other organizations; that is using a bridging player to connect to others.

Apparently, learning within and across projects had occurred through several sources and mechanisms across the project process. However, there were some remarkable obstacles to learning as well. The past project team was not approached by some members because, although the project had been extended from the past project, some activities were different (e.g. recruitment of long-term consultant). Also, learning from other Sub-Recipients was not preferred for some members due to the belief of project goals differences and hence different approaches to implementation. In addition, there was an assumption that all Sub-Recipients faced the same problems, and hence might not be able to provide solutions. On the other hand, although they were willing to learn from others, others might not have time and/or be willing to share their lessons learned.

To ensure effectiveness and efficiency, not only project performance, but the individual performance had also been assessed regularly through the use of such forms as Timesheet and Summary of Monthly Performance. Having recognized its usefulness, the forms had been used in the organization for monitoring of the staffs' working day and assessment of their performance. In addition, some had adapted the project financial reporting forms for the organizational routines, while others shared the project procurement procedures and forms with colleagues in the organization to use in their routines. Doing so would enable project learning to occur at the organization level; that is project-to-organizational learning. However, the use and sharing of project information at the organizational level was mostly at the individual level and to a small extent. Given that there was no requirement for them to use them in the organization or share the project information to colleagues, project lessons gained would resign only in the individual mind in this case. Therefore, it may have been more fruitful if the good practices of IDPs were shared and applied in a wider context such as to other divisions in both formal and informal arrangements for sustainable capacity building.

The above findings are for the case of Project A under the support of the Global Fund who tends set forth a number of requirements and conditions to ensure that the grant funds are effectively managed to reach the project goals and objectives. The following sections present findings of the other two projects which could be similar to and/or different from Project A.

## **4.2 HSIP-AF Project (Project B)**

### **4.2.1 Requirements and Conditions for Project Implementation**

When funding approval is obtained, conditions for effectiveness are met, and the legal documents are accepted and signed, the implementation phase begins (World Bank, 2013b).

#### **4.2.1.1 Operation Conditions and Requirements**

Like other IDPs, prior to project implementation, there were conditions and obligations set forth in the Agreement for compliance. These included general conditions, definitions, financing (e.g. the amount of grant, payment dates and currency, etc.), additional conditions of effectiveness (e.g. adopting an updated Financial Management Manual and Project Implementation Plan), effectiveness deadline, and a list of representatives and their addresses. Additionally, there were obligations for project execution such as implementation arrangements (e.g. institutional arrangements, anti-corruption, and safeguards), project monitoring, reporting, and evaluation (e.g. project reports and financial management, financial reports and audits), procurement; (e.g. general and particular methods of the procurement of goods, works and non-consulting services, particular methods of procurement of consulting services, and review of procurement decisions by the Association) and the proceeds of the Financing (Levesque, 2011).

Notably, given that the project was extended from the previous one, some of the conditions and obligations set out in this Agreement still referred to the Original Financing Agreement, but some were amended. The conditions set forth in the Original Agreement for HSIP included Article I General Conditions, Definitions, Article II The Grant (e.g. the amount of grant, bank account, withdrawal and payment dates, etc.), Article III Execution of the Project (e.g. carry out the Project through MOH in according to the implementation program with due diligence and efficiency, etc.), Article IV Financial Covenants, and etc.

#### **4.2.1.2 Institutional Arrangements**

With a view of shifting away from project management units, and to better align with the Paris and Vientiane Declarations, the institutional arrangements for the additional financing were designed to put activities directly under the

responsibility of the MOH technical department providing capacity support within the MOH. In short, there was a shift from a project-based to a program-based approach. The policy direction was provided by the existing Steering Committee within the MOH (World Bank, 2011a: 29). The arrangements of project implementation are described in the following sections.

#### 1) Steering Committees

The MOH Steering Committee, chaired by the MOH and comprising of the Vice Minister and ten Directors of the MOH Departments, provided guidance and oversight to the implementation of the additional financing. The main functions of the Steering Committee were to (1) advise and supervise all health projects financed by international organizations which operated under the MOH, (2) endorse and approve quarterly and yearly project action plans, (3) monitor and evaluate project performance, and (4) oversee and provide guidance to projects in over-coming problems they encountered. The Steering Committee met at least twice per year for project semi-annual and annual review meetings, and ad hoc Steering Committee meetings were organized on request (MOH, 2006b: 5-6).

#### 2) National Coordinating Project Office

DPIC was responsible for overall coordination and management, as well as implementing activities in their work plan supported by the additional financing (World Bank, 2011a: 29). In this case, the project was run and managed by the health officials, not just implementer as previous projects. In addition to implementation responsibilities for specific activities mapped to DPIC, the primary functions of the DPIC were overall project planning, budgeting, coordination, monitoring progress, procurement and financial management, and safeguards. Thus, with DPIC responsible for coordination and management, the Director General served as the national Project Coordinator or Project Director (World Bank, 2011a: 29).

At central level, it included the NPCO and MOH Departments concerned. The NPCO was managed by an Assistant to the Project Director, appointed by MOH together with the Project Director, but this position was hired by the project as Project Manager. Furthermore, there was also an Assistant to Project Manager who was contracted staff. The Project Manager directly supervised the heads of three Units: Procurement, Finance, and Administration. The Procurement Unit was headed

by a Procurement Specialist, supported by an Assistant to Procurement and supporting staff to assist both Procurement and Administration, while the Financial Unit composed of three staff (under a financial consulting firm) including the Chief of Finance, an accountant and an assistant to the accountant. For the Administrative Unit, it also was composed of three staff including Chief of Administration, an assistant to administration and cashier, and one driver (National Project Coordination Office, 2013: 23).

Notably, the contracted full-time Project Manager and the Procurement Specialist were DPIC officials. From past experience, fiduciary capacity at the MOH was limited. Financing had been contracted to a consulting firm to assist and build capacity of the MOH to monitor and report on implementation as needed. Therefore, the three experienced finance staff members from the previous project were retained to work on the project. Consultants for these positions were recruited in accordance with the World Bank Consultant Guidelines, under Terms of References, to include capacity building and training of relevant MOH counterparts (World Bank, 2011a: 28).

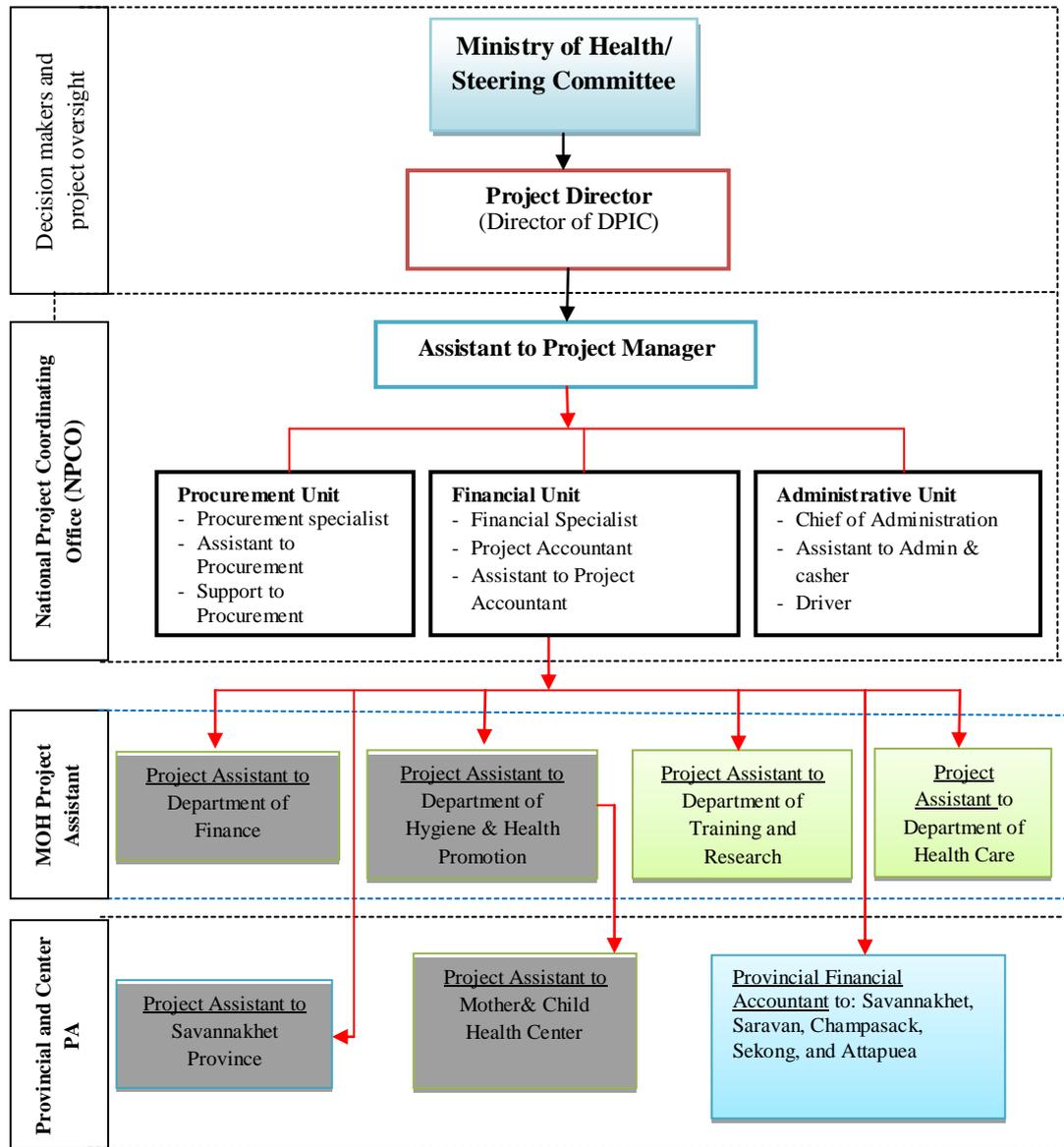
### 3) Project Assistants to Departments concerned

Other departments received support for implementing activities in their work plan according to the project component. During the initial 18-month period, there were Project Assistants to support such departments as the Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion (DHHP), Department of Finance (DF), Mother and Child Health Care (MCHC), Department of Health Care (DHC), and Department of Training and Research (DTR). Such contracted staff were co-located in the department to which they were supporting (World Bank, 2011a: 29).

### 4) Provincial and Center Project Assistants

In recognition of the substantial scale of the activities being conducted at the decentralized level, each Project Province was provided with a full time accountant to support districts and facilities in managing activities. These contracted staff played an internal audit function for additional financing support managed at the province level and below, as well as provided on-the-job training and support to the Provincial Health Office's accountants (World Bank, 2011a: 30).

Figure 4.6 shows the institutional structure of project implementation.



**Figure 4.6** Organizational Arrangement

**Source:** National Project Coordination Office, 2013.

The following sections present the World Bank’s requirements for project procurement and finance management, as well as project monitoring and reporting during the course of project execution.

#### 4.2.1.3 Procurement Management

According to the Financing Agreement, all goods, works and non-consulting services required for the Project and to be financed out of the proceeds of the financing shall be procured in accordance with the requirements set forth or referred to in Section I of the Procurement Guidelines (of the World Bank dated January 2011), and this Agreement. All consultants' services required for the Project shall be procured in accordance with the requirements set forth or referred to in Sections I and IV of the "Consultant Guidelines: Selection and Employment of Consultants by World Bank Borrowers," and in this Agreement (Levesque, 2011: 6-7). Within the Financing Agreement, particular methods for the procurement of goods, works and non-consulting, and consulting services are briefly presented. For the procurement methods for International Competitive Bidding, goods, works and non-consulting services shall be procured under contracts awarded on the basis of International Competitive Bidding of the World Bank (Levesque, 2011: 7).

More details of the threshold values for particular methods of procurement were specified in the Original Agreement. For instance, goods estimated to cost less than US\$100,000 equivalent per contract may be procured under contracts awarded on the basis of National Competitive Bidding and the following additional provisions: the procedures to be followed shall be those set forth in the Prime Minister Decree No.03/PM dated January 9, 2004, on "Government Procurement of Goods, Construction, Maintenance and Service" and its Implementing Rules and Regulations issued by the Ministry of Finance No.0063/MOF dated March 12, 2004. Goods and works estimated to cost less than US\$30,000 equivalent per contract may be procured under contracts awarded on the basis of Shopping. Quotations are required for the goods estimated to cost less than US\$30,000 but more than US\$5,000.

In addition to the Procurement and Consultant Guidelines, there are requirements for local procurement in borrowing countries and a sample procurement plan. The procurement plan is required to be included in the Project Appraisal Documents. The detailed procurement plan is still mandatory for disclosure on the Bank's website in accordance with the guidelines. The initial procurement plan covers the first 18 months of the project and then is updated annually, or earlier as necessary. The procurement decisions are subject to Prior Review by the Bank. But the

thresholds for applicable procurement methods are determined by the Procurement Specialist /Procurement Accredited Staff based on the assessment of the implementing agency's capacity (World Bank, 2010). The procurement thresholds for particular methods are specified in the East Asia and Pacific Procurement Thresholds and Prior Review Thresholds (World Bank, 2013e). Table 4.7 specifies the procurement methods and thresholds.

**Table 4.7** Procurement Method and Thresholds

<b>Procurement Method</b>	<b>Threshold</b>
International Competitive Bidding and Limited International Bidding (Goods)	≥ US\$ 600,000
International Competitive Bidding (Works)	≥ US\$ 2 million
National Competitive Bidding (Goods)	< US\$ 600,000
National Competitive Bidding (Works)	<US\$ 2 million
Shopping (Goods)	< US\$ 100,000
Shopping (Works)	<US\$ 200,000

Apparently, there was the use of both the World Bank Guidelines and procurement proceeding issued by the Ministry of Finance in 2010 based on the threshold values. According to the notification of the Ministry of Finance No. 0423/MOF dated 25 February 2010, procurement proceeding of goods, works, maintenance and services shall use 1) the standard bidding documents for each procurement methods including Bid and Contract Forms, 2) Standard Bid Evaluation Form and Writing Bid Evaluation Report, 3) Procurement Manual, 4) Standard Request for Proposal for Selection of Consultant-including such forms as Request for Expression of Interest, Contract, Invitation of Proposal, Technical Proposal Form, Consultant's Organization and Experience, Comments and Suggestions on the Terms of Reference, and 5) Report on Procurement Performance Data which are available at the public procurement website (see [www.pp.gov.la](http://www.pp.gov.la)).

To assist a procuring entity, the guidance is provided in detail for particular methods of procurement and bidding. For example, the Standard Bidding

Documents provide guidance for particular methods such as 1) Standard Bidding Document of public bidding for procurement of works and maintenance, 2) Standard Bidding Document of public bidding for procurement of goods and equipment, 3) Standard Bidding Document of request for quotation for small works, 4) Standard Bidding Document of request for quotation for goods and equipment, and 5) instructions on the implementing of the bid evaluation and Bid Evaluation Report. Also, there are forms for each of these methods.

Likewise, the Procurement Manual describes in detail the procedures for particular methods of procurement. The Manual also specifies threshold values for particular methods (see Table 4.8). For instance, the project can directly perform the procurement of goods and services that is lower than three million LAK. A quotation is required if the procurement is between 3 to 50 million LAK. In addition, there are tables serving procurement planning such as the table of Annual Procurement Plan for Goods and Works, that for Consulting Services, and that of a detailed procurement plan (MOH, 2009: 28).

**Table 4.8** Threshold Values for Each Method

<b>Procurement Method</b>	<b>Threshold Value (Lao Kip)</b>
Direct Purchase	≤ 3,000,000
Direct Purchase (approval on a case by case basis)	> 3,000,000
Request for Quotation (RFQ)	
1. RFQ (National Shopping)	> 3,000,000 to ≤ 50,000,000
1) RFQ by simple way	> 3,000,000 to ≤ 50,000,000
2) RFQ	> 50,000,000 to ≤ 500,000,000
2. International Shopping	≤ 500,000,000 (Goods) not allow for Works
Limited Bidding	> 50,000,000 to ≤ 500,000,000
National Competitive Bidding (NCB)	> 500,000,000 to ≤ 5,000,000,000 (Goods) > 500,000,000 to ≤ 25,000,000,000 (Works)
International Competitive Bidding (ICB)	> 5,000,000,000 (Goods) > 25,000,000,000 (Works)

**Note:** US\$ 1.00 = LAK 8,000

**Source:** Ministry of Finance, 2009: 28.

The requirements had been strictly followed by the Procurement Unit. However, in attempting to be in line with the Procurement Manual, some requirements were found to be inapplicable. For instance, the project is required to purchase goods from a company or vendor who is licensed to sell such goods in Lao PDR. Practically, it is difficult to meet this requirement given that most of the vendors do not have a license to be an agency in Lao PDR. Therefore, adjustment of such requirement was required in order to fit with the actual situation as B1 asserted:

Some were not fit with the reality because sometimes, for instance, in the guidelines, it's mentioned that the bidding winner being selected need to have a license as the agency in Laos. But in reality, in our country it's not like that. Like the computer shop, it's not Sony agency. The shop sells Sony, also Acer, Lenovo, and etc. If we specified that there needs to be license, they (the retailers) don't have. So, there's something that we need to adjust. If following the guidelines, our work cannot continue.

#### 4.2.1.4 Financial Management

##### 1) Requirements of the World Bank

According to the Financing Agreement (Levesque, 2011: 5; World Bank, 2005: 7), MOH as the recipient was firstly required to establish and maintain a financial management system, including records and accounts, and prepare financial statements in accordance with consistently applied accounting standards acceptable to the World Bank. The MOH has to prepare and furnish to the World Bank a financial monitoring report which adequately reflects the operations, resources and expenditures related to the Project. The report is to provide sufficient information for Project monitoring on the use of funds, to ensure that Project implementation is on track, and to ensure that budgeted costs are not exceeded. The financial monitoring report must be furnished to the World Bank no later than 45 days after the end of each quarter. Furthermore, the MOH has to submit the Annual Financial Statements audited by the external auditor to the World Bank no later than six months after the end of the fiscal year (World Bank, 2005: 8; MOH, 2006: 66).

To ensure transparency and accountability, the additional financing adopted the Project Financial Management Manual which had been developed in 2006 under the Original Project. The Manual contains ten chapters, namely 1) Project Introduction, 2) Financial Authorities and Internal Controls, 3) Planning and Budgeting, 4) Fund Flows and Project Bank Accounts, 5) Disbursement Procedures, 6) Project Accounting System, 7) Financial Management-District, 8) Financial Management-Province, 9) Financial Management for NPCO, and 10) Audit. The Manual also provides 76 forms to serve the operating procedures such as Form 1: Sample of Withdrawal Application for Replenishment, and Form 2: Statement of Project Account. Within each chapter, the operating procedures and the forms used were specified in detail about the roles and responsibilities of each level; that is who should do what, how and when. For example, the financial monitoring reports to be submitted quarterly specified in detail the contents, as well as the forms used as illustrated in Figure 4.7.

<p><b>Section I: Project Progress Report</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discussion of Project Progress (including variance analysis and procurement issues) (Annex 5, Form 61 of this FM manual).</li> <li>2. Project Budget Control (Annex 5, Form 62 of this FM manual).</li> </ol> <p><b>Section II: Financial Reports</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Summary of Financial Status (Balance Sheet) (Annex 5, Form 63 of this FM manual).</li> <li>4. Sources and Uses of Funds (Annex 5, Form 64 of this FM manual).</li> <li>5. Expenditures by Component (Annex 5, Form 65 of this FM manual).</li> <li>6. Expenditures by Provinces (Annex 5, Form 66 of this FM manual).</li> </ol> <p><b>Section III. Physical Progress, Procurement and Contract Management</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Output Monitoring Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7-A Output Activity (Physical Progress Report by activities) (Annex 5, Form 67 of this FM manual).</li> <li>7-B Output for Civil Works (Physical Progress Report by Civil Works) (Annex 5, Form 68 of this FM manual).</li> </ul> </li> <li>8. Contract Management (Annex 5, Form 69 of this FM manual).</li> <li>9. Procurement Monitoring Report (Annex 5, Form 70 of this FM manual).</li> </ol>
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**Figure 4.7** Financial Monitoring Report Form

In addition to the financial monitoring report and annual financial statements, the Project must prepare the Project Financial Statement by the first, second and third<sup>rd</sup> quarters, and annual report submitted to concerned

authorities. These are 1) MOH (Department in which the Project is attached to, DOF, and DPIC), 2) Ministry of Finance (Department of Treasury, Department of Foreign Currency, and Department of National Budget), 3) Committee for Planning and Cooperation (Department of State Investment), and 4) the World Bank (MOH, 2006: 68). Furthermore, the accountant is required to prepare necessary monthly reports reviewed and approved by the Consultant and Project Manager (MOH, 2006: 34).

Accordingly, to ensure compliance, there was financial training for central and provincial staff on project financial management (National Project Coordination Office, 2013).

## 2) Audits

According to the Project Financial Management Manual, the project shall be audited internally and externally. The Project internal audit is a full time consulting firm mapped into the project structure to carry out internal audits and provide financial management operations support for the Project. The firm coordinates with the Project Manager through the Deputy Project Manager. The firm coordinates on a day-to-day basis with the Chief of Finance, who provides guidance and supervision during the assignment. The Chief of Finance and internal auditors are thus responsible to the Project Manager for routine finance and accounting functions, and internal controls respectively. They take direction from the Project Manager on routine matters, general accounting policy matters and issues of finance and audit policy. The Chief of Finance or internal auditor must inform the Project Manager in a timely manner about any condition where the lack of or failure of internal controls could put Project funds or assets at risk (MOH, 2006b: 70).

In addition to internal audits, the Project is required to be audited annually by an independent auditor. The primary objective of the audit is to enable the auditor to: express an opinion on whether the financial statements accurately reflect the operations of the project over the period covered by the audit; and report on compliance and internal control over financial reporting of project funds. The audit report and accompanying audited financial statements should be received by the World Bank no later than six months after the end of the fiscal year or period to which the audit refers (MOH, 2011b: 71).

### 3) Storage and Retention of Financial Records

Like other projects, a proper filing and storage system is necessary for all project documents and records, in particular those relevant to grant funds. Indeed, the Project Financial Management Manual includes 'Section 6.8 Storage and Retention of Financial Records' to instruct in detail how particular financial records should be kept, where and for how long, such as

(1) Accounting vouchers and attached supporting documents and reports must be filed and kept in a secure cabinet, and accessible location that is free from possible weather damage,

(2) Copies of contracts, suppliers' invoices, statements of accounts, and official receipts must be stored using fire-proof cabinets in a safe location, and retained for at least two years from the completion of the audit of the Project by external auditors,

(3) Financial reports, a) Audited Financial Statements, b) Financial Monitoring Reports and other periodic financial reports, c) Books of Accounts, and d) Minutes must be kept for the life of the Project in a secure folder and accessible location,

(4) The Finance Unit should produce, on at least a monthly basis, two back-up copies of computer-generated accounting records, where one copy must be kept in a secure location, preferably a fireproof safe (MOH, 2006a: 43-44).

For retention and protection of the soft files, the Manual specifies that back-up copies must be kept on the hard drive and disk (MOH, 2006a: 33).

The requirement for maintenance of project documents and records was also specified separately for each level. For instance, within Chapter IX Financial Management for NPCO, one of the roles and responsibilities of NPCO is to 'maintain Project documentation, technical reports, administrative and project financial records at central level, and monitor the compilation of these reports and documents from the lower level.' Further, the Manual specifically defines who is responsible for this. For example, one of the accountant's responsibilities was to 'maintain the accuracy of all accounts, records and journal entries within their responsibility, and ensures the accurate recording and filing of all project expenditures and incomes' (MOH, 2006a: 59-60).



#### 4.2.1.5 Project Operational Guidelines

In order for the effective implementation of the project work-plan and the Financial Management Manual, the Free Delivery Guidelines had been developed in September 2012. The guidelines detail the operational procedures specific to the free maternal health component. The guidelines are complementary to the National Free Maternal and Child Health Guidelines, especially on more detailed technical and organizational issues. The guidelines include the concept of Results-based Financing (RBF) schemes used to increase utilization of services, units and responsibility, verification methods and committees and healthcare providers, beneficiaries and services, eligible criteria, financial management, payment arrangements and record keeping, and reporting. Also, there were forms serving the procedures such as Form 1: Patient Allowance, Form 2: Maternal Health Provider Payment Claim to summarize and report for each period of time, and Form 3: Maternal Health Patient Allowance Claim. In addition, other important forms and documents were also provided, such as the Standard Village Distance Bands, Health Facility Referral Distance List, Information Card, Maternal Health Service Register Book, and Verification Checklist. The guidelines were reviewed by the Project on the basis of a technical review within six months in order to incorporate clarifications and experiences gained during the initial implementation period of Free Maternal Health. The guidelines were revised as needed by communicating with all relevant stakeholders (MOH, 2012: 7).

Indeed, during project implementation, several issues had emerged from the Guidelines' application since April 2013, and thereby led to revisions of the Guidelines. The revisions resulted in following guidelines: 1) the Operational Guidelines for Paying for Preventive Services and Paying for Quality in March 2014, 2) Blue Mini-Guidelines for Health Facilities-Paying for Preventive Services and Paying for Quality in April 2014, and 3) Operational and Green Mini-Guidelines for Free Maternal and Child Health in May 2014. The revised guidelines provided more detailed procedures and forms, while also adding the Free Child Health component. Importantly, in order to facilitate external verification, all forms were bilingual in Lao and English. The project specific forms were Form 1: Patient Allowance, Form 2: Maternal Health Provider Payment Claim, Form 3: Maternal Health Patient Allowance Claim, Form 4: Child Health Provider Payment Claim, Form 5: Annual

capitation request, and Form 10: Consolidated Reimbursement Request; and Internal Verification Checklist. Other forms were the Standard Village Distance Bands, Health Facility Referral Distance List, Information Card, Maternal Health Service Register Book, Child OPD (out-patient consultations) Register Book, and Child IPD (in-patient care) Register Book. In addition, for effective implementation, some operational guidelines were summarized in a table, such as the benefit package for maternal and child health services at health center, referral/district hospital, and provincial hospital levels, transportation allowance per delivery/per woman at local and referral levels, and basic equipment list for health centers.

#### 1) Reporting Systems

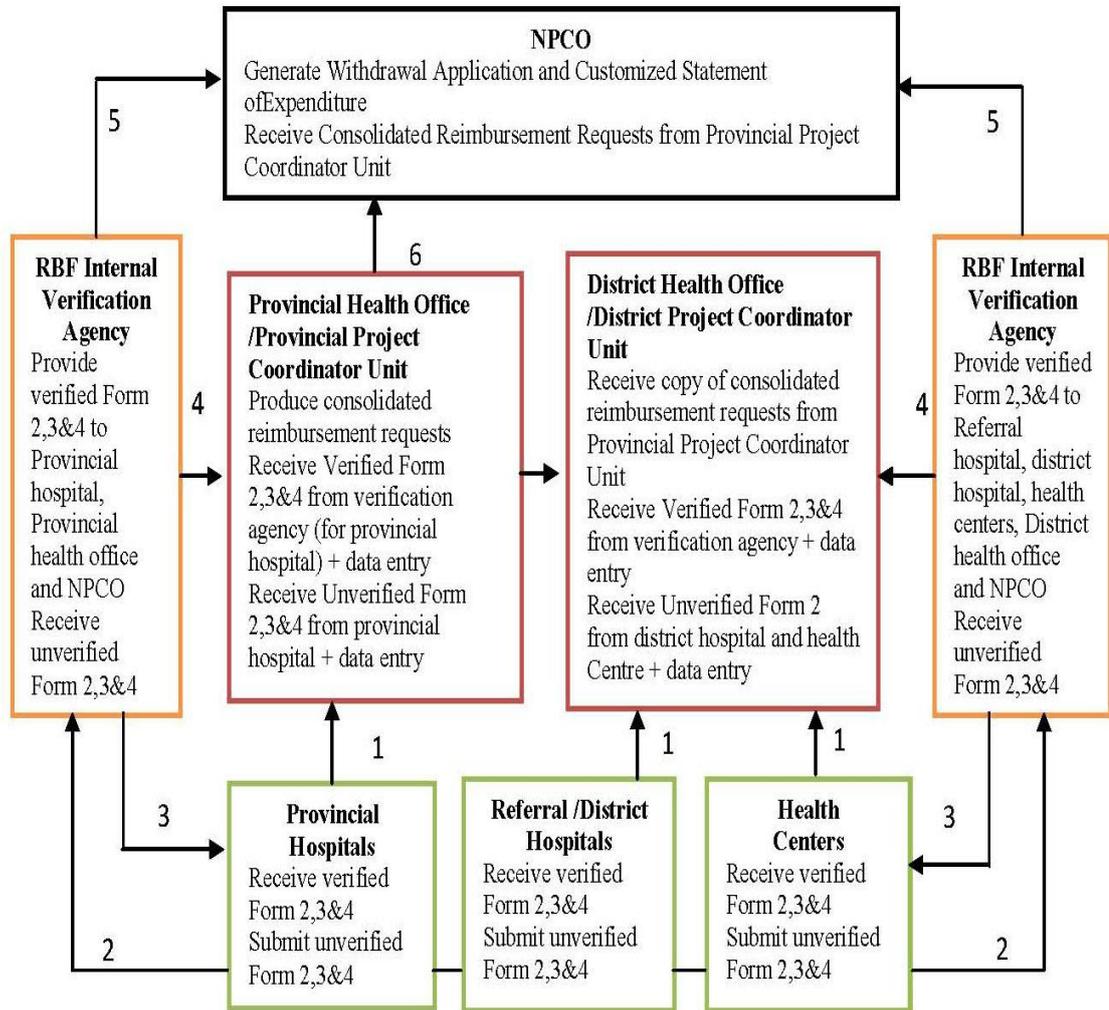
For the effective utilization of the grant funds, the implementing agencies at each level were required to submit the related forms provided and report frequently to the higher levels within specified dates. For instance, in order to receive Provider Payments and be reimbursed for patient cash and transport allowances, all participating health centers are required to report the number of services provided under the Free Maternal and Child Health program, as well as the amounts paid to patients. The health centers have to use Form 2, Form 3 and Form 4 to summarize the services monthly, as noted in the Maternal Health Services Register and the Out-Patient Consultations and In-Patient Care Registers, as well as the Patient Cash Allowance, Local Transport Allowance and Referral Transport Allowance. They have to do this before the sixth of the month following the reported month in three copies. The reason health centers have to fill the forms before the sixth of the month is that the internal verification agency can come any day from the sixth of the (4<sup>th</sup>) month onwards. The health centers submit one copy of Form 2, 3 and 4 to the district health office/district project coordinator unit or the provincial health office/provincial coordinator unit at some time during that month, and keep two copies at the health center for verification purposes. Form 1 does not have to be submitted to the district health office/district project coordinator unit or provincial health office/provincial coordinator unit, but should remain at the health center for verification purposes.

#### 2) Data Management

Initially, there was the use of Microsoft Excel as the project database to collect the services data at each level. However, it seemed to be less

effective, in particular for the timely submission of the report. Thus, a web-based platform has been developed called DHIS-2 for more effective reporting systems. During 2014, the project database (up until then in Microsoft Excel), as well as the health management information system of the MOH as a whole, was transferred to this platform. Because DHIS-2 is web-based, data entered at any level would be immediately accessible to staff at higher levels, as data storage is in the “cloud” (on the Internet). The district and provincial health office levels (including the district and provincial project coordinator units) will be trained in using the new system and how data entry would have to be done. The project database was managed by the IT Assistant of NPCO, who also managed the IT of the health management of information system as a whole. Only specific people at district health office or district project coordinator unit and provincial health office/provincial coordinator unit were given data entry rights, and others had only access rights, meaning they could not enter data, but could only see them. All project staff that had data entry or access rights had a personal account protected with a username and password. As DHIS-2 is a web-based database, meaning that all data are stored on the Internet, there was no need to send data to the provincial health office/provincial coordinator unit or the NPCO. The provincial health office/provincial coordinator unit and NPCO were able to access the data immediately after they have been entered (MOH, 2014: 27).

Figure 4.10 demonstrates the reporting flow chart, while Table 4.9 summarizes details of who should do what and when.



**Figure 4.10** Reporting Flow Chart

**Source:** MOH, 2014: 24.

**Table 4.9** Timing of Reporting, Verification and Payment

Responsible Party	Activities	Deadline
<b>Provincial hospitals, Referral hospital, District hospital and Health Centre</b>	Prepare 3 copies of Form 2, 3 and 4 – keep at health facility	5 <sup>th</sup> of every month
<b>Provincial hospitals, Referral hospital, District hospital and Health Centre</b>	Submit 1 copy of Form 2, 3 and 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health Centres submit to district project coordinator unit on a monthly basis</li> <li>• District hospitals submit to district project coordinator unit on a monthly basis</li> <li>• Provincial hospitals submit to provincial project coordinator unit on a monthly basis</li> </ul>	Before end of the next month (every month)
<b>Internal verification agency</b>	Quarterly Verification of hospitals and 50% of Health Centres based on Form 1, 2, 3 and 4 Provide all verified Form 2, 3 and 4 to the district health office/district project coordinator unit or provincial health office/provincial project coordinator unit (for Provincial hospitals only) Provide all verified Form 2, 3 and 4 to NPCO	End of every 4 <sup>th</sup> month
<b>District health office/district project coordinator unit Provincial health office/provincial project coordinator unit</b>	Data entry of original unverified Form 2, 3 and 4 of the referral hospital/district hospitals and all health centres Data entry of verified Form 2, 3 and 4 for referral hospital/district hospitals and 50% of health centres Check calculation of unverified Form 2, 3 and 4 of remaining 50% of health centres and enter data into database Send all data to provincial health office/provincial project coordinator unit (when Excel is still used)	5 <sup>th</sup> day of 5 <sup>th</sup> month
<b>Provincial health office/provincial project coordinator unit</b>	Consolidate Form 2, 3 and 4 by District and Province Send consolidated payment requests to NPCO	10 <sup>th</sup> day of the 5 <sup>th</sup> month
<b>NPCO</b>	Check consolidated reimbursement requests against hard copies received from the internal verification agency Generate the withdrawal application and customized statement of expenditure for results-based financing. The withdrawal application will list each province as a separate expenditure line. Obtain the required authorized signatures for the withdrawal application. These withdrawal applications are for the replenishment of the designated account. Submit the required requests through the DOF to the National Treasury	17 <sup>th</sup> day of 5 <sup>th</sup> month
<b>National Treasury</b>	Transfer funds from designated account to Project Provincial Accounts, according to the approved reimbursements for each province.	24 <sup>st</sup> day of 5 <sup>th</sup> month
<b>Provincial health office/provincial project coordinator unit</b>	Transfer funds, according to the approved amounts, from Provincial Project Accounts to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provincial Hospital bank account</li> <li>• District Project accounts</li> </ul> Advise district health office/district project coordinator unit and provincial hospitals of the transfers.	27 <sup>rd</sup> day of 5 <sup>th</sup> month
<b>District health office/district project coordinator unit</b>	Transfer funds, according to the approved amounts, from Project District Accounts to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referral/District Hospital bank account</li> <li>• Health Centres (bank accounts, or cash)</li> </ul> Advise district project coordinator unit, district hospitals and health centres of the transfers.	30 <sup>th</sup> day of 5 <sup>th</sup> month In case of cash for health centres 3 <sup>rd</sup> of 6 <sup>th</sup> month
<b>Total Time</b>	The reimbursements for the health facilities for the Free Maternal and Child Health services and cash and transport allowances over any quarter should be available to them two months after the respective quarter.	

Source: MOH, 2014: 45.

#### 4.2.1.6 Monitoring and Reporting of Project Progress

According to the Agreement, the MOH was required to monitor and evaluate the progress of the project and prepare the project reports throughout the implementation phase in accordance with the general conditions and on the basis of the indicators set forth in the Original Financing Agreement (Levesque, 2011). The progress was evaluated based on the indicators set in the results framework such as input, output, outcome, and impact (World Bank, 2013b). The project progress had indeed been regularly reported from the bottom-up-reporting from the provincial level to the departments concerned, to NPCO, and to the World Bank respectively, according to the hierarchy of the project structure.

To effectively follow up on the project progress at the provincial level, some Department Project Assistants had specifically developed the monitoring and reporting forms themselves. These included the use of questionnaires and checklists to collect information needed when monitoring at the field and to send the local levels the monitoring forms in Excel format to fill the information required. For example, to effectively follow up on the progress of the District Grant Allocation activities, the DHHP Project Assistant had developed a number of monitoring and reporting forms as follows.

##### 1) Reports from Project Provinces to Departments Concerned

###### (1) Summary of Project Funds Transferred to Provinces

As a result of being unable to follow up and monitor the transfer and receipt of grant funds by the provinces in each period or quarter, the summary form had been developed:

This one was requested specially, so I summarized for them (the Project). It's not my main work; it's the financial unit, they have their own way of collecting data. For this, we've just used this for us to follow up them easier. So, which one they don't have and I want it to be easier, I'll develop and adjust it. Before 2012, I don't know how they transferred the fund, how much they transferred. So, I develop this form and send the provinces to summarize for me to check. (B10)

The summary in Excel was prepared separately for the provinces, districts and health centers. However, the summary forms for districts and health centers provided details of the funds used for each activity. Table 4.10 shows the sample of summary form which was translated into English by the researcher.

**Table 4.10** Sample of the Summary Form of Fund Transferred to the Provinces

Summary of the Funds transferred to Districts and Health Centers from April 2012 to September 2013								
Reported by: _____ Province: _____								
No.	Period according to estimated plan	Date and period/quarter the central transferred to the province			Remark			
		Date received from the central	Amount received	Period/quarter received				
1	quarter 4 5 6/2012							
2	quarter 7 8 9/2012							
					Specify the amount if divided by activity			
No.	District / Hospital	Date and period/quarter the province transferred to the district			Integrated MNCH	Monitoring	Meeting	Admin.
		Date received from province	Amount received	Period/quarter received				
1								
2								
					Specify the amount if divided by activity			
No.	Name of Health Center	Date and period/quarter the province transferred to the district			Integrated MNCH	Monitoring	Meeting	Admin.
		Date received from district	Amount received	Period/quarter received				
1								

## (2) District Technical Reports

The district technical report form was initially developed by the Project Manager. However, it was then adapted by the DHHP Project Assistant to obtain the progress of each activity in details. The Excel report was prepared separately for individual districts. In addition, there was a performance evaluation form which described the strengths, weaknesses and recommendations. The sample of this form is illustrated in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.11** Technical Report Form from the Implementing Agencies

Report on the indicators implementing for DGA quarterly budget, district level													
Salavanh Province		Kongsedon District											
No.	Activity	Unit	District health sector	District hospital	Tarn-Piew health center	Na-mek health center	Khamthong health center	Thaluang health center	Kengcon health center	Kengthuat health center	Nanong health center	Namuang health center	Total
Integrated MNCH activities													
1	Number of children immunized												
2	Number of pregnant women receiving antenatal care before giving birth												
3	Number of pregnant women receiving antenatal care after giving birth												
Monitoring													
	Number of trip - from province to district												
	Number of trip - from district to health center												
	Number of trip - from health center to village												
Meeting													
	Provincial												
	District												
	Health center												
Administration													
	Budget used for administration												
Performance evaluation													
Strengths													
1													
2													
3													
Weaknesses													
1													
2													
3													
Suggestions/Recommendations													
1													
2													
3													

### (3) District Financial Report

Not only was the technical report needed for district level, there was a need for district financial reports as well. The district expenditures were reported monthly based on individual activity as shown in Table 4.12.

**Table 4.12** District Financial Report Form

Salavanh Province		Kongsedon District																Total
Activity	Unit	Quarter I				Quarter II				Quarter III				Quarter IV				
		10	11	12	Total	1	2	3	Total	4	5	6	Total	7	8	9	Total	
Integrated MNCH activities																		
	Number of children immunized																	
	Number of pregnant women receiving antenatal care before giving birth																	
	Number of pregnant women receiving antenatal care after giving birth																	
Monitoring																		
	Number of trip - from province to district																	
	Number of trip - from district to health																	
	Number of trip - from health center to village																	
Meeting																		
	Provincial																	
	District																	
	Health center																	
Administration																		
	Budget used for administration																	

## (4) Weekly Progress Report on District Grant Allocation

The Weekly Progress Report form was sent to the provincial project coordinators to report the progress on District Grant Allocation (briefly called DGA activity) in each province weekly. The report, in the Excel format, enabled the Department Project Assistants to effectively monitor and follow up the project progress and to solve the challenges in a timely fashion because it provided information in details (see Table 4.13 for a sample of the Weekly DGA Progress Report Form).

