

**Réponse Managériale d'Eclosio et de Louvain-Coopération
au rapport d'évaluation à mi-parcours des OS1 et des OS2 du programme Uni4Coop
Cambodge**

I. Identification:

Project	Uni4Coop Program 2017-2021 Cambodia
Code	OS1: BE-BCE_KBO-0432503697-PROG2017-2021_cambodiaOS1 OS2: BE-BCE_KBO-0422717486-PROG2017-2021_cambodiaOS2
Objectives concerned	OS1: Small-scale family farmers and their family members strengthen their capacities to achieve food sovereignty, to defend their interests and to generate pro-poor growth. OS2: The food and economic security and the level of organization of vulnerable rural populations have improved in a sustainable way.
Date of the evaluation	From September to November 2019; final report received on 14 December 2019
Evaluator	Bernie O'Neill
Date of the Managerial Response	11 February 2020
Writer of the Response	Christophe Goossens, Amaury Peeters

II. Introduction:

The Uni4Coop program in Cambodia is implemented by two of the four Belgian University NGOs, ECLOSIO and Louvain Coopération (LC) and is tackling two sectors, the Health and the Agriculture / Rural Economy; while ECLOSIO is involved in the agriculture and economic sector, LC is involved in the health sector and in the agriculture and economic sector. This managerial response is concluding the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the two Specific Objectives concerning the agriculture and economic sector.

There were four objectives to this MTR:

- Review the achievements of the global partnership strategy of LC and Eclosio in Cambodia as described in the Uni4Coop Program Document;
- Appreciate the quality and performance of the partnership relations that exist between Eclosio, LC and their five local partners' structures in the execution of the program;
- Appreciate the institutional capacities (understood in the sense of appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of the institution, not directly related to the program) of the partners agreeing to participate in the exercise; and
- Propose recommendations and suggestions for improvement in the short-term (last two years of the 2017-2021 Program) and in the medium term (Preparation of the second phase of the 2022-2026 strategic frameworks) regarding partnership relationships.

III. Quality process and report of the evaluation:

The implementation period of this MTR coincided with political tensions that occurred in Cambodia with the tentative mobilization of opposition parties to resume activities in the country. This had for consequence that local authorities restricted meetings and group gathering in districts and villages that were concerned with population targeted by the project. This impacted specifically the parts of Eclosio Specific Objective; the evaluator was not able to reach these target groups in Takeo province as initially intended, had to replace the target areas with other provinces where Eclosio actions have less outreach, and had to review the scope and methodologies to retrieve information and data from shorten field visits and small group and individual meetings. This impacted on the content of the MTR, requiring much more exchanges with the evaluator than expected for clarification. However, Eclosio acknowledge that, in a general way, the evaluator produced sufficient information and that the final report is containing the information required to answer the objectives of the MTR.

From LC's perspective, the opportunity of having two separated NGOs collaborating to the achievement of one combined specific objective has not been enough investigated nor analyzed in the report despite the fact it was one of the options considered in the TOR and highlighted in the comments of the draft version of the report.

IV. Responses to the Evaluator' Recommendations

SN	Issue to be addressed	Recommendation	To whom/when	Answer	Comments on the validation and actions to be implemented
1	Partnership				
1.1	ECOLAND raised an issue that some partners were not so active in the development phase of this Uni4Coop program. It is essential to the development of a strong partnership that all partners take full ownership of activities	To ensure full ownership of the next phase of the program, it is critical to identify the relevant partners early in the process so they can be fully involved in the development of the program proposal	Eclosio/LC – as soon as possible [Steps are already being taken by Eclosio and LC]	Yes	That is already done; the new program Uni4Coop 2022-2026 will have to be presented to the DGD in August 2021. The process of consultation already started; its scopes include different stages, including consultative stages involving potential and future partners and collaborators. Phase 1: October & November 2019: Strategic Workshops in Cambodia to retrieve strategic elements to be reported to Uni4Coop Executive Committee (COPIL) in Belgium Phase 2: November 2019 to January 2020: Join strategic reflections of the next program by COPIL and Management Boards Phase 3: May 2020: Uni4Coop strategic workshop in Belgium Phase 4: from July 2020: Process of consultation for the elaboration of the new program 2022-2026 in detail and in Cambodia Phase 5: August 2021: Submission of the new program 2022-2026 to the DGD
1.2	The total budget is very small when spread over many partners, and many years. The implementation of SA by LC could have benefited from a more restricted geographical focus – more farmers in closer	In developing the next phase of the program, reduce geographical focus of SA to ensure greater impact from funding	LC for new program development	Partially	Given the long term investment of UNI4COOP in several locations in Cambodia where we have worked to support the transition towards AE & Sustainable Agriculture Practices, the suggestion for next programme is keep supporting some key areas for their outstanding or specific achievements. These areas will become flagship sites that will be put in connection and serves to demonstrate, further

