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SCNL ORGANISATION ADMINISTRATIVE ASSESSMENT REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

Background:

In 2006 the management team of SCN Lao requested that an assessment of the management and administrative capability of the country programme be carried out as part of its internal review upon achieving ten years' of operation in Lao P.D.R. While a number of project evaluations had been carried out as inputs to the development of the country programme, no organisational assessments had been conducted. In order to improve the ability of SCN Lao to meet the challenges of the new strategy period, a participatory administrative assessment was proposed in the 2006-2009 plans. Towards that end an external assessment team was invited to conduct a participatory review of the organisational strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities for the meeting future challenges along with recommendations for ways to improve in several key areas.

Specific objectives of the Participatory Assessment

- To find out contributions and constraints of the management systems of SCNL, to partners' projects implementation and SCNL self implemented projects
- To assess effectiveness of the organizational policies, procedures, guidelines, principles and practices to the programme implementation, development and support
- To recommend possible ways of improving the existing system for better programme support and cost efficiency

Expected Outcome from Assessment

Recommendation on how to strengthen/improve, where necessary,

- SCN's technical, administrative, & financial support to partners in order to better facilitate programme implementation in order to achieve strategy objectives for 2006-2009
- administrative performance of the country programme office
- capacity of staff to meet the needs of the organization and its partners

Assessment Team and Methodology:

An assessment team was chosen comprising Ann Epps, an external facilitator from LENS International in Malaysia, as leader of the assessment team; Sarah Soon Malling, SCN Oslo, and Vipaka Halsacda, SCN Australia in Lao PDR, to conduct the participatory assessment with all three persons on site from 6/7 – 16 Feb.

The participatory assessment was carried out in three phases:

1. *Document Study* - Prior to the team's arrival in Vientiane, SCNL forwarded a number of documents and reports for study in preparation for the interviews and report writing. Common interview formats were also developed during this period.
2. *Interviews and Workshops* - The team conducted 41 interviews with 48 different individuals in eleven days between 16 January and 15 February. Twenty of the interviews were conducted with internal management and staff of SCNL and 21 with external persons from the Lao PDR government at national, provincial and district levels in 2 provinces and in Vientiane, as well as with representatives from SCN Oslo and donors in Vientiane. During the onsite work from 6-16 Feb in Vientiane, the team also conducted four half-day workshops, the first with the entire SCNL group to introduce and explain the process and to develop a vision for SCNL for the next 10 years. Subsequent workshops were conducted with the management, programme, and administration teams to reflect on the journey of SCNL over the last 10 years.

3. *Written Reports* - The team documented approximately 90 pages of interviews, summarised them into 21 pages in the external categories of Partner, Head Office, and Donors and internal SCNL organisation categories of Programme/Project, Finance, Administration, and Management Team. The summary documentation notes key strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations for each category.

A compilation report of initial findings was presented to the entire SCNL team on 23 Feb 2007. This report was given as part of a full-day workshop in which the report was read and discussed in sections by several different team configurations. These teams gave initial feedback to the assessment team in plenary reports. The group also participated in several communication exercises during the day. This workshop was followed by a period of further study and discussion of findings by SCNL with extensive feedback comments by section forwarded to the assessment team on 30 March. The assessment team leader was requested to review the comments and produce a final report by 9 April 2007.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The **strengths** of the SCNL team and country programmes are impressive in many ways. They have managed over the last ten years of operation to form good relations and joint projects with their government partners. SCNL is regarded by partners, local donors, and SCN Head Office to have good control, planning, and reporting mechanisms in place. The SCNL policies and procedures are seen to be clear and generally understood. The staff appear to be eager to learn new approaches and are proud to work for an organisation focused on improving the lives and rights of children in Lao PDR. In short, the assessor team finds the SCNL team and country programme office effective in their work and strategy. As with all organisations, improvements can be made for greater effectiveness. What follows are our summary findings in terms of current weaknesses and overall recommendations for improvement.

