



Lao Tropical and Public Health Institute
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Knowledge Translation Strategy

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Foreword

Since the recognition that health research is a fundamental matters for health development under the responsibility of the Council of Medical Sciences (CMS) by the Decree of the Council of Minister's office in 1989. Referring to the real demand of public health development to be focused more in public health research and training, the National Institute of Public Health (NIOPH) has been established under the MOH Decree No.247/MOH on 22nd February 1999, and became also the bureau of the CMS. NIOPH has made great achievements and significant progress in introducing a research culture, supporting and promoting a conducive environment for conducting health research activities in Lao PDR through capacity development and building skills for health professionals and young researchers. It has guided health research priorities through its Health Research Master Plan, managed its research through the Lao Health Research Portal, and disseminated its findings via key networking forums and circulation channels such as the annual National Health Research Forum since 2007, and the Health Sciences Bulletin.

Nevertheless, despite these notable improvements, major challenges remain; including access to health research information and more evidence-based decision making and policy advice.

As a consequence, in order for the newly approved Lao Tropical and Public Health Institute (Lao TPHI, MOH Decree No.2979/MOH, 6th December 2017) that resulted from the merging of NIOPH and the Francophone Institute for Tropical Medicine (IFMT) to continue progressing towards providing policy makers and implementers with tools, methods, and information needed to render decision making more evidence-based, Lao Tropical and Public Health Institute (Lao TPHI) will continue in its commitment to providing policy advice and support to answer specific public health research questions in the future. With the vision of an improved equity in the health sector and achievement of universal health coverage, it is essential to emphasise knowledge translation measures that start from knowledge creation and end with knowledge tools and products such as policy briefs, guidelines and recommendations.

This Knowledge Translation Strategy will be critically important in supporting the health sector reform process and its implementation to promote and improve the health of the multi-ethnic Lao population.

Vientiane Capital,
Director General of NIOPH,
Minister of Health, Lao PDR

Dr. Souraxay Phommala

Date: 30 January 2018

Acronyms and abbreviations

CIHR	Canadian Institutes of Health Research
KT	Knowledge Translation
KTA	Knowledge-To-Action
MCNV	Medical Committee Netherlands – Vietnam
MoH	Ministry of Health
NHRF	National Health Research Forum
NIOPH	National Institute of Public Health
Lao TPHI	Lao Tropical and Public Health Institute
OCA	Organisational Capacity Assessment

Introduction

1.1 Background

Knowledge translation (KT) is defined by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) as “a dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically-sound application of knowledge to improve public health, provide more effective health services and products and strengthen the health care system.” (CIHR, 2010). In other words, it is a process to improve public health by guiding relevant stakeholders with the use and communication of research. Different tools exist to facilitate KT one of the tools being a KT strategy. KT strategies often focus on the dissemination and implementation of existing knowledge according to well evaluated steps.

This KT strategy is formulated based on three major events in combination with weekly meetings between staff of the Lao Tropical and Public health Institute (Lao TPHI) and the Medical Committee Netherlands – Vietnam (MCNV). A questionnaire was distributed amongst Lao TPHI staff in September to identify the current status, barriers, past efforts and possible solutions concerning KT in Lao TPHI. Based on the information of the questionnaire a draft version of the KT strategy was constructed and presented to Lao TPHI staff for input in October, 2017. During this meeting activities were evaluated one by one and the KT strategy was changed based on these inputs. Additionally, a consultative dialogue took place during the eleventh National Health Research Forum (NHRF) in Vientiane on Knowledge Translation, with panellists from Lao TPHI, VU University Amsterdam, University of Health Science Vientiane and University of Basel, the results of which has further contributed to guide this document.