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	proximity rather than spread over many communes.				experiment and to favour the adoption of AE. Beside this work around a network of Flagship sites, a transversal work on supporting AE transition is foreseen through the ALiSEA network and members.
1.3	More structured reflection would result if all partners (those of LC and Eclasio) had opportunities to meet more often to discuss their work with each other. This needs to take place at different levels – management staff have different issues to discuss than those operating at field level	Organize more reflection meetings for different groups (e.g. management, field staff) of partners (LC and Eclasio combined)	Eclasio/LC for current program implementation	Yes	There are already regular thematic working groups organised by Ecoland which aims to discuss and reflect on specific topics related to our learning and research objectives and where Eclasio and LC's partners are invited to join and contribute according the topic. More opportunity to reflect together and between partners are beneficial but should be targeted around specific topic. Moreover, LC & Eclasio's management level are meeting regularly to exchange and follow up on our collaboration. LC are invited to Strategic and Coordination Meetings organized by Eclasio.
1.4	Federations' mandate is to support their members' needs. This includes providing technical agriculture training when requested, business planning services, identifying potential financing opportunities and potential markets for members' produce, as well as advocating on their behalf with government and other relevant stakeholders. Unfortunately the capacity assessment conducted with FAEC by LC during this Uni4Coop program used the same format as that for NGO partners; the topics covered did not fully explore the key capacities that would enable the federation to fulfill the mandate described above	Develop a capacity assessment tool that is relevant to AC Federations (FAEC and FCFD) – CBA used for NGOs does not cover the required capacities (and includes some irrelevant ones)	LC/Eclasio for use by end of current program	Yes	This was already attempted but not implemented, Eclasio assessment of FO-Fed covers six main fields of capacities, (1) Representation, legitimacy; (2) Democratic operations, transparency; (3) Managerial capacities, administrative and financial; (4) Diversification of financing, self-financing capacities; (5) Technical capacities; (6) Capacities to influence environment and policies. LC is using its QRCP tool to assess partners. This tool is covering four dimensions of capacities: (1) Structuring and Organisational Capabilities, (2) Capacity of Reflection and Implementation, (3) Technical and Management Skills, (4) Capacities of Collaboration and Diversification. In continuation for the assessment, a capacity building plan is established with each local partner. An Institutional Assessment is foreseen for the FO-Fed that will be part of the partnership of the new program 2022-2026. The FO-Fed is to be selected following the strategic direction provided during phase 3. The next Quality Fund of ACODEV may be dedicated to support the development of the tool. Internally, there have been discussions to develop a tool dedicated to membership based organizations; like Farmers' Organizations.
1.5	Currently documentation (studies, research) of Uni4Coop activities is located in different places. It would be useful to collect all outputs from the program under one access point. As FAEC is a common partner for both ECLOSIO and LC, a portal on FAEC	Support FAEC (or ECOLAND) to create knowledge website to collect and share all documents produced under Uni4Coop – a wider Khmer audience may access studies and research posted on such	ECLOSIO or LC before end of current program	Partially	As explained during the restitution, we believe that this should be under the responsibility of Ecoland as they seems to be more qualified and equipped to do it and with a special link to young Cambodian audience on the campus. Moreover, key products and outputs from our knowledge management are already shared with ALiSEA network which provides larger dissemination.