From the perspective of the assessor team the **major weaknesses and constraints** holding SCNL back from achieving even greater accomplishments are these:

1. Difficult communications between staff and management, particularly among the programme staff with the managers.
2. Technical competence inadequacy (both perceived and real) for raising the quality of the projects and the teachers covered by the education projects[A1].
3. An emphasis on administrative details in planning, reports, and monitoring at the expense of looking at the big picture pulling details into patterns and trends for more creative, strategic thinking and working modes with partners
4. Somewhat inflexible systems, procedures, and working relations

Key Recommendations from the Assessor Team:

1. For improved Partner Cooperation

- a) Offer technical support to raise the quality of the teachers and projects
- b) Carry out more technical monitoring visits
- c) Extend the programme to other clusters in the current districts
- d) Include all stakeholders at all levels in annual meetings with partners
- e) Be more flexible in budgeting, funds transfer, and reporting requirements
- f) Simplify report formats and streamline reporting schedules
- g) Employ a more strategic, creative thinking approach in working with partners

2. For Strengthened Internal Working Relations:

- a) Communicate across and within sections more on a face-to-face and less on a memo basis using examples and suggestions for ease of understanding
- b) Use job descriptions as guidelines listing major responsibilities and accountabilities rather than absolute task boundaries preventing cooperation with others when circumstances require cross-section assistance.
- c) Take the initiative to speak to the CR, HO, the managers, staff whenever it is seen as appropriate. Do not assume one can only speak to the line manager or one's own work colleagues when issues need to be discussed.
- d) Seek to build links across and between sections for strengthening the combined effort of all in relation to the partner projects.
- e) Show respect for everyone in SCNL as each person is making an important contribution to the whole organisation and vision of SCNL.

3. For Participatory, Strategic Management Systems:

- a) Adopt a more flexible, coaching and mentoring style by the managers in relating to staff
- b) Link the SCNL vision, strategy, and overall picture to the daily work and monitoring systems discussions so that the details fit and make sense
- c) Schedule management training workshops in big-picture, strategic and creative thinking for working with partners, planning and decision making
- d) Communicate with visuals, examples, and an understanding of the recipient's framework of operation
- e) Acquire effective meeting planning, design, and leadership skills

III. EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVES and RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. PARTNERSHIP COOPERATION:

Sixteen interviews were conducted with government partners: four in Luang Prabang, 5 in Bolikhamsay and 7 in Vientiane with central level government officers from the MOE Department of General Education and the Lao Youth Union.

Strengths of the SCNL cooperation with Lao PDR government partners as viewed by the partners:

Each government officer interviewed whether at central, provincial, or district level listed a number of strengths and accomplishments of the cooperation, including the dramatic increase in enrolment of students in project areas, with a net enrolment exceeding 99% in cluster schools in some areas. Partners appreciate the improved teaching techniques incorporated by the teachers as a result of the training materials and sessions provided by the cooperation between the ministry and SCNL. By and large the partners interviewed feel the SCNL guidelines and policies are clear and that they can easily communicate with SCNL representatives for further clarification and negotiation.

Several key **weaknesses and gaps** emerged from the partner interviews regarding various aspects of the cooperation between SCNL and the government:

Technical Support:

1. Technical support is spread too thin and is too sporadic at all levels of the partnership—central, provincial and district
2. All partners interviewed feel that the quality of education is low in the cluster schools; though enrolment and access have improved dramatically.

Capacity for Expansion:

3. The number of clusters reached does not yet cover all the clusters in districts within Bolikhamsay and Luang Prabang. This seems to create a sense of inequality within the district with some clusters getting more resources than others.

Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring, Reporting, Feedback:

4. Monitoring visits are less frequent than planned; there are difficulties in getting all the designated government partners together for the combined partner monitoring visits.
5. Several central level government partners expressed dismay about what they perceive to be frequent changes in the SCNL project coordinators. It was not clear whether the partners were thinking in terms of the 10-year partnership in which they had been the government partner liaison for the entire time, with a few changes in SCNL staff, or whether they were referring to recent changes in SCNL coordinators.
6. Many, particularly at the provincial and district level mentioned the difficulty in filling in forms required by the partnership. One district level principal said “they must have been developed by a PhD.” All partners also acknowledged that it is their responsibility that the reports are filed late due to inaccurate or missing data from the training reports at the district level. They do not fault SCNL for the lateness of the reports or the accompanying delay in transferring funds when the reports have not yet been filed. (SCNL programme team members repeatedly expressed frustration at the invalid, incomplete reports forwarded by the government partners.)