1.2 Knowledge translation context

In May 2005 NIOPH produced a report ‘Knowledge Transfer and Exchange Practices in the Context of Lao PDR’, which explains the KT situation in Lao PDR. Here, some policy makers were interviewed and questionnaires were self-administered by researchers and health care providers. Both the in-depth interviews and questionnaires contained questions related to KT. It was identified that all groups supported the use of health research as an input for the decision making process, however a significant barrier was found to be the provision of and access to information. Moreover, research institutions were not able to make their research accessible through communication tools such as websites or newsletters, policy makers and health care providers were not able to access information. Another finding was that workshops and seminars held by research institutions were scarce. Based on these findings a few recommendations were made:

- 1) The government should invest more on research and KT activities to improve access and provision of information;
- 2) Documents such as articles, reports and syntheses should be for free upon request,
- 3) More training should be provided on KT for all relevant stakeholders, with the provision of incentives to engage in KT activities; and
- 4) Recommendations resulting from research should include public values and expectations.

Since 2013, Lao TPHI envisioned to act as the focal point for health research and continued to work directly with the Department of Organization and Personnel and Department of Training and Research of the Ministry of Health (MoH). It generated knowledge by doing research in line

with the country's research priorities as reflected in the National Economic and Social Development Plan, National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan, and five-year plan of MoH. All health researches in Lao PDR is monitored by NIOPH through the Lao Health Research Portal. Researchers have to apply for ethical approval through this portal and are requested to share the findings of their study. Knowledge is communicated through the annual National Health Research Forum and other platforms to all relevant stakeholders including policy makers in order to strengthen the health research system. Furthermore, knowledge is communicated through training courses and master programs provided by Lao TPHI.

Current data from the questionnaire provided to NIOPH staff indicated that most researchers do not know who the policy makers are and vice versa, which is a significant barrier for KT. Additionally, there is no system, responsible body or person in place for (or the guidance of) KT and most researchers do not know how to communicate with or approach policy makers. Another barrier is that research is often based on donor requirements, so research topics are not always in line with the current health priorities. Lastly, it is often mentioned that limitations in workforce, capacity, time and English language skills are barriers for NIOPH's KT activities. In the past workshops about KT and policy briefs were provided to NIOPH staff, however not all participated, as well as English language training. It was further identified that only some NIOPH staff have experience in disseminating research findings in the form of presentations and publications.

A consultative dialogue on KT that took place during the 11th NHRF in 2017 confirmed the gap between researchers and relevant stakeholders, mainly policy makers. A few facilitators that were present during this panel discussion suggested setting research priorities, integrating KT at the early stage of proposal writing, identifying the relevant stakeholders, making information more accessible (for example translate into Lao and English), combine research and use cost-effectiveness analysis. While it was further suggested during this dialogue that NIOPH become the focal point of research in Lao PDR, and ultimately be responsible for KT, it is important to emphasise that this is already part of the mandate of NIOPH. One of the main objectives of this strategy therefore, is to not only acknowledge this, but to initiate a plan to mainstream KT and put it into practice.

1.3 Policy and strategy context

Many different health policies and strategies have been developed in Lao PDR, however there is not a specific policy or strategy that is significant for this KT strategy. This strategy is not developed focussing on a single policy or strategy, but rather as a tool to bridging a process that contributes evidence to improving health policies and strategies in general. Therefore, this KT strategy aims to strengthen all health policies and strategies of Lao PDR to improve public health.

1.4 Achievements and lessons learned

In the 'National Health Research Situation in Lao PDR 1992-2005' (2005) report it is described how NIOPH successfully implemented three five-year national health research master plans. During this time NIOPH has improved in research capacity and strategy development to strengthen the health system in the future. Despite the progress, in the document a few gaps for

improvement are highlighted. First, human resources were limited in terms of quantity and quality. Second, financial support from external donors is not always in line with Lao PDR's research priorities, resulting in a higher need of internal investments. Third, the promotion of research utilisation is not optimal. Finally, the reliability and validity of information should be improved to build public confidence in science.

