

**COMBINED PROJECT INFORMATION DOCUMENTS / INTEGRATED
SAFEGUARDS DATA SHEET (PID/ISDS)
CONCEPT STAGE**

Report No.: PIDISDSC16199

Date Prepared/Updated: 10-Feb-2016

I. BASIC INFORMATION

A. Basic Project Data

Country:	Lao People's Democratic Republic	Project ID:	P157963
		Parent Project ID (if any):	
Project Name:	Poverty Reduction Fund III (P157963)		
Region:	EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC		
Estimated Appraisal Date:	09-Mar-2016	Estimated Board Date:	24-May-2016
Practice Area (Lead):	Social, Urban, Rural and Resilience Global Practice	Lending Instrument:	Investment Project Financing
Sector(s):	Other social services (75%), Public administration- Other social services (15%), General agriculture, fishing and forestry sector (1 0%)		
Theme(s):	Rural services and infrastructure (40%), Participation and civic engagement (40%), Nutrition and food security (10%), Other social d evelopment (10%)		
Borrower(s):	Lao People's Democratic Republic		
Implementing Agency:	Lao Poverty Reduction Fund		
Financing (in USD Million)			
	Financing Source	Amount	
	BORROWER/RECIPIENT	10.00	
	International Development Association (IDA)	30.00	
	SWITZERLAND Swiss Agency for Dev. & Coop. (SDC)	15.00	
	Financing Gap	0.00	
	Total Project Cost	55.00	
Environmental Category:	B - Partial Assessment		
Concept Review Decision:	Track I - The review did authorize the preparation to continue		
Is this a Repeater	No		

project?	
Other Decision (as needed):	

B. Introduction and Context

Country Context

Despite impressive economic growth in the last few decades, poverty remains high in Lao PDR, especially in rural areas and among ethnic groups. Poverty declined from 41.4 percent in 2002/03 to 28.8 percent in 2012/13. With a GDP per capita of around US\$1,600 in 2014, Lao PDR has become a lower-middle income country. In general, Lao population now live in better housing, own more assets and have better access to infrastructure and services than ten years ago. Improvements in welfare at the national level, however, mask significant differences between regions and among socioeconomic groups. Poverty stands at 28 percent in rural areas as compared with 10 percent in urban areas. About 40 percent of Mon Khmer and Hmong ethnic groups are poor, compared to 15 percent of Lao-Tai people, and ethnic groups account for about two thirds of people without formal education. Stunting is more pronounced among ethnic groups. Less than 60 percent of women in poor households are able to read and write, compared to over 80 percent of men who can.

The Systematic Country Diagnostics (SCD) Concept Note estimates that about 42 percent of poor in Lao PDR, about 70 percent of whom belong to ethnic groups, rely on subsistence farming, have low human endowments, lack access to infrastructure and services, and are vulnerable to external shocks. It maintains that policies directed at increasing social inclusion, including investments in both human and physical capital, and a well-designed social protection system, are necessary to reach this largely rural population and lift them out of poverty permanently. A significant portion of Lao citizens who escaped poverty in the recent past have fallen back into poverty again, indicating a high level of vulnerability the poor and near poor face and the scale of difficulties they face to escape poverty permanently. About 19 percent of Lao citizens are undernourished, and 44 percent of children below-five are stunted. Inequality is rising: between 2002 and 2012, the Gini coefficient rose from 32.5 to 36.2. Access to services and markets remains a constraint for many rural poor: approximately 30 percent of rural villages are at least two-hours on foot from the nearest health dispensary, and only 69 percent of the bottom 40 percent have access to all weather roads. Ethnic groups tend to be significantly poorer than the majority Lao-Tai population even when education levels and livelihoods (farm/non-farm wage) are controlled for.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

The GoL's 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) calls for tailored interventions to improve the welfare of the poorest groups, in particular ethnic groups. Investments proposed include the construction of basic education infrastructure, rural access roads and improvements in access to safe drinking water. It also recognizes that poverty reduction must be tailored to the specific needs and capabilities of ethnic groups, and address gender issues among various ethnic groups.