7. Several persons interviewed, primarily at the central level, noted that the SCNL per diems paid to government partners were below those paid by some other international organisations, principally UNICEF and the World Bank. (SCNL PT for their part mentioned hearing the plea for more per diem numerous times from the govt. partner.) The main difficulty posed for SCNL with this issue is that other donor agencies giving higher per diems appear to have first priority for implementation when there is a conflict of time schedule and activity urgency between two or more education partnerships.
8. SCNL staff sometimes end up writing the project reports that partners should be writing in order to honour the donor deadlines.

Information/Communication Systems:

9. The central government partner is quite strong about not wanting SCNL people to visit projects without notifying them. They mentioned that toward the end of the year when there is an urgency to speed up project activity SCNL people may go to the districts directly without notifying their central government partners as specified in the MOU.

Assessor Team Recommendations - Partnership Cooperation:

Out of the suggestions and recommendations made by partners to SCNL to improve the technical assistance and effectiveness of the various systems employed by the cooperation, the following are recommended by the assessment team to strengthen the support of the partner cooperation:

1. Scale up technical support/training to be

- more frequent, more specific, and more relevant to specific situations. Discuss the SCNL policy based on examples that can easily be understood and adapted in the local context (e.g child friendly schools instead of child protection)
- Provide additional short courses in financial technical training for the partner financial liaisons, including district level with participation by central and provincial level participation as well. Training should be practical. Go through formats and fill them out together with responsible at district level.

2. Selection and Expansion:

- Provide more support to more clusters and make the support more equal among the existing clusters.
- Expand to 6th cluster in Bolikhamsay and the remaining clusters in LPB.

3. Planning, budgeting, implementing, support, monitoring

- Plan the number and the dates for the monitoring visits, both technical and financial, annually. Try to cover all districts where projects are implemented..
- Discuss within SCNL if budget for administrative support such office items such as filing cabinets, stationery, and IT needs related to the cooperation should be provided to facilitate the partners reporting capacity.
- Open up the budget to include overhead and preparation fees for the workshops.
- Simplify forms especially report forms. (Note that the assessment team was not sure which forms being referred to were government forms and which were the SCNL partnership forms)



4. Feedback

- Revise systems to obtain more accurate, speedy reports from the districts; PA's seem to be spending a great deal of time in chasing this data..

5. Communication/Information

- Inform central level government in advance of visits, changes of any kind, purchases, activities, etc.

B. HEAD OFFICE and LOCAL DONORS

Five interviews were conducted with HO representatives in Oslo and with local donors in Vientiane.

Strengths of SCNL as perceived by the Head Office and Local Donors include the following:

- Good staff capacity and capability to achieve the 2006-2009 strategy
- Confidence in finance capability and systems for both current situation and potential future expansion
- Current CR is appropriate for the situation
- Clear strategy for basic education, CRC, VAC and Children's Participation
- Good at details in planning, monitoring, evaluation
- Good communications between CR and HO
- Trust in SCNL systems and reporting
- SCN is regarded to be the leading agency in Lao PDR in education
- The Lao PDR government trusts SCNL as a partner
- Capability in reaching large numbers of children, enrolment rates have increased.

Key Weaknesses pointed out by HO and Local Donors:

Programme:

- Lack more creative ways to insert CRC curriculum into local authority's own educational curriculum
- Staff are more operational and less on technical
- The need in Lao is expanding which may mean current systems of operation may not be sustainable
- Capability in reaching large numbers of children, but is that the most strategic in the face of unreached ethnic minorities in remote areas, for example?
- Gap in seeing the big picture

Funding and Finance:

- Gap in link between finance and programme
- Gap in fundraising, marketing and networking skills

HR

- Gap in staffing for communications and fundraising

ASSESSOR TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS re. HO and DONOR SUGGESTIONS:

Programme:

1. Find more strategic, creative ways to work with partners in getting the CRC content into the government curriculum and way of thinking. Some have observed that conducting more of the training directly with the teachers at the district level with central and provincial people in attendance might be one way. The effort to change the language as is already being done by using the concept of “child-friendly” schools is another way. Some facilitated creative thinking “what if we were to try...” sessions with SCNL and friends among the partners might be of assistance here as well.
2. Adapt a more big-picture approach to planning
3. Perhaps split programme development and administrative responsibilities
4. Future focus to be more on generating impact in the projects (particularly remote areas) rather than activity planning, monitoring, and reporting
5. Carry out more field visits and more initiatives for teachers
6. Invent new methods and be more strategic to be able to reach ethnic minorities in remote areas