Since 2007 NIOPH has organised the National Health Research Forum in Vientiane, its most prominent means of sharing its research findings. During this forum, new networks are also made with other research institutes, both nationally and internationally, as well as other relevant stakeholders. The most recent 11th NHRF in October 2017 welcomed 256 participants from 18 different countries, the highest rate of participation in its history, and presented data via 30 oral and 32 poster presentations. Overtime the 11th NHRF has observed not only an increasing level of participation, but also the number of (young) Lao presenters, suggesting positive signs for the future.

One of the four functions of the national health research system strengthening strategies mentioned in the Fourth National health Research Master Plan (2007-2011) was on knowledge production and utilization which aimed to strengthen the coalition of three main constituencies: researchers, users, and funders by making them involved in research process since the beginning, developing concrete messages of research findings for reporting to main target audiences/users of research including media as well as developing and strengthening research data bases.

NIOPH provided knowledge for the development of various health policies and strategies:

- Health Master Plan up to 2020 (November 2002)
- Deworming policy (2008)
- Law on Tobacco Control (26 November 2009)
- Law on Control of Alcohol Beverage (30 January 2015)
- Policy on Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) (2016)
- National Nutrition Strategy to 2025 and Plan of Action 2016-2020 (2016)

Lastly, Dissemination and applications of research outcomes is one of the six strategic components of the Strategy on the Promotion and Management of Health Research by 2020 (Department of Training and Research, August, 2014) in which its main aims are to disseminate and promote the application of the evidence based and health research outcomes by the policy and decision makers, service providers and users. One of its expected outcomes is preparation of policy briefs or organizing meeting with all stakeholders at least twice per year.

Components of the strategy

2.1 Overarching principles

- **Evidence-based recommendations result in better informed policies.** This strategy aims to contribute to a change in paradigm on how to develop policies that address public health issues in Lao PDR. It will reach beyond communication of results, and rather encourage the synthesis and application of knowledge that stems from research evidence.
- **Commitment to equitable resource allocation and improved public health.** An outcome of this Knowledge Translation Strategy will be better informed policies, their

implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This will further contribute to the wider goal of improved equitable resource allocation, improved population health and Universal Health Coverage in Lao PDR.

- **The inclusion and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders is ensured.** This strategy further aims to develop and establish a culture and practice of collaboration among stakeholders involved in the policy making process, be it from policy makers, to policy influencers, and ultimately, its end-user.
- **A culture of collaboration among stakeholders is ensured.** As a result of the inclusion and involvement of relevant stakeholders, this strategy aims to facilitate and support the shared responsibility of the evidence-based policy production process by both policy makers, and policy advisors. Collaboration will contribute to, build and strengthen the demand and supply for evidence, which will further encourage the sustainability of the process.

2.2 Guiding principles

- Involvement of stakeholders since the beginning in knowledge creation will develop a strong sense of **ownership** of the process and its outcomes.
- Communication skills and knowledge-sharing platforms will support ensuring that research findings are **accessible and understandable for all**.
- Encourage researchers to think critically about their findings and effective, the **key entry points** that their research should trigger, and timely means of disseminating their findings to policy makers and influencers.
- Encourage researchers to better understand the policy making process, and in parallel, policy makers will be encouraged to better understand the research and policy recommendation process, and how and when to access its findings.
- Encourage other stakeholders to better understand knowledge translation
- Commitment to develop an operational plan that is **practical, sustainable, and resilient**.

