SCOPING STUDY ON WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR IN LAO PDR

In Support of WOCAN – IFAD Project
“Capacity Building for Women’s Leadership in Farmer Producer Organizations in Asia and the Pacific Region Project”

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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<td>CDC</td>
<td>Convention of the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women</td>
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<td>DAFO</td>
<td>District Agriculture and Forestry Office</td>
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<td>IFAD</td>
<td>The International Fund for Agriculture Development</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization</td>
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<td>LPDR</td>
<td>Lao People’s Democratic Republic</td>
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<td>LDP</td>
<td>Livelihood Development Project</td>
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<td>LWU</td>
<td>Lao Women Union</td>
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<td>MAF</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry</td>
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<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</td>
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<td>NAFES</td>
<td>National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service</td>
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<td>NCAW</td>
<td>National Commission for the Advancement of Women</td>
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<td>NGPES</td>
<td>National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy</td>
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<td>NTFP</td>
<td>Non-Timber Forest Products</td>
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<td>PAFO</td>
<td>Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office</td>
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<td>SNRMEP</td>
<td>Sustainable Natural Resource Management Project Enhancement Project</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agriculture is an important component of the Lao economy, with 84% of the total population involved in farming activities. Women play a significant role in agricultural production: they do most of the farm work and spend long hours performing off-farm and household chores such as collecting firewood, preparing meals and caring for children. They are also involved in transplanting, weeding, and harvesting, threshing and post-production activities.

The Government of Lao PDR is fully cognizant of women’s important roles in agricultural production, as is reflected in their commitment to the advancement of women and men inscribed in the Constitution of 1991. However, within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, gender has not been integrated into their policies and programs planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Statistics and information related to gender are dispersed and not well coordinated to inform systematic planning.

As a result, the translation of such positive policies into ‘on-the-ground’ activities is yet to be fully realized. For instance, women farmers, particularly in ethnic groups, continue to have limited access to extension workers and capacity building activities. In general, extension practices prioritize extension training and transfer of technology to male farmers. Additionally, this study finds several constraints that hinder women from becoming more effective members of production groups within their own communities. Beyond the language barriers experienced by women in ethnic groups (there are 49 ethnic groups in the country), women from all ethnic communities are overburdened with work, face cultural barriers that limit their access to decision making processes, and inhibit their mobility to external opportunities such as markets and training activities.

However, concerted efforts have been made to mainstream gender in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) by implementing a gender mainstreaming project supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The project aims to develop a gender-sensitive MAF strategy and action plan and a gender-responsive MIS and MAF annual plan with sex-disaggregated targets. The implementation of gender-integrated planning, monitoring, and evaluation are being piloted in several provinces. It is an ongoing project thereby its impacts have not been assessed yet.

Based on these findings and discussions with the IFAD Country Program Manager in the country, the study puts forth several recommendations for capacity building activities for women and men of producer groups that are targeted by IFAD projects. Specifically, women’s leadership capacity and skills should be built to enable women and men to develop gender sensitive and systematic village level planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. A final recommendation includes conducting a training of trainers so that potential trainers can roll out trainings in other IFAD targeted communities in the country.
1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1.1 Laws and Policies

Lao PDR is highly committed to promote gender equality and the advancement of women and men of all ethnic groups. This is inscribed in the Constitution of 1991. The Government has also signed and ratified several international conventions to this effect, including the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Platform for Action from the Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing, among others.

In keeping with these international conventions, Article 24 of the Lao Constitution adopted by the National Assembly in 1991 states the following:

“Discrimination is interpreted as distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing the reorganization of right and freedom in the political, economic, social and cultural other field”.

The family and property law (1990) also confirms the government’s intention to allocate property and rights equitably to both women and men.

The Law on the Development and Protection of Women, 2004 is issued to guarantee and promote the roles of women; define the fundamental contents of, and measures for developing and protecting legitimate rights and interests of women; and define the responsibility of the State, society and family towards women with the following aims: 1) promoting the knowledge, capability and revolutionary ethic of women, and gender equality; 2) eliminating all forms of discrimination against women; 3) preventing and combating women and children trafficking and domestic violence against them, in order to create conducive conditions for women to participate and to be a force in national defense and development.

So far, the law is not yet widely disseminated and fully implemented. Women still face many aspects of discrimination such as limited access to education, lack of access to high level positions in the Party and government and the grassroots level.

1.2 Machineries to Promote Gender Equality

Lao Women’s Union
The Lao Women’s Union (LWU) is an organization to present and protect the fair benefits of the Lao Women and children of all ethnic groups in the country. Its status is equivalent to a ministry and has an organizational network from the central to grassroots level with the roles to mobilize solidarity among women of all ethnic groups, and educate all women about their rights and obligations. Therefore, the LWU actively contributes to national social-economic development as well as actively advocate gender equality and the advancement of women.