Finance:

1. Find smarter solutions rather than spending so much time on the small details; make sure budgets cover indirect costs
2. Continue to request visits from HO Finance

Communication and Coordination with HO:

1. Suggest more people from SCNL contact HO for assistance

HR:

1. Need communications and fund-raising person
2. Need skills in fundraising, marketing and networking

IV. INTERNAL ORGANISATION FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. PROGRAMME SECTION

Seven interviews were conducted with the programme team (PT), including one member who had resigned to take up a scholarship for further study. An additional interview was conducted with the Programme Director for further clarification of reporting mechanisms required of the partners. Note: Due to time constraints the assessment team did not study or assess the cost effectiveness of the SCNL programme efforts. Some suggestions are made, however, for expanding the programme outreach, for scaling up the technical assistance, and streamlining the reporting process, all of which have implications for budgeting of finances and time.

Strengths of the programme team (PT) as observed by partners, the team itself, the donors and SCN head Office include the following:

- the members are eager to learn
- the control systems for project & programme finance mechanisms appear to work well with the partners
- the planning mechanisms are regarded to be effective by both partners and HO
- there is good interchange and sharing among the PC's and PA's
- the team is proud of the purpose and mission of SCNL

Assessor Team Listing of Programme Section Weaknesses & Recommendations:

Weaknesses	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In general communications appear to be difficult between the team and the managers.• There appears to be low morale in the PT resulting from communications difficulties with the managers, slowness in approvals and decisions regarding the learning development plans.• There is a perception that there is not enough support from the administrative team.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Programme, Finance and Administrative managers need to use more face-to-face conversation and provide rationales for why something can or cannot be done in order to engage in more productive, effective modes of communication with the programme team members. Communications training workshops with both the managers and PT could serve to enhance the quality of conversations between staff and managers.

Programme weaknesses & recommendations continued

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of the PT appear to have insufficient specific technical competence to be of assistance in increasing the project quality, even in CRC and CRP 	<p>2. Acquire technical support to be of assistance for upgrading the quality of the schools covered by SCNL projects. [A3] This technical support might be provided in a variety of ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) <i>Secure services of qualified education and CRC “expert” consultants</i> who can be on call for the partners at national, provincial, and district levels. One central govt. partner mentioned that international experts would be welcome and encouraged as long as they operate inside the Lao context. b) <i>Provide further technical training for the existing project coordinators</i> to deliver the required technical support, assistance and training to teachers and government officers particularly at the district level, assuming that the PC’s can be freed up from some of the administrative work they are currently doing. c) <i>Hire additional PC’s with the technical capabilities</i> to deliver the required technical support, assistance and training to improve the quality of teacher training and depth of knowledge in the CRC to inject into the classroom and the materials. d) <i>Organise more workshops and forums at the district levels</i> where direct training can be targeted towards teachers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PC's have confidence to negotiate with senior government partners, but the senior government partners prefer to negotiate only with senior SCNL staff 	<p>No recommendation made</p>

Programme weaknesses & recommendations continued

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project administrative and coordination matters tend to crowd out strategic and creative thinking about the longer term project sustainability and partnership cooperation innovations. • There is a sense that the PT is overwhelmed by all the detail work of getting accurate and timely reports from the field (especially district level). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Spend at least 10 minutes at the beginning of each meeting referring to the SCNL vision and mission in meetings to tap into the overall purpose of the organisation when the major focus of the meeting is on specific coordination programme administrative details. 4. Clarify the primary task of the PC's so that it is clear whether they are to provide administrative, coordination assistance to the projects as well as technical programme assistance, or administrative and coordination assistance only. 5. Introduce more strategic and creative approaches to working with the partners and prioritise tasks so that time spent on administrative details does not preclude strategic considerations during the meetings and partner monitoring visits. Some training and coaching in strategic and creative thinking methods for both managers and team members is advised to help with the adoption of more strategic approaches within the team. 6. Consider with finance the possibility of planning and reporting on an annual and quarterly basis instead of activity by activity to help streamline processes, monitoring, and reporting efforts.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There appears to be unclarity about what is actually expected from line management among PT members. • There is low morale among the PT resulting from communications difficulties with the managers, slowness in approvals and decisions regarding the learning development plans <i>(repeated again from page 9)</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Clarify the decision-making process carried out by the management team. Currently there is a feeling that the Managers make decisions without considering the ideas from the PT. While this may be necessary, Managers should explain why particular decisions are made and why some ideas cannot be taken up.