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	website or Facebook page would be a logical place to develop a Uni4Coop library. Alternatively, such an information portal could be established by RUA-ECOLAND	a site compared to the number who may access ECLOSIO or LC websites.			Specific dissemination among farmers of appropriate materials produced should rather be discussed with communication specialists and planned with our partners. Supports are planned in 2020 and 2021 dedicated to capitalization of knowledge to be publicized as part of the ending strategy of the Program.
1.6	It is unclear what data will be used for measurement of the indicators at objective level: SO1: The target percentage suggests that target families' income will not only increase by 25% but will increase by 25% more than non-target families. The baseline does not mention which data is being used for non-target families – will national statistics be used for this? SO2: Similar issue for the second indicator	In order to prepare data for end of program evaluation, Eclasio and LC need to confirm the sources of comparative data for indicators at objective level	Eclasio/LC before end of program evaluation takes place	Yes	This will be provided to the Uni4Coop M&E Working Group to explore options for common methods at the Uni4Coop level. Convening the Uni4Coop M&E working group and organize common M&E data collection. LC & Eclasio are working on the clarification of the source of data for indicators at objective level.
1.7	In order to allow sufficient time for capacity building, it is critical to ensure that the formation of new groups takes place in the early stages of the program. This also applies to monetary or physical support (e.g. agriculture interventions). Therefore program budgets need to be designed on a sliding scale, with most of the physical inputs taking place in the first half of the program	In designing the next phase, key project inputs (or group formation) should be planned for the first half of the program (with appropriate budget allocation)	Eclasio/LC for new program development	Yes	Given the delay of getting fund during the first year and the change of one key partner for LC during the second year, there are still several new groups that need to be formed. In general, resources allocation and planning can take this into account for the next program.
1.8	Currently budget amounts are re-negotiated with partners each year – but sometimes it can be well into the new year before exact budget is known. This makes it very difficult for partners to plan	Annual budget planning should be speeded up (finalized by end December of current year) so that partners are clear on amounts by the start of the new year	Eclasio and LC (annual action)	Partially	The process includes coordination meeting in December to plan budgets for the next year; this is part of institutional strengthening activities and the coordination process as FAEC is low in capacities to prepare budgets and plans. End of the year activity and budget planning for the next year are usually planned in December.
1.9	Even though budgets are agreed annually, partners have to make separate requests in order to access these budgets (quarterly for LC partners and monthly for Eclasio partners). Linked to this partners also have to scan all their invoices to Eclasio/LC. This	Contracts with partners should stipulate rate of release of funds (linked to plans). Transfers should then be made without further need to request.	Eclasio and LC for current project implementation	No	Invoices are already scanned and not copied anymore. We have made several steps towards the digitalization of supporting documents whose originals stay with the partners. There are no more copies of invoices, digital scans are provided since 2018. Budget transfer request from FAEC are still not updated correctly according to plan updated during Coordination Meetings.

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	treats partners more like contractors than real partners.	Both Eclasio and LC should accept finance reports without copying invoices (this would respect partner independence and demonstrate trust)			Transfers without further need to request could be considered only if partners have shown regular correct spending following the plan Verification of update budget request and of invoice in accordance to governance role of donor is still necessary as still not conformed (at least for FAEC).
2	Program				
2.1	Most of the SHGs do not show willingness to continue to build up finances; rather they see the group as a short-term saving mechanism which they will close every year and start again	LC/MB should consider not forming any more SHGs; instead focus on production groups (PGs) of farmers in close proximity to each other to transition to SA	LC/MB for current program phase	Partially	LC doesn't aim to develop production groups but rather SHG with support to its members on SA practices. Having said that, LC could consider reduce the number of new SHG and focus more on strengthening the existing ones (to be discussed with the partners). But it will automatically mean that we will not be able to reach several targets because interventions are designed around SHG and their members and targets are based on a certain number of SHG. Current approach with SHG saving activity includes the accumulation of the capital through the credit cycles. This could be organized with the technical support to be provided by Eclasio Senior Agronomist to LC partners.
2.2	There is still insufficient numbers of specialists and service providers considering the large number of AC and SHG members For SO1, the program aims for 55 by the end of the program but only 24 trained so far. More challenging is increasing the numbers of women and youth among these. Those numbers currently fall very short of the targets	Assist FAEC/FCFD to increase the number of specialists (with more emphasis on women and youth) to provide services to AC members Select and train additional service providers/model farmers to support SA	Eclasio during current program MB/FAEC during current program	Yes	This was foreseen to be discussed in the December Coordination Meeting to review implementation roadmaps for 2020 and 2021.
2.3	Regarding quantity of services provided (SO1), the program has not established any mechanism to measure this. It should be possible for each service provider to keep an account of the number of times they provide various services to each AC (or AC member). This should be put in place immediately and data should be collected monthly by FAEC and FCFD for reporting to Eclasio	Assist FAEC and FCFD to develop system for specialists/service providers to record details of services provided so that information can be reported as per indicator	Eclasio during current program	Yes	This was foreseen to be discussed in the December Coordination Meeting to review implementation roadmaps for 2020 and 2021.