National Commission for Advancement of Women
The government officially established the National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW) in 2003 as a national machinery to promote gender equality, being institutionally independent from the Lao Women’s Union, a mass organization which is part of the State.
Since then, it has taken significant steps by issuing the Law on the Development and Protection of Women (2004) and the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (2006). The National Commission for the Advancement of Women has established sub commissions for the advancement of women at the ministerial and provincial levels. In the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), a ministerial committee was established in 2004 and has been operational on an ad hoc basis.

1.3 Gender Issues in Agriculture
The Gender Development Index of 2005 assigns the Lao People’s Democratic Republic a rating of 0.518 and a ranking of 135 among 175 countries. Ethnic minority women and girls are the most disadvantaged segment of the society. The overall impact of poverty is particularly severe on rural women, particularly upland minority women. These women work much longer hours than men, performing 70% of the agricultural and household tasks, while rearing young children. The infant mortality rate is 87 per 1,000 live births. Women have an average three years of schooling (two years in rural areas), compared to four years for men. The literacy rate among women is 59.1%, compared to 81.7% among men. Ethnic minority women comprise 70% of the illiterate population.

The agricultural sector is important for the Lao economy. According to the population census in 2010, 84 percent of the active population is farmers. Lao rural women play a significant role in agriculture. They do most of the farm work (planting, weeding and harvesting crops), tend livestock, and also spend long hours performing off-farm and household chores such as collecting firewood, preparing meals and caring for children. Traditionally, men plough, make bunds and prepare seedbeds. Women, on the other hand, do more than half of the transplanting, weeding, and harvesting, threshing and post production. In some areas, traditional task division is changing due to lack of men’s labor. As many men migrate to seek jobs in the urban areas, women’s work burden is increasing. Generally, rural households grow rice, vegetable, sweet potatoes, tobacco, cassava, and maize, and they tend fruit and banana trees. For these crops, men usually do the land preparation, plowing, harrowing and fencing. Women do the weeding, uprooting seedling, transplanting and marketing. But men and women jointly plant, manure, irrigate and harvest.

The Lao Agricultural Census 2010/11 reported that households decision making among Lao farmers were as follows: two-thirds of farm households reported that the farm operations were jointly managed. This was usually by husband and wife. More than 80 percent of single-management holdings were managed by men. There were 51,300 agricultural holdings operated entirely by women, either solely or as co-holders. They were more likely to produce for their own use and have another source of income. The Lao Agricultural Census 2010/11 highlights that women are less likely to have livestock or engage in fishing.

General trends in the Lao agricultural sector may affect women and men differently, especially in poor and ethnic minority communities. These trends include the implementation of land allocation and land titling policies, policies to stabilize shifting cultivation and reduce opium cultivation, and policies to promote new technologies and commercial agriculture. 

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1 Report and recommendation of the President to the executive board on the proposed financial assistance to Lao PDR for the rural livelihoods improvement programme in Attapeu and Sayabouly, 2005, page 3
2 Lao Census of Agriculture 2010/11 Highlights, 2012, page 10
There is considerable variation in land tenure and land inheritance practices among ethnic groups. For example, among ethnic Lao, family houses and paddy fields are typically inherited by the child who has taken care of the aging parents, often the youngest daughter. However, among the Hmong, women have no traditional rights to inherit land. Rural communities have also developed unique rules and practices governing the use of common land and access to forest land. National laws, decrees, and policies of Lao PDR increasingly affect rural land tenure and use, often in tension with traditional land practices, and impact men and women differently.  

Traditional land practices are also changing due to increasing population pressure on arable land, growing interest of many farmers in growing cash crops, fruit trees and rice, and other factors. During the development of the Land Law of 1997, the LWU lobbied to protect ethnic Lao women’s traditional rights to inherit family land and jointly own land acquired with household resources. As a result, the Land Law requires the names of both husband and wife to be recorded in the land register. Considerable attention also was paid to gender awareness in the preparation of the original land titling project. Recent studies have suggested that greater attention also needs to be paid to gender issues in the allocation of agricultural and forest land, especially in non-Lao ethnic areas.

The government’s land-forest allocation program is closely tied to a number of other policies and programs including the stabilization of shifting cultivation practices, reduction of opium cultivation, focal site development and promotion of more commercial approaches to agriculture and agro forestry. For example, studies show that the land-forest allocation program has severely reduced the fallow periods for upland farmers, leading to the decline of soil fertility and rice yields. This circumstance affects women farmers who spend much more time clearing fallows of weeds and experience lower rice yields.

Women’s and men’s livelihood activities are especially strained in relocated villages where there is not enough land for all of the relocated households, and water and forest resources are insufficient for the growing village population.

Changes in agricultural practices, such as increasing mechanization and shifting from subsistence to commercial agriculture have transformed the gender division of labor and gender relations. In these instances, men typically assume greater control of land, farming equipment and marketing ventures. For example, field studies have found that the replacement of buffaloes with power tillers to some extent reduced women’s workloads. Although the women have been responsible for raising much of the cash needed to purchase the tillers, the change also increases the decision-making power of male household members who assume control over the machines. Similarly, men have assumed the dominant role in water user associations formed to operate and maintain new irrigation facilities, even though the cash needed to pay water user fees often comes from the trading and other productive activities of women in the community. Men also tend to take control of women’s traditional livelihood activities such as rice milling and the raising of small livestock once the process is mechanized or external resources are provided.