B. FINANCE

Four interviews were conducted relating to the finance mechanisms and processes, including the SCNL auditor from KPMG.

Strengths of the finance systems mentioned by the auditor, the team, HO, donors, and partners include the following:

- the control and monitoring systems generally appear to work quite well
- HO is satisfied with the reporting from SCNL to Oslo
- HO mentioned that they are satisfied with the way SCNL finance manages the reports they get from partners which often are late and contain inaccuracies
- the partners indicate the rules and procedures for reporting and transfer of funds are clear
- reporting for the current level of multiple donors works well
- staff are hard working and motivated to do well and are willing to learn new things in order to improve and strengthen both individual and organisation
- there is good team work and communication within the team

Assessor Team Listing of Weaknesses & Recommendations for Finance Section:

Weaknesses	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearance of inflexibility of some of the financial guidelines and forms <i>(note: the perception of inflexibility re. reporting forms and guidelines was mentioned several times by various partners, but as no specific forms were mentioned, it is unclear whether the perception pertains to past or present working relations with SCNL. The SCNL finance team members feel they are quite flexible and understand the lack of capacity of the partner to fulfil the requests and fill in the forms. SCNL maintains that the forms are given as guidelines and need not be strictly used as long as the data required is forthcoming. SCNL finance team also indicates it is willing to discuss and adjust the guidelines with partners as long as necessary controls are in place.)</i> • Some misunderstandings and disagreements between finance and programme regarding what kind of report formats are needed for project reporting <i>(the finance team feels this difficulty no longer exists as misunderstandings have now been cleared up)</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Streamline the reporting and financial monitoring systems and requirements: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Explore with programme team whether there can be annual/quarterly planning and reports rather than activity by activity planning and reporting b) Simplify the report forms for partners. <i>(While partners did not specify which forms they would like simplified, the perception exists that the reporting forms are quite complicated. The issue may be more a lack of training or communication than the forms themselves.)</i> c) Communicate to partners about the change in rules about having to submit receipts for purchases not normally given receipts. <i>(Although the requirement has been altered to accommodate situations when receipts cannot be obtained for taxi charges, for example, the perception is still there on the part of some partners that this requirement continues to be in force.)</i> d) Amend the requirement that a partner must obtain three quotations from vendors before purchasing any items over \$300. Consider raising the amount to \$1,000. 2. Be more flexible in transferring funds for activities that might not be in the original plan, such as unexpected extra costs necessary to implement an activity. Consider a general planning reserve for this purpose.

Finance Weaknesses & Recommendations continued:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because finance procedures and technical language are sometimes not clearly understood by non-finance people, difficulties in communication and implementation are experienced by those outside finance. 	<p>3. Adopt a more “user friendly” language when speaking “finance” to programme staff, partners, and others outside the finance section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Give examples of what is meant and show how it would work in the listener’s context. b) Speak directly to the parties involved rather than relying on memos which can be easily misunderstood, or not understood at all. c) Organise more trips to the field, especially at the district level to explain what is and what is not necessary to report. <p>3. Improve the financial data system for both budget holder and MT</p> <p>4. Improve the budget holder’s understanding of their scope of responsibility in following up their budget</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCNL finance and programme teams end up doing much of the financial work that SCN partners normally do because of the particularities of the Lao PDR government context. 	<p>No recommendation made to this point</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient staff to conduct more spot checks, monitoring, and training in the field 	<p>6. Employ another staff member to make more visits possible to the field and develop a back up system within finance section.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some gaps in understanding the Aggresso system for all members of the team 	<p>8. Request a visit from HO finance department to give Aggresso training and to help the finance section find more effective methods and new ideas for SCNL accountability system.</p>

C. ADMINISTRATION SECTION

Five interviews were conducted with Administrative staff, officers and manager involving nine people.