The "Sam Sang" initiative, piloted first in 2012, envisions increasing decentralization. However, evidence suggests that while responsibilities have been delegated to lower levels of government (for example in health and education), funding decisions remain centralized. Furthermore, weak public financial management arrangements, especially at the local level, have contributed to running up arrears. In general, responsibility assignments between various levels of government need to be further clarified in some sectors.

The Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF), established in accordance with a Prime Minister's Decree, has served as one of the GoL's main vehicles to address rural poverty. The PRF is part of the National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (NCRDPE) which reports to the Minister to the Government Office and is in charge of broad issues related to rural poverty in Lao PDR. The PRF is governed by the Board of the PRF which consists of representatives from line ministries and Provincial Governors. The Executive Director and his office, staffed by consultants, manage day-to-day operation of the PRF through a highly decentralized structure with permanent staff located at the provincial and district levels. The PRF staff and implementation structure is increasingly used by the GoL to implement some of the rural poverty projects, such as the Bank funded Lao Upland Food Security Improvement Project (LUFSSIP) and an employment generation program implemented by the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare.

Relationship to CAS/CPS/CPF

The proposed PRF III would contribute to the World Bank Group's Lao PDR Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) for FY 12 – 16. Specifically, it would support Outcome 3.3 Improved access to basic services and markets and community participation in rural areas under the Strategic Objective 3 Inclusive Development. The CPS includes additional IDA support for PRF in FY 16/17.

C. Proposed Development Objective(s)

Proposed Development Objective(s) (From PCN)

The PDO of the proposed PRF III is tentatively proposed as follows: improve access to basic services for the Project's targeted poor communities. The PDO would be achieved through inclusive community and local development processes with emphasis on ensuring sustainability. This PDO will be refined based on the result of the Quality Enhancement Review.

Key Results (From PCN)

The same PDO indicators as those of the PRF II are tentatively proposed. They will be refined during the project preparation. They include: (i) Greater than 75% satisfaction levels reported by beneficiaries in targeted villages regarding improved services and local development planning; (ii) improved access to and utilization of basic economic and social services in kumbans supported by PRF; (iii) direct project beneficiaries; and (iv) decision-making on allocation of PRF resources involve at least 40% women.

D. Concept Description

Since its approval in 2011, the PRF II project has improved access to infrastructure for more than 1,500 poor villages in ten provinces, directly benefiting about 685,000 rural people. The Project Development Objective (PDO) of the PRF II is to improve the access to and the utilization of basic infrastructure and services for the Project's targeted poor communities. Typical subprojects financed include improvements of water supply systems, school expansion and rural road rehabilitation. The PRF II has been implemented satisfactorily and is on track to meet the PDO. The current project rating is Satisfactory for both DO and IP. The Project is fully compliant with legal covenants as well as the World Bank fiduciary and safeguards requirements. There are no overdue audits and there are no qualifications to the audit reports. Most subprojects are functional after two years of operation. About 93 percent of subprojects address women's needs, and ethnic groups account for about 70 percent of direct beneficiaries.

The quality of community engagement has significantly improved, and many efforts have been made to strengthen the sustainability of subprojects. The PRF II introduced the “Deepen CDD” approach during implementation which allowed the PRF to reach out to “hamlets” outside village centers and increase the participation of ethnic minorities cost-effectively. The pictogram of good and poor works, the improved Operation and Maintenance (O&M) manual and semi-annual follow-up community visits, among other measures, have strengthened the capacity of villagers in the upkeep of infrastructure subprojects.

Potential for sustainable impact are constrained due to a limited number of repeated subprojects. Only a little more than 20 percent of PRF villages implemented more than one subproject. As the project would engage only once with the majority of communities, the PRF II could develop the capacity of villagers only to a limited extent. Without repeated engagements and continued technical and financial supports, mid/ long-term sustainability of subprojects remain unclear.

The PRF II established Self-Help Groups (SHG) and Village Nutrition Centers (VNC) on a pilot basis in four districts, which proved to be a useful platform to deliver last mile services in rural areas. SHGs receive seed grants and on-lend to members to start livelihood activities. Nutrition grants were given to VNCs to help pregnant and lactating mothers cook nutritious but low-cost meals for themselves and young children, and start home gardens. Basic knowledge on pre/ post-natal care including food intake are also provided to VNC members. After a significant delay and learning processes, SHGs have started to build the capacity of rural women, improve their livelihoods and promote behavior change to achieve nutritional outcomes. Implementation procedures are now aligned with the PRF’s bottom-up processes to enhance the potential of the SHG as an effective institutional platform to deliver broader services.