Women farmers are also hampered by the small number of female and ethnic minority extension workers. Particularly in villages, women are unlikely to engage with male, Lao-
speaking extension workers, even when the extension workers provide advice and inputs that relate to the women’s livelihood activities. Yet, project evaluations confirm that providing extension training and technology only to male farmers does not guarantee that the information and inputs will reach other household members who can most effectively use them.

1.4 Technical Support
Program⁴ one of the Strategies for Advancement of Women in the Agriculture and Forestry Sector 2011-2015 highlights the need to increase women participation in the implementation of the Development Strategy for Development of Agriculture and Forestry Sector to achieve four targets, eight programs and 14 measures. In doing so, there are several strategies planned that include:

1. Increase number of female staff trained to at least 35% (of total participants) and increase number of female farmers in vocational training to at least 45% (of total participants);
2. Facilitate female farmers to produce goods related to processing to increase their annual income in order to eradicate poverty by 2015;

The National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES) is the lead extension agency in the Lao PDR. The role of NAFES is to support the work of the extension service in the provincial and district levels by developing extension strategies, organizing staff training and providing technical information in accordance with the needs of farmers.

2. OBJECTIVES AND OUTPUTS OF THE STUDY

2.1 Objectives:
The study objectives include:

1. Gathering background information on existing resources for enhancement of women’s leadership in Lao PDR, with in-depth information on the situation of women in farmer’s organizations in the country;
2. Identifying potential partners (farmer producer organizations/other IFAD partners);
3. Identifying women and men of IFAD partner organizations, particularly farmer producer organizations, who have the potential to be trainers;
4. Identifying the gaps to support rural women’s leadership and capacity building needed for women farmers.

⁴ Program 1: Increased participation of women in the implementation of the Strategic Plan to ensure poverty eradication and improvement of women’s livelihoods. Program 2: Capacity building for management at each level in promotion of advancement of women creates opportunity for women to get involved in discussion and increase the number of women in decision-making positions.
2.2 Specific Outputs
Specific outputs of the study include:
1. Lao PDR country brief with in-depth information on women’s status in farmer organizations;
2. Potential resource persons that can become future trainers are identified;
3. Potential partner producer organizations are identified.

3. METHODOLOGY AND TIMEFRAME

Method used:
The study is based on interviews, focus group discussions and review of relevant literature. The primary information has been obtained from interviews and discussions with key members from the government, farmer’s organizations, cooperatives, and IFAD personnel. The consultant’s direct experiences in facilitating the trainings for ADB’s project on Capacity Strengthening for Gender Mainstreaming in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry also help to shed the lights on some issues covered in the report. The secondary sources of information include reports, project documents and other relevant documents. The program and policy recommendations presented in this paper are based on the primary and secondary sources of information.

Time Frame: The scoping study was conducted from May 26 – June 26, 2012.

Picture 1. Focus Group Discussion conducted in the Phouhaoxang Village, ViengKhuang Province
4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In support of the project “Women’s Leadership in Farmers Producers Organization and the Asia Pacific Region”, a scoping study is conducted in Lao PDR, particularly in 5 provinces (Savannakhet, Champasack, Salavan, Xiengkhuang, and Luangnamtha provinces) where the IFAD Natural Resource Management Project (NRMPEP) is being implemented. The project objective is to assist MAF for strengthening institution and capacity (including governance) in order to enhance sustainable management of the sector while contributing to the Government’s overall objectives to improve agricultural productivity; promote commercialization of agriculture; and protect the country’s natural resources.

The Livestock Development Project (LDP) is implemented in the north of Lao PDR. The overall goal of the program is enhancing economic growth and livelihoods among the rural poor (including women and other vulnerable groups) in the eight program districts.

5. OBSERVATION AND FINDINGS

5.1 The status of women’s leadership in Ethnic Communities

This is a summary of interviews with members from production groups conducted among ethnic groups (Hmong, Akhah, Mou Xeu, La Hoo, and Kmou) in XiengKhoung and Luang Namtha provinces. These interviews were conducted with members of cattle – raising production groups.

In all the groups, men are in leadership positions; although there are many women members, they are usually quiet during group meetings and discussions, and the decisions are made by the men.

Groups for large ruminants are mostly made up of men. Women are usually responsible for accounting, book keeping and calling members for meetings. Although it is rare for women to be in leadership positions in the production groups, they are more active as leaders in poultry, goat and crop production groups.

There are several reasons why women encounter difficulties to become leaders. First, they have many responsibilities (productive, reproductive and community roles) and have little time to devote to group meetings. Second, they did not have enough support from their families, and valued their roles as ‘good wife and mother’. Hence, they feel responsible for these additional responsibilities that increase their burden, and prevent them from taking leadership positions.