Strengths of this section include the following:

- clear structure charts for line and line management
- job descriptions developed for each position
- open communications with all personnel within the admin section
- inclusion of all staff, including the drivers, gardeners and maid in all-staff meetings at the office and at six-monthly retreats held outside the office
- an atmosphere of humour, solidarity and support within the section resulting in effective teamwork

Assessor Team Listing of Weaknesses & Recommendations for Administration Section:

Weaknesses	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• While willing to perform tasks outside their JD's admin staff members feel at times they do not have sufficient technical training to support their work and are concerned to take on multi-tasks outside their major job focus or expertise as they do not feel adequately equipped to perform the additional tasks effectively.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provide relevant technical training in learning and development plan for each admin staff member.
<i>Administrative Weaknesses & Recommendations continued:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other section staff members may go directly to admin staff with ad hoc requests when urgent deadlines arise creating a difficulty for admin staff to know how to prioritise their work.• At times admin staffs feel they still do not fully understand the organisation policies that relate to their work.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Staff to be encouraged to bring up and discuss unclear policies, guidelines, and priorities during administration meetings.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and recognition difficulties at times between admin and programme sections: admin feels programme people do not follow their instructions, and programme people do not feel fully supported by admin in terms of carrying out their requests 	<p>3. Adopt a user-friendly mode of communications with others internally and externally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Communicate face-to-face with others, particularly programme staff, to avoid misunderstandings that may arise in memos. Use examples in communications as much as possible instead of just quoting rules. b) Written documents should use examples, headlines, and some graphics to grab attention for ease of understanding instead of just lists of numbers or rules to follow.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admin staff feel that admin section lacks substitute persons to cover while someone is absent, especially at the office level. 	<p>4. Take up the issue in the management team to find a way to solve the problem of backup in admin section</p>

D. OVERALL SCNL ORGANISATION STRUCTURE (HR, Management Team)

These observations are pulled from comments across the internal sections, interviews with the management team members, including the CR, and from external parties including partners, HO, and donors.

Strengths

- Staff have quite a lot of capacity (assuming vacant positions will be filled) to deliver the 2006-2009 strategy despite the recent staff turnovers and the turmoil experienced during the 2002-2005 period.
- The overall atmosphere in the SCNL office at all levels is welcoming and warm to partners and guests.
- There is openness in communications in general; staff are not afraid to speak their mind when invited to do so.
- The current CR is well regarded as a listener interested in the Lao people, Lao language, and in helping the staff to improve personally and organisationally to implement the SCN vision and mission within the Lao PDR framework.
- The SCNL partner cooperation control systems are well regarded by partners and HO and rigorously applied to the projects in the provinces and districts.
- Job descriptions have been created for each position in SCNL.
- The management team has good rapport and communication among themselves with frequent meetings to discuss matters affecting the whole organisation.

Assessor Team Listing of Organisation Structure
Weaknesses & Recommendations:

Weaknesses	Recommendations
<p>Job Descriptions, Responsibilities, Accountabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff in general are a bit confused about their responsibilities despite rather detailed job descriptions for each position; there is an expectation that one should do only what is in one's job description. The assessor team believes this is an unworkable, and in some instances an unreasonable expectation to operate as one team the size of SCNL.• There appears to be some unclarity as to what is the administrative area of responsibility and what is programme responsibility particularly in the area of the Learning Development Plan.	<p>1. Reframe the job descriptions so that everyone understands there is a major focus, responsibility, and accountability for each position, but also an expectation of helping others in emergency situations. Managers should make sure that that some staff don't become overloaded with others' work to the extent they cannot carry out their own job responsibilities. Reconcile what might appear to be overlapping job responsibilities among the PD/PA/FM job descriptions.</p>

Organisation Structure Weaknesses & Recommendations continued

<p>Communications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision making structures and processes appear unclear to the staff. Whereas some staff were used to going directly to the CR or RR in the past, there is now a management team who makes the decisions and communicates them to the staff. It is not always clear to the staff why decisions are made the way they are; or why certain inputs from staff are not taken up • Programme staff in particular feel that managers have little regard for the staff ideas or requests for help. Programme staff indicate their questions for guidance are often met with further questions from the managers or a listing of rules and policy that are to be followed rather than suggestions for ways to move forward. This kind of atmosphere gives rise to low morale and mistrust between staff and management • There appears to be tension between the programme team staff and admin, although the specifics of any difficulty was not immediately apparent. 	<p>2. Communicate more frequently on a face-to-face basis between line managers and staff using illustrations, examples, and suggestions to guide staff to take the next step rather than asking more questions and quoting policy or rules. Training and coaching in effective communications for both management and staff may be of help in this arena.</p>
<p>Meeting Management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings, including bi-annual staff retreats, tend to get bogged down with administrative details without linking to the overall purpose and picture of SCNL or without effective prioritisation of topics and concerns. Issues may be discussed but little action taken following the meetings. Meeting agendas and schedules both internally and externally are sometimes not circulated enough in advance for adequate preparation by the attendees. 	<p>3. Spend some time in each meeting to connect to the overall purpose, vision, and strategies of SCN and SCNL.</p>