**Table 4.13** Weekly DGA Progress Report from the Provinces

Weekly progress report on DGA																			
reported by: _____ Province																			
District /Project agency	Budget period: 4 5 6 (to be used in Jul, Aug, Sep) to be submitted on 15/09/2013						Budget period: 7 8 9 (to be used in Oct, Nov, Dec) to be submitted on 15/12/2013						Where was the problem rooted from: which district, hospital, or health center?	Who will solve/ be responsible for? Name? position?	How to solve?	When to complete?			Remark
	Financial report			Technical report			Financial report			Technical report						date to be submitted to district (problem at health center)	date to be submitted to province (problem at district)	date to be submitted to the central (problem at province)	
	sent	not yet sent	sent some	sent	not yet sent	sent some	sent	not yet sent	sent some	sent	not yet sent	sent some							

**Note:** please report the problems faced and unable to solve or to be solved (report only the problems or challenges). For problem-solving methods, please write the methods only.

Both the financial summary and weekly progress report forms were sent to all implementing agencies at the local to fill in the information required and sent back to the Department Project Assistant by e-mail. The financial and technical reports were then gathered into the report form provided by NPCO (see Table 4.14 below for a sample of the Weekly Progress Report Form of NPCO).

Besides these, NPCO has also developed forms for monitoring and following up on the project progress at the local such as a table for monitoring the free delivery activity, and the form for Consolidated Validated Replenishment Request.

#### (5) Weekly Meetings

At the NPCO level, the monthly meetings were initially held to discuss the project implementation progress and to solve the problem of project implementation delay as well as to agree on the next steps. In reality, the first monthly meeting was held on December 30, 2012. The second monthly meeting was held on March 29, 2013 with the central and provincial project management team (National Project Coordination Office, 2013). The status of project progress and challenges were normally monitored and reported by the implementing agencies involved to the Project Manager directly through e-mail (see Table 4.14 for the sample of the project progress reporting form to NPCO), as well as by the submission of official reports in hard copy.

**Table 4.14** Weekly Progress Report from Implementing Agencies to NPCO

Weekly progress report sheet of NPCO on 25-29/03/2013 Department of Health Care							
No.	Code	Activities	Deadline	Progress	Challenges	Next steps	Responsible person(s)
Procurement							
1	A2.01.01	ICB: equipment and tools for health centers and district hospital					
Construction and repair							
2	A2.01.12	NS: repair and maintenance of Health centres' instruments by the local labors	Mar-13	Savannakhet Province: on the process of documentation Salavanh Province: health center repair by the grant of US\$ 3,800 - on the process of compiling the plan for approval		Savannakhet Province: the central will monitor at the site Salavanh Province: field monitoring by the central	Dr..... Dr.....
<u>Director of the Department</u>			<u>Project assistant to the Department</u>			<u>Reported by</u>	

However, it appeared that some activities had no progress. Even worse, it was not only unable to follow up on the status of activities, but it was also unable to identify the root causes of the problems; that is, it was unable to track where the problems were. As a consequence, the meetings were held weekly to monitor the progress in order to solve the problems in a timely fashion. *B2* pointed out the need to hold weekly meetings as follows:

Because I need to solve the problem, the situation forced me to know. If I leave it for a month or 2-3 months, I was unable to catch it. In fact, I was able to follow up, but not in details and cannot track the problem deeply. I don't know where the problem is. The second problem is that they fingered point at each other. For example, I've sent you this matter, but I have no evidence when it was sent.

The weekly meetings have just started 3-4 months ago because there's a problem that we've shifted to a program-based and we are unable to follow up what has been done. The weekly meeting monitored within each week, whether each activity assigned is achieved or not. If not achieved, I need to know the reason why, where it is. So, it needs to be followed up each week.

The weekly meeting had been held every Monday morning since July 2013 onward. The project progress of each department involved was reported verbally by the Department Project Assistants and coordinator. In effect, the reports were directly documented in the Project Progress Monitoring sheet (see Table 4.15 for the sample of the Project Progress Monitoring sheet of NPCO) shown on the screen during the meeting.

**Table 4.15** Project Progress Monitoring Sheet of NPCO

<b>HSIP-AF: Monitoring project progress for August, 2013</b>						
No.	Main activities	Next step (Remedy)	Deadline	Person responsible	12-16/08	19-23/08
<b>Component 1: Improving Quality and utilization of Health Services</b>						
Department of Finance	Free Delivery	Internal inter-departmental conference to reach decision on roles and responsibilities for Free MH implementation	July 10, 2013	DoF/NPCO	on going drafting Ministerial decree on roles and responsibilities of all parties concerned based on existing free MH guidelines	
		Conduct training on how to consolidate free delivery Form 2 into database for central and 4 provincial staff who will work on data entry at provincial level	July 22-23, 2013	NPCO	Task complete	
Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion	DGA	Provinces with experienced consultants (financial accountants and Provincial Project Assistant) provide cross support to provinces with less experienced staff in planning, budgeting and reporting procedures. The operational costs for this cross support would be met out of the project funds.	June 27, 2013	NPCO, DPIC	Proceed to publish in the newspaper requesting for EOI.	

The weekly reports were documented, in both Lao and English languages, in the table format. The table provides clear information by dividing the main content separately in each row such as date, duration, place, reporter, objectives, participants, and project progress of individual department (see Figure 4.11 for a sample of the weekly report). In addition, the reports in English were also prepared. The report was in fact taken from the Project Progress Monitoring sheet documented during the weekly meeting and hence contained similar headings (see Table 4.16 for a sample of the report in English).

In order to provide feedback about the weaknesses needed to be improved, the weekly reports were distributed to all departments concerned, as well as to the Administration Division of DPIC. The Project Manager had to also attend the DPIC's weekly meetings, which were held every Tuesday morning, to verbally report on the project progress. In addition, there were monthly reports on the project progress and plans for the following month submitted to DPIC. The report consisted of three main parts: a brief background of the project (e.g. name of the project, donor, budget, period, and coverage), the project progress within a particular month (e.g. coordination, training, procurement, and finance), and plan for the next month.

 <p><b>Lao People's Democratic Republic</b> Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity ***** ❖ *****</p>			
Ministry of Health Department of Planning and International Cooperation		Vientiane Capital, Date.....	
<p><b>Weekly Report</b></p> <p><b>Weekly Meeting of the Assistant to NPC and the Department Project Assistants To monitor the HSIP-AF progress for the First Week of September 2013</b></p>			
<b>Date:</b> 02/09/2013	<b>Time:</b> 02-06/09/2013	<b>Place:</b> meeting room of HSIP- AF	<b>Reporter:</b>
<b>Objectives</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To monitor the progress of activity implementation under the responsibility of each Department and project coordinating units.</li> <li>- To identify the problems delaying the project implementation of each Department, unit as well as individuals, in order to solve the problems in a timely manner.</li> </ul>			
<b>Participants:</b>			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assistant to NPC together with the coordinators of five Departments (or Department coordinators).</li> <li>2. Department Project Assistant.</li> <li>3. All of the National Project Coordinating and Operating (NPCO) team.</li> </ol>			
<b>Deadline</b>	<b>The activities to be achieved within September 2013</b>		
<b>Department of Finance</b>			
18/08/2013	Waiting for the decree on Committees of the free delivery and free children under 5.		
<b>Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion</b>			
09/08/2013	Follow up the submission of technical and financial reports from five provinces after the project funds had been transferred to the districts for April, May and June.		
<b><u>Assistant to NPC</u></b>			

**Figure 4.11** A Sample of the Weekly Report of NPCO to DPIC

**Table 4.16** A Sample of the Weekly Report in English

<b>HSIP-AF: Monitoring project progress for June, 2014</b>			
<b>No.</b>	<b>Main Activities</b>	<b>Next steps</b>	<b>June 23-27, 2014</b>
<b>Component 1: Improving Quality and Utilization of health Services</b>			
<b>Department of Finance</b>	<b>Free delivery</b>	Still pending both PM decree on free MNCH and leading committee for free MNCH with DOF	
		Reimbursement of health facilities for free delivery implementation	ATP: NPCO received form 2 from almost districts up to Apr/2014 except Samakhisay+Phouvong up to Feb/2014 CPS: NPCO received form 2 from all districts up to Jan 2014
	<b>RBF (free MNCH, PPS &amp; PFQ)</b>	Minister or designated directors approve the guideline on MNCH	Already approved by MOH Minister in May 27, 2014
		Finalize the contract with PHO and DHO for improved supervision data entry and fund release	Now NPCO is preparing the contract
<b>Department of Health Care</b>	<b>Health facility upgrading</b>	Basic medical equipment for support free delivery in Attapue province	Still remain 6 items haven't delivery yet
		Complete the training on how to use incubators and address all of the issue of oversupply to where facilities are needed (by June 16, 2014)	DHC is preparing to translate the manual into Lao.

In essence, for more effective monitoring, the Project Manager prepared the monitoring schedule for 2013-2014 which was distributed to all team members. Furthermore, it was printed out and tacked to the wall next to the whiteboard (see Table 4.17). In addition, due to the concern that the schedule might not be well noticed by the team, it was thus written down on a big whiteboard to remind all team members about the project progress under their responsibility (see Figure 4.12).



All monitoring and reporting forms were indeed effective and helpful because they enabled the NPCO to follow up the project progress in all three main areas (activity, finance and procurement) within each week. The effectiveness and usefulness of the monitoring forms were acknowledged by project team members as follows:

The forms enable us to know where we've reached based on the schedule and try to track and catch up in case of the delay. (*B1*)

He (Project Manager) uses this one (the project monitoring sheet) which specify the deadline, how to monitor next (next step/remedy), and who is responsible. In this way, he is able to complete the job (on time). It's like modern tools that I used to work with TICO, they called 'list of job to be done.' It's like we list out our job.

Not only was there weekly meetings to monitor the progress at NPCO, there was regular field monitoring to monitor the progress of project implementation. The field monitoring was highly important because most of the activities were implemented at the local levels. Furthermore, given certain goods were procured by the Provinces as part of the decentralization policy, there needed to be monitoring of the implementing agencies at the provinces and districts as *B4* stressed:

We go to check whether their actual procurement is conforming to the plan or not, and when the goods come, do they check it or not. For the health instrument repair at the local, we also have to check whether it's been repaired.

In the meantime, the World Bank also conducted monitoring missions every three months such as in March, June, and October, in order to monitor and evaluate the project progress and challenges. The missions had in turn motivated the project team to implement the project effectively to meet the project schedule as *B9* described:

The IDPs are general similar, but what is different here is that the World Bank will come to monitor the progress every 3 months. Their mission is to monitor how the progress of project activities that they support is. On the other hand, they push us to implement the activities as planned.

After the mission, the World Bank provided an Aid-memoire which included the weaknesses and action needed to be taken as well as deadlines for the following missions. However, due to the effective weekly monitoring, and because there were annual reviews of project performance by the end of the year, the October follow-up mission was cancelled as a result.

1) Report on Status of Execution Projects to the World Bank

In carrying out the Project, the MOH was required to prepare and provide to the World Bank quarterly Project progress reports, in form and content acceptable to the MOH, by January 31, April 30, July 31 and October 31 of each year, and until the completion of the Project (World Bank, 2005: 26). Each Project Report needed to cover the period of one calendar semester, and shall be furnished to the World Bank not later than 45 days after the end of the period covered by the report (Levesques, 2011: 5).

Practically, the Project Manager reported regularly the project progress to the World Bank on a quarter, semi-annual, and annual basis by compiling all information from each implementing agency reported during the weekly and monthly meetings. The reports were first sent to the World Bank team via e-mail to check the correctness before submission of the official reports in hard copies to the World Bank.

Generally, there was no specific reporting format provided by the World Bank. However, the MOH was required to prepare and furnish to the World Bank a report integrating the results of the monitoring and evaluation activities performed, on the progress achieved in the carrying out of the Project during the period preceding the date of said report and setting out the measures recommended to ensure the efficient carrying out of the Project and the achievement of the objectives thereof during the period following such date (World Bank, 2005: 26). As a result, a number of report forms had been developed based on the above requirements and also

to address such questions as: what, when, where, how, and how much. *B2* explained the report formats as follows:

There was no format for reporting. It's only documented in the Agreement that the report should be acceptable by the World Bank. So, I've reported the progress based on the activities, components, the tasks like where it has been achieved, what the problems are, when it's should be done, by whom, and also discuss the problems. It's only based on the formula like what, when, where, how, how much, so answer these. Supposed for the training, we need to know post-training, their knowledge increases how many %. They need to have their own evaluation method.

In addition, the World Bank's Report on the Status of Projects in Execution (SOPE), a brief summary of all Bank-funded projects active at the end of each fiscal year, is available to the public. The report is intended to bridge the gap in information available to the public between the Project Appraisal Document or Program Document, disclosed after the Bank approves a project, and the Implementation Completion Report, disclosed after a project closes (World Bank, 2013b).

It is obvious that the World Bank had set several requirements and conditions for project implement in order to ensure that the resources were managed effectively and efficiently. In an effort to comply with the requirements and conditions, the project team had taken lessons learned from several mechanisms as presented in the following sections.

#### **4.2.2 Sources of Project Learning**

Project learning occurred through two main sources: within and across projects.

##### **4.2.2.1 Within-Project Learning**

###### **1) Learning from Problems**

During project execution, there could be various problems

emerged ranging from minor to major. The approaches were dependent on the nature of problems. Some problems could be handled individually as in the case of the Department Project Assistants and Project Manager who had created several forms as a result of the inability to follow up and monitor on the project progress of the implementing agencies (see section 4.2.1.5 Project Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation for more details). On the other hand, some problems needed instructions from the supervisors, Head of Unit, department concerned, Project Manager, and Project Director, while other problems required instruction from those concerned. For example, in an endeavor to comply with the procurement guidelines, it appeared that some guidelines were inapplicable to the actual situation, and hence needed to be adjusted (see section 4.2.1.3 Procurement Management for more details). However, prior to any adjustment, comments or instructions were needed from those concerned such as the World Bank and Ministry of Finance as B1, the procurement specialist noted:

In case the guidelines are unclear, the procurement committee asks the WB (World Bank) team and the PrMO (Procurement Monitoring Office) at the Ministry of Finance as both of them are back up or macro management of this (the Project Procurement).

In general, the World Bank team's advice or comments were to assure compliance as stressed by B5, the accountant:

I discuss with them (the World Bank) like can I do like this and this or not, can I solve like this or not, something like that. I asked for their comments and confirmation that I can do that.

When seeking advice, communications could be made via various channels such as face-to-face, phone call and e-mail. The use of these channels was dependent on how urgent the problem was and whether it needed a formal or informal approach. However, it appeared that direct phone calls were normally made to solve the problems in a timely manner. In essence, speaker phone

was used to enable others to hear together as evidence. For example, when asking which channels of communication were used phone calls or e-mail, B1 stated that:

I call first. Then, I reported to the meeting. If the meeting said, make it formally I will. Sometimes, I called and opened the speaker phone in order for others to hear what they (the World Bank) say.

For particular problems, they needed to be solved at the project level. For instance, as there were on-going problems with reporting and sharing of project information, NPCO had specifically developed the website called: [www.dhis2/lao.com](http://www.dhis2/lao.com). In general, the website was set up to share project information (see section 4.2.1.5 Project Operational Guidelines for more details of the data management through the use of a web-based platform).

It is apparent that to unravel the problems encountered attempts were made individually and collectively. In addition, the problems were solved collectively through formal mechanisms as practices of lessons learned such as weekly meetings and the annual review meeting. The following section thus reveals these practices.

## 2) Weekly Meetings

The weekly meetings, held every Monday morning, was one example of lessons-learned practices. The weekly meetings had been held as a result of the inability to monitor the project progress and challenged (for more details of the shift from monthly to weekly meeting see section 4.2.1.6 Project Monitoring and Evaluation, 2) Weekly Progress Report to NPCO). From the participant observation on September 30, 2013, it was noticeable that the meeting was open and run in an informal manner. Those who arrived first presented their project progress and could leave the meeting right away after their reports. On the other hand, those who came late reported later. That is, once the problems were solved and cleared, the Department Coordinators and Project Assistants could freely leave the meeting. The meeting thus lasted for only approximately two hours, from 9.00-11.00 AM.

When the Department Project Assistants verbally reported the progress and challenges, the Project Manager asked for clarification to track the

progress from the last week. For example, for the internal inter-departmental conference to reach decisions on the roles and responsibilities for the Free Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health implementation, the MCHC reported that 15 secretariat committees had been specifically assigned to discuss and prepare the final draft of the Manual at Thailand in October, 2013. The earlier draft of the project Manual was halted, and the focus shifted to establish the Manual to be used nationwide, and any project had to apply this national Manual. At this point, the Project Manager asked for clarification by citing that their proposal was to draft a decree on establishing the secretariat committee, but the concern here was who would be the leading the organization to oversee the Manual Development: MCHC, DOF, DHHP or DHC (the previous week's progress shown on the screen was 'the draft Ministry Decree on leading committee is shared with Dr. C together with proposed to conduct a consultative meeting to finalize this decree before presenting to TWG (Technical Working Group)'). The Project Manager clarified that there were four main tasks: 1) manual development, 2) determining which department would be the leader to oversee the ministerial committee, 3) decided on the topics to be submitted to the Prime minister, and 4) establishment of the secretariat committee. Thus, the question was of who would be the leading organization to oversee this as specified in the MOH's decree. The DHHP Project Assistant unveiled that DOF was the leading organization to draft the national Manual according to the agreement of the previous Friday's meeting.

Also, to identify the root causes of delayed project implementation, several questions were raised such as where it was now, what happened to it, and why it was stuck. For example, according to the last week's records, the DGA budget was transferred to Salavanh Province. However, it was questionable why the budget was not transferred for project implementation at district levels. The delayed transfer was pointed to the fact that there was flooding at the local levels and hence made in unable to implement the activities.

Furthermore, for effective project implementation, the Project Manager recommended what to do in detail, how to do it, who to contact, and who should do what and when. For instance, in relation to the Pay for Quality Implementation, the meeting to finalize the indicators was to be held at Thal at on

October 17-18, 2013, according to the previous week's report. For this particular week, the request for conducting the meeting was submitted to NPCO, while the meeting agenda was under process. For the meeting agenda, the Project Manager suggested that the background or rationale of the activity should be presented by the World Bank. For DOF, the presentation should be focused on the main points (e.g. the indicators used to measure) listed in the table who should present what. He pointed out that if the meeting objectives were well defined, the agenda would be easily listed. Furthermore, the Project Manager suggested that DOF prepare the training plan in advance since training on the guidelines would be required once the guidelines were developed. It was recommended that DOF prepare a proposal such as how to train (e.g. training for trainers for the central, provincial and district levels, respectively), who will attend (e.g. the hospitals who provide health services, those who assess the activity, and DOF), and when and where to organize it. Importantly, the Project Manager raised a lesson from the DTR who had requested the Ministerial Decree for the implementation of each sub-activity. Doing so was time-consuming and delayed project implementation. Therefore, the Project Manager suggested other departments to prepare the request for each main activity until project completion; that is obtaining decree at once instead.

In addition, in order to effectively track the progress, a direct phone call to those involved was made via speakers so that those involved in the meeting were able to hear together. For example, the deadline for the training on health center management for district and health center staff Savannakhet Province was on August 26-28, 2013. According to last week's record, the training had been postponed to the end of September 2013. However, the training was still not conducted. Hence, a direct phone call to the PHO was made to confirm the date to organize the training, and if not conducted, the budget transferred needed to be returned to NPCO. From the conversation, the PHO argued that the budget had not been received, while NPCO confirmed that the budget had already been transferred. This situation seemingly showed the lack of evidence of the budget transferred by NPCO and received by PHO. It appeared that the PHO was unable to confirm the training dates. The Project Manager thus advised the Department Project Assistants to take the budget transferred back. However, the PHO later called the Project Manager to clarify the issue and confirmed to provide the training dates within that evening.

Accordingly, holding the meeting weekly and reporting the progress verbally to the Project Manager tended to be fruitful. Undoubtedly, the primary benefits of weekly meetings were relatively derived from its objectives: one was that the project implementation was able to monitor how far the progress was made, and another was that the problems faced by each implementing agency were able to be identified and solved in a timely manner. In addition to these, lessons learned from problem-solving were drawn and shared with each other in an effort to meet the World Bank's requirements.

Another important thing is that the project progress and challenges were documented in English into "the Monitoring Project Progress sheet" which was shown on the screen (see Table 4.15 a sample of the Project Progress Monitoring sheet of NPCO). The sheet was also used as the report submitted to those involved. In addition, some of these lessons learned were also reflected in the semi-annual report. The practices of regular meetings together with the weekly reports became lessons learned not only for the NPCO and implementing agencies, but other and future projects of MOH.

### 3) Annual Review Meeting

The annual review meeting on December 17-18, 2013 was attended by representatives from all sectors involved in the Project execution such as NPCO, World Bank, the Ministry of Finance, departments concerned, health colleges and universities, and the Provincial Health Offices, with altogether 67 participants. For the agenda of the meeting, there were presentations on overall project performance, project procurement, project financial progress, department and provincial reports. The sessions in the second day were group discussions and presentations, presentations on Free Delivery Manual and provincial budget plans.

The meeting was undoubtedly perceived by NPCO as an important practice of project management as in other projects. It provided those involved an opportunity to review project performance and draw lessons learned for the future. Indeed, project lessons were heavily drawn and shared within the two-day meeting.

On the first day of the meeting, information and lessons were shared and drawn across the day. Firstly, the project information could be obtained

from the presentations on project progress in each area of work. The progress was reported in three main groups: 1) programmatic, procurement, and financial progress by NPCO, 2) progress of five Departments, and 3) progress of five targeted provinces. Following the presentation by each group, there was a question and answer session which provided all involved the opportunity to share their opinions or lessons learned. Some of the lessons learned practices were as follows.

Generally, each presentation contained such main points as project implementation progress, challenges, strengths, limitations, and next steps. Most presentations were in detail and specific, and hence enabled all involved to understand what had been achieved and not achieved, and what challenges the project faced. For example, the project performance presented by the Project Manager was reported based on the project progress of each component (altogether three components) in each province separately. For the progress of free delivery, as a sub-component of the quality improvement of health services, the Free Delivery Guidelines had been prepared since 2012. There were trainings on the use of the guidelines for all levels (e.g. central, provinces, districts, and health centers), and training for the provincial and district verification committees. In addition, field monitoring and supervision was conducted two times to find out the issues related to financial flow, recording and reporting systems. The findings had been used to adjust the guidelines.

For the progress and challenges in each province, it appears that while some districts of Savannakhet province performed well, others had no progress; there was no progress report. Thus, questions were raised as to why there were no reports, and what the problems were. For Salavanh province, the reports were submitted by nearly every district. However, based on the provincial data, it seemed that the free delivery services at the provincial hospitals were more than at district hospitals and health centers. This issue was also the case to Champasack Province, where some health centers were already equipped with sufficient instruments and drugs, as well as well-trained health staff, but unable to provide services due to the lack of confidence, and hence needed assistance from the districts. Furthermore, according to the monitoring, it was found that there were mistakes in form filling. In addition, some well-trained staff who were the head or vice head of the health centers

did not work, instead it was the untrained staff who provided the services, and hence could not understand and apply the procedures specified in the guidelines. At the district level, the committees still did not know how to check, though they had already been trained. Furthermore, all health centers' forms were taken to the district for checking during the monthly meetings. As there were many health centers, the committees were unable to check the forms and hence delayed the reports. Therefore, further improvements were highly needed.

In addition, the project progress of particular province had been raised as lessons learned for each other. For instance, being able to achieve its goals and submitted the report on time, Salavanh province was asked to share its management techniques to others. Salavanh province shared their achievement factors as follows: 1) a close attention of the provincial supervisors, 2) teamwork approach by building close relationships with each sector involved and supporting one another, 3) plan the work together within each week/month, and 4) monitor and supervise all tasks to solve the problems in a timely fashion.

Following all presentations, drawing of lessons-learned was conducted by raising the main issues for discussions such as what should be done to ensure compliance with the guidelines (e.g. delivery at health centers, district and provincial hospitals respectively) and for the less effectiveness of the internal verification committee. Specifically, the issues of referring patients to higher-level health facilities (e.g. from health centers to district hospitals, and to provincial hospitals, respectively) were raised for discussion and sharing of lessons learned because the patient-referring systems were not specified in the guidelines. The related issues raised were 1) how to assist the patients due to the transportation difficulties, (2) how to deal with irrational referral cases, and 3) the possibility of a predetermined fee at the hospitals due to the incorrect calculations of referring fees.

Indeed, several participants provided their opinions and recommendations, while some shared their lessons. For example, the Savannakhet province shared their lessons that the district health department had to arrange for a vehicle to refer patients to the provincial hospital, and if there was no vehicle, the transportation fee was paid to the patients. Following this, a department representative cited the guidelines to explain that the pregnant women should use the services at the

health centers where they live. Referring to higher levels was only for complicated deliveries, and the transportation fee would be collected at the service destination. To determine the distance for the referring fee calculation, the internal verification committee had already consisted of several sectors, but since it related to mother and child, there should be technical health staff or department to check this. In response to this, the representative from the Mother and Child Health Center had the following opinions. 1) There needs to be detailed specifications in the guidelines such as how much for the transportation fee from the village to the health center. If the patient uses the services at the provincial hospital, not the health center, payment should cover only transportation from the village to the health center. 2) To be used as references for patient-referring, the conditions of complicated cases should be defined in detail in the guidelines. The transportation fee should be covered from where the patient was referred to as in the case of the Numthern Project which is responsible for all payments because there were only 20% of serious cases. 3) For the late internal verification, there should be external sectors as committee and work in collaboration with the health insurance for sustainable management. Likewise, the Champasack representative also suggested external verification, despite the internal verification committees from various sectors. The issues raised and recommendations provided would certainly be helpful for the improvement of the unclear and incomplete guidelines. For more effectiveness, further revision of the guidelines would thus be proposed to the World Bank and experts.

For the second day, learning initially occurred as a result of group discussions by using the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis tool. The discussions were divided into five groups: 1) overall supervision at the implementing agencies, 2) coordinating and reporting, 3) financial management, 4) procurement, and 5) monitoring and technical assistance (see Figure 4.13 for the arrangement of group discussion). Each group consisted of at least ten participants from the department concerned and provincial representatives. The discussions were led by a facilitator who was a specialist in that area, while the main points discussed were documented by a note taker. The discussions in each group were conducted based on the questions provided. There were dynamic discussions and analysis of the issues, while ideas and opinions were also actively shared within the groups.



**Figure 4.13** Arrangements of Group Discussion

After the discussions and analysis, each group's discussion results were presented to the meeting. Most groups presented their discussion results based on the SWOT tool; that is in four points (such as the Monitoring and Technical Assistance, Project Financial Management, and Coordinating and Reporting). For example, the presentation of Monitoring and Technical Assistance group was based on five questions. Is there an annual field monitoring and supervision plan, how often, by whom and with sufficient budget or not? Are there monitoring tools? What can be done during monitoring? Can other activities be monitored at the same time? How to supervise the health centers to strengthen them? The group addressed the questions by dividing them into four main points of SWOT. For instance, the strengths were the monitoring and supervision plan, with sufficient budget, conducted four times per year; monitoring team consisting of provincial and district, project coordinator, accountant, Mother and Child Health Centre, hospital staff, internal verification committees; and monitoring of several activities at the same time. The weaknesses identified were that the late provision of budget delayed project implementation; and no clear specification of the number of monitoring teams (e.g. sometimes five, or seven). The opportunities included sufficient monitoring members to monitor the related areas of work; provision of guidance to health centers for further improvement; and separation of management and technical monitoring. Lastly, the threats included

well-developed plan before field monitoring: assignment of responsibilities; and a need for discussion after monitoring to summarize the strengths, weaknesses and improvement.

After the presentation, the question and answer session was conducted. At this point, the Project Director asked many questions for clarification regarding the well-developed plan before field monitoring which could be lessons learned for all. These included questions of whether the monitoring team had followed up or known the actual situation at health centers, were there proper records and reports, or did team simply go when it was monitoring time. In response to the questions, the Champasack representative pointed out, based on their experience such as before the monitoring, the team discusses who should do what, what should be monitored, and which problems previously found needed close supervision at health centers. Still, the Project Director further raised several specific inquiries: 1) the actual frequency of meetings held (e.g. weekly or monthly), 2) if monthly, how the problems were solved, 3) how to track which health centers or districts had problems, 4) if there were problems, did the provincial staff go to the district or did the district staff come to the province, 5) was there budget for monthly travelling, and 6) how often exactly was the field monitoring conducted and how much the budget covered. According to the provincial staff, the problems were tracked based on the district reports, and the supervision was provided during the monthly meetings at the province.

For effective monitoring and supervision, the Project Director identified different meanings of three phrases which consisted of three similar syllables of the Lao language. For example, the first phrase, “day pay het,” means "I go to work (but I may not work);" The second one, “pay day het” means "I worked (but it may not be good);" and the last one, “pay het day” means "I go to work and am able to get the things done." To elaborate on the examples raised, the Project Director recommended the provincial health officers to set the strategies by listing out if there were problems, where the problems were, whether it was because lack of funds or lack of staff, who would solve them, and whether it could be solved. Furthermore, the Project Director noted that, although the monitoring practices were good, the monitoring reports were still not in consensus, and thereby submission of the monitoring reports to the Project Director was requested. The Project Director stressed

that the issues raised were meant to be lessons learned for all, and not to assign blame. Thus, for effective monitoring and supervision, the monitoring reports should be in detail, such as what was monitored, what the problems were, and whether the work supervised was solved or not. If this was not done, there would be problems when the external auditors came.

In short, the main issues raised by the Project Director for consideration were detailed work-plan for monitoring and supervision, regular and effective monitoring and supervision, and weekly follow-up of the progress based on the monitoring reports. However, regardless of how good the work-plan and the practices were, they were less effective if the previous monitoring reports were not recorded properly and completely. Therefore, there needed to be accurate and complete records to enable the progress' follow-up. This shows the attempts to take lessons learned from the issues found in order to avoid repeated mistakes and to safeguard their performance. In this regard, it is presumed that the lessons learned raised by the Project Director would be taken into account by those involved. With regards to the diverse reporting forms, it was not clear as to why there were no standard reporting forms for the implementing agencies, provided that NPCO had developed a number of effective reporting and monitoring forms which could be useful for the implementing agencies.

Different from other groups, the procurement group presented their discussion results based on the following questions? 1) was the procurement able to be conducted as scheduled, and what were the strengths and weaknesses? 2) What were the difficulties in such processes as the examination of product quality, distribution, and instrument application? 3) Were the fixed assets listed and checked? 4) How to file procurement documents and records to facilitate the audits? The question-based presentation enabled other groups to understand the context related to particular issues because the answers were focused on the strengths and weaknesses of each issue. For instance, the procurement was mostly conducted on time. The strengths were that the procurement conducted by the provinces had enabled them to learn the procurement procedures and hence strengthened their procurement capability. However, there were considerable limitations such as a lack of competitors due to time constraints and late issue of the Ministry's Decree, late distribution of

goods due to transportation difficulties, and a limited budget. For the second question, when examining the quality of products, one of the problems found was that the products' names and information were in English, which the health centers did not understand, and hence purely counted the number of products and signed for them.

Following the presentation, there was a question and answer session. Given that some issues were not mentioned, the Department of Health Care representative thus raised for consideration as follows: late procurement by some provinces, non-conforming to specifications of some instruments purchased, no or limited use of instruments purchased due to the lack of instruction by the company, and late distribution of goods to the end users. In response to the instrument application, which was found to be inapplicable in some health centers, the World Bank representative recommended for the provinces to find out which health centers that faced this issue, and NPCO to translate the instrument instructions and prepare a simple manual to attach to the instruments for the users.

For effective problem-solving, the Project Director provided several recommendations, such as NPCO should compile all problems and look for measures to solve them; due to delayed procurement, there was a need to estimate at least three months before procurement; and conducting the procurement within the time specified. Given there were numerous procurement problems (such as the delay due to long procedures of procurement consideration, the differences in procurement practices at the central, provincial and district levels due to lack of consensus procedures, etc.), the Project Director requested the procurement unit of NPCO to develop the procurement manual specifically for the World Bank projects to ensure that there were standard procurement procedures for implementation. In addition, the Project Director stressed that this should be taken as lessons learned, and if the project was able to perform well, it could possibly be extended.

For the project finance management, the presentation reported the strengths and weaknesses which were identified. For example, the strengths were a sufficient budget for project implementation, and provision of training on project finance management from the central to the local levels. The weaknesses included delayed reporting and coordination from the central to local levels, no daily records of receipts and spending for some health centers, delayed, inaccurate and incomplete

submission of the reports to the provincial levels and hence delayed disbursement to the district levels, and the lack of regular monitoring and supervision of the health centers by the district levels. The threats or challenges were transportation and communication difficulties, lack of computers and photocopy machines at the district levels, and lack of staff, especially at district levels. The opportunities included provision of training for the local staff in the short and long terms, and provision of sufficient instruments (e.g. computers, notebooks, etc.).

Following the presentation, a representative from the Mother and Child Health Center raised a question on the summary of expenses on the free maternal health components which appeared to have three different results. In response to such enquiry, the Project Manager pointed out that the summaries were different due to the differences in the period being summarized. To ensure its transparency, the Project Director suggested for the Finance Unit to create particular forms for the provinces to summarize the expenses quarterly and also specify the deadlines for submission. If the submissions were late by even an hour, it was excluded. For the delayed submission of the reports, the Project Director recommended that the implementers should be disciplined with the financial records and reports to avoid such problems. In relation to the financial staff, the provincial levels should identify and provide further training to the district levels where needed.

All presentations were considered by the Project Director to be good lessons for project improvement, and hence requested for submission to NPCO and DPIC. Not only the lessons from presentations, all discussion results were documented and recorded by NPCO as well.

Budget plan was another example of lessons learned practices. Given some activities were decentralized to the local levels, the provincial health offices, as implementing agencies, needed to prepare budget planning for 2014 under the guidance and assistance of the Department Project Assistant. Like other sessions, the lessons could be taken from the comments of the Project Director and World Bank representative on the plan following each presentation. For example, the Savannakhet province presented its detailed budget of each activity (e.g. DGA, internal verification, and trainings) for each district. However, given that the training budget proposed was seemingly quite high, while the project budget might not be able to support it, the

Project Director thus recommended for the reconsideration of the budget plan to be an implementable plan. Also, there was a need for realistic projection and assessment of the training due to a limited budget to ensure the effective use of grant funds which would be finished in 2014.

During the meeting, NPCO had introduced the website called, [www.dhis2.com](http://www.dhis2.com), to be used for effective reporting and sharing of project information and data. This is because, in the past, the reporting system, which was mainly based on paper-work, was less effective. Furthermore, there was the use of web-based software to analyze the data collected such as summarizing data in graphs or charts. The website was under the process of being set up. Early the next year, NPCO would hold the training on its use and provide computers to the district and provincial health staff. In addition, the computers and internet air-cards would be provided to facilitate the reporting. The information would be uploaded onto the website in April. The website could be accessed only by those who have a user name and password. For instance, when the districts enter the information and data received from health centers into the form on the website, others were able to see the results. The website would undoubtedly enable all concerned to know each other's progress, which in turn might motivate the provinces where little progress has been made.

Prior to the meeting close, the Project Director provided recommendations for the effective management of grant funds. To safeguard the accountability and transparency, any transactions of the grant fund should have documents or evidence of money transfer and receipt at each level. Also, the funds should be used for the planned activities. Furthermore, given that there was delayed procurement, some activities were unable to be implemented as planned and thereby led to a low absorption of grant funds (with only 52% of grant disbursement). Accordingly, the Project Director requested all concerned to improve their performance; that is implementing the activities within budget and schedule. The Project Director further emphasized that if the grant fund was used effectively and efficiently, there would be further support by the development partners in a wider scope. Thus, all needed to pay a close attention to project implementation effectiveness to get further support for achieving MDGs in 2015. All of these recommendations obviously showed the effort to improve the project implementation

effectiveness, especially meeting the project timeline within the budget plan. On the one hand, this was to ensure the compliance with the donors' requirements. On the other hand, the improvement for project effectiveness was to attain further support in the future.

In summary, it could be said that the lessons learned were taken throughout the 2-day meeting, and during each session, such as presentation of the project progress and future plan, group discussions, question and answer session, and recommendations of the Project Director and World Bank expert. But one important point to be mentioned was the Project Director's recommendations. When providing the recommendations for any particular issues raised, the Project Director always asked everyone to take lessons learned, and not only those who faced the problems. Doing so would undoubtedly be a means to avoid re-invented mistakes, while improving effectiveness of project implementation.

In addition to the meeting, the minutes distributed to all involved could be a good source of lessons learned, not only for the project, but other projects as well. In reviewing the minutes recorded in table format, which the researcher was allowed to access, it appears that the minutes contained all important content such as title of the meeting, date, time, location, reporter, objectives, participants, contents of the meeting, agenda of the meeting, discussions during the meeting, conclusions and future plan (see Figure 4.15 for the format of annual review meeting minute). The most important thing is that the agenda of the meeting was documented in detail of what was presented, what were the opinions or comments from the participants, the response from those concerned, and recommendations of the Project Director. The meeting minutes were documented by bulleting the opinions and recommendations following the presentation as shown in Figure 4.14.

- ❖ Discussions during the Meeting:
  - After Dr. ... briefly reported the progress of project implementation, the discussion was conducted:
    - Savannakhet province: Dr. .... , Deputy Chief of the provincial health office, opinioned that...
    - Salavanh province: Dr..... , Deputy Chief of the provincial health office, commented that...
    - Ms. ... (the World Bank's representative) commented that...

**Figure 4.14** A Sample of the Format and Contents Recorded in the Meeting Minute

However, for the conclusion and future plan, some issues were specified in detail of who should do what (e.g. Salavanh and Attapue Provinces redo the budget plan and submit to the central within the date specified, while other provinces are required to submit the official budget plan to the central as soon as possible; etc.), while others were unclear (e.g. follow up the procurement of motorcycles and cars; follow up the Manual for Free Maternal Health and the Committee with the section concerned; etc.).

Nonetheless, the minutes enabled the readers to understand what had happened to the project in general, what the project challenges in each province and area were, what issues were raised for discussion, what were the solutions proposed, and how they were solved. Due to the detailed records, the minutes consisted of seven pages. From the researcher's experience, there were very few minutes recorded with such detailed information. Most of the minutes simply summarized the main points raised and the solutions taken, but did not document detail who presented or suggested what.

 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Lao People's Democratic Republic</b> Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity ***** ❖ *****</p>			
Ministry of Health Department of Planning and International Cooperation		No. ....../HSIP-AF Vientiane Capital, Date.....	
<p><b>Minutes of the Meeting</b></p> <p><b>The review meeting on implementation of HSIP-AF for 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 plan with five project provinces, the Departments and Centres concerned On December 17-18, 2013 at Khem-nguem Guest house, Thalad district, Vientiane Province</b></p>			
<b>Date:</b> December 17-18, 2013	<b>Time:</b> 8:00-16:00	<b>Place:</b> Khem-nguem Guest house, Thalad district, Vientiane Province	<b>Reporters:</b>
❖ <b>Objectives</b> ○			
❖ <b>Participants:</b>			
❖ <b>Chairman of the meeting:</b>			
❖ <b>Presenters:</b>			
❖ <b>Contents of the meeting</b>			
❖ <b>Agenda of the meeting:</b> Day 1: Day 2:			
❖ <b>Discussions during the meeting:</b> ➤			
❖ <b>Conclusion and future plan:</b> ▪			
<u><b>Director of DPIC</b></u>		<u><b>Assistant to NPC of HSIP-AF</b></u>	
		<u><b>Reporter</b></u>	

**Figure 4.15** Format of the Annual Review Meeting Minute

#### 4.2.2.2 Cross-Project Learning

##### 1) Use of Past Project Experience

The project experience accumulated was admittedly helpful to the implementation of the current project. Its usefulness appeared to be various such

as, it helped to understand the guidelines and procedures or operating systems of donors, the documentation process (e.g. those official forms for requesting to the government agencies), the coordinating and contacting systems of public sector, and to develop the monitoring and reporting forms. For instance, B2, Project Manager, had developed a number of forms based on his project experience such as the form for reporting the weekly project progress to DPIC, and the forms for monitoring the progress (see Figures 4.15-4.19 for samples of the forms). When asked about the reporting format, B2 said that:

There was no reporting format (provided by the World Bank), but we have to know what the activities are and who participate. It's only based on the formula like what, when, where, how, and how much, so just answer these questions.