When women become involved in organizations (such as the Lao Women’s Union), they are expected to act as hosts and serve refreshments to the guests. In public meetings, men usually do all the talking while women are usually silent. Some women and men stated that after receiving gender training, they became more aware of sharing labor for the household chores. In some cases where the project provided skills to women (vaccination of livestock, preparation of animal feed, forage development, management of micro-credit schemes), women proved they were able to teach other members of the family.

5 Please see the annex 1
In some ethnic groups (Hmong) women said that they were taking more decisions by themselves, especially when their husbands were not at home. They also said that they could travel to the markets by themselves when their husbands were busy or not at home. Many men from the ethnic groups said that they would like to encourage women to become members of the production groups (committees) but many women were ‘uneducated’ and could not speak Lao.

5.2 Women’s leadership status in Lao Lum Communities

These interviews were conducted among women in the Lao Lum communities in Savanakhet, Chamapask and Salavanh. The interviews were conducted among three production groups: organic vegetable group; livestock development group; and handicrafts and furniture production group. Communities’ main livelihood source is rice production for commercial purpose. Communities also rely on vegetable production and fishing activities to supplement their household consumption needs.

A. Vegetable production group: Savannakhet Province

This group is composed of ten households. The roles and responsibilities of men and women are separated based on the type of labor required. Men clear the land, while women are responsible for planting, applying organic fertilizer, watering, weeding, harvesting and selling the produce.

In fact, during the field visit, it was observed that only women came to work at the vegetable plots, mostly for weeding. Women said that their husband work mostly at the rice fields and livestock (mainly for family consumption).

The group is headed by a man, while a woman is responsible for the accounting, and another man is responsible for fund management. The consultant’s interview with the woman responsible for the accounts management revealed that she actively participated in all group meetings, shared ideas and also contributed to the decision on which varieties to send to the markets based on the market demand. She also informed that she spent a large amount of time everyday for book keeping. On the other hand, the male group leader was mostly responsible for managing the transportation of the vegetable to market. Once in the market, the women members acted as sales vendors.

Opportunities: Women stated that the trainings on vegetable production had increased their income and ability to travel to markets by themselves. They also stated that as a group, they shared the benefits equally and that, they had better access to new agricultural technologies (vegetable seeds, production of organic compost and bio-extracts).

Constraints: Women in the production group informed that they have lack of post-production skills such as proper storage practices, packaging and labeling.

B. Rice Production Group: Ban Donekhor, Kaison District, Champasack province

Men mostly perform an important role as the leader while women are in charge of administration of the group, with specific responsibility for accounting. Men have more opportunities than women, and this was largely attributed to social norms and values that privilege men over women. The male group leader said that as the head of the group, he had been able to travel
abroad for participating in the trainings and had received new skills and technologies for agricultural production. None of the women in the group get access such opportunities.

**C. Chili Production Group: Ban Vatkang, Salavanh District, Salavanh province**

The chili production group is established and headed by a woman. Even though the leader is a woman, other women still encounter some challenges to actively participate in the production group activities because of their household responsibilities and lack of negotiation skills.

Generally, men have more access to information and extension services while women are involved in the community’s organization. Due to other responsibilities, women are unable to hold leadership positions in the group. Women members also said they had difficulty accessing markets outside their immediate areas because they could not travel far. This is due to their household responsibilities. They also said they did not have enough skills to communicate and negotiate with traders in the market place.

**Mrs. Latdaphone, Ban Vatkang, Salavanh province**, is married and a mother of four children. She is a chief of administration and head of the Village Women Union. She is also the head of chili production group. She said because she has been a chief of the village, she had opportunities to travel and explore new things. That is how she had an idea to establish a chili production group. The purpose of the production group is to help poor women in the community to improve their livelihoods. Initially, the group was established by two women. They learned and bought the materials by themselves. Right now, there are 10 members in the group. As the group has grown bigger, they are encountering a major challenge, which is limited funding to support their activities. Women claim that their ability to generate more capital is hindered by their limited ability to travel a long distance and negotiate with traders in the market.

Mrs Latdaphone said if she got the funds from the SNRMPEP project she would extend her production group and learn how to manage the group. She mentioned that the group wanted to upgrade the quality of their products, increase the production and extend the market so that they can supply the whole province’s needs. But they do not know how to write proposals to ask grants from SNRMPEP. The group found that their income was increasing, because their products became better known. Now with the profit they have earned, they can buy more food and household items. Furthermore, the members can borrow the money without paying the interest when they get sick.

They want to learn accounting, storing, and packaging, and gain access to the market.

She said one of difficulties for the group is to sell their products outside the village. For example, if they want to sell their product in Vientiane, they have to travel a long distance. However, they can stay there only for a few days as they have to come back home to take care of their family, especially their children.