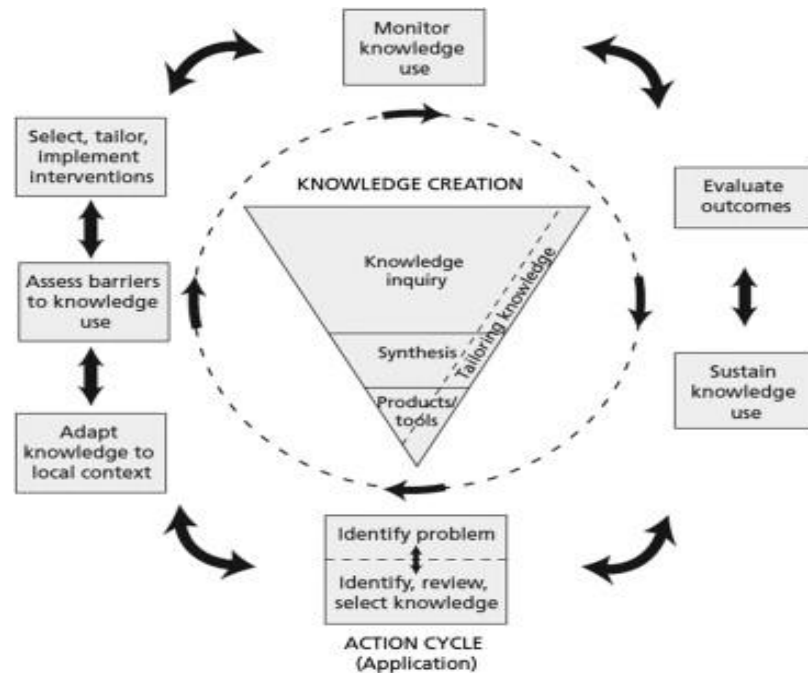
2.3 Conceptual framework

Fundamentals of this KT strategy are based on the conceptual framework of Graham *et al.*, (2006)¹. The so called knowledge-to-action (KTA) process framework divides KTA in two concepts, knowledge creation and action (Figure 1). Knowledge creation cycle, resembled in a funnel, starts with primary data and ends with knowledge tools and products as guidelines and recommendations. The action cycle resembles activities that might be needed for knowledge application to implement knowledge. The actions or phases of the action cycle are dynamic and react to each other. Moreover, the knowledge creation cycle and the action cycle are constantly interacting with each other, resulting in a dynamic process. For example, at each phase potential

¹ Graham, I. D., Logan, J., Harrison, M. B., Straus, S. E., Tetroe, J., Caswell, W., & Robinson, N. (2006). Lost in knowledge translation: time for a map?. *Journal of continuing education in the health professions*, 26(1), 13-24.

knowledge users may base their activities on the work of knowledge producers and knowledge producers may base their activities to the needs of knowledge users.

Figure 1: knowledge to action process framework (Graham et al., 2006)



2.4 Delivery platform

In its current form, this KT strategy will be used as a guiding document for researchers within Lao TPHI when designing how they plan to share the findings of their work, and in what form they will use it to influence policy change. Lao TPHI plan to share this strategy document with other research institutions and their partners, in an effort to extend the outcomes of its principals. The EU funded LEARN programme will form a preliminary delivery platform for the outputs proposed by this KT strategy, whereby resources will be mobilised to support Lao TPHI in translating the knowledge acquired from their research. As its use becomes more practices, a further delivery platform will be identified, which will further facilitate future KT strategies to be implemented.

2.5 Overall goal

The overall objective of this KT strategy is to facilitate and support a process whereby ongoing and future research can contribute to a better population health system in the Lao PDR, through improved policies informed by research of the Lao TPHI and other research bodies. This objective is in line with Lao TPHI's vision, which is to achieve significant improvements of people's health and the health system through quality research and training.

The activities of this strategy are detailed in the section below, and aim to: 1) Increase access to research findings of Lao TPHI; 2) Improve communication between researchers and policy makers; and 3) Establish a dedicated group responsible for the facilitation of knowledge translation.

2.6 Strategic objectives and activities

Strategic objective 1: To increase access to research findings of Lao TPHI and other research bodies in the health sector for all stakeholders, most importantly policy makers.

Activity 1.1: Finalise KT strategy. This is the first KT strategy of Lao TPHI and may provide guidance for staff and partners concerning KT. Completion of all the described actions will result in an improved KT capacity of Lao TPHI.