Likewise, B10, a Project Assistant to DHHP, had created reporting forms (see Tables 4.10-4.12 for the samples) based on the past project experience:

I created by myself for the monitoring form because there's no format (provided by the World Bank). I develop this based on the lessons from other places and my old workplaces. I adapt the format (taken from other places) to match the actual needs.

## 2) Learning from Past Project Teams and Documents

Learning from past projects could be made from the past project team members and/or past project documents. Learning from past project team members was accessible since some of them had continued working for the present project, especially the seniors and Chief of the Procurement and Finance Units. For instance, a new member of the Finance Unit had learned from the seniors on the financial documentation process, how to prepare request for payment, financial statements and reports, and etc. The Assistant to Project Manager as a new member had learned from Project Manager on how to document the minutes of the meeting, how to prepare project reports, how to run documentation process, and etc.

For the past project documents and records, they were easily accessible when needed because there were proper maintenance systems (see Figures 4.8-4.9 for the samples of the filing systems). For example, they were used as references for writing project proposal and for overall project management systems (such as for management of procurement and finance, reporting, monitoring and evaluation, and etc.). The past project documents had also been used as lessons for project implementation. B8, a procurement assistant, explained how past project procurement documents and records were used as lessons learned for the current project:

There were files maintained in the folders. The documents were archived chronically according to the procedures. So, I study the procedures like it starts with documentation process or defining the specification first, and after that is fund approval or what. The documents maintained also included many cases that were problematic. They (the past project team) maintained all reports, so I used them as lessons learned.

### 3) Learning from Other Projects and Organizations

Apart from learning from past project teams and documents, there was also learning from people outside the project. These included friends from the study and trainings, and colleagues from other projects and organizations including public, private and NGO sectors. In other words, there was the use of personal connections to obtain resources needed from other organizations. For example, in an effort to solve the problems, B7 asked for solutions from colleagues within and from other organizations:

I asked my close friends who used to study and work together in the same Department and also friends from other organizations. I asked them how to solve for the problem like this. So they recommended me to ask this or that persons.

In fact, most members had relied on personal and social connections to access information of other organizations. For example, B9, a Project Assistant to CMCH, explained how social networks built from past projects enabled her to access the information needed from other organizations:

I used to work for many projects and Ministries so I know many people. There are networks so it's much easier. If the work needs any information from each organization or Ministry, I can ask from them directly. Like, Ministry of Education where I used to work for, if I want to get some information about education I can ask them directly. They knew me, we know each other.

Similarly, B5, an accountant, used personal ties to obtain the updated financial regulations from and exchange lessons with friends working for other organizations:

Sometimes I called my friends to ask about the regulations that are new released because what I'm doing has to be complied with the guidelines or regulations of the Ministry of Finance who issued them. Sometimes, there're new updated ones, so I have to keep contacting with them in order for compliance.

In the same manner, B8, a procurement staff member, obtained procurement information from a member of the ADB projects:

I ask them (the ADB project team members) for the goods that I've never procured before, but they do. I've got information from them.

Moreover, to obtain the information needed and to get the work done, some had attempted to intentionally establish a relationship with others by themselves. For others, the relationship with others was built through a project team member playing a brokerage role. For instance, socialization with other departments was bridged through the introduction of the Department Project Assistant.

In addition to such informal approaches, several meetings also facilitated cross-project learning to occur during and after the meetings. For example, learning from other projects had occurred during the weekly meetings of the DPIC where all of the IDPs' progress and challenges were reported. *B2* unveiled how learning from other projects occurred during the weekly meetings of DPIC:

I saw their forms (of the ADB projects) because I also have to report at the meeting like them, we go to report together. They have their own forms for collecting and reporting the data which are different from us. I do learn from them, but also from the actual problems.

Furthermore, there was cross-project learning during and after the meetings of the World Bank missions held for all World Bank-funded projects and the portfolio meeting for the World Bank and ADB-assisted projects. The aim of the meetings was to exchange lessons learned with each other among the ministries' projects assisted by the World Bank and ADB. The meetings were also attended by the Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Finance. For instance, when asked about other sources of learning, *B1*, a procurement specialist, said that he had learned by sharing experience with friends from other ministries during the portfolio meeting held by the World Bank and ADB:

The World Bank and ADB held the meeting. They invited all ministries that were assisted to come and ask that how was your ministry's implementation, how the financial unit was, how the procurement unit was, how the expenses were, how the quality control was, we shared with each other, we discussed there. If it's like this, how we gonna solve it. The ministry concerned would explain.

During the meetings, the feedbacks or comments on each other could be made, according to *B1*. That is the World Bank or ADB could make any comments to the project teams. Conversely, the project teams could also provide feedback to the World Bank or ADB. Doing so was to continuously improve the

project effectiveness and efficiency. Indeed, B1 admitted that the practices of lessons learned from the portfolio meetings were useful. Part of the reason is because the Guidelines of the World Bank and ADB were similar to each other.

There was sharing and taking lessons learned, not only during the meeting, but after as well. The ongoing sharing of project information resulted from the social networks built during the meetings. B1, a procurement specialist, explained how the social connections were developed and used to obtain or exchange information with other projects' members:

For some information, I ask from my close friends. But, I sometimes ask friends from Ministry of Education and Ministry of Energy which are assisted by the same donor because we exchanged e-mail address with each other when attending the meeting. So, we send e-mail to each other to exchange the evaluation methods of one another to promote the good practices and avoid weaknesses.

Sometimes I ask ADB-assisted projects, my case is like this which guideline should be used, what about your case. Sometimes their methods are better than us; I need to learn from them. But if our method is better or more suitable, they will take our method to adjust to their project. Sometimes I didn't ask them, but when they have something new, they'll forward to me. We need to always update the information because those who stay still will be out-of-dated.

Therefore, it is apparent that many had made use of personal and social connections built from past and present projects to obtain resources needed for various purposes such as to solve problems, improve their performance and ensure their compliance.

#### **4.2.3 Barriers to Project Learning**

Even though learning could occur through several mechanisms, there were still some obstacles to learning. The common barrier was cited as the uniqueness of the

project itself. For instance, *B5*, an Accountant, stated that learning from other projects was difficult because the operating procedures of each donor were dissimilar, although the general principles were similar:

When talking about the work, generally, it's similar, but the implementation is different. Some procedures, when talking about the manuals and the procedures for documentation, it's different.

Also, learning from other projects or organizations was not carried out by some members because of the belief that others had no knowledge about the project given the project was irrelevant to them as expressed by *B9*, a Department Project Assistant:

I didn't discuss with friends from other organizations because if I discuss with them, they won't know. Our project is irrelevant to them.

#### **4.2.4 Use and Sharing of Project Information**

To complete the project goals on time, improvement of project implementation effectiveness was needed, not only at the central level, but also local level as the implementing agencies. The efforts were thus made through the enhancement of project management skills and technical competence to the local health personnel. These included financial and procurement management through targeted short-term training, seminars, and regional conference at the central, provincial and district health offices (World Bank, 2011a). For example, to decentralize the activities to project provinces, NPCO conducted procurement training for procurement and financial staff on how to conduct procurement in their province by themselves on November 20-30, 2012 (National Project Coordination Office, 2013: 22).

#### **4.2.5 Conclusion**

The World Bank, like other IDPs, had imposed a number of requirements and conditions for project implementation. The main requirements were generally imposed for the effective management of project finance and procurement, and regular

monitoring and reports of the project progress. To ensure its compliance, the project had continuously applied the Project Financial Manual developed for the original project. According to the Manual, the project was to be internally assessed by the Finance Unit, which was managed by a consulting firm, and externally audited by an external independent body. For procurement management, the project had applied the National Procurement Manual for local procurement, and the World Bank's Guidelines for international procurement. During the course of project implementation, project progress had been reported to the World Bank regularly as specified (e.g. quarterly, semi-annual, and annually). In addition, the project had been monitored and evaluated every three months by the World Bank team.

To achieve the project goals on time, the project team had taken lessons learned from problems encountered during project implementation within and across projects. Some problems were handled individually. For instance, for effective follow-up and monitoring of project progress some members had developed forms based on their past project experience. However, there were particular problems that needed advice or confirmation from those concerned (e.g. the World Bank and Ministry of Finance for the inapplicability of some procurement guidelines). At the project level, a particular web-based platform called DHIS-2 had been specifically developed for effective reporting systems, especially for on-time, accurate and complete reports from the bottom-up. The platform had been useful, not only for follow-up project progress across the project, but also for sharing the health management of the information system of MOH.

Furthermore, weekly meetings had been held to ensure that project activities were completed within time and budget. For instance, to follow up the project progress, a direct phone call to those concerned was made during the meetings (e.g. to track the issues of training postponed by the implementation agencies). Also, the lessons from the past were raised for consideration (e.g. the delay of Ministerial Decree for individual sub-activities). Furthermore, there were detailed recommendations for what to do, how to do it, who to contact, and who should do what and when (e.g. preparing the training proposal in advance though the guidelines were still in the development process).

In addition, the annual review meeting was held as formal practices of lessons learned for the future. During the annual review meeting, project information and lessons were shared and drawn across the process. Firstly, the presentation of project performance informed all participants to know what had been achieved and what the challenges of individual activities were. For example, training on the use of the Free Delivery Guidelines was provided to the implementing agencies. However, there were no progress reports from some districts and hence clarification from the provinces concerned was needed.

During the question and answer session, several provinces thus pointed out their challenges to implementation. Salavanh province, for instance, provided reasons such as, some health facilities were in temporary conditions, moving of trained staff to a new position, lack of female health staff, and unavailability of information for ethnic groups. The detailed and specific information would presumably lead to effective solutions. Also, to ensure the compliance, there were discussions on common problems faced, such as the transportation fee for sending the pregnant women to give birth at the district or provincial hospitals. Since there were no detailed guidelines on this issue, further revision of the Guidelines was recommended.

Furthermore, there were group discussions on five specific work areas: 1) overall supervision at the implementing agencies, 2) coordinating and reporting, 3) financial management, 4) procurement, and 5) monitoring and technical assistance. Using the SWOT tool, individual group members were able to analyze their work areas in detail. On the other hand, the presentation of discussion results enabled all concerned to know more about each work area, in particular its challenges. In essence, to solve the problems effectively, each group could take lessons learned from the opinions shared by all concerned, and especially the Project Director's recommendations. For example, some of the Project Director's recommendations for the procurement issues were a need to estimate at least three months before procurement due to delayed procurement, developing the procurement manual for the World Bank projects specifically to ensure consensus procurement procedures, and others.

Not only the meetings, but the minutes could also be used as lessons learned as they documented in detail the issues raised, the opinions provided by individual

representatives, and recommendations of the Project Director. In short, it recorded in detail who said what on particular issues during the meetings. In this manner, the minutes can become good lessons for other or future projects. In addition to the minutes, the reports on project progress (e.g. weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annually and annually) could also be used as lessons learned as these reports, not only described the project progress, but the challenges that the project team encountered and the actions taken in detail.

In addition, to achieve project goals as planned, capacity building was highly required, not only for the project team at the central level, but at the local level as well. There had been provisions for training on procurement and financial management for the implementing agencies. Therefore, the decentralization approach would help strengthen the capacity of local health personnel, in particular the project management skills and competence.

Apart from learning within the project, there was learning across the projects as well. For instance, some had made use of the procurement records which were archived systematically as lessons learned. Others had used their personal connections to obtain resources needed or lessons learned from other people outside the project, such as colleagues or friends from other organizations. The relationships had been built through various channels such as through a bridging person, the trainings held by the project, and the meetings for all projects being assisted by the World Bank and/or ADB. For instance, the portfolio meeting held by the World Bank and ADB, not only provided for all participants from various ministries to share and draw lessons learned with each other during the meeting, but after as well. This is pointed to the fact that personal contacts were exchanged during meetings for the on-going sharing of project information and lessons after the meetings.

However, while some members had attempted to learn from other projects, others had not preferred to do so due to the belief of differences in operating procedures. Further, it was argued that since the people outside the project were irrelevant to the project, they had no knowledge about the project. Despite that fact, other projects might have had useful lessons in dealing with particular problems which emerged during project implementation.

The findings of Project B are seemingly similar and also different from Project A. The extent of similarities and differences of the two projects, and also of Project C, will be discussed further in Chapter 5. The next section thus introduces findings from Project C as the last case study before the cross-case analysis of the three projects.

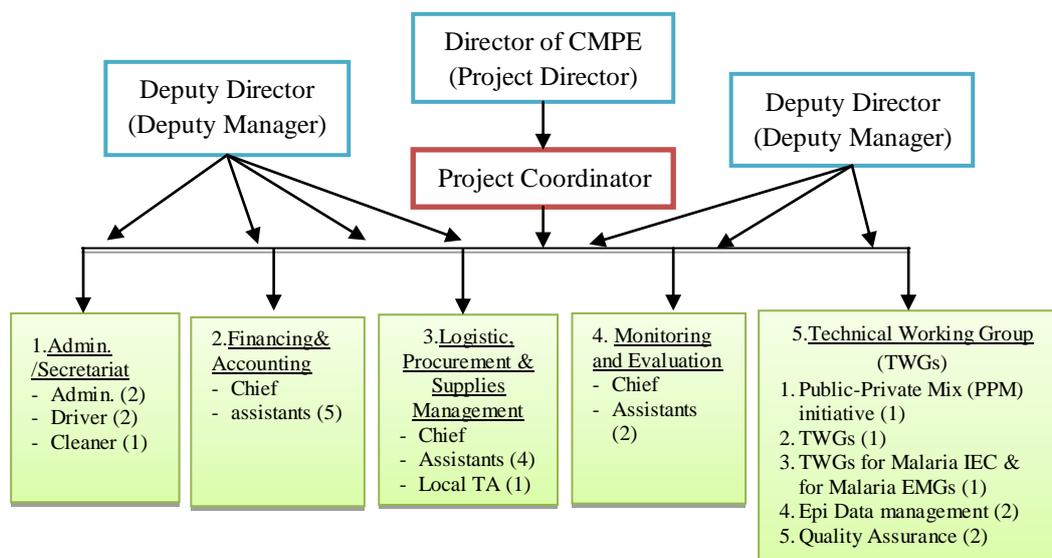
### **4.3 Malaria Project (Project C)**

#### **4.3.1 Requirements and Conditions for Project Implementation**

Certainly, the requirements and conditions for project implementation were similar to other projects being supported by the Global Fund. However, there could be some differences in practices. Thus, the following sections present the actual practices of the Malaria project.

##### **4.3.1.1 Program Management Structure**

Fundamentally, the program consisted of five main Units. The first three Units were supervised by a Deputy Director and the Project Coordinator. Firstly, the Administration or Secretariat Unit consisted of five members: two administrative staff, two drivers and a cleaner. The second Unit was the Financing and Accounting Unit including six members: a Chief and five assistants. The third Unit was Logistic, Procurement and Supplies Management which consisted of six members including the chief and the Technical Assistant (TA). Fourthly, the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit consisted of three members. Finally, there were five Technical Working Groups (TWGs), namely 1) Public-Private Mixed (PPM) Initiative, 2) TWGs, 3) TWGs for Malaria IEC & for Malaria EMGs (for ethnic minority groups), 4) Epidemic Data Management, and 5) Quality Assurance. The last two Units were supervised by another Deputy Director and Project Coordinator, while the Director of CMPE served as Project Director to provide guidance and oversight to the project. Figure 4.16 displays the structure of the Global Fund-Malaria Control Project of CMPE.



**Figure 4.16** Structure of the Global Fund-Malaria Control Project of CMPE

#### 4.3.1.2 Standard Terms and Conditions

Like other Sub-recipients, there were standard terms and conditions for complying. Noticeably, the Original Program Grant Agreement for Malaria component Round 7 was similar to the HIV component Round 8 or Single Stream Funding Round. The Round 7 standard terms and conditions consisting of 43 articles had also been applied to the project. However, there were some more special terms and conditions for compliance. For instance, the Principal Recipient was required to provide 1) evidence of a system for conducting an annual internal audit of the use of Grant funds under the program by no later than 30 September of each year, 2) evidence of an analysis of all salary incentive and related payment schemes, and 3) the Procurement, Use and Supply Management Improvement Plan (GFATM, 2013g: 4).

Among those standard terms and conditions, there were some important articles that needed to be paid close attention to in terms of its actual practices. These are program financial management, logistic, procurement and supplies management, monitoring and evaluation, and progress reports. The actual practices of these articles are as follows.

##### 1) Program Financial Management

Like other Sub-recipients, CMPE had strictly followed the Financial Guidelines to ascertain its overall compliance and accountability to the

Global Fund requirements and conditions. In essence, there was a contract accounting specialist responsible specifically for the Financial Unit to ensure effective management of the grant funds.

Undoubtedly, CMPE was audited both internally and externally as other Sub-recipients. The internal audit was conducted by the Principal Recipient Office, while the external ones by the local fund agents. In addition to these, there was an additional audit by the Office of Inspector General which was specifically hired by the Global Fund to conduct an extra audit.

An obvious example of its compliance to the Financial Guidelines was the filing systems of the related financial documents and records. Generally, the filing systems in the Financing and Accounting Unit were quite well organized and in order. In fact, not only the financial documents and records had been maintained properly and systematically, but other Units maintained the same standards as well. The project documents and records had been kept in binders with proper names and in proper cupboards. Figures 4.17-4.19 show the filing systems of the Finance Section, the Global Fund Malaria Control Project Office at CMPE, and Administration Division, respectively.





**Figure 4.19** Filing Systems of Administration Section

Another obvious practice of proper filing systems was in the Epidemiology Section where there was maintenance of a pile of documents collected across the country. The documents were kept in proper binders and names separated by individual provinces and year such as “Salavanh Province 2013” (as shown in Figure 4.20). Within each binder, the documents were divided into 12 months.



**Figure 4.20** Filing Systems of the Epidemiology Section

With regard to the maintenance of documents and records, the same applied to the Logistic, Procurement and Supplies Management Unit. For instance, according to the Program Grant Agreement of Round 7, the Unit was required to maintain appropriate records of all fixed assets purchased with the Grant funds (GFATM, 2008: 11). Indeed, the Unit has even stored separately the records of IDPs and government funds as shown in Figure 4.21 below.



**Figure 4.21** Filing System of the Logistic and Procurement Section

The practices were thus consistent with the Guidelines which specify that the filing of hardcopies of documents should be maintained by disease by per GFATM Round (MOH, 2011c: 49). Doing so would undoubtedly facilitate the accessibility to documents effectively when needed. Indeed, when the researcher asked for particular documents and records, most team members were able to find them within a few minutes.

Not only filing of hard documents, the soft ones were also maintained through the use of advanced ICT systems. A database program had been specifically developed since Round 4 by the WHO expert, who was a consultant to CMPE, to manage and run the huge files of data collected from the provinces. Also, the program was used to effectively facilitate the search of particular data needed. In effect, the program had been improved overtime to meet the increased number of indicators and practical needs. Significantly, the program was accessible by those involved whenever they were needed regardless of time and place, and hence had been admittedly convenient and effective by the users.

In addition, there was the use of an advanced ICT program called “Dropbox” to manage and store such huge files of data and information collected throughout the country. An intranet system via server also used to share the information within and across the units (i.e. within the Logistic, Procurement and Supplies Management Unit). The program and server enabled all involved to learn about the progress or updated information of the program execution daily and monthly or wherever needed.

In fact, CMPE also had its own policies on management of documents and records. This was evident in the ‘Manual for SOPs of Reporting Forms on Malaria Epidemiology and Products’. The Manual had specified that all data should be maintained in proper binders as well as in the computer. Also, there should be back-up in CDs, USB, and external hard drives (CMPE, 2014: 6). All of these practices were therefore consistent with the Global Fund’s requirements and conditions specified in the Program Grant Agreement, as well as in the Project Financial Guidelines in relation to the maintenance and retention of project documents and records.

## 2) Logistic, Procurement and Supplies Management

Similar to other Sub-recipients, the procurement practices of CMPE Sub-recipient must comply with the requirements specified in the Program Grant Agreement. To ensure the compliance to the requirements, the Division of Logistic and Procurement responsible for the Logistic, Procurement and Supplies Management Unit applied the '2009 Manual for Procurement of Goods and Services for the Global Fund-assisted program' as guidance to the procurement practices. Further, there had been a contract procurement specialist and an assistant to the procurement specialist specifically for the Procurement Unit.

For the logistic management, there was the use of the 'LMIS (Logistic Management Information System) Manual' published in June 2008 for the Global Fund project. The Manual had been developed by the MOH to provide detailed and specific aspects of Procurement and Logistic System regulation in each level in order to meet the demand and requirement of the Global Fund specifically. To be more specific, the Manual provided guidance to the Project Procurement Unit, Health Centers, Provincial Health Department and District Health Department to achieve regularity and uniformity of procurement and logistic procedures, efficiency and economy, and transparency in use of the Grant Fund from the Global Fund.

The Manual helped personnel collect and manage the information necessary to support objective decision making in managing the supply chain. The goal of this decision making is to ensure an uninterrupted supply of commodities and to identify any problems in the supply pipe-line. The Manual was composed of all the forms and documentation used to maintain records and produce reports on the logistics system.

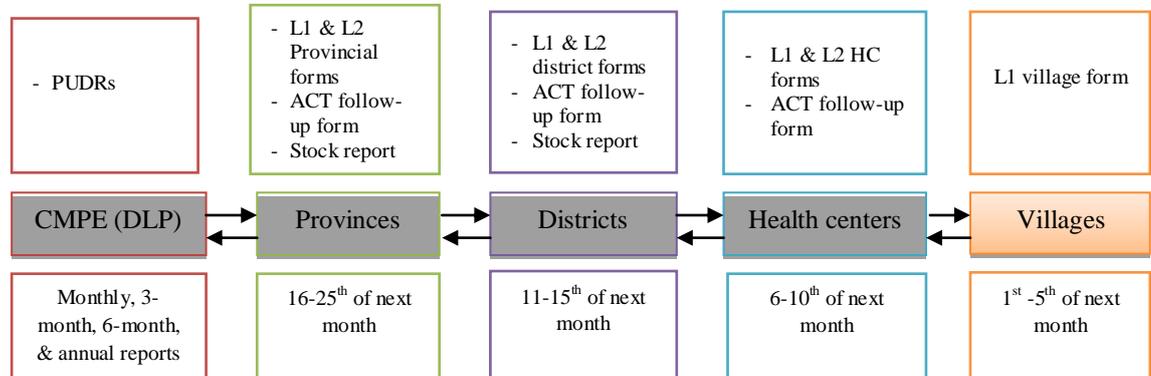
Despite this Manual, it has been challenging to effectively manage the logistic and procurement systems. The challenges were evident in the procurement plan which was sometimes over or insufficient with the actual needs. This was because the data collection and reporting systems were ineffective, and hence resulted in the failure of some indicators. To be consistent with the actual application, CMPE had thus specifically developed the 'Manual for Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT) and Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs) Reports' (for Provincial Malaria stations), under the Grant funds in 2011. Generally, the Manual

provided standard operating procedures (SOPs) for reporting the ACT and RDTs at each level, such as indicators of logistic management, distribution and schedule of report submission. To effectively manage the supply chain, each level also had its own forms to be recorded for any receipts and uses of ACT and RDTs (CMPE, 2012).

However, it appeared that the old reporting systems were still less effective. Thus, in order for effective data collection and reports, two logistic reports were separated: stock-in and stock-out. The stock-in reports relied heavily on the use of an online web-form, <https://cmpe.wufoo.eu/forms/stock/>, which has been developed by the CMPE's Technical Advisor in 2012. For the stock-in report, the provincial logistic officers called and collected quantities of essential commodities in hand (in stock) at the district stations and hospitals of the province every Friday. The provincial logistic officers communicated it to the Logistic and Procurement Unit of CMPE via the online web-form. Only the data entered on Friday was taken into account in the system. Every Monday, the Logistic Unit at CMPE downloaded and analyzes the data entered from the web-form. The data and results were then shared with the provinces in order to help them better evaluate the needs and plan more efficiently the delivery of the right quantities of essential commodities at the district stations and hospitals. Every two weeks, on the first and the third Mondays of every month, this data was sent to the provinces in a report by fax and email. The report provided the provinces with information on commodities stock in hand and put them in perspective with the consumption forecast. The Logistic Unit also added some recommendations of what actions should be taken.

For the stock-out reports, there was the use of several forms and Excel database to collect data across the country. All of the forms recorded were submitted to the respectively higher level within five days of the next month. For instance, after the end of the month, the villages submitted the ACT and RDT follow-up form-L1/village level to the health center or District by the 5<sup>th</sup> of next month. The ACT and RDT data and reports submitted by the Provincial Malaria Stations were entered into the Excel database which was prepared separately by individual provinces. The stock-out report of ACT and RDT across the country was submitted quarterly to the Principal Recipient Office (CMPE, 2012). In general, the report summarizes such data as stock-in, stock-out, number of patients, and balance in stock.

The delivery and stock-out reporting systems of ACT and RDTs from each level are illustrated in Figure 4.22.



**Figure 4.22** Distribution and Stock-out Reporting Systems of ACT & RDTs

Thus, to ensure that the new forms and reporting systems were well understood by the implementing sites, CMPE held a 3-day workshop for the provinces on November 25-27 2013 prior to its use.

### 3) Monitoring and Reporting of Project Progress

#### (1) Monitoring and Evaluation

As other Sub-recipients, CMPE had the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit to monitor and evaluate the project progress and challenges of implementing sites (provincial, district, health center, and village) according to the set schedule. The Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, responsible by the Division of Epidemiology, had initially used ten forms to monitor malaria data across the country such as Form 1: Daily records of blood test for malaria (Village level), and Form 2: Daily records of blood test of in- and out-patients (Health Center level). The forms had been used to specifically monitor the Malaria Epidemiology. However, data collection and reporting systems for effective planning of the strategies and policies had been challenging. It appeared that the malaria data reported by each level was ineffective. For example, some did not submit the reports, while some reports submitted were not on time or incorrect and incomplete, and hence failed to meet the timely, accurate and complete indicator set by the Principal Recipient. Further, the forms were unable to meet the needs to collect additional data, especially during the

heavy epidemic seasons (e.g. the number of patients within the province and from other provinces, foreigners, etc.). As a consequence, in 2012, CMPE had attempted to modify and improve the forms to become more consistent with actual the application at each level, as well as to meet the set indicators. Prior to the actual use, the forms had been piloted in Savannakhet and Champasack provinces, the southern provinces where there had been high cases of malaria.

In fact, the forms developed since Round 1 with only a few indicators, had been continuously adapted and modified, approximately every 2-3 years. Up to the present, the forms had been improved at least five times, of which the latest was at the end of 2013. The latest adaptation and modification resulted in the 'Manual for SOPs of Reporting Forms on Malaria Epidemiology and Products' (CMPE, 2014). The Manual was used as guidance to collect Malaria epidemiology data on time, accurately, and completely at all levels. The data collected enabled effective management and planning consistent with the strategies for the National Malaria Control and Malaria eradication in the future. In essence, the Manual was updated one year after the implementation in order to become more consistent with actual needs.

Apparently, to be more effective while saving resources, CMPE had reduced and modified the Malaria Epidemiology forms. In the meantime, because other Units had also regularly monitored and evaluated their activities, CMPE had combined the logistic and IEC forms together with the Malaria data collection forms. The combined forms were prepared as a logbook of A3 size (29.7 x 42 cm) for reporting epidemiology data and malaria surveillance; that is to collect the Malaria, logistic, and IEC data from all levels - health centers to provinces. Further, the logbook was prepared separately for each level such as the Logbook for Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT) and Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs) Distribution (for village level strata 02 and for District and Provincial levels), and the Logbook for Blood Test and Logistic Report (for Health Center Level).

In addition to these forms, the Manual included other necessary forms such as records and summary of blood test (field visit), questionnaires for malaria cases, reports on epidemic, and monthly additional reports (CMPE, 2014). In effect, CMPE provided training on the use of the Logbooks and

Manual to the provinces at the end of November, 2013. The provinces then held training for lower levels (district, health center and village). After the training, the Logbooks and Manual were distributed to all implementing agencies nationwide in May, 2014.

## (2) Programmatic Progress Reports

After collecting data, each level was required to regularly report their progress back to the higher levels within the required schedule. For instance, the villages were required to submit all malaria data recorded to the health center or district (for the villages that do not belong to the health center) by the 5<sup>th</sup> of the next month. Then, the health center officers checked and aggregated the forms from villages and health centers, and submit to the District Malaria Station by the 10<sup>th</sup> of next month. The District Malaria Station checked, aggregated and analyzed all data collected from the village, health center and district levels as well as other health facilities (e.g. district, police, and army hospitals) before reporting to the Provincial Malaria Station and Provincial Health Department by the 15<sup>th</sup> of next month. The analyzed data was then sent back to the health centers monthly.

For the Provincial Malaria Station, it was required to check and analyze the forms from Districts, and to send data aggregated at the district levels to the Provincial Health Department and CMPE by the 25<sup>th</sup> of next month. However, prior to doing so, the Provincial Malaria Station was required to send the monthly summary to the Unit concerned by e-mail for checking and providing feedback. Another important reason for sending the summary by e-mail was to meet the timeframe which was an essential indicator - that is on-time submission of the report. The correctly analyzed data was then sent back to the district level.

For effective monitoring and supervision of project progress of the implementing agencies, there had been the establishment of special supervision teams. This special arrangement was derived from the fact that the reports submitted to individual Units (e.g. epidemical, logistic, IEC, and PPM) were still not on-time, were inaccurate and/or were incomplete as specified, and thereby affected the achievement of set indicators. The challenges of on-time, accurate and complete reports were highlighted by C9, a logistics staff:

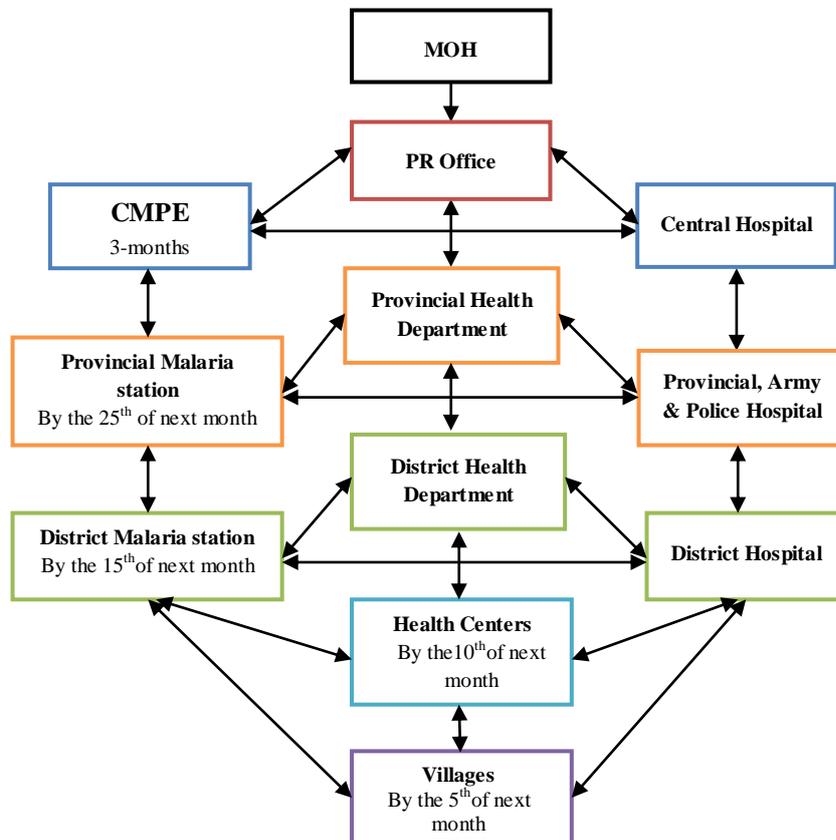
All Units are related to each other because the reports from each unit are compiled as the CMPE progress reports (before being submitted to the Principal Recipient). Supposed that the epidemic and PPM reports are complete, but not the logistic, the (on-time, accurate and complete) indicator is considered as failed. Achieving this indicator is really a challenging for us.

Each supervision team was responsible to a technical staff member (e.g. from the monitoring and evaluation, Logistic unit, etc.) and an assistant to follow up the weekly and monthly progress reports of one or two provinces. All activities reports would be submitted to the team who then sent them to each unit concerned. In addition, the team had to conduct field monitoring and supervision of all activities, except finance, every three months. During the supervision, proper advice may be needed by the implementers in order to improve the effectiveness of project execution. C9 explained the responsibility of supervision teams as follows:

Like, I work for the logistic and go to the site, I have to also monitor the epidemic, the PPM (Public-Private Mixed) activities. Similarly, if the PPM unit goes, they have to also monitor my work (the logistics) and provide advices or whatever you can help them (the implementers). It's like, one person goes can get 4-5 work done, not to waste the time. It's not like, the logistic goes and gets only the logistic work done.

At the central level, each Unit and the Technical Working Groups involved gathered and checked the data. All of the Provincial Malaria data sent via e-mail and being corrected were transmitted into the CMPE database. The corrected data was then analyzed by the web-based program which had been developed by the expert or consultant to the Unit. The final results were saved in the Dropbox program, to which all involved had access to as aforementioned. That is to say, there was the use of ICT advance to help manage the data effectively. Finally, CMPE prepared on-going progress updates and disbursement requests and submitted to the Principal Recipient office regularly as specified in the Grant Agreement.

The reporting systems of malaria data from the local to the central levels are demonstrated in Figure 4.23 below.



**Figure 4.23** Reporting Systems of Malaria Data

**Source:** CMPE, 2014: 10.

For the Transforming Funding Model grant, the CMPE Sub-recipient was required to provide “Period Reports” to the Principal Recipient regularly through the use of the programmatic progress updates and disbursement reports form as previous in Rounds. The reports were submitted relatively based on the indicators set. Some indicators were required to report every three, or six months, or even annually. The regular monitoring and reports within specified schedules were to ensure the effectiveness of project implementation. To meet such schedules, some members had become more disciplined with their work:

I would say that the M&E makes me become more responsible for what I'm doing. The figures or numbers reported (to the Principal Recipient) have to be accurate. In fact, the project has made me become more disciplined and thorough. I need to really work hard and pay a close attention to the work. I cannot simply behave like today I'm lazy I'm not working and taking it easy. (C6)

### (3) Weekly Meeting

In order to follow up the progress regularly, and also to solve the problems on time, CMPE had normally organized weekly meetings. The meeting was held, in fact, to follow up on the progress of all CMPE work or activities supported by the public and development partners. The meetings were commenced by the reports on the progress and challenges of individual sections such as Administration, Epidemiology, Entomology, Laboratory and Treatment, and Training-health Education. Following this, the project progress of all IDPs (e.g. Global Fund, ADB, WHO, etc.) was reported by the Project Coordinator and the technical advisors (e.g. for monitoring and evaluation, Procurement, and Finance). After each report, the Director would provide advice or recommendations for the challenges faced by individual projects which could become lessons for all:

When I attend the meeting, I'm able to understand and learn from others. I would say that attending the meeting is not a waste of time; I've learned many things there, like, logistic, procurement, and etc. (C6)

Each division will report how their activities are and what their challenges are. Sometimes, I realize that we have similar problems. So, what the Director advised, I'll take note and adapt to my work. (C10)

The weekly meetings were normally recorded as the weekly report to be submitted to the Department of Communicable Disease Control. The report was documented based on the format provided by MOH which included such contents as title of the meeting and date (e.g. Weekly report on 27-31/01/2014 and

plan for next week 03-07/02/2014), general status (e.g. number of staff and education degree, its divisions), the staff's compliance with the Party and Government rules and regulations, outstanding activities-what each section had done or achieved last week (e.g. the Administration Section had transferred funds to 17 provinces, the Epidemiology Section followed up the Malaria case reports in December, and monitored the training on the use of new epidemiological and logistic forms for district and health center staff at Luangnamtha and Borkeo provinces from 27/01-07-02/2014; etc.), Plan for the next week-what each Section will do (e.g. the Epidemiology Section will continue preparing the information for the Progress Updates and Disbursement Requests or PUDR for Q1 and Q2 of the TFM), and proposal. However, if there were urgent issues needed to be solved or discussed on time, a special meeting would be held immediately. The minutes of the meeting would be recorded based on the CMPE format.

Before the year 2012, CMPE had used a number of administrative forms separately for each IDP and administration division. These were specific forms for the requests, minutes of the meetings, invitation, notice or announcement, and so on and so forth. Further, the forms used in each section appeared to be different and confusing. As a consequence, the forms had been adapted to a general format for the entire Center, regardless of the types of work. For the minutes, it consisted of such contents as the title of the meeting, date, location, participants, objectives, content of the meeting, and conclusion (see Figure 4.38 for the meeting minutes form of CMPE).

Practically, the minute's heading was exactly the same as the format provided, while the contents were documented in detail and were specific. For instance, according to the minutes number 1805 dated 21/05/2012, the record contained the following contents: title of the meeting (e.g. the minutes: the meeting on termination of the incentives to Dr. Kongxay from the Malaria Control Program supported by the Global Fund); the meeting date and location (e.g. the meeting was held on June 21, 2012, at 11.00 and closed at 11.30, at the meeting room of CMPE); *participants* (e.g. there were altogether 05 participants as listed below); objectives of the meeting (e.g. to discuss on termination of the incentives from the Global Fund project to Dr. Kongxay, vice Chief of the Epidemiology Section, and Vice Chief of the

monitoring and evaluation unit of CMPE); content of the meeting (e.g. referring to the agreement of the health minister number 938/MOH dated June 15, 2012 on appointing Dr. Kongxay Luangphengsouk, vice Chief of Epidemiology Section, CMPE, to be the consultant to the disease surveillance and response for the Communicable Disease Control Project II of ADB grant number 0232 Lao-SF for 44 months from June 01, 2012 to December 31, 2015...); and conclusion (e.g. the meeting agreed upon the content aforementioned...).



#### 4.3.2.1 Within-Project Learning

Within the project, learning had occurred at both individual and collective levels from the attempt to improve the effectiveness of project implementation. The following sections will examine the mechanisms through which within-project learning took place.

##### 1) Learning from the Training

Training was an initial source of learning for the project team, especially the new members, because the Principal Recipient would usually provide training for the Sub-recipient before project implementation. During project execution, additional training would also be organized if there were any new policies issued by the Global Fund and/or modifications of the project guidelines. For instance, the Principal Recipient held a three-day training on the use of the modified version of the Logistic and Management of Information Systems in July 2012 to ensure the compliance of Sub-recipients and Sub-sub-recipients. Likewise, when there were modifications of the Financial Manual and accounting program, additional training was provided as C11, an accountant, stated:

Regardless of the Financial Manual, forms and program, there could be some changes after using it if it's not appropriate. And if there are any changes, they (the Principal Recipient) will organize training and/or on-site training. There is also on-site training because there is an accounting program of which the accounting firm is responsible for installing and providing training.

##### 2) Learning from Technical Advisors

Having recognized its limited capacity, CMPE has used the services of consultants or technical advisors since Round 1. The services were for such units as financial, logistic and procurement, epidemic, public-private mixed, and malaria control as a whole. To assist CMPE, the technical advisors' role was involved less in daily operational issues than in overall management, support, organization and procedural issues. Also, to build the capacity of CMPE staff, the technical advisor needed to identify staff needs. There would then be agreement on expected results,

methodology, resources, and timeframe. This specific skills transfer plan was part of the technical advisor action plan (MOH, 2011c: 60). A sample of the skills transfer plan format was provided as shown in Figure 4.25.