There is a growing interest within and outside the GoL to use the PRF’s trained staff and village institutions as a platform to deliver last mile services cost-effectively. The PRF’s community facilitators and village leaders have already started providing behavior change and facilitation services to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. The PRF is also in negotiations with a few Bank funded projects to provide community facilitation and outreach services. A number of private entities are reaching out to the PRF for partnership on their local community development programs.

The Kumban Development Plan (KDP), developed under the PRF II, is becoming a useful spatial planning tool for Government and Development Partners. More than 40 percent of the KDP have been used by DPs or GoL agencies to identify priority investments for funding. The GIS based Kumban resource maps under development will further strengthen the quality of the KDP as a spatial development planning tool at the local level.

The PRF can enhance efficiencies and poverty reduction impacts by institutionalizing the PRF in GoL’s rural poverty programs and leveraging its core competencies. The share of community engagement cost is on average less than 10 percent of the subproject cost. The PRF can reduce the share of project management cost in the total project cost, which is about 17 percent now, by delegating implementation responsibilities to local governments where feasible. The institutionalization of PRF procedures in the GoL system will also allow mainstreaming the PRF approach and contribute to its sustainability. The PRF could further improve its efficiency and enhance its contribution to reducing rural poverty by leveraging its existing expertise and providing services to relevant GoL agencies and private firms.

An incremental approach to innovation should continue to be used. This is particularly so for the institutionalization of PRF processes and structures, given the limited capacity and funding available to local officials as well as concerns over accountability. During the PRF II, various innovations were introduced on a pilot basis and scaled up gradually over time. Given the significant capacity constraints, changes in project structure should be introduced on a step by step basis.

Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) III project

The proposed PRF III project would build on the bottom-up processes strengthened and the institutional platform laid out under the PRF II project and seek to leverage them to further improve the rural poor's access to infrastructure services and their livelihood conditions. Details of project activities will be developed during preparation, but the following three components are tentatively identified. The budgets provided for each component is only tentative.

Component 1: Community Development Sub-Grants (US\$23.5 million): community block grants will be provided to eligible communities to implement subprojects identified by community members themselves. The adequacy of the kumban as the unit of fund allocation will be assessed during preparation. Communities eligible for project support will be selected based on the on-going poverty mapping exercise, and the amount of sub-grants to be provided and the number of the districts to be covered will be determined based on the overall financing envelope. Eligible investments would include not only public goods (i.e. infrastructure) but also private goods such as livelihood, nutrition and sanitation activities. The modality of sub-grant allocation for public and private goods, including whether the support for public and private goods should be provided under separate components, will be developed during preparation.

Beneficiary villagers will be encouraged to prioritize both investments and maintenance activities, and villages with a successful track record in the maintenance of subprojects will be eligible to use the grant for maintenance. Annual technical audits will be conducted, and the semi-annual follow-up visit will continue to be conducted to verify the condition of infrastructure. Provision of Maintenance grants for maintenance activities will not only help enhance the sustainability of infrastructure but will also allow repeated engagement with beneficiary communities over multiple years and promote the use of Community Force Account (CFA) for subproject implementation.

As under the PRF II, the Self-Help Groups (SHG) and the Village Nutrition Centers (VNC) will be formed and receive seed grants to start pro-nutrition livelihood activities, with a focus on developing their basic capabilities and strengthening their food and nutrition security. Detailed support to be provided to SHGs and VNCs and the implementation arrangements to be used under the PRF III will be developed based on the experience of the current phase, but the saving groups will continue to be strengthened, and seed grants be provided to promote the production of diverse foods for both consumption and sales. In addition, the micro-enterprise approach (see box) will be piloted under this component whereby interested SHGs would be contracted for the asset management of tertiary infrastructure. The potential for co-financing from the GoL's Road Maintenance Fund will be explored. Labor methods will be extensively promoted to increase job creation impact.