Organisation Structure Weaknesses & Recommendations continued

<p>Working Relations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a staff perception that the CR directs most of his attention to building up and supporting the management team with less support to the rest of the staff. • There is staff disaffection about the lack of action in implementing the learning development plans for each staff. (As of April 2007 a decision about these plans is moving forward and implementation is being scheduled.) 	<p>4. Guard against the tendency to carry over some of the rigidity and inflexibility sometimes necessary in project accountability to dealings with each other among the SCNL staff. Because SCN is noted for its “flat organisation” with maximum participation, there is an expectation that every decision should be participatory with input on all matters at all times. Find ways to balance the participation with the hierarchy of the MT in decision making and communications.</p> <p>5. Act quickly on the LDP implementation.</p> <p>6. Honour the contributions of all the section teams to avoid the appearance that only the programme team does the valuable work.</p> <p>7. We encourage the CR to be more vocal in expressing his own vision and priorities to all the staff in addition to the MT to correct the perception that everything has to go through the MT for staff to understand or be understood</p>
<p>Big-Picture, Strategic Thinking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In general organisationally, there seems to be more attention paid to details of finances, reporting, and policy and less attention paid to overall big-picture and strategic thinking in regard to partner cooperation, long-term project development, and organisational capacity and capabilities. 	<p>8. Managers to go through training in big-picture, strategic, and creative thinking in order to think through long-term strategies and actions relating to partner cooperation and SCNL planning.</p> <p>9. Provide training in effective meeting design and leadership for assisting all the MT and staff to prioritise their work and conduct meetings so that the major issues become the focus more than the details that can consume all the meeting time.</p>

VI. CONCLUSION and NEXT STEPS:

Additional Notes:

As SCNL is already developing action plans to move on prioritised issues and recommendations mentioned in the preliminary administrative assessment report presented on 23 February 2007, this “final” report is no doubt already out of date. Feedback from the sections and management team have been incorporated into this report either as corrected text or as notes of explanation to the draft-report wording.

It must be pointed out that one of the items in the assessment Terms of Reference mentioned the need to “assess the cost effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation in delivering program support,” (see item #3 under “scope of assessment”). The administrative assessment team would have to confess that it simply did not have the time to delve into budgets, or the current level of cost efficiency or effectiveness in regard to programme support. Obviously some of the findings and recommendations regarding the streamlining of reporting and financial requirements and formats may result in time efficiencies for SCNL staff so that more strategic considerations could be given to project development and innovation. The team has also made suggestions for expanding the programme work within two provinces, for scaling up technical assistance, and for including a planning reserve for additional, unplanned activities, all of which have implications for increasing expenditures.

Next Steps:

The SCNL team is already developing action plans to move forward on prioritised improvements suggested in this administrative assessment. Undoubtedly this report will be shared with relevant persons within the Oslo head office for additional comments and advice.

Some of the issues and accompanying recommendations appear to be quite urgent, and we would suggest moving on them quickly. Most of these matters fall within the areas of communications and working relations. Two new programme staff were hired during or just prior to the arrival of the assessment team and interviews are being conducted with potential candidates for the vacant post of communications manager. These new personnel will provide opportunities to review and revise structures as well.

The team suggests that SCNL resist any temptation to focus only on internal organisational matters, as there is much food for thought among the partner, donor, and HO comments. The fact that one local donor is considering a general re-focusing of programme and financial priorities towards quality and impact and away from generating outputs and activities could herald a trend among other donor organisations. Such a move might have implications for some of the SCNL projects.

Conclusion:

The team of Vipaka, Sarah and Ann wish to thank the members of SCNL for inviting us to work in a participatory manner with them, their partners, and donors. We treasure the conversations we have had with each and every individual, with the various sections and the Management Team. All three of us have the greatest admiration for what SCNL has accomplished in the last ten years with the MOE and with the children of some of the most remote areas of the country. We wish SCNL well over the next decade and look forward to hearing of even greater accomplishments in the future.