Activity 1.2: Showcase research findings online. Lao TPHI uses three different websites for communications and visibility activities: the Lao TPHI website, the SDG4A website and the Lao PDR health research portal. The main focus will be to showcase documents on the official Lao TPHI website, since it currently lacks content. Despite a recent upgrade, the website may require further adjustments to ensure its user-friendliness and ease of access to the information it will showcase, and will be reviewed on a regular basis by the KT Team. From the Lao TPHI website, links will be created to relevant documents on the other websites. Content on the SDG4A website is focused on health for adolescence in the Mekong region. The Lao PDR health research portal contains proposals and full reports of researches. Currently only a limited number of documents containing main findings are uploaded when compared to the amount of proposals, therefore an incentive might be created for researchers to upload their full reports. Lastly, this activity is significant for documents that are produced through other activities in this KT strategy.

Further to the online platforms mentioned above, the KT Team will also explore channels of sharing research findings through social media, particularly Facebook, as well as the formats in which they will be shared. For example, full research reports can be shared on the Lao TPHI website and Health Research Portal, but it is also important to ensure that information be presented in accessible formats such as short summaries that highlight the key points and recommendations. The different online sharing platforms will also be monitored to identify how often they are being visited and which topics appear of most interest, but also to ensure that the information is easily accessed and navigation is kept simple. Should any upgrades be required, the KT Team will respond and take action accordingly.

Activity 1.3: Organise the annual National Health Research Forum. Lao TPHI is in its 11th year of organising this important event, which has proved to be an effective forum for presenting and sharing its research findings, as well as raising its profile to key stakeholders both nationally and internationally. The 11th NHRF, with the theme “Health Research Capacity Strengthening towards Sustainable Development”, successfully took place in October 2017 at the Crowne Plaza

in Vientiane. The aim of this forum was to provide a platform to share knowledge between stakeholders through abstracts, oral presentations, poster exhibitions and discussions. Four people from TPHI presented research findings during this forum. Additionally, consultative dialogue about KT took place of which the content is used to construct this KT strategy. Moreover, a proceedings report should be developed in order to learn from this years' NHRF and to improve next years' edition.

Activity 1.4: Improve the Bulletin of Health Sciences. The Bulletin of Health Sciences contains all research findings of Lao TPHI and partners from the previous year in the form of summaries and manuscripts, and is distributed within the MoH structures at Provincial and District levels. By distributing printed versions and uploading the document on the website key stakeholders can become more aware of Lao TPHI's research findings. Since this activity not only relies on the input from Lao TPHI itself but also from partners it is very time intensive to collect all the materials. Therefore, the Bulletin of Health Sciences is developed once every year, however in the future, efforts will be placed on improving this process so that it can be published more frequently. This activity will involve identifying ways to improve the structure, content and layout of the Bulletin, in order to ensure that information is presented in an attractive manner, and thus, more likely to be read by relevant stakeholders.

Activity 1.5: Publications. Publish articles in the Lao Medical Journal or international peer reviewed journals to disseminate research findings to other researchers. Also, websites of activity 1.2 will be used to share these publications.

Activity 1.6: Annual report. The annual report contains Lao TPHI's achievements and activities of the previous year. Additionally, future plans are displayed in this report. By uploading it to the Lao TPHI website and distributing printed versions including bullet pointed summaries to the MOH and departments under MOH, more awareness for Lao TPHI's work might be created. To increase accessibility to the content of the document, a Lao and English

Strategic objective 2: To improve communication between researchers and policy makers, so that researchers know better what the research priorities are and policy makers use research findings in policy development.

version will be produced.

Activity 2.1: Stakeholder mapping. A stakeholder mapping exercise will facilitate to a clearer understanding of the policy making process, but also identify key decision makers, and potential entry point for influence, which will support Lao TPHI better reach the target audience for the other activities. In 2005 Lao TPHI performed a stakeholder mapping exercise and in 2017 this was done by the Ministry of Sciences and Technology.