Component 2: Local and Community Development Capacity Building and Learning (US\$3 million): This component will continue to develop the capacity of villagers and local governments in managing local development processes in partnership. The strengthened community engagement process piloted under the PRF II will continue to be rolled out to all PRF III villages. Efforts will be made to further harmonize PRF processes with rural development processes funded by GoL or DPs based on the on-going stock-taking of participatory rural development processes. The capacity of kumban facilitators who play a critical role in community facilitation and bottom-up processes both under the PRF investments and for services the PRF would provide to other agencies will continue to be strengthened.

This component would also support the development of PRF's business lines to provide services to development partners and GoL agencies. The quality of the KDP as the spatial planning tool would continue to be strengthened, and training may be provided to local Technical Service Providers (TSP) who may be contracted by villages to support technical supervision and contract management under CFA. It is expected that the district authorities would play a greater role in the implementation of the proposed PRF III at the local level, and some of the PRF implementation functions, in particular engineering designs and supervision of subproject implementation, may be delegated to respective line agencies at the district level. Care will be exercised so the delegation of responsibilities will be matched with their capacity and adequate accountability mechanisms are instituted to minimize governance, accountability and technical risks.

Component 3: Project Management (US\$3.5 million): This component will continue to support the cost of project implementation at the national, provincial and district levels. Assessment of the PRF as a service provider will be carried out during implementation both from the perspective of effectiveness in service delivery and for purposes of institutional building and complementarity with line ministries' delivery mechanisms.

II. SAFEGUARDS

A. Project location and salient physical characteristics relevant to the safeguard analysis (if known)

The PRF III will finance small scale rural and social infrastructure in poor communities, which will be selected based on the on-going poverty mapping exercise. The amount of sub-grants to be provided and the number of the districts to be covered will be determined based on the availability of co-financing. Eligible investments would include not only public goods but also private goods such as livelihood, nutrition and sanitation activities. Ethnic groups are expected to be present in the predominant parts of project areas. The project kum bans include villages that are located in designated protected areas and/or zones known of high conservation value.

B. Borrower's Institutional Capacity for Safeguard Policies

The proposed PRF III will be implemented by the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) which has well established safeguard arrangements and staff experienced in safeguards from the central to district levels. Many key management and high level technical staff has worked on safeguards since the first PRF operation began in 2003. These staff are well-trained and able to apply all safeguard policy requirements. They have also been requested by many development projects in Laos to share safeguard knowledge and experiences. Continued safeguard capacity development will be provided under the PRF III, in particular on documentation and reporting, in partnership with Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (PONRE) and its provincial offices (PONREs). The Bank's safeguard task team will also provide safeguard implementation support to the PRF.

C. Environmental and Social Safeguards Specialists on the Team

D. POLICIES THAT MIGHT APPLY

Safeguard Policies	Triggered?	Explanation (Optional)
Environmental Assessment OP/BP 4.01	Yes	<p>The PRFIII would continue to be classified as Category B. Safeguard review of the PRFII conducted in 2015 did not find any major environmental issues. Most civil works financed under the PRF II are new construction, rehabilitation or improvement of small-scale rural infrastructure, such as gravity-fed water supply systems, additional school buildings, spot improvement of rural roads, footbridges, and dispensaries, which could be mitigated through good construction practices and housekeeping. Minor issues were identified with regard to the monitoring and reporting of environmental safeguard implementation as well as minor environmental impacts such as felling of trees.</p> <p>The PRF III would continue to finance similar types of civil works. Negative impacts are expected to be minor and localized as under the original projects and could be mitigated during the planning and implementation of the project. The ECOP developed under the PRF II will be updated and will be used for PRFII.</p> <p>The PRFIII would continue to support the same livelihood and nutrition improvement activities (such as the production of small livestock and vegetables) that which the PRF II had been implementing, in the same geographical areas.</p> <p>The PRFIII may also scale up the Open Defecation Free (ODF) program which the PRF II has been piloting in 40 villages using Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach. The PRF III may provide finance to villagers to build simple pit latrines. The PRF III will use, and strengthen where necessary, the Environmental Code of Practice (ECOP) developed under the PRF II.</p> <p>Subproject screening criteria developed for the PRF II would continue to be used to exclude subprojects with potential large and/or significant impacts that</p>