<b>SKILL TRANSFER PLAN</b>			Date:
<i>The objectives are defined following discussion. indicators should be SMART*</i>			
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Expected outcomes indicators</b>	<b>Activities involved</b>	<b>Contributing party(ies)</b>
EXAMPLE: The cash management in the office is transparent and reliable	After three months, the cashier is conducting cash management by him/herself without any mistakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design of a cashbook/cash count format</li> <li>• Recruitment of a cashier</li> <li>• Hand on training of the cashier</li> <li>• Supervision and assessment of the cashier</li> </ul>	Accountant Finance office
1.			
2.			
3.			
Other objectives (add lines as necessary)			
*Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time Framed			

**Figure 4.25** Sample of Skill Transfer Plan Form

**Source:** MOH, 2011c: 189.

Accordingly, despite the training, the technical advisors had to transfer technical skills to project team members who were CMPE staff during the course of project implementation. For instance, the technical advisor for the Epidemic Division, who had developed software programs for malaria data analysis and stock reports, transferred technical skills to CMPE staff on the use of such programs. This was mentioned by C1, a new project team member, whose responsibility was different from the organizational routine:

I mostly learned from the TA (technical advisor). They taught me how to collect data, how to analyze, and how to draw the graphs, something like this.

Similarly, C9 explained how the technical advisor for the Epidemic Division had assisted her as a new member:

I've learned about the reporting program from Olivia (the Technical Advisor). Olivia is the one who developed this (the database). Like, you tried this, tried that, the method to summarize the data like this and that, the excel table format. I've learned closely with Olivia. He's provided good advices. He'll help me anything that I ask.

In addition to the technical skills, the Project Director specifically requested the Technical Advisor to hold training on project management skills for CMPE staff for project sustainability; that is to enable the staff to continue working once the project was completed as stressed by C10, a Technical Advisor:

Mostly, in the Center, the government officials are not good at management. They are all doctors who've never learned about project management before. But most of the divisions' work relates to administration. Like, there is a budget for each division, but they don't know how to manage it. So, I'll help them and guide them how to do budget plan, draft the report, and etc. This is to train the government official so that when the project is completed, they are able to continue.

#### 4) Learning from the Principal Recipient

In addition to learning from the Technical Advisor, the Principal Recipient was another crucial source of learning. When facing problems, most members preferred to approach the Principal Recipient rather than other people outside the project because they could provide the best instructions and definite decisions. C7 pointed out the reason why learning from the Principal Recipient was the most likely approach rather than other projects or organizations:

I didn't ask others because I work for the Global Fund only. Also, the PR (Principal Recipient) will come to monitor and supervise us frequently, around once a month, for the reporting. If which one is incorrect, the PR will provide further advices to us. And if our work is not consistent with the system, the PR will provide us comments.

#### 4) Learning from the Audits

Audits were a good source of project learning in particular for improving the effectiveness of project implementation. Project team members could take lessons learned from the weaknesses identified and commented by the auditors as *C11*, an accountant expressed:

I've got lots of lessons from the audit each year because they (the auditors) provided comments for us to improve our work. They commented on the improper expenses, signature of the receipts, the receipts with insufficient contents, inappropriateness of timeframe, and so on and so forth.

In fact, some admitted that their operating systems had been improved as a result of strict audits and thereby preferred more frequent monitoring and supervision by the Principal Recipient:

The audit is very good, I would say. It makes our operating systems better. Some may not like, but I think it's good because it makes us to be more careful with what we're doing. In the past, I had no idea. When the auditing period came, I could not sleep well and felt uncomfortable. But now, please come to check us. We ask the PR (Principal Recipient) to help us check our work. (C6)

The audit process itself had been taken as lessons learned for monitoring and supervision of the implementing agencies as *C6*, a monitoring and evaluation staff, expressed:

At first, I don't know how to check the data, but when I saw how they (the local fund agents) conducted the audit, I've learned how to check. There are auditing procedures as well as provision of advices. I've also learned how to file the documents properly to be ready for the audits and how to monitor the data submitted by the local.

## 5) The Practices of Lessons Learned

### (1) Annual Review Meeting

Initially, the malaria annual meeting was planned for June-July, after the completion of Round 7. However, CMPE held their annual meeting by the end of the year to review the 2012-2013 performance; that is Round 7 year 5 and Transforming Funding Model Quarter 1-2. Meanwhile, the Transforming Funding Model plan for 2013-2014 was also raised for discussion. In other words, the performance was reviewed based on the fiscal year, rather than the Round schedule.

The annual malaria meeting was held at the Meeting room of the Lao Electric Club (Thalad), Keo-oudome District, Vientiane Province. There were altogether 152 participants from various sectors and agencies, such as the Health Departments concerned, the Principal Recipients office, MPSC, the Health Poverty Action, the Army's Disease Prevention, provincial health offices, Provincial Malaria Station, CMPE, and the Media. The main objectives were to break down the technical and budget plans into detailed activities which were acceptable by the implementing agencies, and to ensure the achievement of the project goals as planned.

Across the 3-day meeting, lessons learned had been drawn and shared among participants. On the first day, all participants were able to firstly know about the 2012-2013 project performance on what they had achieved and how, what the challenges were, and how to deal with them for more effectiveness. For example, the performance of Round 7 year 5 provided such important information as a brief background of the project, total grants supported by GFATM since Round 1 in 2003 up to Transforming Funding Model, Malaria control networks and the flow of malaria information system (e.g. from 1,694 villages to 850 health centers to 140 districts to 17 provinces to CMPE), the confirmed malaria cases and death in each

province, drug resistance monitoring from 2009-2013, insecticide susceptibility of vectors (e.g. due to the population movements into the forest for rosewood trade, the source of the demand caters to both local, Vietnamese and Chinese business, the rapid pace of development with resultant hydro dams, plantations, road and rail construction with migrant workforce, etc.), malaria epidemic survey and control, IEC interventions (e.g. Tri-lingual messages-road side banners, billboards and posters), logistic management through the use of web page (e.g. for stock-in and stock-out reports), challenges (e.g. the national MDG indicator for malaria morbidity rate in 2015 is two persons per 1,000 population, but the cases increased from 2.76 in 2011 to 6.91 in 2012), and opportunities (e.g. cooperation from all sectors concerned, internally and externally).

Also, the presentation by the Health Poverty Action (HPA), an NGO partner funded by the European Commission for Humanity, could be good lessons learned for all participants. The presentation reported performance of the special project, in cooperation with CMPE, WHO, and the Global Fund to control the malaria epidemic in the South of Lao PDR from November 2011 to July 2013. These included project goals and objectives, expected results and strategies, and what had been done (e.g. malaria case survey in 304 targeted villages of 30 districts, found 2,040 positive cases from 27,726 cases, mostly were men aged 15-40 going to the forest; IEC for people staying overnight in the forest, road construction workers, etc.). Also, the strengths and weaknesses were shared as lessons learned for improving the networks and coordinating systems. For the strengths, the project was able to be implemented as planned based on the basic guidelines and due to the collaboration from all parties concerned including the army from the central to local levels. The weaknesses were a lack of skillful health personnel and budget for implementation during July till December 2013, and inappropriate measures initiated by the central level, though the endemic information was provided by the local level. Therefore, it was recommended that there should be the use of the government budget, and strategic adaptation by the implementing sites to be consistent with the local situations for more effectiveness.

Following this, the MPSC Director presented the process of logistics, procurement and supplies management, as well as the challenges found at

the local level, especially the management of health products and commodities in the store room. For more effectiveness, some raised such issues as, once the products arrived at the local store rooms, whose responsibility was reporting. In response to the issue, some recommended for the clear assignment of work for the district Food and Drug Unit and Malaria Unit, while others suggested for development of the manual for receiving health products at the district food and drug unit. Thus, to solve the problems, the Director of the Principal Recipient Office, as the Chairman, suggested (1) CMPE and MPSC to draft the instructions for implementation, (2) the malaria station should maintain health products in accordance with the MOH policy, and (3) the reporting responsibility of the health products stored at the district food and drug unit would be discussed further.

After that, the Principal Recipient Office reported the progress of each indicator, which provided all involved knowledge of how effective their performance was. For instance, the reports on public-private mixed activity was able to be submitted on time and complete with over 80%, the rate of suspected malaria cases being tested covered 100%, and so on and so forth.

Then, the representatives from Oudomxay Xiengkhuang, and Salavanh, provinces reported their performance (e.g. diagnosis and treatment, distribution of long lasting insecticide nets, stock reports, IEC, etc.), strengths and limitations, and the 2013-2014 plan. Different from those three provinces, Luangprabang and Savannakhet provinces shared the malaria epidemic and control lessons in their provinces. For instance, the Luangprabang representative presented the malaria epidemic and control in Ngoy district. The causes of the epidemic were from malaria workers who came back from hydro dams in Xayabouly Province. To control the epidemic, several measures were approached such as insecticide spray, diagnosis and treatment, provision of health products and budget, and IEC. The endemic was able to be controlled due to the close attention of all sectors involved. However, there were some limitations that needed to be improved such as late reports of malaria cases from villages to health centers and districts, and lack of spontaneous budget. Savannakhet malaria station presented a joint study on cross-border malaria epidemic of Savannakhet province (Lao PDR) and Quang Tri province (Vietnam). The study results showed several malaria related factors which were useful for a effective

malaria control program. For instance, there was no use of long lasting insecticide nets in Vietnam, but in Laos use was over 60 %. Further, the majority of them did not sleep under a bed net when in the forest. The malaria rate in Laos was higher than in Vietnam because Lao villages are near the forest, and the forest density in Laos is higher than in Vietnam.

For the second day, several technical issues were raised and discussed throughout the day. For instance, following the presentation on the plan for provisions of bed nets to pregnant women and targeted populations in each province, the implementing sites raised several issues such as 1) provisions of bed nets were estimated based on which criteria, 2) how to calculate for the case where the infected rate had been changed in villages of stratification 2 to 3, 3) the number of bed nets to be distributed in stratification 3 in each province, 4) the budget for emergent cases, and 5) the late delivery of Malaria commodities from the central to the local level. Thus, to ensure effective implementation, the Principal Recipient and CMPE responded to such inquiries as follows: 1) the estimation plan was based on population size, the provincial and district geography, and the rate of infection and cases; 2) the province should provide proper documents to confirm such changes in villages for the future plan; 3) there needed further discussion for the decrease of bed nets in the North where there was no Malaria case, and increase to the South with high Malaria incidents; and 4) the Provincial Malaria Station should request for emergency budget from the Government for fast response to a malaria outbreak.

The technical issues were further raised and discussed on the third day of the meeting such as 1) the distribution of each type of bed net such as family nets, nets for pregnant women, single nets, and jungle nets, and 2) the provincial reports on the re-treated bed nets indicator. The discussion was based on various options proposed such as the long lasting insecticide nets distributed in the last four years (2010-2013), comparison of the initial plan in 2009 with the numbers of positive cases found in February 2012 to July 2013, and the positive cases in district strata from September 2012 to August 2013. After the dynamic discussion, the results of long lasting insecticide nets distribution plan had eventually been reached. For instance, 1) single nets would be distributed to the forest goers in six Southern provinces from Khammuan to Attapue provinces where the positive cases were high,

2) the bed nets for pregnant women should be available at the health centers and strata 2 and 3 of the villages and 3) each province should submit the list of villages needing long lasting insecticide nets, the size of each village, and stratification of each village.

In addition, for the effective maintenance of Malaria commodities, several solutions were raised for consideration such as maintenance of the bed nets in the regional warehouse, storage of the drugs and rapid diagnostic tests, as well as bed nets at the provinces or districts. To solve the problems, the chairman thus recommended CMPE and MPSC to draft the standard operating procedures for the maintenance of Malaria commodities at regional, provincial and district levels.

In addition to the technical issues, the financial report was another important lesson for improving project effectiveness. The financial information and lessons derived from the presentation by the Finance Unit of the Principal Recipient Office included 1) summary of year 5, Round 7 budget and expenses, 2) sources of grants received and provincial expenses or grant absorption, 3) challenges of project implementation, and 4) issues found from the audit. The financial summary was quite specific and easy to understand. It showed how much the project had spent and for what (e.g. 50 % for health products and instruments, 14% for monitoring and evaluation, 3 % for consultants; etc.), and which provinces were able or unable to absorb the grant and how much. For example, the majority of provinces were able to absorb the budget (e.g. 100% for Xiengkhuang, Bolikhamxay and Salavan provinces), while Bokeo and Luangprabang provinces were able to absorb less than 50%. Despite the achievement, there were many limitations needed to be taken into account such as the late submission of provincial reports (e.g. Phongsaly and Salavan provinces), and the late approval of grant funds and hence limited time for implementation of some activities (e.g. unable to implement the IEC for treated bed nets and collecting the local reports). Also, the issues found from the audits could be lessons for those involved as it was pointed out in detail and specifics such as late clearance of advance (e.g. Savannakhet, Champasack, and Sekong provinces), no update of fixed assets (CMPE), in-stock health products less than the list (CMPE), and inconsistencies of the receipts and contents (e.g. Phongsaly, Khammuan, and Salavan provinces). In addition, there were specific recommendations for effective implementation. For example, the provinces should follow up on the annual budget

provided by the central level and absorb the funds on time and correctly as specified, and all expenses should be summarized in the same monitoring table and deducted from the bank accounts.

Therefore, it was apparent that project progress and challenges were shared on the first day, while the last two days focused more on discussions of the problems faced and lessons drawn for the following years. The practices indeed provided more options to problem-solving and eventually led to acceptable solutions. Further, for effective project implementation, specific recommendations were provided-who should do what and how in each particular area of work such as project management, financial, logistic, and IEC.

Minutes of the meeting were another possible source of learning for the project team as well as other projects given the minutes were documented in detail and specifics for each heading. The minutes, consisting of seven pages, included such contents as 1) title of the meeting, 2) references, 3) overall goals and specific objectives, 4) date and location, 5) participants (e.g. list of representatives), 6) agenda of the meeting, 7) contents of the meeting (e.g. the challenges and solutions), and the meeting results (e.g. strengths and weaknesses of project performance), 8) proposal of the meeting, and 9) agreement of the meeting.

Within each heading, the contents were grouped into particular topics. For instance, the contents of the Agenda of the Meeting were divided into three main areas: 1) project management (e.g. presentation on the 2012-2013 project performance and plan for 2013-2014, logistic of MPSC, and distribution of the long lasting insecticide nets by the Principal Recipient Office), 2) the technical part (e.g. presentation on technical part included the Malaria endemic control in six southern provinces by HPA, malaria epidemic surveillance of Salavanh province; cross-border study on Malaria control of Savannakhet Province; management of malaria control program of Xiengkhuang and Luangprabang Provinces; indicator achievement of Oudomxay province; and LMIS introduced by the Principal Recipient Office); and 3) the financial presentation on the summary of year 5 Round 7 budget and plan for year 1 of the Transitional Funding Mechanism. Likewise, the Contents of the Meeting were documented in detail of what topics were raised for discussion and what were the solutions taken on each day. For instance, day 1 (04/11/2013) was for

(1.1) Provincial and District Logistics (maintenance of drugs, test kits, bed nets, and instruments). Figure 4.26 shows a sample of the format and contents recorded in the minutes.

<p>V. Contents of the Meeting</p> <p>1. Day 1 (04/11/2013)</p> <p>1.1. Provincial and district logistic (maintenance of drugs, test kits, bed nets, and instruments):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Issues discussed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- After handover of instruments to provincial, district, and health center levels, who would be responsible for the report;</li> <li>- There should be operating guidelines for keeping the health products at the warehouse of the Food and Drug Division; and so on and so forth.</li> </ul> </li> <li>❖ Solutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MPSC and CMPE will draft the operating guidelines; etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>1.2 Long lasting insecticide nets distribution plan for the Global Fund project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Issues discussed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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**Figure 4.26** A Sample of the Format and Contents Recorded in the Minute

Also, the Agreement of the Meeting was divided into three groups: management (e.g. MPSC and CMPE will prepare the Standard Operating Procedures for maintenance of the health products at the regional, provincial, and district levels, etc.), distributions of long lasting insecticide nets, and finance. Recording in this manner would enable the readers to understand what issues were faced by the project team and implementing agencies, how they attempted to solve them, and what actions they had taken throughout the three-day meeting.

#### (1) Continuous Modification of Project Manuals and ICT Systems

Other lessons-learned practices were the continuous adaptation and modification of the Project Manuals and improvement of the ICT systems. Since the first Round in 2003 until present, it appeared that most of the Project Manuals had been continuously adapted and modified. The main purpose of continuous adaptation and modification was to become consistent with the practical application and actual conditions of the country in a particular period of time. The Project Manuals being adapted and modified included the Manuals, standard operating

procedures (SOPs), and forms which had been used by several Units. These included the ‘Manual for Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT) and Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs) Reports’ (for Provincial Malaria stations), and the ‘Manual for SOPs of Reporting Forms on Malaria Epidemiology and Products. Likewise, the ICT programs used for managing malaria data and information had also been adapted and modified in order to meet the actual needs and requirements.

Apparently, ICT tools have been heavily used for the effective management of malaria data and information. The Excel program was seemingly used as a database by several units such as for summary report of stock-out, stock reports, malaria epidemiological data, and logistics and supplies management. Also, there had been the use of advanced ICT programs for effective reports of data and information. For instance, the Logistics Unit had used a web-based platform called WUFOO (e.g. <https://cmpe.wufoo.eu/forms/stock/>) as a stock-in reporting system of the Logistics and Management of Information Systems. In addition, there had been the use of Dropbox for reporting, storing, and retrieving the malaria epidemiological data. The effectiveness of ICT advanced programs had been admitted by project team members as follows:

For the project data and information, it's now getting much better. Olivia (the Technical Advisor) had created a database for us, and we can get whichever information stored in the Dropbox. So, whoever works at wherever is able to know & update the project information if there's internet. In the past, if I wanted to get the information about children under five, we needed a week to summarize from each province, district, and etc. But now if I want to get such information, it'll take only 2 minutes. (C6)

All of the ICT systems have been developed by the Technical Advisors as technical consults to CMPE, under the support of the Global Fund Grants since Round 1. In effect, the IT programs used had been improved all the time to meet the actual needs and applications. The advanced ICT programs, which had been developed and improved specifically for each particular area of work, have

indeed become one major source of learning for the CMPE staff in terms of technical and computing skills.

#### 4.3.2.2 Cross-Project Learning

Not only learning within the project, but there was also learning from other projects. This included the use of past project experience and documents, as well as learning from the past and/or other project team members as presented below.

##### 1) Use of Experience Accumulated

Some members accepted that the experience accumulated had been useful for the current project execution. For instance, the experience was used for the administrative work such as planning the work better, follow-up of the progress, documentation processes, and coordinating process. How useful the past project experience was to the current project was described by C10, a Technical Advisor, as follows:

Because I used to work on many areas for the past projects like writing the report, budget planning like this. So for this project, I'm able to apply and adapt a little bit to be consistent with the actual needs. Basically, the experience from past projects was very helpful for this project.

Not only for the current project, the past project experience had been used even for future projects as stressed by C5, Project Manager, as follows:

It appears that the experience or lessons learned from the past projects were used in the actual work, especially for the present project as I'm responsible for the Global Fund project. The past project experience is very useful because it helps us to get supports ranging from Round 4, 7, and TFM. And currently, I'm preparing the proposal for, they called: New Funding Model, which is coming soon.

## 2) Learning from Past Documents and Team Members

Past project documents were perceived to be crucial for the current project. The past project documents were primarily used as references for preparing and developing the project proposal. During program execution, numerous documents and forms developed during the previous Rounds have been continuously applied in the current project, given it was the extension of Round 7. For example, the Technical Working Groups for Malaria IEC used the “2006 Manual for Health Education and Communication” to communicate or provide knowledge to the people at risk in order to prevent and control malaria. Likewise, other Units (e.g. the Financing, Logistic, Procurement and Supplies Management, and monitoring and evaluation) had also continued to use the past project documents and forms. In addition, the past project documents and Manuals were an important source of learning for the new members. These included the 2008 Logistics Management Information Systems Manual, the 2011 Manual for Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT) and Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs) Reports (for Provincial Malaria stations), and the 2014 Manual for SOPs of Reporting Forms on Malaria Epidemiology and Products.

In spite of the project manuals, some were unable to understand, especially for the new comers, and hence learning directly from past project team members was highly needed and possibly more effective. In essence, although the past project team members were working worked for a new organization, they were accessible and willing to help when needed as C6 stated:

We still keep contact with each other. Sometimes, he came to help us. If we call him to help us, he'll come. Sometimes, there is something that I don't understand, I also ask him.

Similarly, C1, as a new member, had learned from the seniors and past project team members who were now working for other divisions. The learning occurred through both telephone and face-to-face mentors:

I've got colleagues who used to work here before. Whenever I ask them, they'll help me. And I also learned from senior staff who used to work here before but now work for other jobs.

Therefore, it can be said that the past project documents and team members were important sources of learning for the present project team members.

### 3) Learning from Other Projects and Organizations

As other IDPs, there have not only been uses of past and other project documents, but also other documents such as documents of other IDPs within and across CMPE, and the information from implementing sites and/or other organizations concerned. Other documents were first used as references to support the development and preparation of the proposal. For instance, given the transport costs specified by the Global Fund were different from the company, the transport budget needed to refer to the companies' documents for the employees of private companies to attend the discussion meeting *as* C10 emphasized:

Supposed that I prepare the budget for private companies to attend the discussion meeting based on the Global Fund's guidelines, but their transport costs are like this. If they don't get the company's rate, they won't attend. So, I need to have their documents as references for the Global Fund.

During project execution, there was the usage of manuals and forms developed by other IDPs. For instance, the "Guidelines on Quality Control for Malaria Microscopy," which were published in October 2011 under the WHO funded project (CMPE, 2011), had been applied for Malaria tests at three levels: district, provincial and regional. Furthermore, within the Logistics and Procurement Unit, there was the use of the '2008 Manual for Workers of Warehouses in Laos,' which was published by the Strengthening Medical Logistic Project of MPSC, under the support of JICA. Specifically for the Financial Unit, it needed to refer, not only to the project financial manuals, but other relevant documents as well. These included

guidance or notices from the Ministry of Finance which informed about the financial regulations, and important documents or letters from the Principal Recipient Office to inform of any amendments of the policies and practices in accordance with the Global Fund's requirements. This was highlighted by an accountant, C11:

Apart from the project financial manual, there are other modified or additional documents each year. These are documents from outside that I need to know, like from Ministry of Finance. It's a decree on expenditures or regulations of the Ministry of Finance, so I have to refer to them for compliance. Further, the Principal Recipient Office also had changed in accordance with the Ministry of Finance's rules and regulations.

Not only documents, but there was also learning from other projects or organizations. For instance, during the annual review meetings, the Health Poverty Action, an NGO partner funded by the European Commission for Humanity, shared their lessons learned on the malaria epidemic control in the South of Lao PDR from November 2011 to July 2013 (see the 'Annual Review Meeting' section for more details). The meetings allowed all participants to learn and exchange lessons with one another. To continuously improve effectiveness of project implementation, learning from other projects after the meetings was also perceived as crucial and necessary as C10 said:

May be their operating procedures are different from us; data collection methods may also be different from us. When attending the meeting, we need to compare ours is like this, theirs is like that. So, we need to get information from them in order to get new experience and knowledge about their methods after the meeting.

Also, there was learning from other Sub-recipients who presented their issues during the meetings at the Principal Recipient Office, especially for the head of the units. However, some preferred to discuss with others outside the

project to exchange information and lessons such as old classmates, and friends from other organizations or other Ministries as C11 noted:

I discussed with friends who used to study together to exchange lessons learned, like, friends who graduated from Parpasak (College classmates) together, friends from Dongdok (University classmates) or from other organizations, other ministries or from our own Ministry. I discussed with them about the processes, like how they work, and whether their procedures are the same with mine or not. I also discussed with them when I faced with the problems or difficulties from the audit each year.

Apart from asking, I also exchange information with them and learn from them. I told them my lessons learned were like this and that, and they shared with me their information. Sometimes, I take their information and use them. Like, if their forms are good, I'll use them.

Importantly, some obtained the information needed from other organizations through a past project team member who was now working for that organization. That is there was the use of a bridging person to access other organizations' information. For example, C10 explained how the information needed from other organizations was obtained:

When I need information about the epidemic across the country from the Epidemiological Center, I'll ask Dr. Kongxay (a past project team member) who is now working there, like, can I please have this and that information. If it's not concerned about the Centre's confidentiality, they'll provide me. And if it's very official, they'll ask for submission of the request.

Therefore, it could be said that learning from others occurred through formal and informal approaches. The formal approaches took place through

the meetings as the formal practices of lessons learned, while the informal ones were through the use of personal relations. In addition, learning from other organizations had taken place during the visit to a particular organization. For example, C7 described how learning from the logistics system of MPSC happened when going to get the health products maintained at the MPSC warehouse:

It's not an official visit. It's just like when I go to take the health products at the Xiengda Warehouse (MPSC warehouse), I've noticed their operating procedures, which one should be adapted to our storage. Their system (storage system) is JICA system which seems to be very good. So, I asked the staff about the system.

Accordingly, it was obvious that project-based learning had been facilitated by many mechanisms within and across projects. However, there existed some remarkable impediments to learning in the project environments. The following section thus examines these impediments.

### **4.3.3 Barriers to Project Learning**

Apparently, project learning had occurred, but mainly within the project. Learning from other project teams or organizations was less likely preferred by some members due to the belief that their work area was unique. Another argument was cited to the reason that the resources needed were able to be obtained adequately within its own networks as C5 stated:

Because our Center consists of many projects such as ADB, JICA, and WHO, I mostly ask or contact with the project coordinator of these projects. It's quite adequate for the information needed. I'll contact or ask from people outside only when it's really necessary.

This was given to the fact that CMPE had consisted of many partners (e.g. the Health Poverty Action), while its implementing sites had also been the main source of malaria data and information. In the meantime, the national malaria control program

of CMPE had been supported, not only by the Global Fund, but other development partners as well, such as the ADB, WHO, World Bank, and JICA.

On the other hand, some members, especially the government staff at the implementing level, had lacked opportunities to learn from other Global Fund projects even though they were preferred. This is because, although the Principal Recipient held the meetings to draw lessons learned among the three main components (HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis), it was mostly attended by the Chief of Units or Technical Advisors. For example, when being asked about learning from other Sub-recipients, C7, a logistics staff, noted that:

No, we've never had a chance to attend such meetings, so no idea whether other places will be more modernized (better) or not or how they are. We've proposed to the PR (Principal Recipient) that as the Global Fund projects consist of three main SRs (Sub-recipients) like AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria SR, there needs a sharing of lessons learned with each other.

Especially, we'd like to hold a small round-table meeting by ourselves, but it's never happened like that. Like, the reporting systems from the district level, stock out stock report, like this, why the AIDS SR had reported better, something like that. They were able to report on time and when the PR audit, they were also able to show the documents, but CMPE has no documents...something like this.

#### **4.3.4 Use and Sharing of Project Information**

##### **4.3.4.1 Use of Project Lessons**

Initially, the project lessons had been employed to improve project performance. One example was the use of lessons learned from the local fund agents' audit to check the reports submitted by the implementing sites. C6 elaborated how the audit lessons had been applied to check the provincial reports to minimize mistakes:

I would say that I'm now following these procedures (the audit procedures). After obtaining the data from provinces, I'll check it and then provide them feedback where it's still incorrect. If they did it incorrectly, like, they typed it, but changed the numbers by pen, I won't accept it. Because when the local fund agents audit us, they would ask if there's any change of the numbers. They would ask why others were typed and why this one was changed by pen, something like this.

Furthermore, the audit lessons had also been used to monitor and supervise the implementing sites at the field as C6 pointed out:

Now, when we monitor and supervise the provinces and districts, we also do like this (follows the local fund agents' procedures). Can you please show me your data? Can you please show me the data of this district? Where did you take these numbers from? Why were the numbers in the database and submitted reports different? Something like this.

Not only for the Global Fund project, the project lessons had been used for the organizational routine and other projects of CMPE. This is because, even though the program had been supported by the Global Fund for several Rounds, the program activities were a means to directly achieve the CMPE's goals - that is the National Malaria Control Program of CMPE. Therefore, for those who had similar project responsibilities to the routine job, the experience gained from the Global Fund project was most likely be applicable to their organizational routine. For instance, given the project responsibility was similar to the routine, C11, an assistant to the accounting specialist, had attempted to adapt the project lessons to plan for the government budget. Furthermore, C11 had made use of project lessons to develop particular forms for better operating procedures. Importantly, it turned out that the forms had been used by others as it was easy to understand and contained all necessary information. Similarly, the logistics staff had attempted to adapt the Global Fund's forms to other projects of CMPE such as ADB and WHO.

In addition, some had made use of the project lessons in their daily lives. For example, C6 uncovered how the project lessons were applicable to her personal life:

I can adapt the project lessons to my daily live as well. For instance, I have become more, what they call, respectful to the decision of other people. I can't just depend on my needs, it's impossible. I would say that it makes me become more flexible.

Therefore, it can be said that the project lessons were applicable at all levels: individual (e.g. for personal live), project (to improve project implementation effectiveness), and organization (for the routine).

#### 4.3.4.2 Sharing of Project Lessons

Not only making use into the routine, but the project lessons were also shared with others. Within CMPE, the project lessons were transferred among the staff as a result of the special arrangement of the supervision team (for more details see 'Project Monitoring and Evaluation' in section 4.3.1.2). The fact is that, to be able to follow up on the provincial progress, as well as supervise the main activities of particular provinces under their responsibility, the team had to know what and how to monitor and supervise the implementing agencies. This means that each team should be able to monitor the progress of many activities such as Epidemiological, Logistic, Public-Private Mixed, and IEC. C9, a logistics staff, explained the need to transfer project information for the supervision team as follows:

Supposed that the PPM (Public-Private Mixed) unit goes what they should look at, how to explain and supervise the local. Supposed they face the problems, what and how to explain and supervise them. For the logistic, what should be looking at, what is needed from them, and if they have problems, how to solve, something like this. So, the epidemiology unit has to train me, and I also have to train others.

In the meantime, there was sharing of project lessons to the implementing agencies (e.g. regional, provincial and district). This was evident in the provision of trainings for all levels as a means to improve and upgrade the competency and skills of local health officials. Several topics of training have been held, namely project financial management, overall project management, monitoring and evaluation, logistic, IEC, and so on and so forth. For instance, the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit had applied the lessons gained from the audit practically through the provision of training on monitoring and evaluation for provincial officials. An example of how the audit lessons were shared to the implementing sites was noted by C6:

We advise them, now you have to do like this. When they (the auditors) come to audit, the data should be like this and that. When they ask for the file, you should be able to show them. In the past, it's very messy.

The provision of the training was specifically needed for project finance management as specified in the Financial Guidelines:

Due to the diversity of the project structure, a common standardized accounting system for the whole project is very important. Therefore, extensive training should be provided to all the finance staff implementing the Global Fund Program especially at the provincial level (MOH, 2011c: 63).

The training provided, not only for strengthening technical skills, but overall project management as well. C10 explained the type of lessons being transferred to the local level:

Like, the Dropbox or developing the database or graphs, mostly I'll share to the provinces, every activity, every 3 months, we'll visit the provinces. We'll teach them how to enter the data, develop the graphs, draft the technical reports or administrative documents, and etc. We have to teach them everything.

In addition to the trainings, during the field monitoring and supervision, there was the provision of advice for the provincial staff to be more disciplined and organized. At the same token, the provincial staff had taken these lessons learned to monitor and evaluate the district levels. Indeed, the monitoring and supervision of the implementing agencies had in turn become lessons for the local level it selves:

The provinces had learned a lot from us. Now, they've become more disciplined with their work. In the past, whatever the districts and health centers sent them, the provinces took all, whether they were right or wrong numbers, without careful checks. And even when we monitored at the health centers and districts, there're less mistakes. I would say that they've all become more disciplined with filing systems, calculation, and etc. So, our systems are getting much better now when comparing to the past. (C6)

In addition, the project information was officially shared to others through the meetings. For example, the Logistic and Procurement Unit presented the use of modified forms for malaria data collection and a new reporting system through an ICT advanced program called web-form during the meeting on November 25-17, 2013.

#### **4.3.5 Conclusion**

Generally, the requirements and conditions for project implementation were similar to other Global Fund projects. These included the requirements on strict compliance with the Project Financial Manual and Procurement Guidelines provided by the Principal Recipient. An example of its compliance was the proper maintenance and systematic filings of project documents and records as specified in the Project Financial Manual (see Figures 4.26-4.30). Other important requirements were the regular monitoring and supervision, and on time submission of accurate and complete reports. The compliance efforts were reflected in the development of the Manual for Logistic and Management of Information Systems and Manual for Malaria data

reporting. Notably, the Manuals had been continuously improved and modified to meet the actual needs during each period of time.

Not only the Manuals, but various ICT programs developed by the Technical Advisors had also been continuously improved to achieve the indicators of on time, accurate and complete report. To do so, the system was accessible by those concerned whenever and wherever needed. These included the use of the Dropbox program to store and share project data, the specific development of a web-form platform as a database to follow up the stock-in status across the country, and the Excel program for stock-out reports. The ICT programs had indeed been admittedly effective for storing and sharing of project information across the country. In addition to the ICT programs, the special supervision teams had been specifically arranged to closely follow up and supervise the implementing sites.

At the individual level, to achieve the project goals on time and within budget while meeting the requirements, project team members had attempted to learn within and across the project. Learning was highly needed for those who were new team members and/or responsible for the job different from their routine. Learning mechanisms were primarily from seniors and Chief of the Units, as well as Technical Advisors to the Section and organization. Learning from the CMPE consultants and/or Technical Advisors to the Unit was extremely important because most CMPE staff had limited technical skills. In the meantime, for sustainable capacity building of government staff, the technical advisors should identify staff needs and plan for skills transfer as part of their job. On the other hand, although most of the project team members had had certain experiences in management of the Global Fund project, there was still a need to attend additional trainings held by the Principal Recipient. These included the trainings on modified manuals for the Logistics, Procurement, and Financial Unit, among others.

To ensure the effective use of grant funds, the project was internally audited by the Principal Recipient and externally by the local fund agents annually as other Sub-recipients. The audits had indeed become a crucial source of within-project learning for the project team and implementing agencies. Initially, the project team took lessons learned from the errors identified by the auditors for the future. For instance, to minimize the mistakes, the project team had carefully checked the project data

submitted by the implementing agencies, in particular the numbers. Further, some members had taken the auditing procedures as lessons to monitor and supervise the implementing agencies in the field to avoid repeated mistakes. At the same token, the provincial staff had taken lessons from the central level to monitor and supervise the district and health center levels. Indeed, as a result of the audits and feedbacks provided at each level, there had been gradual improvements of the project operating systems. For example, less mistakes were found at all levels (health center, district and provincial) when compared to the past.

In addition to the audits, there were formal practices of lessons learned for improving project implementation effectiveness such as the weekly and annual review meetings. CMPE held the meetings weekly to follow up on the progress and to solve the problems on time for all activities of CMPE, whether they were supported by the Government or development partners. In this situation, lessons learned of all projects were drawn and shared-that is cross-project learning. The progress reported by the Chief of each Section and project coordinators was reflected in the weekly reports submitted to the DCDC. The meetings provided opportunities for each Section to learn from each other about the progress, challenges faced and possible solutions recommended by the Director. The weekly report, which was recorded based on the MOH format, could also be lessons for all concerned as it provided specific information about what each Section had done within a particular week and what shall be done in the following week. In addition to the weekly meetings, there might be urgent meetings for discussions on the issues which needed to be solved in a timely manner. In this situation, the meeting minutes were recorded based on a specific format of CMPE which consisted of such contents as title of the meeting, date, location, participants, objectives, content of the meeting, and conclusion (see Figure 4.36 for the sample). The minutes were indeed quite specific and clear for each heading documented. This enabled readers to clearly understand the issues raised for discussion and actions taken.

The annual review meeting was another essential lessons learned practice of the project team and implementing agencies as a whole. Across a three-day meeting, three main issues were shared and drawn: project management, technical and financial. The first day shared the project achievements and challenges of individual

activities; the lessons learned from the Malaria epidemic control of the Health Poverty Action and in Luangprabang and Savannakhet provinces. For the last two days, several technical issues of the long lasting insecticide nets distribution were actively discussed and eventually led to acceptable solutions for effective improvement of project implementation. Also, the financial report could be another good source of lessons learned for the whole project as it presented in detail who had achieved what, how much in percentages and what needed to be improved further. For example, most provinces were able to absorb the budget with over 70%, while Bokeo and Luangprabang provinces was less than 50% and hence needed to improve their implementation effectiveness. Phongsaly and Salavan provinces did not submit the provincial reports on time. In addition, the meeting minutes could be an essential source of learning for the project as well as other projects. The minutes, consisting of seven pages, documented in detail as it was processed in the meeting, such as the main contents reported, the issues raised for discussions, and the solutions proposed and taken by the meeting. For instance, the content of the first day covered the presentations on achievement and limitations of the project, and the logistic issues. In this manner, the readers can understand and make sense of the information recorded in the minutes.

Apart from within-project learning, there was also cross-project learning. These included the use of past project experience as well as the past and other project documents of the organization (e.g. ADB, WHO, etc.) as references to develop the project proposal. Also, other project documents had been used as guidance for operation. For instance, the Logistics and Procurement Unit used the '2008 Manual for Workers of Warehouses in Laos,' published by the Strengthening Medical Logistic Project of MPSC, under the support of JICA, in addition to the Project Logistic Management Information System Manual. Despite the existing operating manuals or guidelines, face-to-face learning from the past project team members was necessary for those members who were new to the project, especially on the technical procedures. In addition, to access the information of other projects and organizations, some members had used their personal connections such as old classmates from the study, and friends from other organizations or ministries. Others acquired the resources from other organizations through past project team members playing a brokerage role.

As aforementioned, to achieve the goals on time and within budget, the supervision teams were set up. Each team, consisting of two to three members, had been assigned to regularly monitor and supervise particular provinces. To ensure that individual teams were able to do so, there was sharing of technical lessons among the teams. In addition, there was sharing of project lessons to the implementing sites through the provisions of training and also during the project monitoring and supervision at the field. In fact, the project lessons obtained had been, not only used and shared within the project, but also across the project. For instance, some members had used the project logistics and procurement forms for other projects of the organization, while others had adapted the project budgeting lessons to plan for the government budget. However, the use of project lessons to other projects of the organization or the routine was mainly made at the individual level since there were no specific requirements for them to do so.

It was evident that project learning had been taken, used and shared through various mechanisms. However, there was the existence of some considerable constraints to learning. The primary constraint stemmed from the individual perception of project differences. It was argued that learning from other projects was not preferred as the work areas were different, and there were different implementation strategies and approaches. Rather, they took lessons learned within the Malaria networks or from the Principal Recipient who could provide definite instructions and decisions. This was understandable since the Malaria information and lessons learned could be obtained from the implementing agencies across the country. On the other hand, although cross-project learning had been available through several occasions (e.g. the meeting at the Principal Recipient office), it was mostly attended by the Chief of Units or Technical Advisors who were contract staff. In this regard, the government staff at the implementing level lacked opportunity to learn and exchange lessons learned with other projects or organizations. Thus, cross-project learning opportunities should be provided to the government staff for improvement of the project implementation effectiveness and sustainable capacity building.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS**

This chapter conducts a cross-case analysis of the three projects based on the following research areas: the main requirements and conditions imposed by donors for project implementation; the learning mechanisms through which the project teams used to achieve the project goals on time and meet the requirements and conditions; barriers to learning in the project settings; and the use and sharing of project information and lessons within and across the projects.

#### **5.1 Requirements and Conditions for Project Implementation**

During project execution, both the Global Fund and World Bank had imposed a number of requirements and conditions to the program grant agreement. Fundamentally, the main requirements and conditions were for effective management of the project finance and procurement, and the regular monitoring and reporting of the project progress. The practices in these areas of three projects are compared and contrast in the following sections.