Even in cases where women do go to the markets, they get cheated due to their inability to communicate and negotiate effectively. In another case in XiengKhouang Province, a woman leader gave an example of how they got cheated. When they got opportunities to participate a government-organized trade fair, they requested the organizers to sell the goods for them because they were unable to travel there. However, at the end of the fair, the organizers informed the women that their goods had not been sold and that they
could not locate the products. The women did not want to enter into conflict with the organizers, so they lost all the investment.

D. Animal Production Groups: Ban Pha Mou and Phou Hao Xang, Nong Het District, Xiang Kuang province

These livestock production groups have received extensive trainings from the livestock development project. These trainings focus on enhancing skills such as disease prevention and management, preparation of nutritious animal feed, forage development, building animal sheds/pens, management of a revolving fund, and gender awareness. The leaders of the production groups are mixed between men and women. Men are leaders of groups for large ruminants (buffalos, and cows), while women become the leader of groups related to smaller animals such as pigs and poultry.

The project staff said that men were better and faster learners during trainings because most of them could read and communicate in Lao, whereas women were shy and could not communicate well. Most of the women were illiterate. Men could also learn by writing down the instructions, while women had to memorize everything, making it difficult for them to remember all the details that they learned during the trainings.

Women also said that they would like to learn the Lao language. Unless there is sharing of household task responsibilities, women could not become effective leaders in the production groups.

**Examples of the difficulties for women in leadership positions**

**Mrs. Mailelao, at Ban Phouhaoxang, Nong Het district, XiangKhuang province**, is a 37 years old Hmong woman who only finished 3rd year of Primary School. She moved to the village to stay with the husband’s family after marriage. Her husband, a 42 year Hmong man, is a government official with position of Director of a primary school in Nong Het District. They have four children (two daughter and two sons) who are all enrolled in school.

Her main occupation is cash crop production (corn and rice) on five hectares of land. Her secondary job/income is livestock production e.g. pig, and poultry. The family income is based on the two above sources and the husband’s salary.

She was elected by the community as a second deputy chief of village administrative committee and has served the position for a year. At the same time, she also serves as a deputy of the Village Lao Women Union. She complained about the overload that she must bear, including family and social responsibilities. Thus, she wants to give up the position of the village deputy chief. But the whole community appreciates her leadership performance and supports her to continue holding this position. She feels very exhausted and says that no one will take care of her crops if she continues to keep the deputy chief of village position. She wants to hand over the position to the men, because she said ‘men have fewer responsibilities than women’.

She is very busy with family productive works and also burdened with household works as her husband go to his office from early morning to late afternoon followed by joining his colleagues for social entertainment. In this situation, Mrs. Mailelao was unable to be
involved in the production group of the Livestock Development Project activities by ADB/IFAD.

As a member, she had opportunities to be involved in project activities, such as trainings and meetings, on behalf of the village committee and Lao Women’s Union. She said she transferred new skills and knowledge to neighbors and practiced some in her own family production. Concerning her status, she acknowledged that her position and contribution to public works made her respected by the community and also increased her opportunities. Community members listen to her opinions and views. Furthermore, she also gets more opportunities to be involved in community decisions during village meetings.

Her husband has acknowledged her contribution to their family wellbeing. He stated: “I would not be in this position if my wife did not support me. I realized my wife works so hard for the family while I can do very little to help her in household chores. Most of income is earned by my wife that enables us to have a nice big house and other properties like motorcycles.’ Thus, he wants his wife to be a role model for other women in the community. He said he would support his wife if she wanted to keep her position as a deputy chief of the village.

**Mrs. Maimoi, Ban Pha Mou, Nong Het District, XiengKhuang province**, is Hmong and a mother of six children. She moved and stayed with her husband after getting married. All of her children go to school. Her husband and she have two hectares of land for planting cash crops, e.g. corn and paddy. She plays an important role in the community, because she is the head of Lao Women’ Union. Her family (her husband and herself) is a member of livestock production group which is supported by the LDP project. Her responsibility in the group is only to call members to pay interests to the revolving fund of the group but she never attends the trainings. The fact that men are considered as the breadwinner in the household widens the possibilities for them to access public sphere. As a consequence, her husband often attends the trainings and meetings thereby enabling him to learn new skills and knowledge from the project e.g. vaccination, animal pen, forages, among others.

She informed that after her husband came back from the trainings and meetings, he transferred his knowledge to her and to neighbors. She said that her main obstacle was communicating and interacting with outside people as she could neither speak nor read Lao. As the LWU organization is always assigned by the village head to receive and prepare food for visitors, she said she wanted to learn cooking to improve her skills to better serve the guests.
Mrs. Na Lor, Ban Ja Gni, Luang District, Luangnamtha province, has five children. She is from Mou Cheu ethnic group. She is the head of Lao Women's Union, a member of the revolving fund group and a deputy head of the production group. She said that one of the major difficulties for her to attend the group meetings is not being able to communicate in Lao. As a result, in the trainings organized and conducted by the livestock project, she has to memorize all the new knowledge and she forgets most of the information when she gets home. Sometimes, she gets help from her husband, especially in numeracy skills.