Activity 2.2: Meeting between policy makers and researchers. We will use the annual meeting of the Council of Medical Sciences (CMS) to be a platform for meeting between policy makers and researchers. For the year 2018, a first CMS meeting will be organized in February to elect its new President and its new members. In this occasion, a summarised version of the KT

strategy will be discussed among policy makers and researchers will be invited to join the discussion. The meeting will consist of a workshop concerning KT followed by a group discussion about how to improve communications between researchers and policy makers in the future. This activity may have significant implications for future KT activities, since it is a good opportunity for researchers and policy makers to establish relations or make agreements. For example, an agreement can be made that policy makers and researchers will meet on an ongoing basis in the future.

Activity 2.3: Develop a 5-year health research master plan. This activity includes many meetings between people from all institutions around MoH to discuss research priorities for the next five years.

Activity 2.4: English capacity building. The LEARN programme will conduct an Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA) of Lao TPHI in the near future, and depending on the results of this, a Capacity Building Plan will be established. It is envisaged that English language lessons will form part of this plan, which will further build the skills of Lao TPHI researchers in communicating their findings, both orally, and in the written form.

Activity 2.5: Conduct policy dialogues. As part of Lao TPHIs monitoring of the policy making and policy review timetable, it will schedule the communication of its research findings via policy dialogues with the concerned stakeholders. However, the timing of an organised policy dialogue does not necessarily need to be limited to an ongoing policy drafting process of the MOH. Each year a minimum of two policy dialogues will take place. This year at least one policy dialogue already took place, the ‘National Strategy and Action Plan for Integrated Services on Reproductive, Maternal, New born and Child Health 2016-2025’. However, there are more opportunities for the current year, for example on the National Youth Policy.

Strategic objective 3: To set up a responsible body for the facilitation of knowledge translation.

Activity 3.1: Establish a KT team. This activity can potentially be initiated during activity 2.2 including follow up meetings. Lao TPHI will assign a responsible person/body/team to facilitate KT. The KT team will also be responsible for updating, monitoring and evaluating future KT strategies. In the early stages this activity will be guided by the LEARN program.

Activity 3.2: Monitor, evaluate and update KT strategy. The team from activity 3.1 will be responsible for this. Meetings with Lao TPHI staff will be held quarterly to monitor and evaluate the activities. Additionally, the KT strategy will be updated 4 times a year, the first time in January of 2018. However, the KT strategy can change anytime based on possible activity deviations and emerging need.

Expected results

Expected results 1: Accessibility of research findings from Lao TPHI and partners will increase by improving current and designing new channels to transfer knowledge to stakeholders including policy makers. Increased accessibility of research findings will lead to a higher use of research findings for policy development and improved health programs.

Expected results 2: Communication between researchers and policy makers will improve, so that it is clear to researchers what the research priorities are and it is clear to the policy makers what the research findings mean. This will result in more evidence informed policies, especially when researchers involve policy makers in their research at an early stage.

Expected results 3: A responsible person, body or division will be in place to facilitate KT. This person, body or division is used as a focal point by other Lao TPHI staff and also aims to create and maintain relations with all the research institutions around the MOH.

Management and accountability

For each individual activity, leaders are appointed that will be responsible for the activity (Appendix 1). Additionally, as part of this KT strategy a KT team will be set up (specific objective 3.1) which manages the KT strategy in general.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The KT Team appointed under activity 3.1 will be responsible for the overall monitoring and evaluation of the KT Strategy as described above under activity 3.2. Indicators of achievement should be used to keep track of progress. It is intended that this document be dynamic and updated quarterly based on the outcomes of its implementation and the findings of the KT Team. For this activity the KT team meets at least four times per year to monitor, evaluate and update the KT strategy. Updating the KT strategy includes removing accomplished objectives, adjusting existing non finished objectives and come up with new objectives. This indicates that the KT strategy will be adjusted multiple times per year, which likely has a positive effect on sustainability.