##### **5.1.1 Procurement Management**

For effective procurement management, a number of requirements and conditions had been set forth in the program grant agreement for compliance. For the Global Fund projects, the Principal Recipient was required to coordinate, develop, and implement standard operating procedures satisfactory to the Global Fund. Thus, to ensure the transparency, efficiency, economy, accountability and ethical standards, the Principal Recipient had specifically developed the project manual for procurement of goods, pharmaceutical and other health products, works, maintenance and services in 2009 which was further modified in 2012. The manual specifies the procurement steps and methods, as well as the responsibility of each level: the Principal Recipient,

Sub-Recipient, Sub-Sub-Recipient, and Provincial Procurement Unit. Furthermore, the Principal Recipient summarized the main procedures and threshold values for each procurement method in the table for easy application. In general, the table provided the information about how much money each level could procure, and by which method. For instance, the Sub-Recipient could procure any health products directly if the procurement budget is lower than or equivalent to one million LAK (Lao Kip; approximately US\$125.00), but if it is over one million LAK to less than 30 million LAK (approximately US\$3,750.00), the Sub-Recipient was required to comply with the requirements specified in the Manual. For the steps involved in procurement, the type of documents required by each procurement method is also specified (see Figure 4.3 for the threshold values for each procurement method and Figure 4.4 for Step of Procurement Procedure). In addition, a number of forms had been introduced to serve each procurement method. For example, there were 11 forms for the ‘Shopping Simple Way’ method, 13 forms for the ‘Shopping National Goods’ method, and etc. The forms were very concise and easy to understand and follow for the project as they were specifically developed to meet the project needs (see Procurement Management in section 4.1.1.3 Standard Terms and Conditions). In essence, the Principal Recipient held the training on the Procurement Manual to ensure that all Sub-Recipients understand and apply the correct procedures. During the project implementation, the Principal Recipient provided additional instructions for the Sub-Recipients with weak procurement management. With the detailed procedures, as well as trainings and instructions, compliance with the requirements and conditions was less problematic for the Global Fund projects.

Different from the Global Fund projects, there were no guidelines specifically developed for the World Bank project. According to the Grant Agreement, the project procurement was performed based on both the Guidelines of the World Bank and borrowing countries. To elaborate, the procurement of goods, works, non-consulting and consultants’ services was performed based on the World Bank’s procurement guidelines for international procurement and the Procurement Manual of the Ministry of Finance for the national procurement. The use of particular guidelines and methods was fundamentally based on the threshold values. For instance, goods of less than \$100,000 were procured based on the National Competitive Bidding procedures set

forth in the Prime Minister Decree No.03/PM dated January 9, 2004, on “Government Procurement of Goods, Construction, Maintenance and Service” and its Implementing Rules and Regulations issued by the Ministry of Finance No.0063/MOF dated March 12, 2004. Other than these, all goods, works and non-consulting services required for the Project were procured in accordance with the requirements set forth or referred to the Procurement Guidelines of the World Bank.

For the Procurement Manual, the rules, principles and detailed procedures have been prepared to guide the implementation of procurement under public funds for transparency, efficiency, economy, accountability and ethical standards, and to promote governmental macro management to apply state budget effectively. Even though the Ministry of Finance had introduced several forms for particular methods (see section 4.2.1.3 Procurement Management), the forms were not specifically developed for the World Bank project, and hence had not been able to fully respond the project needs. In fact, due to lack of a specific procurement manual for the project, the HSIP-AF project had encountered certain procurement problems at all levels. At the central level, for instance, the project was required to purchase goods from a company or vendor who was licensed to sell such goods in the Lao PDR. Practically, it was difficult to meet this requirement because most of the vendors do not have a license as the representative for particular goods in the Lao PDR. In order to fit with the actual situation, adjustments of such a requirement were highly needed. Other problems were the delay due to long procurement procedures, and the differences in procurement practices at the central, provincial and district levels due to lack of proper procedures. As a consequent, development of the project procurement manual was required and important.

The requirements on project procurement management of the Global Fund and the World Bank projects are summarized in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1** Requirements on Procurement Management of the Global Fund and the World Bank Projects

	<b>Global Fund Projects</b>	<b>World Bank project</b>
<b>Procurement manual</b>	Developed in 2009 and further modified in 2012	Guidelines of the World Bank and Ministry of Finance
<b>Main procedures and threshold values for each procurement method</b>	Summarized in the table: easy application	
<b>Use of procurement forms</b>	Specific forms for each methods	General forms

### **5.1.2 Financial Management**

#### **5.1.2.1 Project Financial Guidelines' Contents**

For effective utilization of grant funds, the grant recipients were required to assure an effective flow of funds to all implementing parties with appropriate accountability arrangements, and provide adequate and transparent reporting of programmatic results and financial accountability. To ensure the accountability and transparency of grant funds, the Guidelines for project finance management had thus been specifically developed for both the Global Fund and World Bank projects as specified in the program grant agreement. For example, the Financial Guidelines for the Global Fund projects had been developed for use by the Principal Recipient Office, MOH, as well as the approved Sub-Recipients, Sub-Sub Recipients and Implementing Sites in receipt of grants from the Global Fund. The Guidelines, developed in 2006, had been revised in 2011 by the Finance Team of the Principal Recipient Office. For the World Bank project, the Financial Management Manual had been developed for the HSIP specifically in 2006. Therefore, the HSIP-AF, which had been extended from the HSIP, continued applying this Financial Management Manual.

When comparing the financial guidelines of the two projects, the main contents of the Guidelines were generally similar although the number of chapters covered was different, for example, 19 chapters for the Global Fund projects, and 10 chapters for the World Bank project. Firstly, the guidelines provided detailed procedures for the financial staff to ensure their compliance with the requirements. The guidelines for the Global Fund projects specified the operating procedures for each financial topic, as to who should do what, how and when (see Section Program Financial Management in Section 4.1.1.3 Standard Terms and Conditions for Global Fund projects). From the ‘Reporting Requirements,’ for instance, it specified that the Implementing Sites have to submit the monthly accounting reports to the Sub-Recipient every 10<sup>th</sup> day after the end of the month. The Sub-Recipient then submits the reports to the Principal Recipient every 20<sup>th</sup> day after the end of the month. For the World Bank project, although the Financial Management Manual covered 10 Chapters, it provided detailed operating procedures for each financial function (e.g. planning and budgeting, disbursement procedures, project accounting system, etc.). More importantly, it also defined separately what should be done at each level. These included the Financial Management for District, Financial Management for Province, Financial Management for Project Management Unit (see Section 4.2.1.4 Financial Management of the World Bank project).

In addition, the World Bank project had more forms than those of the Global Fund projects, with 76 forms for the former and 60 forms for the latter. The forms of the World Bank project were more specific and simple than those of the Global Fund projects as they had been designed for the project specifically. For example, the financial monitoring reports to be submitted quarterly were to cover certain contents and forms as specified in the sample form provided. Conversely, the Global Fund’s forms tended to be more complicated and demanded detailed information to be filed. For instance, the Sub-recipients were required to submit several reporting forms for the progress updates and disbursement requests (see Figure 4.3). Furthermore, each of these forms required detailed information to be filed in (see Table 4.3 for the sample of the form).

To ensure the correct application, the Principal Recipient Office held the training on Project Financial Management for the Sub-Recipients and Sub-Sub-

Recipients prior to project implementation. Likewise, the Finance Unit of the World Bank Project provided training for the local levels.

#### 5.1.2.2 Financial Reports

According to the grant agreement, each project was generally required to submit financial and project progress reports on a quarter and yearly basis. To submit the reports in a timely manner as required, the Financial Management Manuals had clearly defined the type of reports and forms to be submitted as well as the deadlines for submission of the reports from each level such as from the health centers to district, provinces, central levels and donors respectively. For example, the Financial Guidelines of the Global Fund specified that the Sub-Recipients are required to submit: monthly report, progress update and disbursement request every 6 months, and yearly enhanced financial report to the Principal Recipient who would then prepare a consolidated report and submit to GFATM. Also, the Guidelines clearly defined what to be submitted. For instance, 30 days after the end of each semester, Sub-Recipients were required to send a progress update and disbursement request to the Principal Recipient Office based on the control checklist.

Likewise, to ensure the compliance with such requirements, the Project Financial Management Manual for the World Bank project also specified who should submit which reports to whom and when. For instance, the project was required to submit: 1) financial reports on a monthly basis to the Project Manager, the Management Board and concerned parties to be used in decision-making processes; 2) financial monitoring reports to the World Bank not later than 45 days after the end of each quarter; and 3) annual financial statements audited by the external auditor by the end of fiscal year. Furthermore, the Manual specified in details what contents should be included and which forms should be used. For instance, the project needed to produce the financial monitoring reports with the following contents: 1) Project Progress Report which includes discussion of project progress (see Annex 5 form 61), and project budget control (see Annex 5, form 62); 2) Financial Reports; and 3) Physical Progress, Procurement and Contract Management.

The financial reports were submitted together with the reports on project progress. The practice of timely submission of the financial and project progress reports are discussed in Section 5.1.3 Monitoring and Reporting of Project Progress below.

### 5.1.2.3 Audits

According to the grant agreement, revenues and expenditures of the grant recipients had to be audited internally and externally. For the Global Fund projects, the Principal Recipient was required to perform internal audits. The internal audit of the World Bank project was conducted by the Financial Unit responsible by a full time consulting firm. Both approaches were a sound practice because the Principle Recipient and Financial Unit of the World Bank project were independent external organization/unit. In essence, the Financial Unit of the Principle Recipient and the World Bank projects was responsible by the financial experts which were outsourced. The Principal Recipient Office was required to furnish to the Global Fund an audit report within six months after the end of the period under audit. The audit report should include financial statements and a management letter which gives an opinion and highlights the lack or disregard of procedures and recommends some corrective actions. For the World Bank Project, the firm took direction from the Project Manager on routine matters, general accounting policy matters and issues of finance and audit policy. The firm must inform the Project Manager in a timely manner about any condition where the lack of or failure of internal control could put Project funds at risk. In short, their roles were to conduct a financial review, forensic audit or evaluation, or to take any other actions that it deemed necessary to ensure the accountability of the Sub-recipient and Sub-sub-recipients for the Grant funds. More importantly, the internal audit helps the project team accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes. In addition, these practices would enable the recipients at all levels to prepare their readiness for the external audit.

For the external audit, each project was annually audited by an independent external auditor (e.g. by the Local Fund Agents for the Global Fund projects). This was internationally recognized as an important and necessary practice for project financial management. However, the Global Fund projects were also audited by the Office of Inspector General of the Global Fund at any time. The audits covered the use of Global Fund resources at a country level.

#### 5.1.2.4 Management of Documents and Records

For accurate recording of advances and/or reimbursements, and to facilitate the review and auditing of executed project transactions, all projects were required to maintain all financial statements with supporting documents and all relevant accompanying notes and details. In this regard, proper archiving and filing of project documents and records were highly required. To ensure the compliance with the requirement, the Financial Guidelines or Manual had detailed the procedures on how to retain protect financial records and documents. For instance, Chapter 14 of the Financial Guidelines for the Global Fund projects specifically described the Retention/Protection of Financial Records and Documents (see Section (3) audits and records for Program Financial Management of the HIV/AIDS Project). Similarly, the Project Financial Management Manual of the World Bank project also covered a chapter for storage and retention of financial records (e.g. Section 6.8 Storage and Retention of Financial Records). The chapter provided operating procedures on how particular financial records should be maintained, where and for how long. Furthermore, the requirement for maintenance of project files was defined separately for each level (e.g. in Chapter VII: Financial Management-District, Chapter VIII: Financial Management-Province; Chapter IX: Financial Management for NPCO). In addition, the procedures for handling electronic or computer-generated accounting and financial data had also been instructed in detail.

Practically, each project had maintained the financial documents and records properly as specified in the Manual. Also, the HSIP-AF and Malaria projects had managed other documents and records of the project (such as procurement documents and records, project progress reports, and etc.) chronologically in proper binders and cupboards or shelves (see Figures 4.8-4.9 for the pictures of filing systems of the HSIP-AF Project and Figures 4.26-4.30 for the pictures of filing systems of the Malaria Project). In essence, there had even been development of policies on management of all documents and records. For example, the 'Manual for SOPs of Reporting Forms on Malaria Epidemiology and Products' specified that all data should be maintained in proper binders as well as in computer. Accordingly, the documents and records were kept chronologically in proper binders and cupboards or shelves. The binders were named and coded properly. This is because the Malaria

Project, with long experiences of IDP management, has had a huge pile of documents and records, and thereby needed a proper filing system to facilitate the retrieval when needed. Indeed, the proper filing systems had effectively facilitated the access to documents and records needed. Different from the HSIP-AF and Malaria projects, other documents and records of the HIV/AIDS Project were not well organized and retained. In fact, some were quite messy and hence difficult to find when needed.

The requirements on project financial management of the Global Fund and the World Bank projects were summarized in Table 5.2 below.

**Table 5.2** Requirements on Financial Management of the Global Fund and World Bank Projects

	<b>Global Fund Projects</b>	<b>World Bank Project</b>
<b>Development of project financial manual</b>	1) 19 chapters: operating procedures for each financial topic in detail, as to who should do what, how and when. 2) 60 forms: complicated and demanded detailed information	1) 10 chapters: detailed operating procedures for particular topics and each level: central, province and district. 2) 76 forms: specific and simple
<b>Financial reports</b>	1) Quarterly report 2) Progress update and disbursement request (6 months) 3) Enhanced financial report (yearly)	3) Project Financial Statements 4) Financial Monitoring Reports (quarterly) 5) Annual Financial Statements
<b>Audits</b>	1) Internal audit: by the Principal Recipient 2) External audit: by an independent external auditor (e.g. local fund agents), and the office of inspector general	6) Internal audit: by the Financial Unit (a consulting firm) 7) External audit: by an independent external auditor

**Table 5.2** (Continued)

	<b>Global Fund Projects</b>	<b>World Bank Project</b>
<b>Management of documents and records</b>	1) Retention/Protection of Financial Records and Documents (Chapter 14)	8) Storage and retention of financial records 9) The requirement for maintenance of project files for each level

### **5.1.3 Monitoring and Reporting of Project Progress**

#### **5.1.3.1 Monitoring and Reporting Tools**

To closely monitor the project progress from bottom-up, some projects had specifically developed the monitoring and reporting manuals and forms. For instance, even though there were the Principal Recipient's manuals as guidance (e.g. the Logistic Management Information System Manual published in June 2008, and the 2009 Procurement Manual), the Malaria Project had developed many manuals and forms. These included the Manual for Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT) and Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs) Reports (for Provincial Malaria stations), and Manual for SOPs of Reporting Forms on Malaria Epidemiology and Products. These manuals and forms had been continuously modified to meet the actual needs. For instance, the epidemiological monitoring and reporting forms had been continuously modified and adapted with at least five times since 2003 up to present. For more effectiveness and efficiency, the manual combined various forms in a logbook such as the forms for collecting the data of malaria cases, logistic, and IEC.

In addition to such monitoring and reporting manuals and forms, each of the Global Fund projects consisted of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit to quarterly monitor and evaluate the financial, procurement, and project progress toward its objectives, in accordance with the monitoring and evaluation plan and reports to the Principal Recipient within specified dates. Different from the Global Fund Projects, the World Bank project was monitored and evaluated by the World Bank team every three months. After the mission, the World Bank provided an Aid-memoire which included the weaknesses and actions needed to be taken, as well as deadlines for the following missions.

However, the Malaria Project had set up special supervision teams for effective monitoring and supervision of the project progress of the implementing sites. Each team consisted of a technical staff from particular Sections (e.g. Epidemiology, Logistic, IEC, etc.) and an assistant to closely follow up the weekly and monthly progress of one or two provinces. Furthermore, the team had to conduct field monitoring and supervision of all activities, except finance, every three months.

Similar to the Malaria project, the HSIP-AF had described in the Guidelines in details who should submit which forms and reports to whom and when. According to the Free Maternal Guidelines, for instance, in order to receive Provider Payments and be reimbursed for patient cash and transport allowances, all participating health centers were required to report the number of services provided under the Free Maternal and Child Health program, as well as the amounts paid to patients. The health centers had to use Form 2, Form 3 and Form 4 to summarize the services monthly, before the sixth of the month following the reported month in three copies. Moreover, the HSIP-AF project had been developed several monitoring forms to monitor the project progress of the implementing agencies. These included the monitoring schedule (see Figure 4.20) and the weekly progress report form from implementing agencies to NPCO (see Figure 4.16). Also, for effective monitoring and reporting of the progress at the local levels, several forms had been deliberately developed such as 1) summary of the fund transferred to the provinces, 2) technical report form from the local, 3) district financial report form, and 4) Weekly District Grant Allocation's progress report (see Figures 4.12-4.15 for sample of the forms). In addition, rather than using the meeting minute as other projects, the HSIP-AF had developed the project progress monitoring sheet which contained detailed information such as who was responsible for what (the responsibility department), when to be complete (deadline), what the issues were (challenges), what should be done (next steps) and by whom (responsible persons). The sheet had indeed assisted the Project Manager to monitor and follow up the project progress of the implementing agencies.

Unlike the HSIP-AF and Malaria projects, the HIV/AIDS project had mainly used the monitoring and evaluation forms specified in the Project Financial Guidelines. However, as the forms were designed for all Global Fund projects, they might not be fully applicable to particular projects. In this situation, adaptation of the forms was necessary in order to meet the needs not a particular project.

To ensure the timely, correct and complete submission of the reports from the implementing sites, reporting forms as well as submission deadlines had been detailed in the guidelines or manuals for project implementation. For instance, to monitor the progress of the Free Maternal and Child Health activity, the HSIP-AF project required the implementing agencies to regularly report the results to the higher levels as specified in the Free Maternal Guidelines as to who should submit which forms and reports to whom and when (see Figures 4.10-4.11 for the reporting flow chart and responsibilities of each level). Similarly, to ensure the timely reports from the bottom-up, the Malaria project specified deadlines for each level in the Manual (see Figure 4.37 for the reporting systems of malaria data from the local to the central level). For instance, the villages were required to submit all malaria data recorded to the health center or district (for the villages that are not belonged to the health center) by the 5<sup>th</sup> of next month.

The monitoring results and project progress were normally required to report to the development partners in the reporting forms specified. For instance, the HSIP-AF project reported the project progress by using the forms specified in the Project Financial Management Guidelines. Similarly, the monitoring and evaluation results as well as the progress of the Global Fund projects must be reported in the form provided by the Principal Recipient (see Table 4.5 for sample of the form). However, the monitoring and reporting forms were seemingly inapplicable to all projects as some projects were quite unique. For instance, the Malaria project had used its own forms to report instead of using the forms provided by the Principal Recipient office. Thus, since not all forms were applicable to all projects, there should be flexibility in the use of forms. The forms should be adaptable for effective monitoring and reporting of the progress of particular projects. Not only the DPs, the project teams had to report to other organizations concerns. For instance, the HSIP-AF project had to submit the weekly report in Lao (see Figure 4.18) and English (see Figure 4.19) to the Department concerned as well as to the Administration Division of DPIC. Furthermore, the minutes were submitted to the Department Project Assistants via e-mails to update the progress during the following week. Likewise, the Malaria project used the weekly reports submitted to the Department of Communicable Disease Control. The report was documented based on the MOH report format.

Also, the deadlines and forms for submissions of project financial and programmatic progress reports of each level were specified in the project financial guidelines. For instance, 30 days after the end of each semester, Sub-Recipients of the Global Fund are required to send a progress update and disbursement request to the Principal Recipient Office (see Table 4.4 Type of Financial Reports Required and Deadlines for Submission) based on the control checklist (see Figure 4.3 a Control Checklist for Submission of the Progress Update and Disbursement Request to the Principal Recipient Office).

The submission deadlines and conditions were detailed for each level in the manual because it was used as an indicator to measure the project goals' achievement. The late, incorrect or incomplete submission of the reports from the bottom-up would directly affect the submission of reports at the central level to the DPs and eventually the rate of achievement. More importantly, the late implementation of activities would extremely affect the achievement of project goals because if the project progress was unable to achieve the project goals within a period of time set (say less than 50 percent), the grant funds could be terminated. The requirements were seemingly effective for measuring the achievement of project goals and objectives within a period of time. In order to meet such requirements, therefore, the project team had to push the implementing agencies at all levels to complete the activities and report the project progress within the timeframe set.

The monitoring and reporting tools of three projects were summarized in Table 5.3 below.

**Table 5.3** Monitoring and Reporting Tools of Three Projects

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
Monitoring and Reporting from the bottom-up		
1) Monitoring and Evaluation Unit	1) Monitoring schedule	1) Monitoring and Evaluation Unit
2) Monitoring forms of the Principal Recipient	2) Forms and deadlines: specified in the Operating Manual for	2) Weekly monitoring and supervision by individual

**Table 5.3** (Continued)

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
3) Forms and deadlines: specified in the Project Financial Guidelines	Free Maternal Health Self-created reporting forms	Sections and supervision teams 3) Forms and deadlines: specified in SOPs for Reporting on Malaria Epidemiology and Products
Reports to DPs Using forms specified in the Project Financial Guidelines	Using forms specified in Project Financial Manual	Using forms specified in Project Financial Guidelines

#### 5.1.3.2 Use of ICT Tools

According to Lindner and Wald (2011: 881), ICT is considered as a necessary precondition for successful knowledge exchange. These include the use of standard communication systems (like telephone and e-mail), and advanced technological systems (such as intranet, website within the organization, or on-line systems). These tools are used for supporting multidirectional communication like net-meetings, web-portals, web-based platforms, and video conferences. Indeed, all projects had made use of the ICT infrastructure to manage, store and share project data and information within and across the project.

Fundamentally, all project teams had managed the project information and data by using the computer software, especially database software. For example, the HIV/AIDS Project had specifically established database to inspect the products in the markets (e.g. at the private pharmacies, hospitals' pharmacies or warehouse, etc.), and a database for drug analysis for FDQCC. The Malaria Project had used the Excel software as a database for effective Logistic Management of Information Systems. For example, there was the use of several forms and Microsoft Excel to collect data about the stock-out reports across the country. Also, to ensure the timely submission

of the reports, the deadlines for particular levels were specified (see Figure 4.31 for the delivery and stock-out reporting systems of ACT and RDTs from each level). For instance, after the end of the month, the villages needed to submit the ACT and RDT follow-up form-L1/village level to the health center or District by the 5<sup>th</sup> of the next month.

In order to share project information within and between organizations, there had been generally the use of intranet (e.g. server) and internet (e.g. e-mails) systems. For instance, the Malaria Project had applied the ICT software called 'Dropbox' to store and share project information and data within project team. For effective monitoring and reporting of project progress, however, there had been the use of web-based software. For instance, because the old reporting system, using Microsoft Excel to collect and report project progress of each level, was less effective, in particular for the timely submission of the report, the HSIP-AF Project had specifically established a web-based platform called DHIS-2 ([www.dhis2.com](http://www.dhis2.com)) in 2014. Given DHIS-2 was a web-based database (stored on the Internet), the data entered at local levels would immediately be accessible to the staff at central level. Likewise, a web-form platform called WOOFU had been developed for effective monitoring and reporting of commodity stock-in reports. The data entered into the online web-form every Friday by the provincial logistics officers allowed the central level to know the commodities available at each level. The Logistic Section of CMPE then shared data and analytical results with the provinces in order to help them better evaluate the needs and plan more efficiently the delivery of the right quantities of essential commodities at the district stations and hospitals. The Logistic Section also provided some recommendations of what actions should be taken.

The use of ICT tools for monitoring and reporting project progress of three projects was summarized in Table 5.4 below.

**Table 5.4** Use of ICT Tools for Monitoring and Reporting Project Progress of Three Projects

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
1) Intranet and internet systems	1) Intranet and internet systems	1) Intranet and internet systems
2) Establish a database to inspect the products in the markets and a database for drug analysis	2) Develop a web-based platform (DHIS2) for Free Maternal and Child Health Component	2) Develop a webform (WOOFU) for stock-in reports
		3) Excel database for stock-out reports

#### 5.1.3.3 Regular Meetings

To follow up the project progress at the central level, all three projects had held regular meetings of the project teams and/or of the organization. The frequency of regular meetings was continuously adapted based on the actual needs of the problems faced. For instance, the HIV/AIDS project initially held the meetings more often at the earlier stage of the project (e.g. every Saturday morning), and then lessened to once a month (e.g. 10 times in 2011), and then only when necessary (e.g. seven times in 2012, four times in 2013). Part of the reasons was because the activities had been lessening in 2013. Conversely, the HSIP-AF project initially organized the meetings quarterly. However, it appeared that some activities had no progress, while others were unable to follow up and identify the root cause of the problems. Consequently, the weekly meetings were held every Monday morning to monitor the progress and also to solve the problems in a timely fashion. For the Malaria project, although the project progress was normally monitored during the weekly meetings of the organization, there were also ad-hoc meetings when necessary. In short, the project progress could be monitored by the project team and/or through the organizational meetings which was normally held weekly. The frequency of meetings held by the project team could be adaptable to meet the actual needs. It could be more or less often as long as the project team was still able to follow up the project progress and to solve the problems on time.

Generally, all project teams had made use of the meeting minutes as a monitoring tool to follow up the project progress in each period of time. Each project team had its own way of recording the minutes. While the HSIP-AF and Malaria projects had developed a standard format, the HIV/AIDS project had no fixed or standard format for recording the meeting minutes. Regardless of the format, the main headings of the minutes were generally similar and covered the following headings: Title of the Meeting; Objectives; Contents of the Meeting or The Meeting Results (i.e. the progress and challenges, issue by issue); and Conclusion or Recommendations (for those issues raised).

However, there were differences in the extent of details being recorded: some minutes were documented in details, while others were very brief and unclear. It appeared that the more detail the minutes were recorded the better the ability to follow up was. For instance, the project progress monitoring sheet which was specifically created by the HSIP-AF project team had enabled them to effectively monitor and follow up the project progress during each week because it contained detailed information such as who was responsible for what (the responsibility Department), when to be complete (deadline), what the issues were (challenges), what should be done (next steps) and by whom (responsible persons). Likewise, the Malaria Project documented the meeting minutes based on the standard format which contained all important information (e.g. objectives, content of the meetings and conclusion). Also, the minutes were very specific and clear and hence quite easy to understand. In this manner, the readers were able to fully understand what had happened to the project and what actions had been taken during a particular period of time.

For the HIV/AIDS Project, as it had no specific format for recording, the minutes were sometimes documented in textual or table or a combination of both table and textual formats, but most minutes were in the textual format. The table format was used if the issues discussed were mainly based on the workplan, whereas the textual one was for general issues. However, the table format was easier to understand because they contained important information in English language such as Reference No., Objective/Activity, Budget (USD), Responsibility (e.g. procurement, finance, monitoring and evaluation, consultants), and Results of Meetings (the project

progress and challenges). For the textual format, some minutes were recorded in details for the challenges faced and solutions taken. Conversely, others were documented briefly and unclear and hence difficult for the readers to understand the context. Furthermore, despite detailed records of the project progress, challenges and recommendations, it seemed to be difficult to link the whole story of a particular issue, given they were recorded separately. Nonetheless, the minutes generally helped the readers or others to know what had been done, what difficulties emerged, and how they were solved during a particular period of time. All of these practices reflected their efforts to monitor the project progress and solve the problems in a timely fashion to meet the project goals within budget and time.

Table 5.5 showed the regular meetings and meeting minutes of three projects.

**Table 5.5** Regular Meetings and Meeting Minutes of Three Projects

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
Regular meetings		
1) Meetings of the project: shifted from weekly to monthly or when needed)	1) Meetings of the project: shifted from quarterly to weekly meetings	1) Ad-hoc meetings of project team
2) Weekly meetings of the organization	2) Weekly meetings of the organization	2) Weekly meetings of the organization
Meeting minutes		
No standard format: sometimes unclear and not specific	Standard format: clear and specific	Standard format: clear and specific

#### **5.1.4 Project Structure**

In order for effective management of the project, a project team was formed. For the project structure, three projects were similar and different in particular areas. Firstly, the structure of the HIV/AIDS project was similar to the Malaria project's structure as each project at least consisted of Finance, Procurement, and Monitoring

and Evaluation units. For instance, the HIV/AIDS project consisted of four units: Finance, Procurement, Monitoring and Evaluation, and IT. The Malaria project consisted of five units: Finance, Procurement, Monitoring and Evaluation, Public-Private Mixed, and Technical Working Groups. Different from the HIV/AIDS and Malaria projects, the HSIP-AF project of the World Bank had only three units: Finance, Procurement, and Administration; that is there was no specific monitoring and evaluation unit. Rather the project progress of all departments concerned was monitored and evaluated by the Project Assistants to the department and reported to the project team weekly every Monday morning (see Figure 4.2 for Program Organization of the HIV/AIDS project, Figure 4.6 for Organizational Arrangement of the HSIP-AF project, and Figure 4.25 for Structure of the Malaria project). Regardless of the project structure, it was primarily designed to meet the project needs.

For the project team members, there were differences in the number and project experiences. For the number of project team members, it seemed that the bigger the project size, the higher the number of project team members. Based on the project size (e.g. scope of the project and amount of funds), the smallest number of team members was the HIV/AIDS project with altogether 12 members, while the biggest one was the Malaria project with a total of 26 members. However, there were differences in the use of consulting services for technical areas. For instance, the HIV/AIDS and Malaria projects had made use of few contract staff; that is most members were government staff. For instance, there were three contract staff for the HIV/AIDS project (e.g. a financial specialist and an IT Manager and specialist) and five for the Malaria project (e.g. the financial specialist, procurement specialist, and assistant to procurement specialist, public-private mixed expert, and epidemic expert). Conversely, most members of the HSIP-AF project team were contract staff (12 out of 20). These included five Project Assistants to individual Departments concerned, an assistant to Project Manager, a Project Assistant to Savannakhet province, and five Provincial Financial Accountants. Furthermore, the Financial Unit was responsible by a full time consulting and accounting firm.

It is apparent that there were differences in the composition of team members among three projects. Part of the reasons was derived from the requirements or conditions specified in the grant agreement. For instance, the HSIP-AF project was

required to use the service of a consulting and accounting firm responsible for the financial unit. Furthermore, it had to use the service of outsourced staff as Project Assistants to individual departments in order to closely monitor project progress of the departments concerned, especially the implementing agencies at the local levels. For the Global Fund projects, they were allowed to hire the financial specialists, while the accounting and cashier could be responsible by the government staff. For some projects, however, it is necessary to use the service of consultants who are knowledgeable or expertise in certain technical areas since the government officials had lacked knowledge and skills in such areas. For example, the Malaria project had hired technical experts for the units of epidemiology, logistic and procurement, and etc. Irrespective of the composition of project team members, the main purpose was generally to ensure that the project activities were implemented and monitored and that the project goals were achieved within specified timeframe effectively and efficiently.

With regard to the experience of individual team members, most members of the HIV/AIDS project were new to the Global Fund projects, although they had previously worked for IDPs funded by different development partners (e.g. ADB, WB, WHO, UNIDO, SIDA, UNICEF, etc.). Further, many of them had project responsibilities which were different from their routine (see Table 3.4 for background of the HIV/AIDS project members). For members of the HSIP-AF project, some had worked for IDPs or NGOs for quite a long time, while two members had just worked for the current project as their very first time (see Table 3.5 for background of the HSIP-AF project members). Background of the Malaria project members were also various like the HSIP-AF projects. Most members were responsible for the project work which was similar to their routine. Some had worked for the Global Fund project for several rounds, while few were new staff to the project (see Table 3.6 for background of the Malaria project members).

Not only was the background of individual team members different, there were also differences in the experiences of project management. For the HIV/AIDS project of FDD and FDQCC, although it was extended from the previous project (Round 6), it had been managed by a different project team. Even though there were past project teams (Round 6) available for consultations in the same organization, the

project team might have encountered difficulties during project execution given most members were new to the Global Fund-assisted project. On the other hand, the HSIP-AF project of the World Bank had been extended from the previous project, while some members had continued to the present project. For the Malaria project, CMPE had had long experiences with over 10 years of the Global Fund project management (since 2003 till present) (see Section 3.2.2 Project Studies Selected for more details of the project background).

The project structure, numbers and experience of three project team members are compared in Table 5.6.

**Table 5.6** Project Structure, Numbers and Experience of Three Project Team Members

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
1) Project structure		
Four units: finance, procurement, monitoring and evaluation, and IT	Three units: finance, procurement, and administrative	Five units: finance, procurement, monitoring and evaluation, administration, and technical working groups
2) Number of project team members		
11 members (03 contract staff)	23 members (15contract staff including Financial Unit)	26 members (05 contract staff)
3) Team members' experience		
New to the Global Fund project: 08	New to the World Bank project: 02	New to the Global Fund project: 02

Based on the experiences of individual team members and the organization itself, there might have been differences in the extent and mechanisms of learning as their attempt to complete the project work-plan within timeframe and budget set. Among the three projects, the HIV/AIDS project might have needed to learn more

than the other two projects. For the HSIP-AF project, compliance with the World Bank requirements and conditions could have been less difficult than the HIV/AIDS project. Likewise, the Malaria project would have less difficulty in the effort to comply with the requirements and conditions of the Global Fund. Therefore, the following sections compare and contrast the similarities and dissimilarities among the three projects with regard to their learning mechanisms and constraints, as well as the use and sharing of project information.

## **5.2 Sources of Project Learning**

This section presents the mechanisms through which each project team learned in order to complete the project work-plan within timeframe and budget.

### **5.2.1 Within-Project Learning**

To comply with the requirements, all three project team members had learned from various sources within the project. Among the three projects, however, it seemed that the learning sources of the HIV/AIDS and Malaria projects were more likely similar to each other given they were both supported by the Global Fund. The learning mechanisms of three projects are reviewed below.

#### **5.2.1.1 Learning from the Project Experts**

Learning from the Principal Recipient experts was apparently preferable by most members of both the HIV/AIDS and Malaria projects. Prior to project implementation, the Principal Recipient Office held training on the use of guidelines and forms (e.g. for procurement, financial, monitoring and evaluation) for all Sub-recipients to ensure their compliance. With such a short period of training, most members of the HIV/AIDS project, in particular those who were new to the Global Fund project, were able to understand the guidelines and forms to be used in general. When it came to practices, however, there were confusions in the application of the guidelines and forms. Thus, to ensure the conformance, further clarification and instructions from the Principal Recipient were highly necessary during the early phase of project implementation. These included the instructions for reporting, budget planning, procurement, and reprogramming and reallocation of money.

Different from the HIV/AIDS project, as most members of the Malaria project had had long experiences in management of the Global Fund project, they were able to understand the guidelines and forms faster. Furthermore, the additional training held for any modified guidelines (e.g. the Financial Manual in 2011, Logistic and Management of Information Systems in 2012, etc.) helped strengthen their understanding and technical skills. Despite that fact, when facing problems during the course of project implementation, most members of both the HIV/AIDS and Malaria projects preferred to discuss with the Principal Recipient rather than with other people outside the project because the Principal Recipient Office consisted of expert teams who could provide the best instructions and definite decisions.

Likewise, some members of the HSIP-AF project also consulted with expert teams of the World Bank to ensure the compliance with the guidelines. For instance, the instructions were sought for adjustment of some procurement guidelines which were inapplicable to the actual situation (see section 4.2.1.3 Procurement Management for more details).

#### 5.2.1.2 Learning from Technical Advisors/Consultants

Learning from technical advisors or consultants was extremely important and necessary for the government officials who lack capacity in particular areas. Having realized that fact, most projects were required or allowed to use the service of technical assistants or consultants. For example, according to the Financial Guidelines of the Global Fund projects, the Principal Recipients and Sub-recipients were allowed to hire national or international technical assistance as service providers to build up their capacity in the field of financial management and accounting. The main reason to hire technical assistants was to transfer technical skills to the government staff. The roles of technical assistants or consultants should be thus involved more in over management, support, organization and procedural issues than in daily operational issues. For effective transfer of skills, the technical assistants, together with the team, should identify staff needs, and agree on the expected results, methodology, resources, and timeframe. The specific skill transfer plan is part of the technical assistant's action plan (MOH, 2011c: 60). Also, a sample of the skills transfer plan format was provided (see Figure 4.25). Thus, both the HIV/AIDS and Malaria projects had hired the financial specialists responsible for project finance and accounting management.

For the World Bank project, the use of consulting services had been specified in the grant agreement. For instance, the HSIP-AF project was required to hire a consulting and accounting firm responsible for the financial unit. The consulting firm was also required to transfer technical skills to the local staff to help build their capacity. Additionally, to sustainably build the capacity of health officials, it had been proposed to the MOH technical working group that a junior finance staff member from the DPIC be appointed to work with the consultants or, alternatively, a new graduate be recruited through a competitive process, with an agreement that the candidate will become a government official after the completion of the AF (World Bank, 2011a: 26-28). Therefore, the project financial management manual specified that the specific duties of the consulting firm were to review project activities at all levels particular attentions to build capacity at district and provincial levels, and provide specific on-site training and demonstration in financial management and accounting practices at provincial and district levels as part of the assignment (MOH, 2006b: 71). Furthermore, in recognition of the substantial scale of the activities being conducted at the decentralized level, each Project Province was provided with a full time accountant to support districts and facilities in managing activities. These contract staff not only played an internal audit function for additional financing support managed at the province level and below, but also provided on-the-job training and support to the Provincial Health Office's accountants (World Bank, 2011a: 30). The requirements and conditions for transfer of financial management and accounting skills were a sound practice as it would help build the capacity of government staff and enable them to work once the project is completed.

The use of technical assistants' services was not only for finance management, but also for other technical areas. For the HIV/AIDS project, there had been employment of IT experts, but only for developing a website and database (e.g. for registration of drugs). However, since the project was finished in 2014, it is in concern for the sustainability of the project. In this regard, it is highly necessary for the transfer of IT skills to the government staff and planning for building the staff capacity in the long term. The Malaria project had hired the technical assistants for such areas as logistics, procurement, epidemiology, public-private mixed, and malaria control. The technical advisors had indeed transferred technical skills to the

government staff through the day-to-day work and on-the-job training. However, the transfer appeared to be mainly on technical skills, but less on project management skills (e.g. preparation of work-plan, budget plan, monitoring and supervision, reports, and etc.). For the HSIP-AF project, it had used the service of the project assistants to the departments concerned. The Project Assistants were hired only to support individual departments; but no requirement on transferring of project management skills to the departments. In this regard, the project is at risk of losing the project knowledge after the project completion.

The fields of learning from technical advisors/consultants of three projects are summarized in Table 5.7.

**Table 5.7** Fields of Learning from Technical Advisors/Consultants of Three Projects

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
Financial management skills		
Transferred by financial specialist as specified in the financial guidelines	Transferred by the consulting firm as specified in the financial manual	Transferred by financial specialist as specified in the financial guidelines
Other technical areas		
Use of IT experts: to develop website and database	Use of consultants as Project Assistants to individual departments: only to support project management	Use of consultants for logistics, procurement, epidemiology, public-private mixed, and malaria control

#### 5.2.1.3 Learning from the Audits

Both internal and external audits were an essential source of learning for project teams to improve their practices in order to assure the accountability and transparency of grant funds. The internal audit, which was an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity, assisted project teams at all levels (e.g. Sub-recipients, Sub-sub-recipients, central, provincial and district) to build and upgrade the financial management capacities through many sources. In general, the project

teams had learned from implementation of the project financial policies and procedures. To be more specific, the project teams had learned from the regular reviews and feedbacks or recommendations for improvements. In addition, project teams had learned from refresh trainings which were held to improve the operations and solve difficult financial problems faced during project implementation. Significantly, the internal audit assisted the project teams to prepare their readiness for the external audit.

For the external audit, the three project teams had learned throughout the auditing process. Prior to the audit, they had learned how to prepare and arrange all financial statements with supporting documents and all relevant accompanying notes and details in order to facilitate the external audits. This is because any lack of proper documentation (e.g. receipts without full information, lack of attendance lists, original contents modified), or discrepancies between workplan and expenditure, may disqualify the expense claims and could lead to a refund of this expense to the Principal Recipient Office (GFATM, 2011a; 2009a; MOH, 2011c: 57).

During the external audits, the project teams were able to learn directly what their mistakes were through the auditors' questions on supporting documents (e.g. signature of payer and receiver, repeated number of receipts, no telephone number of the shop, different price for the same goods, improper expenses, receipts with insufficient contents, inappropriateness of timeframe, etc.). To avoid such mistakes, the project teams had indeed checked more careful with the supporting documents submitted by the implementing agencies, while also provided them feedback. In fact, as a result of the strict and exhaustive audits, the project operations had been admitted by some members to be improved, and thereby some even preferred more frequent monitoring and supervision. In addition, some members had used the auditing lessons to monitor and supervise the implementing sites in the field. Therefore, the regular financial review, forensic audit or evaluation as well as feedback provisions were substantially useful in order to ensure the accountability and compliance of project teams and implementing agencies at all levels.

The audit results and comments were another important source of individual and collective learning for all projects. At the individual level, project team members learned directly from the audit findings and comments which were reported separately by work areas such as financial, procurement, and programmatic progress.