Her main responsibility in the group is to call meetings and ensure that all members attend the meeting. Every month she has to collect the loan repayments from members and with the help from the Lao Women’s Union, she keeps records.

If there is an opportunity, she wants to learn Lao and would like to attend school. She would also like to learn accounting and livestock development skills (e.g. Vaccination and disease prevention and management).

6. ANALYSIS

6.1 Summary of Constraints to Women’s Leadership

Based on the study findings, there are several constrains of women in the producer groups in Lao PDR to resume leadership positions:

- **Inability to speak Lao language**: ethnic women are mostly illiterate; they could not write, read and communicate in Lao language;
- **Women in all ethnic communities (including Lao Lum) are over-burdened with work**: women are responsible for production, reproduction, and community works, with little leisure time. This mental and emotional stress leads to their poor health condition and limits the time they can devote to perform leadership roles in community and producer groups;
- **Cultural barrier/practices**: in ethnic communities, polygamy and other harmful cultural practices are serious problems for women. Many men from ethnic communities in the highlands tend to marry younger wives. There is also a negative perception about widows, that they will be driven out of the communities because they represent ill fortune and ‘bad luck”. Culturally, women’s position in such communities is lower than men’s and this provides a real challenge to women for assuming any leadership positions in the community. Men are easily accepted as leaders within the family and community.
- **Lack of decision making power**: men are automatically considered as family and community leaders. Therefore, it is mostly men who make the decisions within household and community. In most of the cases, the production groups are headed by males, with women occupying administrative positions such as book keeping, etc.
- **Lack of mobility**: due to limited communication skills combined with traditional views that consider women as ‘dependent’, they cannot travel alone outside the

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6 Mou Cheu fall under the Sino-Tibetan linguistic group
community. The lack of capacity to speak Lao and numeracy skills are the primary obstacle for women to communicate and trade with the urban community who are mostly from the Lao ethnic group. Women are also afraid to go alone, because it might insecure to travel on their own. Women tend to travel with companions such as friends or family members.

- **Remote locations**: this is particularly a problem for women from ethnic groups who live in areas that are remote from public services such as health, education, markets, among others. This, combined with lack of language skills, make it difficult for women from remote areas to benefit from market opportunities.

### 6.2. Summary of Opportunities for Women’s Leadership

Despite constrains experienced by women to resume leadership positions in the producers organizations, there are some opportunities:

- Many women interviewed in the study are keen to be actively engaged in the projects and resume leadership positions in their respective organizations. In doing so, they suggest that learning Lao language and literacy will be the key to boost their confidence and enable them to effectively participate in trainings and other project activities;
- Women are also keen to engage in the market thereby they want to learn numeracy and negotiation skills;
- There are some women champions in the village levels that can be further trained to enhance their leadership capacities and build their commitments to train other women in their respective organizations;
- As described above, there are number of policies stipulated by the government of Lao PDR that support gender equality and the advancement of women.

### 6.3 Policy and Program Gaps

Gender has not been integrated into the planning, monitoring, and evaluation cycle. Discussions with the MAF (the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests) identified the following gaps and shortcomings:

- Gender has not been integrated into the planning cycle;
- Gender-integration activities occur in the development of partner-funded projects without coordination with or links to MAF central planning and resource allocation processes;
- Statistics and information related to gender are dispersed and are not well coordinated to inform systematic planning.

### 6.4 Future Potential

**Potential Resource Persons that can become future trainers**

Potential participants and trainers will be selected from the list of participants of IFAD projects and DAFO/PAFO staff below.