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		<p>communities will not be able to manage, using the "non-eligibility negative list", and to guide the preparation and implementation of appropriate mitigation measures according to the nature and extent of the potential impacts. An Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) prepared for the PRF II will be updated for the PRFIII, taking into account the lessons learnt. The ESMF describes clear guidelines for safeguard screening and actions to be carried out according to the sizes and locations of the subprojects and a minimum environmental code of practices which will be applied to subprojects. Implementation of the ESMF will continue to be integrated into the planning and implementation process and the results will be included as part of the progress report. The revised ESMF will be disclosed to and consulted with the public before appraisal, and further revised based on any comments received.</p> <p>Under the PRF III, the PRF may would provide training and community facilitation services to interested agencies including Development Partners, GoL agencies and possibly private firms where the PRF has comparative advantages. In such cases, due diligence will be conducted on both the agencies to which the PRF would provide services and the activities they conduct. Details of due diligence procedures will be described in the ESMF.</p>
Natural Habitats OP/BP 4.04	Yes	<p>This policy is triggered because some villagers to be supported under the PRF III would live in national or provincial protected areas, and the implementation of subprojects may have negative impact on natural habitats in such protected areas, for example, through the construction of new access road in a known reserved forest or established protected areas. As under the PRF II project, these activities are expected to be small-scale, typical for CDD operation, and overall will have only limited impacts manageable through the application of mitigation measures. The policy is nonetheless triggered for precautionary reasons to ensure that any physical interventions (including those proposed in known reserved or declared national forests zones) will not lead to degradation of critical or other natural habitats. The PRF III will continue to use the ESMF amended under the PRF II AF which provides for the</p>

		screening of potential project impacts and how safeguard issues under 4.04 should be addressed.
Forests OP/BP 4.36	TBD	It is unlikely that the PRF III would impact the health and quality of forests, affect the rights and welfare of forest dependent people, or bring about changes in the management, protection, or utilization of natural forests or plantations. The majority, if not all, of the subprojects to be financed under the PRF III would be implemented within village settlements as under the PRF II. If the on-going safeguard performance review of the PRF II finds that impacts occurred that would trigger the policy, the policy will be triggered and the ESMF be updated to address such impacts.
Pest Management OP 4.09	Yes	The PRF III as under the PRF II would continue to support community livelihood activities which will involve agricultural production. As under the PRF II, the PRF III would not procure or and promote use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, which will continue to be included in the non-eligibility list as under the PRF II, and continue to promote organic farming. However, beneficiary farmers may apply pesticides, herbicides and insecticides. A simplified Pest Management Plan (PMP) developed under the PRF II would continue to be applied, which outlines clear regulations and procedures for the management of pesticides and/or toxic chemical as well as provides knowledge and training on health impacts and the safe use of pesticides and/or, when possible, promotion of non-chemical use alternatives such as organic farming.
Physical Cultural Resources OP/BP 4.11	TBD	Adverse impacts on the known archeological, paleontological, historical, or unique natural values in the subproject areas are unlikely. If the safeguard performance review of the PRF II finds any adverse impacts occurred, the policy will be triggered for the PRF III and the ESMF be updated to address such impacts.
Indigenous Peoples OP/BP 4.10	Yes	Target beneficiaries and project areas will be determined during project preparation. It is likely that PRFIII will continue to operate in areas that are home to numerous ethnic groups, who are largely identified to be vulnerable and poor. PRF III will continue to use the approach developed under the PRF II and described in the Ethnic Group Policy Framework (EGPF) to ensure that free, prior and informed consultations would be conducted with