The collective learning occurred during the meetings for all projects being supported by the same development partners. For instance, to take lessons learned from the audit, the Principle Recipient held the meetings for all Global Fund projects, while the World Bank held for all World Bank assisted projects. During the meetings, all project teams could first learn from the project being asked for clarification for the mistakes identified by the auditors. The good practices of particular project were also raised as an example for others to learn from. Importantly, all project teams discussed and exchanged lessons learned with each other in order to prevent repeated mistakes. The intensive discussion had resulted in a detailed corrective action plan on how to solve the identified errors.

The sources of learning and types of lessons learnt from the audits are summarized in Table 5.8 below.

**Table 5.8** Sources of Learning and Types of Lessons Learnt from the Audits

<b>Learning Sources and Types of Lessons</b>	
<b>Internal audit</b>	Regular reviews of project activities and recommendations for improvements Refresh trainings held following the regular reviews
<b>External audit</b>	Prior to the audit How to prepare and arrange all financial statements with supporting documents and all relevant accompanying notes and details in order to facilitate the audit During the audit The auditors' questions on supporting documents (e.g. signature of payer and receiver, repeated number of receipts, different price for the same goods, improper expenses, etc.) After the audit 1) Audit results and comments on financial, procurement, and programmatic progress 2) The meetings for all projects to take lessons learned from the audit

#### 5.2.1.4 Practices of Lessons Learned

##### 1) Annual Review Meeting

In order to review project performance and take lessons learned, as well as plan for the following year, all project teams held annual review meetings as their formal practices of lessons learned. The practices of three projects are compared and contrasted below.

Firstly, the annual review meetings of each project were attended by all sections concerned. For instance, the participants of the HIV/AIDS project included project teams, Sub-sub recipient (e.g. FDQCC), implementing agencies from the local levels, and the Principal Recipients. The meetings of the HSIP-AF project was attended by project teams, representatives of five Departments concerned, health colleges and universities, and the Provincial Health Offices, Ministry of Finance, and representatives of the World Bank. For the Malaria project, participants of the meetings were project team, the MOH steering committee, provincial representatives, Departments concerned (e.g. DCDC), and the Principal Recipients.

For the agendas of the meetings, the main contents included presentations on project progress in each work area, discussions and future plan. However, there were differences in the arrangement of presentation and discussion sessions. For example, the HIV/AIDS project presented the progress of each work area (e.g. project progress, budget and finance, procurement, project progress of FDQCC, Good Manufacturing Practice audit and training, ICT, and Principal Recipient Office) on the first day. The discussions and future plan were conducted on the second day.

For the HSIP-AF project, the discussions were arranged after some presentations on the first day. For example, following the presentations on overall project performance, procurement, and financial progress by NPCO, there were discussions, responses and comments from the representatives concerned. Also, there were comments from provincial representatives after the presentations of three departments (e.g. DF, DHHP, and DTR), and discussions after the provincial presentations. The sessions in the second day were group discussions and presentations, presentations on Free Delivery Manual and provincial budget plans. Also, there were questions and answers as well as discussions after each presentation.

Different from other projects, the Malaria project arranged the discussions after each presentation. For example, the presentations on the first day of the meetings included the Malaria control year 5 of Round 7, logistics, progress updates and disbursement requests, and provincial reports. The discussions were conducted after each of these presentations. The second day mainly focused on discussions on indicator and technical issues including the monitoring and reporting forms. The project financial management and plan were presented and discussed on the third day.

When comparing among three projects, the contents of presentations were generally similar. For example, the presentations of the HIV/AIDS project included such contents as project progress, challenges, solutions and next steps. The presentation contents of the HSIP-AF project were project implementation progress, challenges, strengths, limitations, and next steps. For the Malaria project, the contents presented were project progress, challenges, strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities.

From the contents of presentations, each of them was presented specifically and in detail. For instance, the project progress presented what activities were completed, how many percentages had been achieved compared to the indicators set, how much money the project had received and spent on each activity compared to the budget plan, materials and tools which had been purchased and distributed to the targets. For the challenges, some presentations not only reported the problems faced, but also the possible causes, recommendations or solutions and future plan. In this manner, all involved could learn what had and had not yet been achieved, what went well or wrong, what the main causes were, what actions had been and/or should be taken to solve the problems, and what should be done in the future for each work area.

Following the presentations, the discussion sessions were carried out. Although the discussion sessions were arranged differently among the three projects, the discussions were very dynamic. For example, during the discussion sessions of the HIV/AIDS project, the Principal Recipient recommended for improvement of the monitoring and evaluation report systems as there were late and irregular submissions of monitoring and evaluation reports. Following the Principal Recipient's recommendations, the issues were clarified by the Monitoring and

Evaluation Unit for the cause of late submission. These included sending the report to the Project Coordinator for consideration before submission to the Principal Recipient, lack of assistants, and too many tasks to be complete. To help solve the problems, many participants suggested possible solutions such as a direct report to the Principal Recipient office to meet the deadline, getting more assistants, and arranging additional training if needed. The Chairman finally suggested the project team to discuss this issue further after the meetings in order to look for effective solutions. The discussion obviously shows the collective effort to improve the timely submissions of the reports as recommended by the Principal Recipient.

Another example of the attempt to solve the problems was the discussion on the unsuccessful recruitment of an IEC expert, where various solutions and suggestions were proposed. For instance, many participants proposed for reprogram and reallocation of the money for other activities in order to maintain the planned budget. However, the Principal Recipient considered this solution to be too risky and unacceptable by the Global Fund. Thus, he suggested other options such as advertising through various sources (e.g. newspapers, internet, etc.), and the use of part-time services. As a result, the chairman recommended the person concerned to reconsider or adapt the terms of reference as soon as possible (see ‘Annual Review Meetings’ in Section 4.1.2.1 Within-Project Learning of the HIV/AIDS project).

Unlike the HIV/AIDS project, the HSIP-AF project arranged a Q&A session in order for the sections concerned to clarify and comment after the presentations of each project level (e.g. NPCO, Departments, and provinces). For instance, following the Project Manager’s presentation on which province performed well on what and which province had no progress reports, the provinces concerned pointed out the reasons why there were no progress reports and what the problems were. Furthermore, those who performed well were asked to share their good practices with others. For instance, Salavan province, which was able to achieve its goals and submit the report on time, shared its management techniques to others. This was a sound approach because the issues raised by the presenter were responded and clarified by the sections concerned immediately, while the good practices were shared with each other.

For the discussions, although they were conducted after the presentations of each project level, they were very dynamic and effective. This is because the issues raised by presenters were discussed and solved within the level of project activity. For example, after the NPCO presentations, several issues were raised for discussions, one of which was the issues of referring patients to higher-level health facilities (e.g. from health centers to district hospitals, and to provincial hospitals, respectively). This is because the patient-referring systems were not specified in the guidelines. The related issues raised were 1) how to assist the patients due to the transportation difficulties, 2) how to deal with irrational referral cases, and 3) the possibility of a predetermined fee at the hospitals due to the incorrect calculations of referring fees. To solve the issues, many participants provided their recommendations and opinions, while some shared their lessons. For instance, Savannakhet province shared their lessons on the fee for referring patients from district to the provincial hospital, while a Department representative cited the guidelines to explain the issue. Also, the Mother and Child Health Center provided several opinions such as the need for detailed specifications in the guidelines for particular cases, and the transportation fee. For more effectiveness, further revision of the guidelines on Free Maternal Health was thus proposed to the World Bank and experts.

In addition to the discussion sessions, the HSIP-AF project also arranged group discussions on specific work areas by using the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis tool. The group discussions were an effective approach to solving the problems as they were divided into five specific groups: 1) overall supervision at the implementing agencies; 2) coordinating and reporting; 3) financial management; 4) procurement; and 5) monitoring and technical assistance. Each group consisted of at least ten participants from the Department concerned and provincial representatives. The group discussion was led by a technical specialist as the facilitator, while the tool was used to analyze the topic based on the questions provided. The group discussions enabled learning to occur across the process. Within each group, there were dynamic discussions and analysis as well as active sharing of ideas and opinions. The results of individual group discussions were then presented at the meetings. Most groups (e.g. Monitoring and Technical Assistance, Project Financial Management, and Coordinating and Reporting)

presented their discussion results based on the SWOT tool; that means it included four points, while others were based on the questions provided. After each presentation, the group was asked for clarifications on unclear issues presented. Furthermore, there were discussions on the issues of particular topics identified by the group and participants. In addition, the Project Director provided recommendations for those concerned to solve the problems encountered (for more details see Annual Review Meetings in Section 4.2.2.1 Within-Project Learning of the HSIP-AF project).

For the Malaria project, the discussions were taken as an important part of the meetings. This is apparent in the agenda which arranged the discussions after each presentation on the first day and on the second and third days mentioned above. Although there were several issues raised in the presentations, the technical issues were raised as the main topic for discussions. Also, the discussions were very specific and in detail for individual technical issues. For instance, the issues raised for discussions included 1) the criteria used for estimation of bed nets, 2) the number of bed nets to be distributed in each province, 3) the budget for emergent cases, 4) the distribution of each type of bed net, 5) the late delivery of Malaria commodities from the central to the local level, and 6) the provincial reports on the re-treated bed nets indicator. The discussion was based on various options proposed such as the long lasting insecticide nets distributed in the last four years (2010-2013), comparison of the initial plan in 2009 with the numbers of positive cases found in February 2012 to July 2013, and the positive cases in district strata from September 2012 to August 2013. After the dynamic discussion, the results of long lasting insecticide nets distribution plan had eventually been reached. For instance, 1) single nets would be distributed to the forest goers in six Southern provinces where the positive cases were high, 2) the bed nets for pregnant women should be available at the health centers and strata 2 and 3 of the villages and 3) each province should submit the list of villages needing long lasting insecticide nets, the size of each village, and stratification of each village. In addition, for the effective maintenance of Malaria commodities, several solutions were raised for consideration such as maintenance of the bed nets in the regional warehouse, storage of the drugs and rapid diagnostic tests, as well as bed nets at the provinces or districts. To solve the problems, it was recommended for CMPE and MPSC to draft the standard operating

procedures for the maintenance of Malaria commodities at regional, provincial and district levels (see Annual Review Meetings in Section 4.3.2.1 Within-Project Learning of Malaria project).

From all three projects, it is evident that each project had its own way to arrange the presentation and discussion sessions. Regardless of the arrangement, the main objective was to report the project progress and challenges and to seek for effective solutions to the project problems. Particularly for the discussions, it had indeed led to the identification of the root causes of the problems as well as to the solutions and recommendations of all sections involved, in particular the project director and representative of donors. By sharing the individual experiences and opinions in project meetings and reviews, project teams can achieve an improved level of understanding and learning; that is learning by discussing and learning by confronting (Prencipe and Tell, 2001: 1378). When individuals or teams make a collective effort to enhance their understanding of the causal links between actions and outcomes, project learning is articulated (Zollo and Winter, 2002: 341; Newell and Edelman, 2008: 570). However, the arrangement of group discussions and presentations of the HSIP-AF project was an effective practice for identifying the SWOT of each work area. This is because each group consisted of all sections concerned, ranging from central to local levels. This could be lessons for other or future projects to consider and take as a session of the annual review meetings.

The practice of lessons learnt of three projects was summarized in Table 5.9 below.

**Table 5.9** Practice of Lessons Learnt of Three Projects

	<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
<b>Meeting agenda</b>	Day 1: presentation Day 2: discussions and future plan	Day 1: presentation and discussions Day 2: group discussions and future plan	Day 1: presentation and discussions Day 2: discussions Day3: discussions and future plan
<b>Presentations Sequence</b>	Overall project progress, budget and finance, procurement, FDQCC, Good Manufacturing Practice audit and training, ICT, and the Principal Recipient	- NPCO (e.g. overall project performance, finance, procurement) - Progress of five departments - Progress of five provinces	Overall project performance, finance, procurement, and provincial project performance
<b>Presentation Contents</b>	project progress, challenges, solutions and next steps	progress, challenges, strengths, limitations, and next steps	project progress, challenges, strengths and weaknesses
<b>Discussions</b>	After all presentations	After some presentations	After each presentation
<b>Problem-solving</b>	Issue by issue	Group discussions and presentations on specific areas	Technical-based

Having the meetings alone are insufficient to enable learning to occur, according to Newell and Edelman (2008). They have asserted that when people take the time to write down the lessons, this helps them internalize lessons learned and it helps future teams. Indeed, the meetings were officially documented and distributed to all involved to use as lessons learned for effective improvement of project performance as well as for other projects within and across organizations.

## 2) Minutes of the Annual Review Meeting

Minutes of the meetings could also be a useful source of learning for current, other and/or future projects. For the minutes of the three projects, there were similarities and dissimilarities in the formats used, the contents/headings, and the extent of details documented. Firstly, the HIV/AIDS project had no standard format, whereas the HSIP-AF and Malaria projects had used their own formats for documentation (see Figure 4.24 for the sample of the HSIP-AF project's Minutes, Figure 4.33 for the Meeting Minutes Form of the Malaria project). In terms of the contents, the minutes of three projects seemingly contained some similar headings. The minutes of each project included such contents as title of the meeting, objectives, participants, agenda of the meeting, presentation on the project progress, the issues discussed, proposal, and agreement (see Table 5.10 for the main headings in the minutes of each project).

**Table 5.10** Headings in the Minutes of Each Project

	<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
1.	Title of the meeting	Title of the meeting	Title of the meeting
2.	References (to activities of the work plan)	Date, time, location, and reporters	References
3.	Objectives	Overall goals and specific objectives	Overall goals and specific objectives
4.	Participants	Participants	Date and location
5.	The meeting	Chairman	Participants
6.	Presentation of the progress reports	Presenters	Agenda of the meeting
7.	The issues raised in the meeting	Contents of the meeting (e.g. project progress presentation)	Contents of the meeting (e.g. the challenges and solutions)
8.	Proposals to the meeting	Agenda of the meeting	The meeting results (e.g. strengths and weaknesses of project performance)

**Table 5.10** (Continued)

	<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
9.	Agreement of the meeting	Discussions during the meeting	Proposal of the meeting
10.	-	Conclusion and future plan	Agreement of the meeting

However, there were differences in the extent of the details recorded in the minutes. The minutes of the HSIP-AF project were documented in detail for each heading in tabular format. For instance, under the heading of ‘discussions during the meeting,’ it detailed who presented what, what the participants’ opinions and comments on the presentation were, and what the responses from those concerned were. Further, the name and position of those who shared opinions was also specified (see Figure 4.23 for the sample of the format and contents documented in the minutes). For the conclusion and future plan, some issues were specified in detail of who should do what (e.g. Salavanh and Attapue Provinces redo the budget plan and submit to the central within the date specified, while other provinces are required to submit the official budget plan to the central as soon as possible; and etc.). Some issues, however, were only specified what to do (e.g. follow up the procurement of motorcycles and cars; follow up the Manual for Free Maternal Health and the Committee with the section concerned; and etc.), but not clear for who should do and when. Nonetheless, the minutes enabled the readers to understand what had happened to the project in general, what the project challenges in each province and in particular area were, what issues were raised for discussion, what solutions were suggested by the participants or those concerned, and what the Project Director’s recommendations were.

Similar to the HSIP-AF project, the Malaria project recorded the contents of each heading quite clear and specifically by categorizing the issues under particular topics. For example, in the ‘Contents of the Meeting’, each main topic included the issues discussed and the solutions taken. For instance, included under the heading of ‘Provincial and district logistics’ were the issues discussed, and

the solutions taken (see Figure 4.40 for the sample of the format and contents in the minutes). Also, the Agreement of the Meeting was divided into three groups: management (e.g. MPSC and CMPE will prepare the Standard Operating Procedures for maintenance of the health products at the regional, provincial, and district levels, etc.); distributions of long lasting insecticide nets; and finance. Recording in this manner would enable the readers to understand what the main and specific issues faced by the project team and implementing agencies were, how they attempted to solve them, and what actions they had taken for particular issues throughout the 3-day meeting.

In comparison, the minutes of the HIV/AIDS project contained less detail than the HSIP-AF and Malaria projects. This was reflected in the number of pages and contents of the minutes. For example, there were only three pages for the minutes of Project A, and seven pages for both the HSIP-AF and Malaria projects. From the HIV/AIDS project's minute, the contents under each heading were documented separately for individual issues by numbering or bulleting. In the heading of 'Issues Raised during the Meeting,' some issues were documented quite clear (e.g. how to solve the computer loss of the Friendship Hospital). However, other issues appeared to be quite short and lacked detailed information (e.g. IEC expert's recruitment; barcode systems; and etc.). Also, for the contents of the Meeting Agreement, while some recommendations were clear, others were not (e.g. the drug department works in collaboration with the IT expert to search for solutions). In this regard, only those who were directly involved were able to understand the context of the minutes. This is consistent with the study of Kasvi et al. (2003: 580) who noted that the lessons learned are often not well documented and archived, not edited for reuse, described too generically or not visualized where necessary, too difficult to understand, or difficult to retrieve. Since the minutes were not recorded as lessons learnt for the subsequent projects, it was less likely to be used (see Table 5.11 for comparison of the minutes of three projects).

**Table 5.11** Comparison of Three Projects' Minutes

	<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
<b>Minute format</b>	No format: in textual or table, or mixed	Develop standard formats	Use of standard format
<b>Number of pages</b>	Three pages	Seven pages	Seven pages
<b>Contents under each heading</b>	Numbering or bulleting issue by issue Specific, but unclear and no detailed description of some points	Bulleting the each point (e.g. issues raised, comments, solutions proposed, etc.) Clear, specific and detailed description of each point Described in details who said what (e.g. Dr.... proposed that...)	Categorize the issues under particular topics (e.g. the issues raised, suggestions and solutions for logistics) clear and specific description

### 5.2.2 Cross-Project Learning

Not only learning within the project, all three projects had also learned from other projects. The sources of cross-project learning of three projects are compared and contrasted in the following sections.

#### 5.2.2.1 Use of Project Experience

In reviewing the background of individual members of three projects, most of them appeared to have had experiences with IDPs (see Table 3.4 for background of the HIV/AIDS project members; Table 3.5 for the HSIP-AF project; and Table 3.6 for the Malaria project). However, only some members of the three projects admitted the usefulness of experiences from other IDPs for implementation of the present projects. Firstly, the Project Manager of the three projects used experiences from other projects for developing and preparing the project proposal of

the current projects as well as future ones (e.g. for the HSIP-AF and Malaria projects). Also, members of the HIV/AIDS and HSIP-AF projects asserted that the experiences from other IDPs enabled them to understand the guidelines or operating procedures. However, the past/other projects' experiences might not have been fully applicable when it came to details of the operating procedures because each donor had its own way of doing things. One obvious example was the financial management, in which each project might have had specific accounting software specifically designed by a consulting firm.

Nevertheless, the experience was helpful to a certain extent. The use of past experience in combination with the current ones had eventually become new experience. Hence, the experience had been further accumulated. For instance, members of the Malaria project accepted that their long experience in the Global Fund project had been useful for coordinating and effective management of the project work plan. Furthermore, some members of the three projects had used the lessons from past or other projects to monitor and follow up on the project progress. Particularly for the HSIP-AF project, the Project Manager and the Project Assistant to DHHP had created a number of monitoring and reporting forms (see Figures 4.12-4.20 for the samples) based on their past project experiences to monitor the project progress. This is consistent with the statement of Newell and Edelman (2008: 570) that project team members, who may be moving from project to project, use their accumulated experiences to improve their practices in an incremental fashion. In particular, where learning from the previous experiences is relevant, it is then applicable in the context of the new project. In order to deal with complexity as well as increase efficiency, existing experiences are more valuable as a result (Disterer, 2002). In addition, some members of the HSIP-AF and Malaria projects noted that the past and other projects' experiences helped them to understand the documentation and coordinating process.

Table 5.12 summarized the use of past and/or other projects' experiences of the three project teams.

**Table 5.12** Use of Past/Other Projects' Experience of Three Project Teams

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
To develop project proposal	To develop project proposal	To develop project proposal
To understand the operating procedures and forms	To understand the guidelines and operating systems	-
To conduct monitoring and evaluation of project progress	To develop monitoring and reporting forms	To follow up project progress
	To understand documentation process (e.g. those official forms for requesting to the government agencies)	For documentation processes
	To understand the coordinating and communication systems of public sector (especially for the contract staff)	For coordinating process and effective management of work-plan

#### 5.2.2.2 Learning from Past Project Documents and Teams

Past project documents and team members were important sources of learning for members of the three projects. Certainly, all three projects had used the documents of past projects for developing and preparing the project proposals. During project implementation, the past project guidelines and manuals concerned had been continuously used as reference for project implementation as all three projects had been extended from previous projects. In addition, several types of past project documents had been used as examples for project implementation. However, there were differences in learning from the past project documents among members of three projects.

Many members of the HIV/AIDS project had learned from the past project documents and team members. Part of the reason was because most members of the HIV/AIDS project were new to the Global Fund project although they had had certain experiences about IDPs. Another reason was that the previous project was managed by a different project team, although the previous and present projects belonged to the same organization. For instance, a member of the HIV/AIDS project who had no experience about IDP used the past project's minutes as an example to document the minutes. On the other hand, some members who had had experience from the previous project still used the past project documents as examples to write the reports and set specifications for procurement. Similarly, some members, who had had experience about IDPs except the Global Fund, made use of the past project's audit results as lessons to prevent mistakes.

For the HSIP-AF project, very few members used the past project documents as examples. This is because some members had worked for the project since previous project, while others were consultants (e.g. the Finance Unit, the Project Assistants to individual departments). For instance, a procurement staff member used the procurement documents and records as examples for documentation process, defining the specifications for procurement of particular goods and works, and preventing problems or delay as in the past.

For the Malaria project, numerous documents and forms developed during the previous Rounds had been continuously applied in the current project. For example, the Technical Working Groups for Malaria IEC used the 2006 Manual for Health Education and Communication to communicate or provide knowledge to the people at risk in order to prevent and control malaria. The existing documents and manuals had also been used by the new members as a primary source of learning. For instance, a logistics staff member, as a new member, had used various manuals as guidance for working such as the 2008 Logistics Management Information Systems Manual, the 2011 Manual for Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT) and Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs) Reports' (for Provincial Malaria stations), and the 2014 Manual for SOPs of Reporting Forms on Malaria Epidemiology and Products.

Table 5.13 compared the use of the past project documents of three projects.

**Table 5.13** Use of Past Project Documents of Three Projects

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
1) To develop and prepare project proposals	1) To develop and prepare project proposals	To develop and prepare project proposals
2) Use of past procurement documents and record as examples to write the reports and set specifications	2) As examples for documentation process	
3) Use of the meeting minutes as example to document the meeting minutes	3) To define the specifications for procurement of particular goods and works	
4) Use of audit results as lessons to prevent mistakes	4) To prevent problems or delay as in the past	

The ability to access to the past documents was important to project learning. Learning from the past project documents was possible only when they were easily accessible when needed. Indeed, the past project documents were accessible because they were maintained properly and systematically (see 5.1.1.4 for Management of project documents and records of each project). In addition, the past project documents and records should be clear and easily understood in order to be lessons for other or future projects. However, a mere learning from the past project documents and records was seemingly insufficient. This is because not all types of lessons were able to be captured and codified into words. This was apparent when attempting to capture individual experiences. As Cacciatori (2008: 1592) has noted, the individual expertise, which is largely intangible, is not easy to codify and stored explicitly. Accordingly, it is necessary for new members to take the how-to-lessons from the past project team members who have had experience.

Indeed, members of the three projects attempted to learn from the past project team members directly. For example, not only using the past project documents, some members of the HIV/AIDS project had approached the past project team members to see and learn how to maintain documents properly to facilitate the

audit, how to document the minutes, and how to minimize the mistakes to be prepared for the audits. In essence, the past project team members were cooperative and willing to share their lessons. Access to the past project team members were easy as they all worked for the same organization. For the HSIP-AF project, because some members of the previous project team had continued working for the present project, especially the seniors and chief of Units, the new and junior members learned from them directly. For instance, a new member of the Finance Unit had learned from the seniors on the financial documentation process, how to prepare request for payment, financial statements and reports, and etc. The Assistant to Project Manager as a new member had learned from Project Manager on how to document the minutes of the meetings, how to prepare project reports, how to run documentation process, and etc. For the Malaria project, the new members mostly approached the past project team members to take the how-to-lessons. Fortunately, before moving to the new project or positions, the past project team members had provided mentoring to the new members. In essence, even though the past project team members had been working for the new organization, some of them were still accessible and willing to assist the present team when needed. These included learning about how to analyze and draw the graph of the malaria data using the software, how to calculate the indicators, and how to summarize the data, among others.

Table 5.14 summarized the types of how-to lessons learnt from the past project teams of three projects.

**Table 5.14** Types of How-To-Lessons Learnt from the Past Project Teams of Three Projects

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
1) how to maintain documents to facilitate the audits	1) how to prepare request for payment, financial statements and reports	1) how to analyze and draw the graph of the malaria data
2) how to document the minutes	2) how to document the meeting minutes	2) how to calculate the indicators
3) how to minimize the mistakes to be prepared for the audits	3) how to prepare project reports	3) how to summarize the data

### 5.2.2.3 Learning from Other Projects and Organizations

In addition to past project documents, there had been use of other projects' documents as references for developing project proposals. For instance, the HIV/AIDS project had used documents of the successful donor funded projects. These included documents of the WHO-Essential Medicines and National Policy Program, the Expanded Program on Immunization, the United States Pharmacopoeia Drug Quality and Information project (USP-DQI), the JICA Pharmaceutical Management Project, the Kontraktsfinansierade Tekniska Samabets (KTS) Project which was designed to help implement the Lao National Medicines Policy and funded via the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), and the HIV/AIDS projects run by Medicines Sans Frontier (or MSF, Switzerland).

For the Malaria project, there had been use of not only the existing guidelines and manuals of the Global Fund project, but also of other IDPs as guidance for implementation. For example, there was usage of the "Guidelines on Quality Control for Malaria Microscopy" which was published in October 2011 under the WHO funded project for malaria tests at three levels: district, provincial and regional. Furthermore, within the Logistics and Procurement Unit, there was the use of the '2008 Manual for Workers of Warehouses in Laos,' which was published by the Strengthening Medical Logistic Project of MPSC, under the support of JICA. There was also use of other organizations' documents as references for preparing the budget plan. For instance, as the transport costs specified by the Global Fund were different from the company, the transport budget needed to refer to the companies' documents for the employees of private companies to attend the meetings.

Not only from the past project team members, there had been learning from other projects and organizations as well. Learning from others occurred through formal and informal mechanisms. Fundamentally, the meetings were held as the formal learning mechanisms for all projects to draw lessons from each other. The Global Fund and World Bank projects had held the meetings as the formal practice of lessons learned for all projects being supported. For instance, the Principal Recipient held the meetings for all Global Fund projects to draw lessons learnt from each other. These included the meetings to solve particular technical problems (e.g. finance, procurement, monitoring and evaluation) which were commonly found by many Sub-

recipients during project implementation, and the meetings to review the audit results. During the financial meetings, some Sub-recipients raised the problems faced, while others shared their lessons with others. Likewise, during the meeting to review the audit results, the Principal Recipient asked all Sub-recipients to draw lessons learnt with each other. Also, the good practices of any Sub-Recipient were used as examples for others to learn from as mentioned in Section 5.2.1.3 Learning from the Audit above. For Malaria project, learning from other projects or organizations occurred during the annual review meeting as well. This was the presentation of the Health Poverty Action, an NGO partner funded by the European Commission for Humanity, who shared the lessons on the malaria epidemic control in the South of Lao PDR from November 2011 to July 2013 (see the 'Annual Review Meeting' section of the Malaria project).

Similar to the Global Fund projects, the World Bank had held the meetings for all projects being supported to take lessons learnt with each other. These were the weekly meetings and the meetings to review the results of the World Bank missions and the audit. During the weekly meetings, learning from other projects had occurred through the reports on project progress and challenges all IDPs. For example, some members had learnt from the data collecting and reporting forms of the ADB project. In addition to this, members of the HSIP-AF project had also learnt from other organizations' IDPs formally through the portfolio meetings held by the World Bank and ADB. The portfolio meetings were held for all projects assisted by the World Bank and ADB to exchange lessons learnt with each other. The meetings had indeed enabled cross-project learning to occur. During the meetings, individual project teams raised the problems found during project implementation and provided feedback to the development partners. In the meantime, the development partners also provided comments to the recipients.

Importantly, the meetings had provided the opportunities to members of each project to personalize their connections. The personalization had led to on-going exchange of information and lessons across projects. For example, members of the HIV/AIDS project had shared their problem-solving methods (e.g. financial reports, disbursement, etc.) to members of other HIV/AIDS Sub-recipients. Members of the HSIP-AF project had exchanged information and lessons with members of other ministries' projects to promote the good practices and avoid weaknesses. These

included the lessons on procurement issues and evaluation methods. Likewise, to continuously improve effectiveness of project implementation, members of the Malaria project had kept contacting and sharing the project information with the Health Poverty Action after the meetings.

Moreover, members of three projects had used personal and social connections to obtain information and lessons from other people outside the project. These included colleagues from other projects and organizations, and friends from the study and training, among others. For the HIV/AIDS project, some members discussed with the expert of other organizations (e.g. the WHO experts who used to be their former lecturer at the University) on project evaluation issues. Similarly, some members of the Malaria project discussed with their friends from other health organizations and other Ministries to exchange information and lessons about logistics, finance, and computer programs. In addition, some had learned from other organizations during a visit to that particular organization. For example, the logistics staff had attempted to learn from the logistics systems of MPSC when going to get the health products maintaining at the MPSC warehouse.

Others had made uses of bridging person(s) to access the resources of other organizations. For example, some members of the HIV/AIDS project had used their personal relationship with an analytical Institute in Hanoi to obtain the information about waste management from the company who has expertise in this area in Vietnam. This practice obviously reflects what Adler and Kwon (2002: 24) have noted that external social ties with others give actors the opportunity to leverage their contacts' resources. For the HSIP-AF project, some members had exchanged information and lessons with friends working for other organizations. These included the updated financial and procurement regulations, and procurement of goods.

Furthermore, to obtain the information needed, some members had deliberately established relationships with members of other organizations. In essence, the socialization with other Departments was bridged through the Department Project Assistant. Likewise, some members of the Malaria project had obtained information needed from other organizations through past project team members who were then working for IDPs of those organizations. Thus, the resources were obtained through indirect personal relationships with others (Adler and Kwon,

2002: 19); that is through individuals who played a brokerage role in bridging across divided communities (Bhandar, Pan and Tan, 2007).

Therefore, it could be said that learning from others occurred through formal and informal approaches. The formal approaches took place through the meetings as the formal practices of lessons learned, while the informal ones were through the use of personal and social relations. These included past project team members, project team members of other IDPs, friends from other organizations, and others. Table 5.15 summarized the sources of learning from other projects of three projects.

**Table 5.15** Sources of Learning from Other Projects of Three Projects

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
<b>Formal learning mechanisms-practices of lessons learnt</b>		
1) weekly meetings of the organization	1) weekly meeting of the organization	1) weekly meeting of the organization
2) the meetings held by the Principal Recipient to solve technical problems (e.g. procurement, finance) and to draw lessons learnt from the audit	2) the meetings held by the World Bank to draw lessons learnt from the audit, from the World Bank Missions	2) annual review meetings (e.g. presentation of the Health Poverty Action)
	3) the portfolio meetings held by the World Bank and ADB	3) the meetings held by the Principal Recipient to solve technical problems (e.g. procurement, finance) and to draw lessons learnt from the audit
<b>Informal learning sources-use of personal connections</b>		
1) to obtain the information	1) to obtain the information (e.g. financial regulations)	to exchange information and lessons (e.g. finance, logistic, computer programs, etc.)
2) to share problem-solving methods (e.g. financial reports and disbursement)	2) to exchange lessons (e.g. evaluation methods)	

### **5.3 Barriers to Project Learning**

It is apparent that three project teams had learned from various sources in an endeavor to achieve the project goals on time and within budget. There were similarities and differences for the learning mechanisms among the three projects. However, there were considerable barriers to cross-project learning. The learning obstacles of the three projects are compared and contrasted below.

#### **5.3.1 Project Uniqueness**

There were several obstacles to cross-project learning, but the most commonly found obstacle was the perception of project uniqueness. Newell (2004: 17) notes that the more a project is perceived as unique, the less likely are project teams to try and learn from others. For example, although the HIV/AIDS project had been extended from the previous project, learning from the past project team was not approached because of project differences. There were indeed some differences in project objectives, one of which was the procurement of technical advisors or consultants. Further, some cited differences in the use of reporting procedures and forms resulting from the shift of financial systems. Meanwhile, there were changes in the accounting software which was different from the past projects. In addition, learning from other Sub-recipients was not preferred by some members due to the belief of project differences. It was asserted that each Sub-recipient had different objectives and hence different approaches to implementation of activities. Similar to the HIV/AIDS project, some members of the HSIP-AF project contended that it was challenging to learn from other IDPs because the operating procedures of individual donors were dissimilar, although the general principles were similar. Also, learning from other projects or organizations was not approached by some members because of the belief that each organization's project was different in the field of work and hence it might be difficult to understand and learn from other organizations' projects. Likewise, learning from IDPs of other organizations was less likely preferred by some members of the Malaria project due to the belief that their work area was unique. The goals and objectives of the Malaria project mainly focused on Malaria control, which was very distinct from other IDPs or organizations, and hence distinct operating approaches.

Accordingly, some might not have opted for learning from other organizations' projects supported by the same donor. Others cited to the reason that the resources needed were able to be obtained adequately within its own networks. This was because CMPE had consisted of many partners (e.g. the Health Poverty Action, MPSC, etc.), while the national malaria control program of CMPE had been supported not only by the Global Fund, but other development partners as well, such as ADB, WHO, World Bank and JICA.

Indeed, several scholars (e.g. DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Newell, 2004; Robertson and Williams, 2006) have asserted that the unique nature of projects makes it difficult for project teams to learn from other project experiences. Several researchers contend that rather than learning from other projects, they solve the new problems of the project themselves (Scarborough et al., 2004: 88; Newell and Edelman, 2008: 579). Also, it is believed that new knowledge was more naturally created from solving problems than from project successes (Newell et al., 2006: 179).

### **5.3.2 Reluctance to Share**

Although some members had attempted to learn from other projects, their willingness was unsuccessful. This was because while some were willing to share their lessons to other people, others might not have been willing. For instance, some members of the HIV/AIDS project contended that they had tried to approach to other Sub-recipients, but it appeared that others were reluctant to share. Arguably, the reluctance to share the project information and lessons to others was due to the assumption that others might not need or be able to understand since the lessons were very specific (Cooper et al., 2002; Newell, 2004; Newell et al., 2006: 175; Robertson and Williams, 2006; Newell and Edelman, 2008: 587). On the other hand, the reluctance might be unintentional and they might be cooperative and willing to share information and learning as found by in the study of Gharaibeh (2011). The unwillingness to share might be because of the pressure to implement their project activities on time.

### **5.3.3 Time Pressure**

For the HIV/AIDS project, there were not only barriers from the belief of project differences, but others as well. For instance, some members asserted that

learning from other Sub-recipients might be difficult because they were very busy with their own projects in an effort to achieve project goals on time. This was consistent with the study of several scholars who found that project teams lack opportunities to share lessons with colleagues outside the project due to time pressure towards project completion (Disterer, 2002; Schindler and Eppler, 2003; Robertson and Williams, 2006). Furthermore, even learning from other projects being supported by the same donor was not approached by some members because of the assumption that other projects would also face with similar problems. For example, as there was a change in the financial systems in 2010 as well as in the procedures and forms, some members presumed that the level of understanding of the new formats might not be much different between Sub-Recipients. Therefore, rather than learning from other projects, most of the team members preferred to ask the Principal Recipient experts who could provide definite instructions and decisions to their problems.

#### **5.3.4 Lack of Opportunity**

Although learning from other projects was not preferable by some members, it was perceived as important and necessary by others. However, they had lacked the opportunities to learn from other project teams. For example, some members of the Malaria project, especially the government staff at the implementing level, had lacked opportunities to learn from other Sub-recipients, even though they preferred it. This was because although the Principal Recipient had held the meetings to draw lessons learned among the three main components (HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis), it was mostly attended by the Chief of Units or Technical Advisors.

Certainly, learning from other projects and organizations can be made through several occasions, in particular the meetings where there are many different organizations attended. However, such meetings were mostly attended by the head of Units or Technical Advisors, while the government officials at the implementing level quite often have no or less opportunity to attend. They thus missed the opportunity to learn and exchange with other projects and organizations during the meeting, as well as the opportunity to develop connections with others for exchange of resources later.

Table 5.16 demonstrated the barriers to cross-project learning of three projects.

**Table 5.16** Barriers to Cross-Project Learning of Three Projects

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
Project uniqueness	Project uniqueness	Project uniqueness
1) Different project objectives and approaches	1) Different operating procedures of individual donors	Distinct project goals, objectives, and operating approaches
2) Different reporting procedures and forms	2) Different fields of work	
3) Changes in the accounting software		
Time pressure each was busy with its own project to complete project activities on time		Lack of opportunity Government staff at implementing level: lacked opportunities to learn from others
Reluctance to share		
Willing to learn from other projects, but others were unwilling to share		

From Table 5.16, there were differences among three projects in terms of the barriers to cross-project learning. Members of the HIV/AIDS project seemed to have faced more impediments than others. The reasons were primarily because of the IDP experience. As aforementioned, because most members of the HIV/AIDS project were new to the Global Fund project, they had faced with many problems during project implementation. They had thus attempted to learn from various sources, including past and other project teams. Unlike the HIV/AIDS project, most members of the HSIP-AF project, especially the contract staff, had had certain experiences about IDPs. More importantly, they had built social connections with the past and other project teams to exchange project information and lessons. In addition, some members had worked for the project since previous phases. Consequently, the access to information and lessons from others was easier. Similarly, the Malaria project had

had fewer difficulties in learning from other projects. The new members could learn from the seniors directly because the project had been implemented for several Rounds. Like the HSIP-AF project team members, there was a use of social and personal connections to obtain information and lessons from other organizations' projects as mentioned above.

## **5.4 Use and Sharing of Project Information**

In general, project information and lessons had been shared and used at three levels: individual, project, and organizational. The use and sharing of project information and lessons by the three projects were compared and contrasted below.

### **5.4.1 At Individual Level**

Having realized the usefulness, some members had shared project information and lessons with other project teams of the organization. For example, some members of the HIV/AIDS project shared the procurement guidelines and forms with colleagues for application to other projects of the organization. Moreover, some members had applied the project forms to other projects of the organization and the organizational routine. For instance, as the project responsibility was similar to the routine, an assistant to the accounting specialist of the Malaria project had attempted to adapt the project budget lessons to plan for the government budget. Likewise, the logistic staff had adapted the Global Fund's forms to other projects of the organization such as ADB and WHO. For the HIV/AIDS project, some members adapted the project financial report forms for the organizational routine, while others directly applied the project procurement lessons to the organizational routine. In addition, some members had made use of the project forms personally. For example, after having realized their usefulness, head of the monitoring and evaluation unit of the HIV/AIDS project had used the individual performance forms (see Figure 4.5 and Table 4.6 for the sample of the Summary of the Month forms and Timesheet) not only for assessment of individual team members' performance, but also for self-assessment.

The use of project information and lessons to other projects of the organization were good practices. However, the practices were made individually and personally. Since there are no requirements for them to apply or share project information and lessons with others in the organization, they can choose to do or not to do so. The sharing and use of project information at individual level of three projects were summarized in Table 5.17.

**Table 5.17** Sharing and Use of Project Information at Individual Level

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
1) Sharing procurement guidelines and forms with colleagues for application to other projects of the organization	-	1) Adapt project budget lessons to plan for the government budget
2) adapted project financial report forms for the organizational routine		2) adapted the project financial report forms for the organizational routine
3) use of individual performance forms for self-assessment		

#### **5.4.2 At Project Level**

To improve project effectiveness and efficiency, the project information and lessons had been fundamentally shared and used within the project team. Usually, the project information and lessons had been shared during the meetings of the project team (see Section 5.1.3.1 Regular meetings). Also, there had been use of ICT tools not only for monitoring of project progress, but also for sharing of project information at all levels (see Section 5.1.3.3 Use of ICT Tools). In addition, the project teams had provided regular feedbacks or supervisions and transferred project lessons to the implementing agencies at the local levels. For the HSIP-AF project, the efforts were made through the enhancement of project management skills and technical competence to the local health personnel. These included financial and procurement management through targeted short-term training, seminars, and regional conferences

at the central, provincial and district health offices (World Bank, 2011). For example, to decentralize the activities to project provinces, NPCO conducted procurement training for procurement and financial staff on how to conduct procurement in their provinces by themselves on November 20-30, 2012 (National Project Coordination Office, 2013: 22). Similar to the HSIP-AF project, the Malaria project had shared project information and lessons with the implementing agencies through the regular supervisions, as well as provision of trainings to improve and upgrade the competency and skills of local health officials. These included the training on project financial management, overall project management, monitoring and evaluation.