**Potential partner producer organizations and related IFAD projects/programs**

Table 1. List of participants from Natural Resource Management Enhancement Project (SNRMPEP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Mr. Keobounma</td>
<td>Savannakhet</td>
<td>Head of Vegetable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Mr. South Soulinthone</td>
<td>Ban Donekhoe, Kaisone District Champasack</td>
<td>Head of Rice Production Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Ms. Sisouphan Sengsoukphachanh</td>
<td>Champasack</td>
<td>PAFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Ms. Thiphachan Kongkeo</td>
<td>Champasack</td>
<td>DAFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Ms. Latdaphone Souanithi</td>
<td>Ban Vatkang, Salavanh</td>
<td>Head of Chili production group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Ms. Lattana</td>
<td>Salavanh District, Salavanh</td>
<td>DAFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Ms. Maniyong Sisomphone</td>
<td>Salavanh</td>
<td>PAFO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. List of participants from Livelihood Development Project (LDP) in XiengKuang and LuangNamtha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Ms. Maiyelao</td>
<td>Ban Phouhoxang, Nong Het District XiengKhuang</td>
<td>Deputy Head of village/LWU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Ms. Maimoi</td>
<td>Ban PhaMou, Nonghet District XiengKhuang</td>
<td>Livestock production group/LWU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Ms. Na Lor</td>
<td>Ban Jagni, Long District LuangNamtha</td>
<td>LWU/Revolving Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Ms. Phondavanah</td>
<td>Bokeo</td>
<td>DAFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Ms. Jem Phaichit</td>
<td>Luangnamtha District LuangNamtha</td>
<td>Project Coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. List of participants from Rural Livelihoods Improvement (LDP) Program Attapeu and Sayabouly Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Ms. Leuh</td>
<td>Ban Dakhied</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Mr. Vongkham</td>
<td>Ban Dakhied</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Ms. PhengsathidChanthalangsi</td>
<td>Staff of DPCU</td>
<td>Staff of CD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Ms. Tiengchai Siphomma</td>
<td>Agricultural of Phouvong district</td>
<td>Staff of village group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Soukphaphone Sommalad</td>
<td>Agricultural of Xaysetthadistrict</td>
<td>Staff of village group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. List of participants from Soum Son Seun Jai, Sayabouly and Oudomxay provinces Sayabouly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Ms. Na</td>
<td>Xienghon District</td>
<td>Production group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Ms. Silivanh Phonevichit</td>
<td>Sayabouly District</td>
<td>CAW/PAFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Ms. Pingkeo Khamfeung</td>
<td>Saysathan District</td>
<td>CAW/DAFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Ms. Phoutsaphone Mounivong</td>
<td>Hongsa District</td>
<td>CAW/DAFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Ms. Khamkong Dalasouk</td>
<td>Gneung District</td>
<td>CAW/DAFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Ms. Yathmany Vidavone</td>
<td>Xienghone District</td>
<td>CAW/DAFO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. List of participants from Oudomxay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Ms. Siyom</td>
<td></td>
<td>Production group (member)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Ms. BaoilengVongboupha</td>
<td>Na Mor District</td>
<td>LWU/DAFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Ms. Naly</td>
<td>Gna District</td>
<td>LWU/DAFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Ms. ManivanhAnousone</td>
<td>Beng District</td>
<td>LWU/DAFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Ms. KeomathaHeulaoleu</td>
<td>Houne District</td>
<td>LWU/DAFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Ms. Sagnoune Keoboungheng</td>
<td>Pak Beng District</td>
<td>LWU/DAFO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are largely based on the discussions with the IFAD Country Program Manager, who proposed that for Lao participants, the trainings would be most effective, and also have the most impact if they are conducted in the country. She also emphasized that because of limited English language skills, Lao participants would be best served if they are trained and ‘mentored’ on-site, rather than attending training courses with the larger group of participants from other countries involved in this particular IFAD-supported grant.

1. Build capacity of producer groups in all stages of specific IFAD-identified projects. Since most of the IFAD-supported projects are in the early stage of inception, there is an opportunity to build capacity at all stages of the project cycle, and hence have the most impact. In the past, capacity development programs were usually introduced into projects when they were well underway, hence making it difficult to revisit some of the gaps in the problem analysis and project design stages. However, the opportunity now exists for capacity development interventions to be made at all the stages of the project cycle that include: problem analysis, design, implementation and the development of monitoring and evaluation indicators.

2. Ensure that the selected trainers identified by IFAD from producer groups are trained ‘on the job’ rather than be trained separately. In the past, training was usually provided to potential trainers who were then expected to train others in a cascading process. Such a process however, proved to be difficult for the trainers to roll out the trainings by themselves. ‘On-the-job’ training implies that the potential list of trainers can function as ‘resource persons’ who will assist WOCAN master trainers, and in the process, learning by doing over a period of time. The potential list of trainers can function as ‘resource persons’ along with other potential trainers from outside the project area (such as district and provincial extension staff) who can also be invited to join the trainings to build their capacity.

3. A group of potential trainers can be selected among the participants who have engaged the ‘on the job’ trainings to attend the final Training of Trainers to improve their facilitation skills. This will also serve as an incentive for them.

4. The training content should include the following themes:
   a. Gender and planning: it will include skills for gender analysis, project design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. It is aimed at enhancing the ability of producer groups to develop and implement a gender responsive project that will be linked to on-going IFAD supported project activities.
b. Women’s leadership: it will include leadership and negotiation skills for women thereby enabling them to engage effectively in the IFAD project activities.

c. Training of Trainers: it will include training and facilitation skills so that participants can roll out the trainings on their own, particularly in other areas where IFAD projects are active.
BIBLIOGRAPHY:


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ADB. 2004. Lao PDR Gender, Poverty and MDGs


FAO and MAF. 2010. National Gender Profile of Agricultural Household in Lao PDR.
ANNEX 1
PROJECT BACKGROUND

I. Project Background of Soum Son Seun Jai in Sayabouly and Oudomxay provinces

The project has been implemented since 2012 and it will end in 2018.

Program Area:
The program will target 225 villages, where the poverty rate is above 30 percent. Those villages are located in nine districts in two provinces (four districts in Sayabouly Province and five districts in Oudomxay Province). The program aims to increase the income and quality of life of about 17,000 rural households.