		<p>affected ethnic groups leading to their broad community support, and that they receive project benefits. The EGPF was prepared as a standalone document in line with OP 4.10 requirements, and will be updated during the preparation of the PRF III. Due attention will continue to be given to ensure that ethnic groups do not suffer adverse impacts and that they receive culturally compatible social and economic benefits. Throughout the PRF's subprojects' implementation, steps are included to make sure that the cultures of the multi-ethnic society are respected and that gender issues are integrated at all levels. The feedback and resolution mechanism strengthened under the PRF II will continue to be used under the PRFIII. Specifically, these mechanisms will provide affected ethnic groups an 'on-the-ground' platform for monitoring and reporting on the RAP and/or EGPF implementation.</p> <p>Under the PRF III, the PRF may would provide training and community facilitation services to interested agencies including Development Partners, GoL agencies and possibly private firms where the PRF has comparative advantages. For example, PRF staff may provide support to DPs in carrying out social assessment, community engagement, free, prior and informed consultations and facilitation in development process. In such cases, due diligence will be conducted on both the agencies to which the PRF would provide services and the activities they conduct. Details of due diligence procedures will be described in the EGPF.</p>
Involuntary Resettlement OP/ BP 4.12	Yes	<p>The PRFIII, as under the PRF II, would continue to finance the new construction, rehabilitation or improvement of small scale rural infrastructure on a demand driven basis. No involuntary loss of land occurred under the original projects. Minor loss of land and assets has been addressed as voluntary donations per the Compensation and Resettlement Policy Framework (CRPF) prepared for the PRF II in line with the OP 4.12. In case conditions of voluntary donations provided in the CRPF could not be met, an abbreviated Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) would be developed. CPRF would be updated to reflect the experience of the PRF II and used for the PRFIII in order to avoid, minimize and mitigate minor loss of</p>

		<p>private land/ assets that may result from the PRFIII financed activities.</p> <p>Under the PRF III, the PRF would provide training and community facilitation services to interested agencies including Development Partners, GoL agencies, and possibly private firms where the PRF has comparative advantages. Also, PRF staff may provide training and technical know-how on social assessment and resettlement planning and land acquisition and voluntary donation reporting. In such cases, due diligence will be conducted on both the agencies to which the PRF would provide services and the activities they conduct. Details of due diligence procedures will be described in the CRPF.</p>
Safety of Dams OP/BP 4.37	Yes	The policy would be triggered because, as under the PRF II, the PRF III would likely finance the construction of small weirs that will regulate the flow of small creeks which may be classified as dams. The weirs to be built are classified as “small dams” as defined in the policy which only requires generic dam safety measures designed by qualified engineers. The ESMF will be updated based on the experience of the PRF II and provide standard procedures the PRF takes to address the safety of weirs in line with the policy.
Projects on International Waterways OP/BP 7.50	Yes	The PRFIII, as under the PRF II, would likely finance the construction of gravity-fed water systems or small irrigation schemes that take water from rivers that are direct or indirect tributaries of the Mekong, an international waterway. The policy is therefore triggered. Riparian countries (China, Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and the Mekong River Commission) will be notified prior to appraisal.
Projects in Disputed Areas OP/ BP 7.60	No	The PRFIII will not be implemented in disputed areas.

E. Safeguard Preparation Plan

1. Tentative target date for preparing the PAD Stage ISDS

28-Mar-2016

2. Time frame for launching and completing the safeguard-related studies that may be needed. The specific studies and their timing should be specified in the PAD-stage ISDS.

After target area has become known, a safeguard screening and assessment will be carried out by the

PMT to identify potential environmental and impacts, appropriate mitigation measures and lessons learned from the PRFII and PRFII AF implementation. The assessment will be completed with a report finalized by January 31, 2016. Based on the assessment outcomes, the existing safeguard instruments applicable for PRFII and PRFII AF including ESMF, CEPF and EGDF will be updated and applied under th PRFIII. These safeguard instruments will be approved and publicly disclosed by the appraisal date, March 28, 2015.

III. Contact point

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V. Approval

Task Team Leader(s):	Name: Satoshi Ishihara	
<i>Approved By</i>		
Safeguards Advisor:	Name: Peter Leonard (SA)	Date: 02-Feb-2016
Practice Manager/ Manager:	Name: Bassam Ramadan (PMGR)	Date: 02-Feb-2016
Country Director:	Name: Constantine Chikosi (CD)	Date: 11-Feb-2016

1 Reminder: The Bank's Disclosure Policy requires that safeguard-related documents be disclosed before appraisal (i) at the InfoShop and (ii) in country, at publicly accessible locations and in a form and language that are accessible to potentially affected persons.