The sharing and use of project information at project level of three projects were summarized in Table 5.18 below.

**Table 5.18** Sharing and Use of Project Information at Project Level

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
1) Use and sharing within project team at all levels	1) Use and sharing within project team at all levels	1) Use and sharing within project team at all levels
2) Provision of feedbacks	2) Provision of feedbacks	2) Provision of feedbacks
3) use of individual performance forms to assess individual team members' performance	3) supervision teams: sharing of project information and lessons among teams to supervise the provinces	

#### **5.4.3 At Organizational Level**

At the organizational level, there was a formal sharing of project information and lessons during the meetings. These included the weekly meetings of the organization, the annual review meetings, and the meetings held by donors such as the meetings for particular technical problems, the meetings to draw lessons learnt from the audit (see Section 5.2.2.3). During the weekly meetings, each project not only reported its project progress, but also formally shared their lessons with other projects of the organization. In the same token, there was sharing of lessons learnt among projects being funded by the same donor during the meetings to draw lessons learnt from the audit.

Apart from the meetings, there was sharing of project information and lessons across the project within the organization. For instance, the Malaria project had specifically arranged the supervision teams to follow up the progress reports of one or two specific provinces, and monitor and supervise all activities, except finance, at the sites every three months (see ‘Project Monitoring and Evaluation’ in section 4.3.1.2). Each team consisted of a technical staff (e.g. Epidemic, logistic, finance, IEC, etc.) and an assistant. To enable individual teams to follow up the provincial progress, it needed transfer of technical skills and lessons to each other (e.g. through 3-day training). The arrangement had not only offered the project team members opportunity to learn from each other, but also sustained project lessons which in turn helped build capability for improvement of the project efficiency and effectiveness. For the HIV/AIDS project, the FDQCC had used the monitoring and evaluation forms of the Global Fund projects to monitor the staff’s working days and performance. For the HSIP-AF project, project information and lessons were less likely used and transferred to the organization. This is partly because most members of were contract staffs who move into other organizations and take their new knowledge and experiences with them after the project completion (Schindler and Eppler, 2003).

The sharing and use of project information of three projects are summarized in Table 5.19 below.

**Table 5.19** Sharing and Use of Project Information at Organizational Level

<b>HIV/AIDS Project</b>	<b>HSIP-AF Project</b>	<b>Malaria Project</b>
1) Formal sharing (e.g. weekly meetings and the meetings held by donors)	Formal sharing (e.g. weekly meetings, annual review	1) Formal sharing (e.g. weekly meetings, annual review meetings, and the meetings held by donors)
2) Personally shared and used for other projects of the organization (e.g. procurement forms)	meetings, and the meetings held by donors)	2) Personally shared and used for other projects of the organization (e.g. ADB, WHO)
3) Adapted for organizational routine (e.g. financial report forms, procurement lessons)		3) Adapted for organizational routine

It is obvious that there were similarities and differences in sharing and using project information and lessons among the three projects. In general, the use and sharing of the HIV/AIDS and Malaria projects were more or less similar to each other. The project information and lessons had been shared and used at all levels formally and informally. Part of the reasons was because most members of the HIV/AIDS and Malaria project teams were government staff and hence had shared and used the project information and lessons within and across the project. Conversely, the HSIP-AF project had only shared and used project information and lessons formally at the project and organizational levels. This was because most members of the project team were contract staff or outsourced, while only few of them were government staff.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

To ensure effective management of grant fund, the development partners imposed several stringent requirements and conditions for project implementation. The main requirements and conditions were set for procurement, finance, monitoring and reporting of the project progress. For effective procurement management, the Principal Recipient had developed the procurement manual for all Global Fund projects. On the contrary, the World Bank project was required to use the World Bank procurement guidelines for international procurement and the borrowing countries' manual for the national procurement. In fact, due to lack of specific procurement manual for the project, the project team had encountered with procurement problems.

To ensure the accountability and transparency of grant fund management, the Guidelines for project finance management had been specifically developed for both the Global Fund and World Bank projects. In comparison, the World Bank's manual was seemingly more specific than the Global Fund's ones as it was developed for the project specifically. On the other hand, the Global Fund's manual was used for all Global Fund projects. According to the manual, all projects were required to submit the financial reports quarterly and annually. Also, all projects shall be audited internally and externally. The internal audit of the Global Fund projects were conducted by the Principal Recipient, while the World Bank project was checked by

the Financial Unit responsible by a consulting firm. The external audit of both projects was conducted by the external independent auditor annually. To facilitate the audits, all projects were required to maintain all financial related documents and records properly. The Financial Manual had thus detailed the procedures on how to retain protect financial records and documents. Practically, each project had maintained the financial documents and records properly.

To ensure the funds were used effectively and that the goals were achieved within the time frame, all projects were required to regularly monitor and report the project progress within the dates specified. Thus, to monitor the project progress of implementing agencies, the Malaria projects had developed the monitoring and reporting manuals, while the HSIP-AF project developed the operating manual and a number of self-created forms. The manuals detailed the procedures on who should do what, when, how and what forms to be used. For effective monitoring and reporting, there was a use of ICT tools such as intranet and internet systems and database software. The project progress was finally reported to DPs by using the forms specified in the Project Financial Guidelines. To monitor the project progress at central level, all three projects had conducted regular monitoring through the meetings of the project teams. The frequency of the meetings had been continuously adapted based on the actual needs of the problems faced. The meetings of the HIV/AIDS project were shifted from weekly to monthly and when needed. On the other hand, the HSIP-AF project had adapted from quarterly to weekly meetings. In addition, there were uses of the meeting minutes were as a tool to follow up the project progress. However, there were differences in the extent of details recorded in the minutes. The minutes of the HSIP-AF and Malaria projects were clear and specific and recorded in standard formats. Conversely, the minutes of the HIV/AIDS project were unclear and had no specific format and hence sometimes recorded in textual or table format.

For effective project management, the project team was specifically formed. The structure of three project teams was different in terms of the units, compositions and experience of team members. Firstly, the HSIP-AF project had three units; the HIV/AIDS project four units, and the Malaria project five units. However, each project consisted of two main units; finance and procurement. Secondly, most members of the HIV/AIDS and Malaria projects were government staff, while

members of the HSIP-AF project were contract staff. Finally, there were differences in the experience of project team members. For the HIV/AIDS project, most members were new to the Global Fund project. Most members of HSIP-AF project had worked for many IDPs or NGOs, while some members had worked since the previous project. Likewise, most members of the Malaria project had had long experience in management of the Global Fund project.

In an effort to meet the requirements, all projects had attempted to learn within and across the project. Within the project, the main sources of learning included donors' experts, technical advisors or consultants, audits, and annual review meetings. Firstly, learning from the donors' experts was mostly approached by all project teams because they could provide definite instructions and decisions to the problems. These included the instructions for reporting, budget planning, procurement, and reprogramming and reallocation of money. Secondly, learning from the technical advisors was highly necessary because the government staff lacked technical knowledge and skills. The use of consultant services was for finance, logistic and procurement, epidemiology, and ICT. Audits were the third source of project learning. During the audits, individual being questioned exhaustively on particular issues by the auditors could learn directly the mistakes needed to be improved. After the audits, project teams learned from the meetings to draw lessons learnt from the audits. During the meeting, there was sharing of good practices among project teams and discussing particular technical issues as the collective efforts to improve project performance. Finally, the annual review meetings had been held as the formal practices to review project performance and take lessons learnt for the future. The learning primarily took place through presentation and discussion sessions which were arranged differently. The HIV/AIDS project held the discussions after all presentations, while the HSIP-AF project was after some presentations. For the Malaria project, the discussions were conducted after each presentation. The presentations generally provided such information as the project progress against its goals, the difficulties encountered, strengths and weaknesses, and what to do. The discussions were held to solve the common issues faced through identification of the root causes and solutions. Also, the meeting minutes were an important source of project learning. In general, each minute contained such headings as agenda of the

meeting, presentations on the project progress, the issues discussed, proposals, and agreement of the meeting. The minutes thus enabled the readers to learn what had been achieved, what the issues discussed were, and what solutions were taken by project teams. However, there were differences in the extent of details recorded in the minutes as discovered in the minutes of the meetings of project teams.

For cross-project learning, the main sources were from documents of the past and other projects, past project experience, past project team members and the meetings. Principally, there was use of past project experience for the present project such as to develop project proposal, to understand the operating procedures, and to develop monitoring and reporting forms. Also, the past project documents had been used for developing project proposal; as the example for completing the job. In addition, there was learning from the past project team members for the how-to-lessons such as how to maintain documents to facilitate the audits, how to document the minutes, and how to prepare request for payment, financial statements and reports. Additionally, there had been formal and informal learning from other projects' documents and information. The formal learning had occurred through the meetings to solve technical problems, the meetings to draw lessons learnt from the audits, and the meetings held by donors for all projects being supported to draw lessons learnt from each other. The informal learning had occurred through the use of other projects' or organizations' information such as for developing project proposal and as guidance for project implementation. The information of other projects and organizations had been accessed through the use of personal connections such as colleagues from other projects or organizations, friends from the study and training, and etc.

In spite of the learning facilitators, there were considerable obstacles to learning in IDPs. Learning from other organizations' projects was not preferred by some members due to project uniqueness as well as different operating procedures of each donor. Thus, rather than discussion with other projects, they approached the Principal Recipient directly who could provide correct instructions and definite decisions to the problems. On the other hand, although some members attempted to learn from others, their willingness was unsuccessful due to the project time pressure, the unwillingness of others to share the project information or lessons, and the lack of opportunity to learn.

Nevertheless, the project information had been shared and used within and across the project at three levels; individual, project and organizational. At individual level, there had been sharing of procurement guidelines and forms with colleagues for application to other projects of the organization; and use of the project forms to other projects of the organization as well as the organizational routine. At project level, the project information and lessons had been fundamentally shared and used within the project team to improve project effectiveness and efficiency. The project information and lessons had been shared through the meetings of the project team; ICT tools; regular supervisions, as well as provision of trainings. At the organizational level, project information and lessons had been shared formally during the weekly meetings of the organization, the annual review meetings, and the meetings held by donors such as the meetings for particular technical problems, the meetings to draw lessons learnt from the audit. Additionally, there was sharing of project information and lessons across the project within the organization through the arrangement of the supervision teams to follow up the progress of implementing agencies.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter has two main sections: the conclusion and recommendations. The first section presents the conclusion drawn from the data and is organized according to the research questions. The second section provides recommendations for effective approaches to project-based learning and future research.

#### **6.1 Conclusions**

In order to alleviate poverty, the GOL, as the Government of a least developed country, relies on foreign assistance and concessional loans from development partners to support public development programs. To ensure effectiveness and efficiency of grant fund management, the development partners usually impose rigorous requirements and conditions for compliance. To achieve project goals on time, and to meet donors' requirements, project learning is extremely important. Thus, this study explored 1) what the main requirements and conditions imposed by donors for project implementation were; 2) what the facilitators as well as barriers to the learning process of project teams were in their attempt to achieve project goals on time and within donor requirements; and 3) how the project information was shared and used by the project teams within and across the projects. To answer the research questions, three projects were specifically selected from a range of IDPs in the Lao health sector: two Global Fund projects-the HIV/AIDS Project named 'Scaling up HIV and AIDS Prevention, Care and Treatment in Lao PDR' of FDD and FDQCC from 2010 to 2014; and the Malaria project named 'Sustaining Malaria Control in Lao PDR, Focusing on Malaria Vulnerable Population through Multi-sectorial approach' of CMPE from 2013 to 2015; and another World Bank assisted project called the 'Health Services Improvement Project-Additional Financing' (or HSIP-AF) of DPIC from 2012 to 2014. In order for triangulation, the data was collected from various

sources and methods such as reviews of project documents and records, in-depth interviews, and participant-observations. The data was analyzed in terms of individual cases and cross-cases in order to understand the themes that emerged from the individual cases.

The study had assessed and discussed the evidence of individual cases in Chapter 4 and cross-cases in Chapter 5. These two chapters are concluded according to the research questions below.

### **6.1.1 Main Requirements for Project Implementation**

To ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of grant fund management, the development partners usually impose a number of stringent requirements and conditions for project implementation in the grant agreement. Fundamentally, the requirements and conditions are imposed for procurement, finance, monitoring, and reporting of project progress. The main requirements are concluded below.

Firstly, for effective management of project procurement, the Principal Recipient for the Global Fund projects was required to develop and implement standard operating procedures satisfactory to the Global Fund. To ensure the compliance, the Principal Recipient had thus developed the project procurement manual. The manual specified the procurement steps and methods, as well as the responsibility of the Principal Recipient, Sub-Recipient, Sub-Sub-Recipient, and Provincial Procurement Unit. Furthermore, the Principal Recipient summarized the main procedures and threshold values for each procurement method in a table for easy understanding and implementation. In general, the table provided the information about how much money each level could procure, and by which method. The type of documents and forms required by each procurement method was also specified in detail. The steps and forms were very concise and easy to understand and follow as they were specifically developed to meet the project needs. In addition, to ensure that all Sub-Recipients understand and apply the correct procedures, the Principal Recipient held the training on application of the Procurement Manual and provided additional instructions for the Sub-Recipients with weak procurement management. As a consequence, compliance with the requirements and conditions was less problematic for the Global Fund projects.

Unlike the Global Fund projects, the project procurement of the Work Bank project was performed based on the World Bank's procurement guidelines for international procurement and the Procurement Manual of the Ministry of Finance for the national procurement. The use of particular guidelines and methods was fundamentally based on the threshold values. The Procurement Manual had provided principles and detailed procedures in procurement process under public funds. Also, there were several forms for particular methods. However, as the manual was not specifically developed for the World Bank project, the HSIP-AF project had encountered certain procurement problems. These included the inapplicability of some principles, the delay due to long procurement procedures, and the differences in procurement practices at the central, provincial and district levels. To ensure that all levels apply the correct procurement procedures, it is thus necessary to develop the procurement manual for the project specifically. The manual should define, in detail, the threshold values and procurement methods, as well as supporting documents or forms to be used by each level. In other words, the manual should specify for each level such as who should do what, when, how, and forms to be used. In addition, it may be more useful to summarize any important procedures in the table and/or flow chart for easy application as the Procurement Manual of the Global Fund projects.

Secondly, to ensure the accountability and transparency of grant funds, the project finance management guidelines had been developed. The guidelines for the Global Fund and World Bank projects were different in terms of the number of chapters and forms, and the contents covered. The guidelines for the Global Fund projects, consisted of 19 chapters, specified the operating procedures for each financial topic (e.g. budgeting, project advance process, etc.) as to who should do what, how and when. On the other hand, although the Financial Management Manual of the World Bank project covers only 10 Chapters, it not only provided detailed operating procedures for particular topics, but also specified separately the financial management for each level: central, province and district. In terms of the forms, the World Bank project had 76 forms, while the Global Fund projects had only 60 forms. To ensure the correct application, the Principal Recipient Office held the training on Project Financial Management for the Sub-Recipients and Sub-Sub-Recipients prior to project implementation. Likewise, the Finance Unit of the World Bank Project provided training for the local levels.

In comparison, the World Bank's manual had been more effective than the Global Fund projects' guidelines. This is because the former was developed for a project specifically and therefore clearly defined who should do what, when, how, and which forms should be used at each level. In essence, the forms were very specific and simple. On the other hand, the later had been developed to be applicable to all Global Fund projects at all levels from Sub-sub recipients to Principle Recipient. Consequently, the forms covered several contents and demanded detailed information to be filed. In reality, however, not all forms are applicable to all projects at all levels since each project is unique. As a result, although it may be unviable to develop a specific manual for each project, it may be more effective for the Principle Recipient of the Global Fund to at least clearly define each recipient should do what, when, how, and which forms should be used in separate chapters for easy application as in the case of the World Bank's manual. Still, for effective financial management, each project should better develop a financial manual for its own project specifically.

According to the agreement, all projects were required to submit financial reports with sufficient information for project monitoring on the use of funds, to ensure that project implementation is on track, and budgeted costs will not be exceeded. In comparison between the Global Fund and World Bank projects, the frequency of financial report submissions was generally similar. Both were required to submit quarterly and annual financial reports. The differences were that the Global Fund projects were required to submit the progress update and disbursement request every 6 months to the Principal Recipient who then prepared a consolidated report and submitted to GFATM; whereas the World Bank project was required to submit the project financial statements quarterly to the authorities concerned (e.g. Department attached to the project, DOF, DPIC; Ministry of Finance; the committee for planning and cooperation; and the World Bank).

Furthermore, revenues and expenditures of the grant recipients were required to be audited internally and externally. The Global Fund projects had been audited internally by the Principal Recipient, whereas the World Bank project was audited by the Financial Unit responsible by a full time consulting firm. In short, their roles were to conduct a financial review, forensic audit or evaluation, or to take any other actions that it deemed necessary to ensure the accountability of the recipients for the Grant

funds. The internal audits of the Principle Recipient and Financial Unit of the World Bank project were a sound practice because they were conducted by independent external organization/unit. In essence, the Financial Unit of the Principle Recipient and the World Bank projects was responsible by the financial experts which were outsourced. In addition, these practices would enable the recipients at all levels to prepare their readiness for the external audit. For the external audit, each project was annually audited by an independent external auditor (e.g. by the Local Fund Agents for the Global Fund projects). This was internationally recognized as an important and necessary practice for project financial management. However, the Global Fund projects were also audited by the Office of Inspector General of the Global Fund at any time. The audits covered the use of Global Fund resources at a country level.

To facilitate the review and auditing of executed project transactions, all projects were required to prepare and arrange all financial statements with supporting documents and all relevant accompanying notes and details. In this regard, proper archiving and filing of project documents and records were highly required. Indeed, to ensure the accountability and transparency as well as readiness for the audit, the Global Fund projects' Financial Guidelines detailed procedures for retention/protection of financial records and documents (e.g. period of retention of financial records, physical filing, physical keeping of documents, and backup of accounting data). Likewise, the Project Financial Management Manual of the World Bank project also defined the procedures for storage and retention of project files, financial records as well as computer-generated accounting records at each level.

In practice, each project had maintained the financial documents and records properly as specified in the Manual. Not only had the financial documents, the Malaria projects also managed other documents and records of the project (such as procurement documents and records, and project progress reports) chronologically in proper binders and cupboards. More importantly, the Malaria Project had specifically developed policies on the management of all documents and records. This was evident in the 'Manual for SOPs of Reporting Forms on Malaria Epidemiology and Products' that all data should be maintained in proper binders as well as on the computer. This is because the Malaria Project has had a large pile of documents and records, and thereby needed a proper filing system to store and facilitate the access

when needed. Indeed, the proper filing systems had effectively aided the access to documents and records needed. Similar to the Malaria Project, all documents and records of the HSIP-AF had been maintained systematically in proper binders which were named and coded properly. Undoubtedly, the practices were to facilitate regular check as well as annual audits of project revenues and expenses since the project had been continued from previous projects. Conversely, other relevant documents and records of the HIV/AIDS project (e.g. procurement, reports, etc.) were not well organized and retained and hence difficult to find when needed. Thus, to facilitate the access and retrieval of all relating project information and data, either hard or soft files, it may be more effective to establish the policies and procedures or manual for management of project information as in the case of the Malaria Project.

Thirdly, all projects were required to monitor and evaluate the project progress and to prepare the project reports regularly throughout the implementation phase. To monitor the project progress of the local levels, there had been development of the monitoring and reporting manuals and forms. Although there were the Global Fund manuals in place, the Malaria project had developed the Manual for SOPs of Reporting Forms on Malaria Epidemiology and Products, with five times of modification (since 2003 up to present). The manual combined various forms in a logbook such as the forms for collecting the data of malaria cases, logistic, and IEC. Similarly, the HSIP-AF project had been developed the Free Maternal Guidelines which had detailed who should submit which forms and reports to whom and when. Furthermore, the project team had developed many more monitoring and reporting forms such as the form to summarize the project funds transferred to the implementing provinces, the district technical and financial report forms, and the weekly progress report from implementing agencies to NPCO. The forms had indeed assisted the Project Manager to monitor and follow up the project progress of the implementing agencies. In addition, the submission deadlines had been detailed in the manuals for each level in order to ensure the timely, correct and complete submission of the reports. The submission deadlines were detailed for each level in the manual because it was used as an indicator to measure the project goals' achievement. The late, incorrect or incomplete submission of the reports from the bottom-up would directly affect the submission of reports at the central level to the development

partners and eventually the rate of achievement. More importantly, the late implementation of activities would extremely affect the achievement of project goals because if the project progress was unable to achieve the project goals within a period of time set (say less than 50 percent), the grant funds could be terminated.

It sounds effective to use the timely, correct and complete submission of the reports as an indicator to measure the achievement of project goals and objectives within a period of time. The indicator might be able to push the implementing agencies at all levels to complete the activities and report the project progress within the timeframe set. However, it appeared that many activities, in particular those at the local levels, had not been able to implement and complete within the specified time due to various factors. These included lack of staff, many activities to be implemented at a time, difficulties in transportation and weather conditions, etc. Thus, the timeframe set for implementation of project activities may need to be more realistic and taken into account for all potential limitations.

In addition to the monitoring and reporting manuals and forms, there had been use of the ICT tools to manage, store and share project data and information. Basically, e-mails had been used as a key channel for communication and sharing of information within and across the project. Furthermore, there had been setup of the intranet and internet systems as a channel for sharing project information and data across the project. The Malaria Project had used such programs as Dropbox, a web-form platform called WOOFU, whereas the HSIP-AF Project had specifically developed a website called DHIS2. Similarly, the HIV/AIDS Project had specifically established a database program to inspect the products in the markets, a program for drug analysis, and etc. In effect, the ICT programs were accessible by those involved whenever needed, and hence had been acceptably convenient and effective by the users. Therefore, the proper and systematic management of project information could facilitate the access to the past and present project documents whenever needed. Despite of the advantages, there were limitations in the use of such web-based software. To monitor and report the project progress, there must be internet accessibility. Furthermore, not everyone was good at using the computer. In addition, the health staff at local levels were normally responsible for various tasks and hence might not have time to transfer project data in the forms into the web-based forms.

For effective use of the web-based software, therefore, the internet accessibility must be taken into account. Also, there may need training on the use of web-based software. For the forms in both hard and soft copies, they should be designed in a way that were uncomplicated, easy to fill in and time-saving for the implementers.

To closely monitor the project progress and solve the problems of implementing agencies in a timely fashion, all projects held the meetings regularly, but the frequency of the meetings was adapted based on the actual needs. The HIV/AIDS project held the meetings every Saturday morning at the earlier stage of the project, once a month in 2011 and when necessary at the end. In contrast, the HSIP-AF project team held the meeting quarterly during the early stage of the project, and then weekly to solve the problems on time. The Malaria project team held the meetings only when needed to solve severe and/or urgent problems. Therefore, the frequency of meetings held by the project team could be adaptable based on the actual needs. It could be more or less often as long as the project team was still able to follow up the project progress and to solve the problems on time. In addition, the project progress of each project was also followed up during the weekly meeting of the organization.

To follow up the project progress of implementing agencies, there had been a use of the meeting minutes as a tool of which each project team had its own way of recording the minutes. The HSIP-AF and Malaria projects had developed a standard format, while the HIV/AIDS project had no fixed or standard format for recording the meeting minutes. There were differences in the extent of details being recorded. The project progress monitoring sheet created by the HSIP-AF project team contained such headings as the responsibility Department, deadline, challenges, next steps, and responsible persons. The information recorded under each heading was detailed and specific. Likewise, the minutes of the Malaria project were recorded in detail and specific on the topic discussed and actions taken. In this manner, the project team had been able to monitor and follow up the project progress effectively. The detailed minutes enabled the readers to understand what had happened to the project and what actions had been taken during a particular period of time. Different from other projects, the HIV/AIDS project had no fixed or standard format for documenting and hence the minutes were sometimes documented in textual or table format, or a

mixture of both formats. Some minutes were recorded in detail for the challenges faced and solutions taken. However, other minutes were very short and ambiguous. In this way, it would be difficult for others to understand the context of the general and unclear information recorded, except the project team. In order for other or future projects to be able to understand and/or learn from, the minutes should be clear, specific and contain all important and necessary information as the project progress monitoring sheet of the HSIP-AF project.

At the central level, each project team was also monitored and evaluated regularly. The World Bank project was monitored and evaluated by the World Bank team every three months. After the mission, the World Bank provided an Aid-memoire which included the weaknesses and actions needed to be taken, as well as deadlines for the following missions. For the Global Fund projects, the project progress had been monitored and evaluated by the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit who then reported to the Principal Recipient within specified dates. Despite of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, the Malaria project had set up special supervision teams for more effective monitoring of project progress at the local levels. Each team consisted of a technical staff from particular sections and an assistant to closely follow-up on the weekly and monthly progress of one or two provinces. The team had to conduct field monitoring and supervision of all activities every three months. The arrangement was effective as it was assigned to a specific group to take the entire responsibility for particular provinces. However, although project team members had shared information under their responsibility with each other, it seemed to be quite challenging for the group who had no or limited expertise in the particular section to monitor project progress and provide supervision to the provinces. For more effectiveness, therefore, there is a need for transfer of knowledge among technical staff of each section concerned.

The project progress was normally required to report to the development partners in the reporting forms specified in the Project Financial Management Guidelines. However, as the monitoring and reporting forms of the Global Fund were seemingly inapplicable, the Malaria project had used its own forms to report to the Principal Recipient. Thus, since not all forms were applicable to all projects, there should be flexibility in the use of forms. The forms should be adaptable for effective

monitoring and reporting of the progress of particular projects. Not only the development partners, the project teams had to report to other organizations concerns.

It appears that each project had made uses of a number of monitoring and reporting tools to effectively monitor the project progress. However, to ensure the timeliness submission of the reports from the implementing agencies, there should be development of the standard operating procedures for reporting that clearly specifies in details who should submit what to whom and when. Also, to effectively monitor the project progress against the goals and to solve the problems in a timely manner, it needed not only the weekly meetings or whenever needed, but also the monitoring and reporting forms. It is apparent that the more sufficient and necessary information they were documented, the higher the ability to track the progress. These included such important points as the activities, deadline, progress/challenges, next steps and responsible persons. A sound effective sample was the project progress monitoring sheet of the HSIP-AF. On the other hand, it is most likely difficult to track the project progress and challenges from the reports with general content or without specific information of how the problems should be solved, by whom and when to be complete. Therefore, the monitoring and reporting forms should cover all necessary headings that effectively help follow up the progress in each period of time. In addition, there is a high demand for advanced ICT systems to support multidirectional communication as well as effective monitoring and reporting of the project progress from the implementing agencies.

For effective management of the project, the project team was formed. The project structure of three projects was different in terms of the number of units, number of members, the use of consulting services, and the experience of individual team members. For the number of units, the HIV/AIDS and Malaria projects had to set up at least three units: Financial, Procurement, and Monitoring and Evaluation. Other units had been basically formed to meet the project objectives. The HIV/AIDS project consisted of IT unit, whereas the Malaria project included the Public-Private Mixed and Technical Working Groups. For the HSIP-AF project of the World Bank, there were only three units: Finance, Procurement, and Administration; that is there was no specific monitoring and evaluation unit. Rather the project progress of all departments concerned was monitored and evaluated by the Project Assistants to the

department and reported to the project manager weekly. Regardless of the project structure, it was primarily designed to meet the project needs.

With respect to the number of team members, it seemed that the bigger the project size, the higher the number of project team members. Based on the project size (e.g. scope of the project and amount of funds), the smallest number of team members was the HIV/AIDS project with altogether 12 members, while the biggest one was the Malaria project with a total of 26 members. Also, there were differences in the composition of team members. Most members of the Global Fund projects were government staff; seven members for the HIV/AIDS project, and 21 members for the Malaria project. Other members were contract staff such as specialists for IT, financial and procurement. Conversely, most members of the HSIP-AF project team were contract staff, with 12 out of 20. These included five Project Assistants to individual Departments concerned, an assistant to Project Manager, a Project Assistant to Savannakhet province, and five Provincial Financial Accountants. The use of consulting services was specified in the grant agreement. The HSIP-AF project was required to use the service of a consulting and accounting firm responsible for the financial unit and outsourced staff as Project Assistants to individual departments. For the Global Fund projects, they had been allowed to use the consulting service not only for finance, but also for technical areas such as epidemiology, logistic and procurement, and IT because the government officials had lacked knowledge and skills in such areas. Irrespective of the composition of project team members, the main purpose was generally to ensure that the project activities were implemented and monitored and that the project goals were achieved within specified timeframe effectively and efficiently.

Finally, the experience of individual team members was various. Some members of the HSIP-AF project had worked for IDPs or NGOs for quite a long time. While some members had continued to the present project, two members were new to the project. For the Malaria project, some members had worked for the Global Fund project for several rounds, while few were new to the project. In essence, most members were responsible for the project work which was similar to their routine. On the contrary, most members of the HIV/AIDS project were new to the Global Fund projects, although they had previously worked for IDPs funded by different

development partners. Furthermore, many of them had project responsibilities which were different from their routine. Additionally, although it was extended from the previous projects, it had been managed by a different project team. As a result, even though there were past project teams available for consultations in the same organization, the project team had encountered difficulties during project execution.

The differences in project management experience resulted in differences in learning mechanisms. Among the three projects, the HIV/AIDS project team needed to learn more than the other two projects. Therefore, the following sections concluded the similarities and dissimilarities among the three projects with regard to their learning mechanisms and constraints, as well as the sharing and use of project information.

### **6.1.2 Sources of Project Learning**

In an effort to meet the requirements, all projects had attempted to learn from both within and across the project. Within the project, the main sources of learning were donors' experts, technical assistants, audits, and annual review meeting. During project execution, the donors' expert teams were mostly approached by the project teams in order to obtain instructions directly because they could provide definite instructions and decisions. The HSIP-AF project team approached to the World Bank team to obtain instructions for particular problems such as the inapplicability of some procurement guidelines to the actual situation. For the HIV/AIDS project team, although the Principal Recipient provided the training on the use of guidelines and forms for all Sub-recipients prior to project implementation, the inexperienced members still needed further instructions such as for monitoring and evaluation, reporting the project progress, budget planning, procurement, reprogramming and reallocation of money. Likewise, although most of the Malaria project team members had had long experiences in the Global Fund project management, they also preferred to discuss with the Principal Recipient to solve such issues as procurement, monitoring and evaluation, and progress reports. To response to such needs, the Principal Recipient Office and the World Bank team, which consisted of experts in particular areas of work, had provided technical assistance to the project team with weak technical management skills through the regular monitoring and supervision,

and refresher training from time to time. The expert instructions were highly necessary and important to all project teams. The roles of expert teams were primarily to provide advice or instructions to the project teams to ensure their compliance with the requirements. Also, the instructions could help the project teams to solve the problems encountered in a timely manner. Notably, the instructions could have become lessons for the project teams when facing with any repeated or similar problems, and had effectively contributed to building the capacities of the project teams.

Learning from the technical advisors or consultants was also highly important and necessary for the government officials. Apparently, having acknowledged that the government officials lacked technical knowledge and skills, the projects were allowed to use the services of technical advisors or consultants, especially for finance management. The main job of technical advisors was to assist in overall management, support, organization and procedural issues of technical areas. Also, the technical advisors were required to transfer technical skills to the government staff as part of their action plan. For effective transfer of skills, the technical assistants, together with the team, had to identify staff needs, and agree on the expected results, methodology, resources, and timeframe. In reality, the HIV/AIDS and Malaria projects had hired financial specialists, whereas the Financial Unit of the World Bank project was fully responsible by a full time consulting firm. In addition, the HIV/AIDS project had hired IT experts, while the Malaria Project had recruited specialists for procurement, logistic, and epidemiology. There had been skill transfer to the government staff mainly on technical areas but less on project management. For the HSIP-AF project, there was use of consultants as Project Assistants to individual departments, but no requirement on transferring of project management skills to the departments. In this regard, it was in concern for the sustainability of the project. This is because most of the health staff had primarily specialized in the health care areas, but had limited capacity in the management field. This includes the skills to write project proposal, to prepare budget plan and reporting, to conduct monitoring and evaluation, and etc. Therefore, for effective management of IDPs and to sustainably build the capacity of government officials, it is recommended for the current or future IDPs that have used or will use the service of consultants to include the transfer project management skills

to the government staff as part of their job or action plan. Otherwise, the projects are at risk of losing project knowledge because once the project is complete, the consultants or technical advisors will move to other projects and bring the knowledge with them.

Internal and external audits were also a good source of learning for the project teams to improve their practices in order to assure the accountability and transparency of grant funds. The internal audits, which were an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity, assisted project teams at all levels to build and upgrade the financial management capacities through many sources. These included operation of the project financial policies and procedures, the regular reviews and feedbacks or recommendations for improvements, and refresher trainings. The internal audits had in turn assisted the project teams to prepare their readiness for the external audits. For the external audits, the three project teams had learned across the auditing process. Prior to the audits, they had learned how to prepare and arrange all financial statements with supporting documents and all relevant accompanying notes and details in order to facilitate the external audits. This is because any lack of proper documentation or discrepancies between workplan and expenditure, may disqualify the expense claims and could lead to a refund. During the external audits, individuals learned directly from the questions being asked by the auditors on particular issues. To avoid such mistakes, all related financial documents and records had been checked carefully as a result. Furthermore, some members had used the auditing lessons to check the financial documents, to monitor and supervise the implementing agencies. After the audit, the audit results and comments had been lessons for individual members and the project team as whole. Individual members had learnt what needed to be clarified and/or improved further as the audit findings were reported separately for each work area. The collective learning occurred during the meeting specifically held for all projects being assisted by the same donors to draw lessons learnt from each other. The main source of learning was derived from such processes as clarification and discussions on particular issues, sharing of the good practices of any particular project, and problem-solving attempts through identification of root causes and solutions or corrective action plan. Therefore, the regular financial review, forensic audit or evaluation as well as feedback provisions were substantially useful in

order to ensure the accountability and compliance of project teams and implementing agencies at all levels. Also, to prevent the repeated mistakes, it is extremely important to hold the meeting for all projects under the same donors to draw lessons from each other. The good practices could be used by other and/or future projects, while the mistakes could be lessons to prevent the repetition.

To review project performance and take lessons learnt for the future, all projects held the annual review meetings as the formal practices. The meetings attended by all concerned such as all project team members, implementing agencies, the department concerned, the MOH steering committee, Ministries concerned, and donors' representatives. For the agendas of the meetings, the main contents included presentations on project progress in each work area, discussions and future plan. The presentation contents included such contents as project progress, challenges, strengths and limitations, solutions and next steps. Each of the contents provided detailed and specific information about the project performance in each work area. In this manner, all involved could learn what had and had not yet been achieved, what went well or wrong, what the main causes were, what actions had been and/or should be taken to solve the problems, and what should be done in the future for each work area.

For the discussion sessions, there were differences in the sequential arrangements. The HIV/AIDS project arranged the discussion sessions after all presentations, the HSIP-AF project organized after some presentations, while the Malaria project held them after each presentation. Regardless of the arrangements, the discussions contained such main practices as clarification of the issues raised, sharing of ideas and lessons, and proposal of solutions and recommendations. For instance, during the meeting of the HIV/AIDS project, the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit first pointed out for the causes of late and irregular submissions of monitoring and evaluation reports such as sending the report to the Project Coordinator for consideration before submission to the Principal Recipient, lack of assistants, and too many tasks to be complete. To help solve the problems, many participants suggested possible solutions such as a direct report to the Principal Recipient office to meet the deadline, getting more assistants, and arranging additional training if needed.

For the Malaria project, the discussions were taken as an important part of the meeting as they were held right after each presentation. Although there were several

issues raised in the presentations, the technical issues were taken as the main topic for discussions. The discussions were very specific and in detail for individual technical issues such as the criteria used for estimation of bed nets, the number of bed nets to be distributed in each province, and the late delivery of Malaria commodities from the central to the local level. The arrangements in such way enabled all involved to identify and share effective solutions or lessons on what should be done, how and when for particular issues. For instance, for the effective maintenance of Malaria commodities, several solutions were raised for consideration such as maintenance of the bed nets in the regional warehouse, storage of the drugs and rapid diagnostic tests, as well as bed nets at the provinces or districts. To solve the problems, it was recommended for CMPE and MPSC to draft the standard operating procedures for the maintenance of Malaria commodities at regional, provincial and district levels

Similar practices were also apparent in the meeting of the HSIP-AF project. For example, following the presentation of Project Manager who reported the project progress in details and very specific which province performed well on what and which province had no progress reports and why, the provinces being questioned pointed out what were the main causes of the problems. Meanwhile, those provinces performed well shared their lessons on management techniques that enabled them to achieve its goals and submit the report on time. In essence, the HSIP-AF arranged group discussions on specific work areas (e.g. coordinating and reporting, financial management, procurement, etc.) by using the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis tools. Each group consisted of participants from the Department concerned and provincial representatives to discuss and share ideas and opinions on a particular area. The results of individual group discussions were also presented to the meeting. Furthermore, there were discussions on the issues of particular areas identified by the group and participants.

Accordingly, it could be said that irrespective of the arrangement, the main objective of the meeting was to report the project progress and challenges, to draw lesson learnt and to seek for effective solutions to the project problems. Particularly for the discussions, the sessions allowed the participants to actively identify what were the problems as well as their root causes of particular issues, how such problems were or should be solved, and what should be done to prevent the repeated problems.

By sharing the individual experiences and opinions in project meetings and reviews, project teams can achieve an improved level of understanding and learning; that is learning by discussing and learning by confronting (Prencipe and Tell, 2001: 1378). When individuals or teams make a collective effort to enhance their understanding of the causal links between actions and outcomes, project learning is articulated (Zollo and Winter, 2002: 341; Newell and Edelman, 2008: 570). However, the arrangement of group discussions and presentations of the HSIP-AF project was an effective practice for identifying the SWOT of each work area. This is because each group consisted of all sections concerned, ranging from central to local levels. This could be lessons for other or future projects to consider and take as a session of the annual review meeting.

Apart from the meetings, the minutes could also be a crucial source of learning for project teams as well as other or future projects as they were distributed to all concerned. Each project had its own way to document the minutes. The HIV/AIDS project had no standard format, whereas the HSIP-AF and Malaria projects had used their own formats for documentation. Nonetheless, the minutes of three projects included such contents as title of the meeting, objectives, participants, agenda of the meeting, presentation on the project progress, the issues discussed, proposal, and agreement. However, there were differences in the extent of the details recorded in the minutes. The minutes of the Malaria Project were very clear and specific; and detailed separately the issues for discussions, the solutions proposed and taken. The Agreement of the Meeting was divided into three groups: management; distributions of long lasting insecticide nets; and finance. The minutes of the HSIP-AF even provided more details about who presented what, what the participants' opinions and comments on the presentation as well as responses from those concerned were, and who should do what. Recording in this manner would enable the readers to understand what had happened to the project in general, what were the project challenges, what were the main and specific issues faced by the project team and implementing agencies, what were the solutions suggested by the participants or those concerned, and what actions they had taken for particular issues. On the other hand, the minutes of the HIV/AIDS Project were quite brief and lacked detailed information under each content. In this regard, only those who directly involved in were able to

understand the context of the minute. This is consistent with the study of Kasvi et al. (2003: 580) who noted that the lessons learned are often not well documented and archived, not edited for reuse, described too generically or not visualized where necessary, too difficult to understand, or difficult to retrieve. Since the minute was not recorded as lessons learned for the subsequent projects, it would be less likely to be used by other or future projects.