Sustainability

With the regular reflection as part of the monitoring and evaluation of the KT Strategy as outlined above, it is intended that this will promote and contribute to the sustainability of this document, and the practice of KT in general. For the duration of the LEARN programme, Lao TPHI's KT Strategy will receive regular attention given its importance to many of the wider activities and objectives of the project. This will encourage the continued practice of KT in the future, and thus further contribute to its sustainability.

Appendix

Nr.	Activities	Communication tool	Target groups	Time	Indicators of achievement	Activity leaders
1.1	Finalize KT strategy	Questionnaire Weekly meetings Summary meetings	Lao TPHI staff	1 st week December 2017	Finalised KT strategy Showcase KT strategy (on website)	Lao TPHI LEARN (Programme Manager, Programme Coordinator, Communication staff)
1.2	Showcase research findings + Improve platforms for information sharing	Reports Summaries Policy briefs Articles Media Social media	- General public + policy makers (TPHI, SDG4A website, Facebook) - Researchers + partner institutions (Lao health research portal) -All stakeholders (media)	Throughout program	Content on websites Number of hits More user-friendly TPHI website At least 1 Report, 1 summary and 1 policy brief uploaded on website each half year More final reports on Lao health research portal	Lao TPHI (IT & communication)

1.3	National Health Research Forum	Poster presentation Oral presentation Consultative dialogue	Policy makers Researchers	Yearly, end of year	Consensus on some topics Suggestions for priorities (pol dial) Proceedings report	Lao TPHI + partner institutions + LEARN Communications Officer
1.4	Bulletin of Health Science	Summaries and manuscripts	All, especially provincial health departments	Yearly, end of year	Number of prints distributed Times read and used	TPHI (Department of Coordination & Research Information management-DCRIM)
1.5	Publications	Research papers/articles	Researchers + partners	Throughout year	Submit three manuscripts per year	Researchers UHS leaders
1.6	Annual report & Follow up meeting	Summary of activities, research findings, achievements and future plans Summary of annual report Meeting	Donors Partners Policy makers Researchers	Q1 of 2018	Finalised version in English and Lao Distributed to MoH Uploaded on websites Used by policy makers Nr of researchers and policy makers that attended the meeting	Lao TPHI (LEARN Communications Officer + DCRIM)

2.1	Stakeholder mapping exercise	Report Website	All stakeholders	December 2017	Finalised stakeholder map Stakeholder map used for other activities	Lao TPHI LEARN
2.2	Meeting policy makers and researchers	Workshop + Focus group discussion	Policy makers Researchers	Q1 of 2018	Amount of attendees (policy makers & researchers) Agreements for future	Lao TPHI/LEARN SPHIP Support Team
2.3	5-year health research master plan	Meetings Discussions	TPHI Policy makers	Q2 of 2018	Conducting research based on research priorities	Lao TPHI (Department of Health Policy & Health System Research-DHHR and Department of Food and Nutrition Research-DFNR)
2.4	English capacity building	Lectures + work groups	TPHI staff	Q1 of 2018 (after OCA)	English courses finished 50% of TPHI staff able to summarise in English	Lao TPHI SPHIP Support Team
2.5	Policy dialogues	Policy briefs Summaries Coffee/lunch meeting	Researchers Policy maker Public (all)	Minimal twice a year	Research findings from researchers are used by policy makers	Lao TPHI KT team

3.1	Set up KT team	Meeting Discussion	Policy makers Development partners TPHI staff	Q1 of 2018	Concrete plans for development of KT team	Lao TPHI
3.2	Monitor, evaluate and update KT strategy	Meetings Discussions E-mails	TPHI staff	4 times a year, first time in January	Updated version of the KT strategy	Lao KT team

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