Target Group:
The main target group consists of ethnically diverse (e.g. Khmu, Hmong and Phrai) poor rural households, with two primary sub-groups: (i) highly vulnerable food-insecure households (> 4 months’ rice deficit p.a.) with limited capacity to enter into the market; and (ii) poor households that are moderately food-secure and have a greater potential to enter into the market. Both categories share a common livelihoods system based on rain-fed cropping, raising livestock, collecting forest products, and wage labor. Many households move between these categories on a regular basis, and many program activities will be suitable for both sub-groups.

Targeting Strategy:
Three primary modes of targeting will be employed: (i) geographical targeting based on poverty ratios; (ii) self-targeting based on type of program activities (tailored approaches to address the two sub-groups) (iii) targeting development of geographically organized farmers’ organizations with production and market linkage potential. These methods will be supplemented by specific targeting mechanisms to ensure that women benefit substantially from program activities e.g. from initiatives involving NTFPs, livestock and drinking water supplies. Youth will be also part of the target group: they will be involved in mentoring activities through linkages with agricultural universities such as the Northern Agriculture and Forestry College in Luang Prabang and with ethnic schools. This will also allow ensuring the transfer of technology.

Objective:
The goal is to contribute to the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger in the Sayabouly and Oudomxay Provinces. The development objective is to ensure sustainable food security and income generation for the rural poor in the target villages.

   1. Project Background of Rural Livelihoods Improvement Program in Attapeu and Sayabouly Provinces
   2. This project has been implemented since 2008 and will end in 2014.

II. Project Background of Rural Livelihoods Improvement Program in Attapeu and Sayabouly Province

This project has been implemented since 2008 and will end in 2014.

Program Area:
The program area covers three southern districts in Attapeu Province and five northern districts in Sayabouly Province, which are categorized as poor or very poor districts by the NGPES, in
which 50 percent or more of the households are poor. The total population in the eight programme districts is 209,783 people (36,858 households); 25 percent of the population lives in Attapeu Province, and 75 percent in Sayabouly Province. Subsistence agriculture is the dominant occupation. There are three basic farming systems, each of which revolves around rice cultivation: (a) upland rice; (b) lowland irrigated rice; and (c) lowland rained rice. Upland rice cultivation is the predominant activity; the rice is often grown together with other crops, e.g. maize, sesame and vegetables. Most families keep livestock, which are managed on an extensive, scavenging basis. The main constraints in the program area include: (a) inadequate land allocated to providing the upland population or those resettled in the lowlands with sufficient food and income; (b) lack of the technical knowledge required for lowland crop cultivation; (c) lack of social infrastructure, e.g. drinking water supplies, schools, dispensaries and access roads; and (d) presence of unexploded ordinance in Attapeu Province.

Target Group:
The target group will consist of 26,200 poor and food insecure households living in the upland and households that have recently resettled from the remote uplands to more accessible areas. Women will be an important part of the target group because of their disadvantaged position in society and their important role in productive and reproductive activities. Unemployed rural youth will be a more general part of the target group because of their potential role in national and local economic development and social stability.

Targeting Strategy:
It includes: (a) focused on the livelihoods of the local households and communities; (b) targeted on the poor, women and marginalized groups in poor villages in the uplands and resettled or merged villages in the lowlands; (c) focused on food security, basic education, and health services and access; (d) decentralized to the beneficiaries and local authorities for management and accountability; and (e) area based, with integrated interventions. The programme will target 207 villages in which 30 percent or more of the households are classified as poor. Within target villages, participatory wealth ranking exercises or other participatory methods will be used to confirm eligibility when selecting members of activity groups from among the community. Self-targeting mechanisms will be used wherever possible to benefit the various groups of the poor, including women.

Objectives and Scope:
The overall goal of the program is improving economic growth and livelihoods among the rural poor (including women and other vulnerable groups) in the eight program districts. The purposes of the components are: (a) communities manage their own development, including the operation of social infrastructure, in ways that can reduce poverty and are sustainable, participatory and gender sensitive; (b) communities use sustainable farming and natural resource management systems and off-farm income-generating activities to meet their subsistence and income needs with the support of rural microfinance and other services; (c) communities have access to the local roads needed to carry out their development activities; and (d) decentralized and participatory rural development to be managed, coordinated and supported by the Government and other service providers in ways that are sustainable, accountable, gender sensitive and pro-poor.
ANNEX 2:

Criteria for a livestock group leader and a small group leader:
- Could either be a man or a woman who lives and farms in the target village;
- Knows and can work with the members;
- Belongs to the same ethnic group as the group members;
- Active and energetic, and good at motivating others;
- Respectful, honest, and patient;
- Able to communicate with others;
- Willing to share information, knowledge and skills to members and other villagers;
- Support democratic principles;
- Gender sensitive;
- Maintain good relationship with the members;
- Able to resolve group conflict;
- Open and transparent;
- A small group leader cannot be elected as overall group leader.