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2.4	MODE final report suggested that 16 out of 18 vegetable growers were still practicing SA techniques such as composting and biological fertilizer. But now the groups they belonged to are no longer a target of MB so it is not clear if any of these families continue to practice – it would be good to know if SA practice continued after project staff no longer visited them	Suggest that if MB has the time and resources, it would be good to follow up on the 16 farmers reported by MODE as still practicing SA – it would indicate whether families may continue to practice SA even if project staff no longer visit or support them	MB during current program phase (if resources allow)	Yes	This could be organized with the technical support to be provided by LC SA Technical Assistant in collaboration with Eclasio Senior Agronomist to LC partners
2.5	ECOLAND is interested to explore further the socio-economic reasons why SA/AE is not being adopted more despite the obvious benefits to health, economy and the environment. Such a study would be very useful and should be supported by the Uni4Coop program	Support additional research by ECOLAND on socio-economic factors influencing the adoption (or non-adoption) of AE/SA	LC – for new program phase (if insufficient time or resources in current program)	Yes	This is a new topic that could be included in the Learning and Research plan but it is pending available financial resources; resources have been already secured in 2020 from FAO to assess the multidimensions of the agroecology; the results of this study will be shared with other Uni4Coop countries were similar study is occurring, notably with Eclasio in Peru and Senegal.
2.6	Banks/MFIs in Cambodia are risk-averse institutions. This makes them reluctant to trust ACs as they don't have track record and many have no collateral to put up as guarantee. Venture Capital institutions are more willing to take risks but few options in Cambodia or SEA)	Eclasio/LC to use their connections in Europe to explore other possible sources of venture capital (as limited options in Cambodia or SEA)	Eclasio/LC during current program phase <i>Note: Eclasio plan to contact TRIDOS; LC has also made some connections (e.g. KAMPANI)</i>	Yes	LC is member of KAMPANI, a social impact investment fund aiming to support the development of entrepreneurial farming in the South. Eclasio will contact TRIODOS. LC will check with KAMPANI if support still can be considered for ACs in Cambodia.
2.7	The issue of limited financing affects another challenge faced by ACs: competition with the private sector (especially for fertilizer supply). Cambodian farmers currently pay higher prices than farmers in neighboring countries.	Eclasio should commission a study on the supply chain of main types of fertilizers to understand better where ACs could enter this supply chain in order to ensure that Cambodian farmers are paying the lowest price possible compared to farmers in neighboring countries	Eclasio (or RUA-ECOLAND?) during current phase if resources can be made available (if not, plan for new phase)	No	The fertilizer service system is the only component that did not bring the expected result, the sales volume not having increased as expected, but having resulted in a level of self-financing which makes it possible to perpetuate durably the current service. In addition, the service promotes chemical fertilization, failed to sell natural fertilizer as intended, which is not in accordance with AE principles. This component was commonly agreed to be finished at the end of 2019, budget replacing this to cover costs for the extension of FAEC Specialists (recommendation 2.2.).