In order to review project performance and draw lessons learnt for the future, most projects organize the annual review meetings, while the minutes of the meeting were documented and distributed to all concerned. However, as the project-based learning experience is relatively held by the teams involved in the project only (Keegan and Turner 2001: 79), documentation of project learning should be made as attempts to capture and transfer the experience and insights of the vanguard project teams to subsequent project teams who can benefit from them (Brady and Davies, 2004: 1607). It may be more effective and useful for other or future projects if the minutes describe in more details how the goals had been achieved and/or why it worked or did not work rather than focusing on what had been achieved or not achieved (Newell, 2004: 16; Newell et al., 2006: 175). Thus, the minutes should cover the full and detailed descriptions of particular issues raised, the identification and solution of concrete and detailed explained problems (Disterer, 2002). Some good examples were from the minutes of the HSIP-AF and Malaria projects, of which they detailed the problems faced for particular topics, the suggestions and solutions. Documented in this manner, the readers were able to understand what had happened to the project and what actions were taken as the practices of lessons learnt.

Not only learning within the project, the project teams had also learned from other projects or organizations. The mechanisms through which the cross-project learning had occurred included the use of project experience, learning from the past project documents and teams, and other projects and organizations.

Firstly, the past project experience had been used to develop proposal of the current and future projects. During project implementation, the experiences from other IDPs had been useful for understanding the guidelines and operating procedures (e.g. communication systems, documentation processes), coordinating and management of the project work plan, monitoring and follow-up of the project

progress, and developing forms. For instance, some members of the HSIP-AF project had used the past project experience to develop monitoring and reporting forms (e.g. the form to summarize the project funds transferred to the implementing provinces, the district technical and financial report forms, and the weekly progress monitoring sheet). Accordingly, it is evident that the project team members who had experienced used their accumulated experience to the current project. Such accumulated experience had been admittedly useful to implementation of the project workplan. However, the past/other projects' experience might not be fully applicable when it came to details of the particular operating procedures given each donor had its own way of doing things. One obvious example was the financial management, in which each project might have a specific accounting program specifically designed by a consulting firm. Nonetheless, the past project experience had been useful to a certain extent.

In addition to the past project experience, there had been use of past project documents for preparing and developing project proposal. During project implementation, the past project guidelines and manuals concerned had been continuously used as reference for project implementation as all three projects had been extended from previous projects. Furthermore, past project documents and records had been used by the inexperienced or new members as examples for documentation process, documenting the meeting minutes, defining the specifications for procurement of particular goods and works, and writing the reports. Importantly, the past project documents and records were easily accessible when needed because they were maintained properly and systematically.

It is obvious that past project documents were an important source of learning for the present project teams. The ability to access to the past documents was important to project learning. Learning from the past project documents was possible only when they were easily accessible when needed. Thus, the past project documents should be maintained properly and systematically in order to facilitate project learning. In addition, the past project documents and records should be clear and easily understood in order to be lessons for other or future projects.

There was not only learning from past project documents and records as the example for completing the job, but past project team members as well. As not all

types of lessons, especially the know-how lessons or intangible knowledge, were able to capture and codify into words, new members had attempted to learn from the past project team members. These included the lessons on how to maintain documents properly to facilitate the audit, how to document the minutes, how to minimize the mistakes to be prepared for the audits, how to analyze and draw the graph by the software program, how to calculate the indicator, and how to summarize the data. For the HSIP-AF project, access to the past project team members were easy because some members of the previous project team had continued working for the present project. On the other hand, even though the past project team members of the Malaria Project had worked for the new organization, they were still accessible and willing to assist the present team when needed. Likewise, the past project team members of the HIV/AIDS Project were cooperative and willing to share their lessons as they all worked for the same organization.

Ostensibly, learning from the past project team members had been possible because the past project team members were accessible such as due to working in the same organization, on-going working for the present project, and willingness to assist. However, it is questionable if the past project team members, especially the contract staff or consultants who usually move from one project to another will bring with them the knowledge, were unable to access to or unwilling to assist. In this situation, the project knowledge can be lost once the project is complete. Thus, to prevent the loss of project knowledge and information, especially of the contract staff or consultants who usually move from one project to another will bring with them the knowledge after the project completion, there may need to be proper policies on project knowledge management. These included the requirements on technical advisors or consultants to transfer project knowledge and skills to the government officials as part of their assignments as in the case of requirements for financial specialists.

Not only the past projects' documents, there had also been uses of the documents and information of other projects and/or organizations. The HIV/AIDS project had developed its project proposal based on documents of the successful donor funded projects such as the WHO - Essential Medicines and National Policy Program, the United States Pharmacopoeia Drug Quality and Information project, the JICA

Pharmaceutical Management Project, the Kontraktsfinansierade Tekniska Samabets Project, and the HIV/AIDS projects of Medicines Sans Frontier, Switzerland. The Malaria project had used others IDPs' manuals as guidance for project implementation such as the "Guidelines on Quality Control for Malaria Microscopy" of the WHO funded project; the '2008 Manual for Workers of Warehouses in Laos,' of the Strengthening Medical Logistic Project of MPSC, supported by JICA; and the private companies' transport costs for budget planning.

In addition, there had been learning from other people outside the project and organization as well. Cross-project learning occurred through formal and informal mechanisms. The formal mechanisms were those meetings held for all projects to draw lessons from each other. The formal cross-project learning mechanisms of the Global Fund projects occurred through various meetings such as the weekly meetings of the organization, the meetings held by the Principal Recipient to solve particular technical problems (e.g. finance, procurement, monitoring and evaluation), and the meetings to review the audit results. Likewise, the HSIP-AF project team had had opportunity to learn from other projects through the weekly meetings of the organization, the meetings to review the results of the World Bank missions and the audit, and the portfolio meetings held for all projects assisted by the World Bank and ADB to exchange lessons learnt with each other.

The meetings had not only facilitated the formal cross-project learning to occur, but also provided the opportunities for the participants from various organizations to develop social connections. The socialization had led to ongoing sharing of the information and lessons among individual members after the meetings. For example, members of the HIV/AIDS project had shared their problem-solving methods (e.g. disbursement, financial reports, etc.) to members of other HIV/AIDS Sub-recipients. Similarly, members of the HSIP-AF project had exchanged information with members of other ministries' projects to promote the good practices and avoid weaknesses (e.g. lessons on procurement issues and evaluation methods). To continuously improve effectiveness of project implementation, members of the Malaria project had also kept contacting and sharing the project information with the Health Poverty Action after the meetings.

The informal mechanisms of cross-project learning had generally occurred through the use of personal connections. Some members of the Malaria Project discussed with their friends from other health organizations to exchange information and lessons about finance, logistic, and computer programs. Moreover, the logistic staff had attempted to learn from the logistic systems of MPSC when going to get the health products maintaining at the MPSC warehouse. Similarly, some members of the HIV/AIDS project discussed with the expert of other organizations (e.g. the WHO experts who used to be their former lecturer at the University) on project evaluation issues. Furthermore, there was a use of a bridging person to obtain the information needed from other organizations. For instance, some members of the HIV/AIDS Project had used their personal relationship with an analytical Institute in Hanoi to obtain the information about waste management from the company who is expertise in this area in Vietnam. Likewise, some members of the Malaria Project had obtained information needed from other organizations through a past project team member who has now worked for an IDP of such organization. For the HSIP-AF, some members had deliberately established the relation with members of other organizations through a department Project Assistant.

Accordingly, the cross-project learning could occur through various sources, but the formal and important mechanisms were those meetings held for all project teams being supported by the same or different donors to take lessons learnt from each other. A good practice of cross-project learning was the portfolio meetings held by the World Bank and ADB, where other or future projects could take into account in order to improve project effectiveness and efficiency. This is because during the portfolio meetings, individual project teams raised the problems found during project implementation and provided feedback to the development partners, while the development partners provided comments to the recipients. Importantly, the meetings provided the opportunity for all project teams to socialize with one another. Such social connections provided the opportunities, motivation and ability for the project team members to share information and lessons with each other later. In addition, the personal connections were an essential source for obtaining information and lessons needed from other people outside. These included colleagues within the organization, friends from the study/training/meetings, past project team members, project team members of other IDPs, and friends from other organizations, others.

In summary, members of the HIV/AIDS project team had attempted to learn from others more than other project teams. The reason was primarily because most members of the HIV/AIDS project were new to the Global Fund project; they had faced with many problems during project implementation. They had thus attempted to learn from various sources, including past and other project teams. Unlike the HIV/AIDS project, most members of the HSIP-AF project, especially the contract staff, had had certain experiences about IDPs. More importantly, they had built social connections with the past and other project teams to exchange project information and lessons. In addition, some members had worked for the project since previous phases. Consequently, the access to information and lessons from others was easier. Similarly, new members of the Malaria project had had fewer difficulties in learning. They could learn from the seniors directly because the project had been implemented for several Rounds. Additionally, there was a use of social and personal connections to obtain information and lessons from other organizations' projects.

### **6.1.3 Barriers to Project Learning**

Although the cross-project learning had been derived from various sources, there had existed certain obstacles. These were project uniqueness, reluctance to share, time pressure, and lack of opportunity. The project uniqueness was the most common obstacle to cross-project learning. Learning from the past project team or other IDPs was not preferred because of the project differences in project goals and objectives, and hence different approaches, and strategies. Furthermore, although the principles were generally similar, the operating procedures of each donor were different from one another, and hence inapplicable to their project. These included the differences in the financial reporting procedures, accounting software, procurement, monitoring and reporting process. This is because the procedures and forms were designed to particularly serve the project needs as well as donors' requirements. Accordingly, some might not have opted for learning from other organizations' projects supported by the same donor.

On the other hand, although some members were willing to learn from other projects, their willingness was unsuccessful. This is because while some were willing to share their lessons to other people, others might not be willing. For instance, some

members of the HIV/AIDS project had tried to approach to other Sub-recipients, but it appeared that others were reluctant to share. The unwillingness to share might be because of the pressure to implement their project activities on time or the assumption of project uniqueness and hence difficult for others to understand. Indeed, learning from other projects was not approached for some members due to the belief that each project was under a high pressure to complete the project on time as planned. The time pressure was particular the case for the Global Fund projects because the timeliness submission was used as an indicator of project performance. Furthermore, some members of the HIV/AIDS project assumed that all Sub-recipients faced similar difficulties due to the change in operating procedures and hence the level of understanding of the new procedures and formats might not be much different. Accordingly, rather than learning from others, they preferred to discuss with the donors' experts who could provide definite instructions and decision to their problems to ensure their compliance with the requirements.

Despite that fact, learning from other projects may still be useful and necessary in order to improve effectiveness of project implementation. Other project team members may have had experiences that could be useful and taken as lessons. The processes of how things are done across the projects might be more helpful since they are likely to share much in common. Also, the way how other project teams overcome the procedural problems they are likely to face could be useful lessons for the project team (Newell et al., 2006: 182). Therefore, there is still a room for project team to learn from experience of other projects despite the project uniqueness.

In addition, although the meetings for cross-project learning were held for many projects to draw lessons learned with each other, such meetings were mostly attended by head of the Units or Technical Advisors. The Malaria project team members who were government officials of the at the implementing level quite often had less opportunity to attend. They thus missed the opportunity to learn from other projects and organizations during the meeting, and develop social connections with others for exchange of the resources needed later. According to Schindler and Eppler (2003: 219-220), the individual experiences are accessible only through informal or social networks. Project team members learned through conversations with those who are able to help them solve particular problems. These people are normally in their

personal or social networks (Newell, 2004:19). In this regard, the organization should provide them the opportunity to learn from other projects and organizations by arranging events for people from different units, divisions, projects to meet and develop networks. For instance, the organization may arrange a small meeting to bring project teams from different projects within and across MOH to exchange lessons learned with each other, provisions of training on specific technical issues (e.g. overall project management, finance, procurement and logistic, and IEC), a study visit at the organizations where there have been best practices in particular areas. In other words, the organization should organize any events of which they have a chance to draw and exchange lessons learnt with others, and the conditions under which social networks are to be developed to provide opportunity, motivation and ability for exchange of resources later.

#### **6.1.4 Use and Sharing of Project Information**

Despite the barriers, the project information was used and shared at three levels. At individual level, some members of the HIV/AIDS project shared the procurement guidelines and forms with colleagues for application to other projects of the organization after having realized the usefulness. Moreover, there had been application of the project forms to other projects of the organization and the organizational routine. This is particular for the HIV/AIDS and Malaria Projects where most of the project team members were government officials. For instance, as the project responsibility was similar to the routine, an assistant to the accounting specialist of the Malaria project had attempted to adapt the project budget lessons to plan for the government budget. Likewise, the logistic staff had adapted the Global Fund's forms to other projects of the organization (e.g. ADB and WHO). Also, some members of the HIV/AIDS project adapted the project financial report forms for the organizational routine, while others directly applied the project procurement lessons to the organizational routine. In addition, some members had made use of the project forms personally. For example, after having realized their usefulness, head of the monitoring and evaluation unit of the HIV/AIDS project had used the individual performance forms not only for assessment of individual team members' performance, but also for self-assessment.

The use of project information and lessons to other projects of the organization were good practices. However, they were made individually and personally. Since there are no requirements for them to apply or share project information and lessons with others in the organization, they can choose to do or not to do so. Thus, there should be policies on sharing and applying of good practices to one another within the organization in order to improve the performance and achieve organizational goals as a whole. For the projects that comprise of government staff as team members, there should be policies on sharing of such good practices to one another within the organization. Also, for sustainable development, there should be the plan for transferring of the technical and project management skills to the health personnel such as through on-the-job training.

To improve project performance, the project information and lessons had been shared and used within the project team during the meetings of the project team. Also, there had been use of ICT tools not only for monitoring of project progress, but also for sharing of project information at all levels. Furthermore, there was a use of audit lessons to monitor and supervise the implementing agencies at the fields. Additionally, the project teams had provided regular feedbacks or supervisions and transferred project lessons to the implementing agencies at the local levels. The efforts were made through the enhancement of project management skills and technical competence to the local health personnel. These included financial and procurement management through targeted short-term training, seminars, and regional conference at the central, provincial and district health offices.

Project information and lessons had been shared across the organization through various meetings. These included the weekly meeting the annual review meeting, and the meetings held by donors such as the meetings for particular technical problems, the meetings to draw lessons learnt from the audit. During the weekly meeting, each project reported its project progress and shared their lessons with other projects of the organization. In the same token, there was sharing of lessons among projects being funded by the same donor during the meeting to draw lessons learnt from the audit. Moreover, there was sharing of project information and lessons across the project within the organization. For instance, the Malaria project had specifically arranged the supervision teams to follow up the progress reports of one or two

specific provinces, and monitor and supervise all activities, except finance, at the sites every three months. Each team consisted of a technical staff and an assistant. To enable individual teams to follow up the provincial progress, it needed transfer of technical skills and lessons to each other. The arrangement had not only offered the project team members opportunity to learn from each other, but also sustained project lessons which in turn helped build capability for improvement of the project efficiency and effectiveness. For the HIV/AIDS project, having recognized its usefulness, the FDQCC had used the monitoring and evaluation forms of the Global Fund projects to monitor the staff's working days and performance.

It is obvious that there were similarities and differences in sharing and using project information and lessons among the three projects. In general, the use and sharing of the HIV/AIDS and Malaria projects were more or less similar to each other. The project information and lessons had been shared and used at all levels formally and informally. Part of the reasons was because most members of the HIV/AIDS and Malaria project teams were government staff and hence had shared and used the project information and lessons within and across the project. Conversely, the HSIP-AF project had mainly shared and used project information and lessons formally at the project level, but less at the organizational level. This is partly because most members of were contract staffs who move into other organizations and take their new knowledge and experiences with them after the project completion. Thus, for sustainable development, there should be plan for transferring of technical and project management lessons and skills to the health personnel as in the case of the Global Fund projects.

## **6.2 Implications for Future Research**

Despite remarkable findings, there are several limitations to this study that may indicate fruitful opportunities for future research. Firstly, to enable generalization of the study results, there need further study in various sectors and donors' type. This is because this study results are generalized based on the case study of IDP-based learning in three health public organizations' of Lao PDR. Yin (2009) suggests that case study findings may not be generalizable. Limitations exist in terms of the

generalization of case study's findings, and thereby there is a need for research in other IDP-based sectors to examine whether the findings are in the same context or not. Also, the study only examined the project-based learning of public organizations in the Lao health sector. Project-based learning in other public organizations may be different. Furthermore, the study is concluded based upon only two main development partners namely the Global Fund and World Bank. The requirements and conditions of other development partners may be distinct, especially the operating procedures which is most likely different. In addition, future study may attempt to conduct a comparative study between the IDPs of public organizations and NGOs which have also been supported by international development agencies.

Secondly, the study is consistent with several scholars that social connections facilitate project-based learning to occur. The connections through personal networks indeed provide channels for information flows and certain advantages that are unevenly distributed within and across organizations (Burt, 1992; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). However, the study mainly focuses on the pattern of relationships between actors- 'that is who you reach and how you reach them' (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998: 244). Thus, it is unknown for the nature or quality of personal relationships (such as strengths of ties, closeness, trust, etc.) that facilitate the resources. Thus, it might be useful to examine the dimensions of social capital of which the project teams used to obtain resource needed from other people outside the projects.

Finally, future research on this topic may examine further the effectiveness of project learning and its contribution to the success of project implementation. Future study may focus more on such questions as which learning mechanisms are most effective for improving the effectiveness of project implementation; how project team's learning contributes to the achievement in project provinces; to what extent is their contribution, and what are the outcomes. In addition, it may be more useful for future research to study from the project sponsor's position rather than from the project team position.

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## **APPENDICS**

**APPENDIX A**  
**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

No.	Research Questions	ຄຳຖາມບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້າ
1.	What are the main requirements and conditions imposed by donors for project implementation?	ໃນການຈັດຕັ້ງປະຕິບັດໂຄງການ ຜູ້ໃຫ້ທຶນມີຂໍ້ກຳນົດແລະເງື່ອນໄຂຫຍັງແດ່?
2.	What are the learning mechanisms used by the project teams to achieve the project goals on time and satisfy the donor's requirements?	ແຫຼ່ງການຮຽນຮູ້ທີ່ທີມງານບໍລິຫານໂຄງການນຳໃຊ້ ເພື່ອເຮັດໃຫ້ສາມາດບັນລຸເປົ້າຕາມກຳນົດເວລາ ກໍ່ຄືບັນດາເງື່ອນໄຂແລະຂໍ້ກຳນົດຂອງຜູ້ໃຫ້ທຶນ?
3.	What are the barriers to their learning?	ອຸປະສັກໃນການຮຽນຮູ້ຈາກໂຄງການຊ່ວຍເຫຼືອມີຫຍັງແດ່?
4.	How do project team use and share the project information within and across the project?	ທີມງານບໍລິຫານໂຄງການໄດ້ມີການນຳໃຊ້ແລະແບ່ງປັນຂໍ້ມູນຂອງໂຄງການ ແນວໃດ?
<b>I. Opening</b>		<b>ພາກສະເໜີ</b>
1	<b>Introducing the research purpose</b>	<b>ຈຸດປະສົງຂອງບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້າ</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This research is being conducted to get to know how project teams learn, use and share project information and lessons in attempting to complete the project goals on time as well as to satisfy the requirements and conditions of development partners.</li> <li>- I am conducting this research for my PhD's course at GSPA, NIDA, in Bangkok, Thailand.</li> <li>- Your kind cooperation in providing information needed would be much appreciated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ຈຸດປະສົງຂອງການສຶກສານີ້ກ່ຽວກັບ ກໍ່ເພື່ອຈະໄດ້ເຂົ້າໃຈແຈ້ງວ່າ ຄະນະບໍລິຫານໂຄງການຊ່ວຍເຫຼືອຕ່າງໆ ມີການຮຽນຮູ້, ນຳໃຊ້, ແລະແລກປ່ຽນ ຂໍ້ມູນແລະບົດຮຽນຕ່າງໆແນວໃດ ເພື່ອທີ່ຈະເຮັດໃຫ້ບັນລຸເປົ້າໝາຍພາຍໃນກຳນົດເວລາ ພ້ອມທັງບັນລຸບັນດາເງື່ອນໄຂຕ່າງໆຂອງຜູ້ໃຫ້ທຶນ.</li> <li>- ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າດຳເນີນການຄົ້ນຄວ້າສຳລັບບົດວິທະຍານິພົນປະລິນຍາ ເອກໃນດ້ານການພັດທະນາການບໍລິຫານ ຫຼັກສູດບໍລິຫານຄຸ້ມຄອງພາກລັດ ຢູ່ທີ່ຄະນະລັດຖະສາດ ຂອງສະຖາບັນພັດທະນະບໍລິຫານສາດ, ບາງກອກ, ປະເທດໄທ.</li> <li>- ການຮ່ວມມືໃຫ້ຂໍ້ມູນຈາກທ່ານແມ່ນມີສຳຄັນຫຼາຍ.</li> </ul>
2	<b>Key informants targeted</b>	<b>ຜູ້ໃຫ້ສຳພາດທີ່ເປັນເປົ້າໝາຍ</b>
	I am especially interested in the opinions of key project team members such as project manager, project coordinator, accountant, procurement staff, M&E staff, and administrative staff.	ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າມີຄວາມສົນໃຈທີ່ຈະສຶກສາການຮຽນຮູ້ຂອງທີມງານບໍລິຫານໂຄງການ ໂດຍສະເພາະແມ່ນຜູ້ທີ່ຮັບຜິດຊອບວຽກງານບໍລິຫານຄຸ້ມຄອງໂຄງການ ບໍ່ວ່າຈະເປັນຜູ້ປະສານງານໂຄງການ, ບັນຊີ-ການເງິນ, ຈັດຊື້ ແລະອື່ນໆ.
3	<b>Explanation of the questions to be asked so that informants understand the information being sought</b>	<b>ອະທິບາຍໂດຍຫຍໍ້ໃຫ້ແກ່ຜູ້ໃຫ້ສຳພາດເຂົ້າໃຈ ຮູບແບບຂອງຄຳຖາມ</b>
	The questions I would like to ask you relate to your own experience of learning in and from IDPs (such as how you learn, use and share project knowledge throughout the project).	ຄຳຖາມທີ່ຈະຖາມທ່ານນັ້ນ ແມ່ນພົວພັນເຖິງປະສົບການໃນການຮຽນຮູ້ຂອງທ່ານຈາກໂຄງການຊ່ວຍເຫຼືອ (ເຊັ່ນ: ທ່ານໄດ້ມີການຮຽນຮູ້, ນຳໃຊ້ ແລະ ແບ່ງປັນຄວາມຮູ້ ແນວໃດ).

<p>4 <b>Confidentiality and consent form</b></p> <p>Everything you tell me will only be used for this research project, and will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. Also your name will not be used, to make sure that no one can identify you with any answers. You have already consented to the interview with the consent form. Do you have any questions before we begin?</p>	<p><b>ການສະແດງຄວາມຍິນຍອມໃຫ້ສໍາພາດ</b></p> <p>ທຸກຂໍ້ມູນທີ່ທ່ານເປີດເຜີຍຈະຖືກນໍາໃຊ້ໃນບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້ານີ້ເທົ່ານັ້ນ ແລະໃນກໍລະນີທີ່ມີການກ່າວອ້າງເຖິງໃນບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້າ ຈະມີການນໍາໃຊ້ນາມແປງແທນຊື່ຂອງທ່ານ ເພື່ອຮັບປະກັນບໍ່ໃຫ້ມີການບັງຊີ້ເຖິງຕົວທ່ານ. ທ່ານໄດ້ລົງນາມເຫັນດີໃນການໃຫ້ສໍາພາດຄັ້ງນີ້ໂດຍສະໝັກໃຈ ທ່ານມີຄໍາຖາມໃດບໍ່ ກ່ອນທີ່ຈະເລີ່ມດໍາເນີນການສໍາພາດ.</p>
<p><b>II. Background Information</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>ຂໍ້ມູນພື້ນຖານ</b></span></p>	
<p>1 <b>Education background and work experience</b></p> <p>Can you please tell me about your educational background and work experience before working for this project?</p>	<p><b>ປະຫວັດການສຶກສາແລະປະສົບການໃນການເຮັດວຽກ</b></p> <p>ກ່ອນອື່ນ ຢາກໃຫ້ທ່ານຊ່ວຍແນະນໍາຕົວເອງໜ້ອຍໜຶ່ງກ່ຽວກັບຕົວທ່ານເອງ ໃນດ້ານປະຫວັດການສຶກສາ ແລະປະຫວັດການເຮັດວຽກ ກ່ອນມາເຮັດວຽກໂຄງການນີ້?</p>
<p>2 <b>IDP experience</b> (name of the project and donors, position, and duration)</p> <p>Have you ever worked for any IDPs before?</p> <p>- <u>If yes:</u> Can you please tell me about your experiences about IDPs?</p>	<p><b>ປະສົບການຈາກໂຄງການຊ່ວຍເຫຼືອ</b> (ຊື່ໂຄງການແລະຜູ້ສະໜັບສະໜູນ, ຕໍາແໜ່ງ, ແລະຈໍານວນປີທີ່ເຮັດ)</p> <p>ກ່ອນມາເຮັດວຽກໂຄງການນີ້ ທ່ານເຄີຍໄດ້ເຮັດວຽກໃຫ້ໂຄງການຊ່ວຍເຫຼືອໃດມາກ່ອນບໍ່?</p> <p><u>ຖ້າມີ:</u> ທ່ານຊ່ວຍເລົ່າໃຫ້ຟັງແຕ່ໄດ້ບໍ່ ວ່າມີໂຄງການໃດແດ່ ເຮັດດົນປານໃດ ແລະໃນຕໍາແໜ່ງຫຍັງ?</p>
<p><b>III. Requirements and Conditions</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>ຂໍ້ກຳນົດແລະເງື່ອນໄຂຂອງຜູ້ໃຫ້ທຶນ</b></span></p>	
<p>3 <b>Responsibility &amp; work procedures</b></p> <p>- Can you please tell me what your roles and responsibilities are?</p> <p>- How are they processed?</p>	<p><b>ໜ້າທີ່ຮັບຜິດຊອບແລະຂັ້ນຕອນການດໍາເນີນງານ</b></p> <p>ຊ່ວຍເລົ່າໃຫ້ຟັງແຕ່ ວ່າທ່ານມີໜ້າທີ່ຮັບຜິດຊອບຫຍັງແດ່? ແຕ່ລະວຽກມີຂັ້ນຕອນການດໍາເນີນງານແນວໃດແດ່?</p>
<p><b>IV. Learning Sources</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>ແຫຼ່ງຂອງການຮຽນຮູ້</b></span></p>	
<p>4 <b>Learning on the job</b></p> <p>In completing your own work, how did you learn the process and procedures of your work?</p>	<p><b>ການຮຽນຮູ້ຈາກການເຮັດວຽກ</b></p> <p>ໃນການປະຕິບັດວຽກງານຂອງທ່ານເອງ ທ່ານຮຽນຮູ້ຂັ້ນຕອນແລະຂະໜວນການໃນການເຮັດວຽກນີ້ໄດ້ແນວໃດ?</p>
<p>5 <b>Use of past experience</b></p> <p>Is the past project experience used for the present project?</p> <p>- <u>If no:</u> why not?</p> <p>- <u>If yes:</u> can you please tell me how the past project experience was used in this project? Any example?</p>	<p><b>ການນໍາໃຊ້ປະສົບການທີ່ຜ່ານມາ</b></p> <p>ປະສົບການທີ່ຜ່ານມາໄດ້ນໍາໃຊ້ໃນໂຄງການປະຈຸບັນນີ້ບໍ່?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າບໍ່:</u> ຍ້ອນຫຍັງ?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າມີ:</u> ປະສົບການທີ່ຜ່ານມາ ໄດ້ຖືກນໍາໃຊ້ໃນການເຮັດວຽກໂຄງການນີ້ຄືແນວໃດແດ່? ຊ່ວຍຍົກຕົວຢ່າງໃຫ້ເບິ່ງຈັກຕົວຢ່າງແດ່?</p>

6	<b>Learning from past project documents</b>	<b>ການຮຽນຮູ້ຈາກເອກະສານຂອງໂຄງການທີ່ແລ້ວ</b>
	<p>Is there any situation that you used the past projects' documents as lessons learned for your own work?</p> <p>- <u>If no</u>: why not?</p> <p>- <u>If yes</u>: how did you obtain it? Used for what kinds of work? Any example?</p>	<p>ທ່ານເຄີຍໄດ້ນຳໃຊ້ເອກະສານຂອງໂຄງການທີ່ຜ່ານມາ ເປັນບົດຮຽນສຳລັບການເຮັດວຽກບໍ່?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າບໍ່</u>: ຍ້ອນຫຍັງຈຶ່ງບໍ່ໄດ້ນຳໃຊ້?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າມີ</u>: ທ່ານເອົາມາຈາກໃສ ແລະ ນຳໃຊ້ໃນວຽກໃດ? ຊ່ວຍຍົກຕົວຢ່າງໃຫ້ເບິ່ງແດ່?</p>
7	<b>Learning from other project documents</b>	<b>ການຮຽນຮູ້ຈາກເອກະສານຂອງໂຄງການອື່ນໆ</b>
	<p>Is there any situation that you used other projects' documents as lessons learned for your own work?</p> <p>- <u>If no</u>: why not?</p> <p>- <u>If yes</u>: how did you obtain it? Used for what kinds of work? Any example?</p>	<p>ທ່ານເຄີຍໄດ້ນຳໃຊ້ເອກະສານຂອງໂຄງການອື່ນ ເພື່ອເປັນບົດຮຽນສຳລັບການເຮັດວຽກບໍ່?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າບໍ່</u>: ຍ້ອນຫຍັງຈຶ່ງບໍ່ໄດ້ນຳໃຊ້?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າມີ</u>: ທ່ານໄດ້ມາຈາກໃສ ແລະ ນຳໃຊ້ໃນວຽກໃດ? ຊ່ວຍຍົກຕົວຢ່າງໃຫ້ເບິ່ງແດ່?</p>
8	<b>Learning from past project team</b>	<b>ການຮຽນຮູ້ຈາກທີມງານໂຄງການທີ່ແລ້ວ</b>
	<p>Is there any situation that you attempted to learn from the past project team members?</p> <p>- <u>If no</u>: why not?</p> <p>- <u>If yes</u>: For what kind of work did you ask them? Any example?</p>	<p>ທ່ານເຄີຍໄດ້ພະຍາຍາມຮຽນຮູ້ຈາກທີມງານໂຄງການທີ່ຜ່ານມາບໍ່?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າບໍ່</u>: ຍ້ອນຫຍັງຈຶ່ງບໍ່ໄດ້ນຳໃຊ້?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າມີ</u>: ທ່ານຮຽນຮູ້ເພື່ອນຳໃຊ້ໃນວຽກໃດ? ຊ່ວຍຍົກຕົວຢ່າງໃຫ້ເບິ່ງແດ່?</p>
9	<b>Learning from other projects</b>	<b>ການຮຽນຮູ້ຈາກໂຄງການອື່ນໆ</b>
	<p>Is there any situation that you attempted to learn from other projects?</p> <p>- <u>If no</u>: why not?</p> <p>- <u>If yes</u>: how did you know them? For what kind of work did you use? Any example?</p>	<p>ທ່ານເຄີຍຮຽນຮູ້ຈາກໂຄງການອື່ນບໍ່?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າບໍ່</u>: ຍ້ອນຫຍັງຈຶ່ງບໍ່ໄດ້ຂໍ?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າມີ</u>: ທ່ານຮູ້ຈັກເຂົາເຈົ້າແນວໃດ ແລະ ນຳໃຊ້ໃນວຽກໃດ? ຊ່ວຍຍົກຕົວຢ່າງໃຫ້ເບິ່ງແດ່?</p>
10	<b>Use and sharing of project information and lessons</b>	<b>ການນຳໃຊ້ແລະແບ່ງປັນຂໍ້ມູນແລະບົດຮຽນ</b>
10.1	<p>Is there any situation that you use the project information and lessons for your routine (for government officials)?</p> <p>- <u>If no</u>: why?</p> <p>- <u>If yes</u>: what did you use it for? How useful is it?</p>	<p>ທ່ານໄດ້ນຳໃຊ້ບົດຮຽນທີ່ໄດ້ຈາກການເຮັດວຽກໂຄງການນີ້ ໃນວຽກປະຈຳວັນຂອງພາກລັດບໍ່? (ສຳລັບພະນັກງານລັດ)</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າບໍ່</u>: ຍ້ອນຫຍັງຈຶ່ງບໍ່ໄດ້ນຳໃຊ້?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າມີ</u>: ໃຊ້ໃນວຽກໃດແດ່? ມີປະໂຫຍດແນວໃດ?</p>
10.2	<p>Were the project information and lessons shared or exchanged with others?</p> <p>- <u>If no</u>: why?</p> <p>- <u>If yes</u>: who did you share with? How?</p>	<p>ບົດຮຽນເລົ່ານີ້ໄດ້ນຳໄປແລກປ່ຽນ ຫຼື ແບ່ງປັນໃຫ້ຜູ້ອື່ນບໍ່?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າບໍ່</u>: ຍ້ອນຫຍັງຈຶ່ງບໍ່ໄດ້ແລກປ່ຽນ ຫຼື share ກັບຜູ້ອື່ນ?</p> <p>- <u>ຖ້າມີ</u>: share ກັບໃຜແດ່? Share ໃນຮູບແບບໃດ?</p>
11	<b>Closing Questions</b>	<b>ຄຳຖາມສຸດທ້າຍ</b>
	<p>This completes our interview. Do you have any other comments you would like to add?</p>	<p>ກ່ອນຈົບການສຳພາດນີ້ ທ່ານມີຫຍັງຢາກແນະນຳຫຼືໃຫ້ຄຳເຫັນເພີ່ມເຕີມບໍ່ ກ່ຽວກັບໂຄງການດັ່ງກ່າວ?</p>
	<b>Thank you for taking your valuable time to answer these questions.</b>	<b>ຂໍຂອບໃຈທ່ານຫຼາຍໆທີ່ສະລະເວລາອັນມີຄ່າຂອງທ່ານ ເພື່ອໃຫ້ຂໍ້ມູນທີ່ເປັນປະໂຫຍດແກ່ບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້ານີ້</b>

**APPENDIX B**  
**LIST OF INTERVIEWEES**

## LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

### Project A

No	Code	Name of interviewee	Project Responsibility	Employment status/Position	IDP experience	Length of interview (mn)
1.	A1	Mrs. Yommaly	Accountant	Accountant, FDA	SIDA, UNIDO, WHO, UNFPA	57
2.	A2	Ms. Khamtanh	Financial Specialist	contract	SIDA, Handicap, and UXO	60 (1 <sup>st</sup> ), 15 (2 <sup>nd</sup> via telephone)
3.	A3	Dr. Sourisak Sounvoravong	Project Coordinator	Deputy Director of BFDI	SIDA, USP DQI, WHO, etc.	61
4.	A4	Mr. Oulaysith Phan-yavong	Secretary	Technical staff, Administrative Division, FDA	None	48+e-mail
5.	A5	Mr. Bounleun Duangdeun	M&E and Assistant to Project Coordinator	Chief of the Herbal Pharmaceutical Division, FDA	SIDA, UNICEF, ADB, WB, & Swiss Red Cross	50
6.	A6	Mr. Lamphet Khunsacknarath	Procurement Assistant	Chief of Drug Division, FDQCC	SIDA, USP DQI, GF Round 6	68
7.	A7	Mrs. Sengchanh Phongsavath	M&E Assistant	Deputy Chief of Quality Assurance Division, FDQCC	JICA, WHO, UNIDO, UNDP	45 (1 <sup>st</sup> ), 20 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
8.	A8	Mrs. Hongbannay Vongsouthi	Cashier	Technical staff, Administrative Division, FDA	ADB	55
9.	A9	Mr. Khamlieng Phommavong	Procurement and logistic	Technical staff of the drug, medical and cosmetic products' unit, BFDI	WHO, USP DQI, GF R6	56

**Project B**

No	Code	Name of interviewee	Project Responsibility	Employment status /Position	IDP experience	Length of interview (mn)
1.	B1	Mr. Bounsathien Phimmasen	Procurement Specialist	Technical staff, DPIC	JICA, ADB, Lux-Development, World Bank, and etc...	57+e-mail
2.	B2	Mr. Chansaly	Program Manager	Technical staff, DPIC	World Bank since 1996-present	54 (1 <sup>st</sup> ), 10 (2 <sup>nd</sup> -telephone)
3.	B3	Mr. Phonesavane	Procurement Assistant (2012-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	None	45
4.	B4	Ms. Phatsalakone	Project Assistant to support DHC (2013-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	Japan Heart	47
5.	B5	Mr. Vilaysack	Assistant to Chief of Finance (2012-present)	Accounting staff, an accounting and consulting firm	ADB (2007-2012)	61
6.	B6	Mr. Khamsen Southisack	Assistant to NPC Assistant (2013-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	Education for Development Fund	59
7.	B7	Dr. ThongsavanhSe nthongdala	DHC Coordinator Assistant	Technical staff, Division of traditional Medicine Administration, DHC	None	52
8.	B8	Mr. Phanthanou Luangxay	Procurement Assistant (2011-present)	Technical staff, Procurement Unit, MPSC	World Bank (2001-2010), ADB	51
9.	B9	Ms. Choulaphone Sayasen	DMCH Project Assistant (2013-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	UNDP, ADF-Lao, WHO	62
10.	B10	Mr. KhampengPath amavong	DHHP Project Assistant (2013-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	UNICEF	58
11.	B11	Mr. Phouthasone Phangsakda	DTR Project Assistant (2013-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	Norway	50
12.	B12	Mr. Somphanh Xaythany	DF Project Assistant (2013-present)	Contract staff (Outsourced)	EU, FAO, France	48

**Project C**

No	Code	Name of interviewee	Project Responsibility	Employment status /Position	IDP experience	Length of interview (mn)
1.	C1	Mrs. Sengkham Phommixay	Assistant to the Public & Private Mixed Group	Technical staff, Administration Section	GFATM Round VII (Jan-Jun 2013)	45
2.	C2	Mr. Somboun Bounyadeth	Chief of Technical Working Groups for Malaria IEC and for Malaria EMGs	Vice Chief of the Training-Health Education Section, CMPE	World Bank, EU, JICA, GFATM (R 1,4,7 & TFM)	59
3.	C3	Mrs. Kaysone Vongsipasom	Chief of Quality Assurance Group	Technical staff, Laboratory and Treatment Section	GFATM R7 & TFM (2012-present)	48
4.	C4	Mrs. Chanthida Prasasouk	Admin./Secretariat Unit	Technical staff, Administration Division	GFATM R4,7 & TFM (2006-present)	47
5.	C5	Dr. Viengphone Sengsavanh	Project Coordinator	Chief of Epidemiology Section	Canada, WHO, Aus-Aid, Vietnam, GFATM R1,4,7 & TFM	55 (1 <sup>st</sup> ), 20 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
6.	C6	Mrs. Khamsuan Khamsy	M&E Assistant	Technical staff, Epidemiology Section	GFATM R7 & TFM (2012-present)	54
7.	C7	Mrs. Manisay Khounsombath	Logistic Assistant	Technical staff, Logistic Unit	GFATM R7 (2013-present)	48 (1 <sup>st</sup> ), 20 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
8.	C8	Ms. Thitthida	Procurement Assistant	Contract staff (Outsourced)	GFATM R7 & TFM (2009-present)	46
9.	C9	Ms. Ngeun Phengkhammy	Logistic Assistant	Technical staff, Logistic Unit	GFATM R7 & TFM (2012-present)	54
10.	C10	Mrs. Daliphone	Public-Private Mixed Technical Working Group	Technical Advisor	JICA, ADB, GFATM R 4,7 & TFM (2008-present)	61 (1 <sup>st</sup> ), 10 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
11.	C11	Mr. Vongxay Somekhit	Financial Assistant	Technical staff, Administration Section	GFATM R 1,4,7 & TFM	51

## **BIOGRAPHY**

### **NAME**

Ms. Malaython Phanavanh

### **ACADEMIC BACKGROUND**

Bachelor of Pharmacist  
University of Medicine Lao PDR  
(1991-1996)

Master of Public Administration  
(Management)  
Flinders University Australia  
(2005-2006)

### **EXPERIENCES**

1997-2001  
Food & Drug Quality Control Centre,  
Ministry of Health  
Drug analysis (Drug & Instrument  
Division)

2002-2003  
Food & Drug Quality Control Centre,  
Ministry of Health  
Sample recipient (Administration  
Division)

2007- present  
Food & Drug Quality Control Centre,  
Ministry of Health  
Quality assurance Division