APPENDIX:

SCNL Vision 2017						
EFFECTIVE OPERATIONAL SYSTEMS		A LEADER FOR CHILDREN			WORKING AS ONE FAMILY WITH ONE VOICE	
Expanding Budgets for Implementation of Activities	Effective Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation System	Education for All Children	SCNL: A Leading Organisation in the Area of Children	Working More with Children	Attitudes & Characteristics that the Staff & Partners Should Have	Better Living Conditions for Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -more funds received and more donors -more projects / more partners / more money -more funds allocated to school construction and provision of education materials -expect funds for each year is \$3,000,000 -SCN has fun to provide food & milk (nutrition) for children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -effective monitoring & evaluation systems to accurately measure the results -the organisational system is clearer and strengthened, including back up system -the organisation has accurate plans of action, targeted results -the lessons from SCN work will be used in partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -all Lao children, especially ethnic children, girls, children with disability completed primary school -children in the remote areas get support of full basic education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -SCN becomes a popular project in Laos -to be an organization as a resource or learning centre for staff and government partners and other organizations -the organization is famous, well known about specific areas of work: basic education and child rights -being a focal point to receive complaints from children & women about child abuse and physical & mental violations -SCN is getting bigger, well known & leading organisation in the field of ed. development & CRC -SCN staff have the professional skill in the specific area of responsibility, such as education, CRC -more focus on child protection issue -give a hand to disadvantaged children to attend school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -working more directly with children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -good attitude -we want to work effectively and all staff proud of working with SCNL -good solidarity where staff help one another -good communication and relations between different sections in SCNL -SCN partners understand and follow CRC -SCN should be one family, one voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -staff is better off in living conditions and professional skills

SCNL vision developed during all staff briefing workshop, 7 Feb 2007

Compiled Journey of SCNL
Management Team, Programme & Administration Sections

"SCNL - The Time of Being Primary Children"					"SCN: A Profile"					
"Pilot Period - The Beginning"					"Confusing Period - Co-Pilots - Consolidation and More Experience"			"Happy & Peaceful Period"		"Deepening Strategy - Work in More Detail"
					"Transition period- (new structures & prep for new CR)"					Fixing Time: reviewing changes
1997	'98	'99	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
-began as country & regional office -BC& PP joined	-enough funds to support projects -child labour project not really taking off -First strategy -KC joined -SV joined -strategy plan extended		-CS joined -setting up responsibilities and learning	-Gro, SCNL Sec Gen visited SCNL -Visited HO staff in Oslo -driving in rainy season every year -SCN was the first org working in a remote area -helping disadvantaged, minority people as well as people in rural & mountain areas to attend school -promote CRC & work for the children	-Prog Dir from Oslo came here -1 st RR retired -KI joined (1 st job) -expansion into remote areas -working to monitor schools in remote areas: no road -destruction of computer system & server; difficulty in data collection -assignment not clear -some senior people left -well known period of SCN - 1 st org. to work in CRC area, risk, challenge, pilot phase	-worked on VAC issue -talk about consolidation -more cooperation with MOE -assisting NCMC to prepare CRC report -VP joined -data collection on school dropout: we talked to each family -organised central filing -APM in Thailand -staff turnover -contribute to estab. staff friendship -new CR -04 change of structure divided into education and PPC; before, no prog dir; all PCs went directly to CR -different education programmes were joined	2005 -Discontinued support to Lao Youth Union magazine as CRC messages not published; discontinue CRC centre -new strategy 2006-2009 -took over SC-UK projects -sub-office in LPQ -mis-understanding between leader & staff -sent complaint letter about RR to HO -conflict in SCNL 2006 -Joint regional/HQ events (Ed conference) -stopped support of Mongolia -Communication mgr left -New CR -New donor – Pestalozzi for ELPS -CR in 2005/6 -lack of technical skill to provide the partners -confusion (shall we coordinate only in the role of admin, or should we give technical support also?) -expanded to deliver CRC to other orgs -SCN losing experienced staff -assisting other PC not clear and no memo -involved in strategy planning	-Administrative Assessment -challenge: some project cycles ending and must make decision to scale up, phase out.....? -BS joined -well known among the INGOs, particularly on the support of ed. -SCN provided the opp to learn about related issues on my res.		