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# Briefing Paper - Gender Strategy of the GIZ Land Program

## Background

Improvements in gender equality In Laos have been limited in recent years. While legislative support is increasingly consolidated, positive changes on the ground – particularly outside urban areas – are the exception. Especially in remote rural regions gender equality ranks low on de-facto development agendas, rural women still have limited access to education, health, markets etc. Traditional gender roles remain rigid. Particularly rural women are facing discrimination in terms of access to land and land titles, despite the country's traditional matrilineal inheritance system and the existing non-discriminatory Inheritance Law. Land use planning and land allocation done so far are regarded very critically by many studies in terms of protecting women's rights: besides often not providing proper protection from land seizure by foreign investors, there is also gender inequality in the formal allocation done so far, shifting land from women to men.

Equal access of women and men to land is defined as an **objective in Lao law**, but practices, especially in the mountainous areas of Laos, diverge from this. Land titles are often issued in the name of the head of the household, even when the land had been previously inherited by the wife. Due to a lack of information women often do not know or understand why it is important for them to have land registered in their names as well. As a consequence of discriminating effects of many land titling processes, matrilineal patterns are slowly fading in those ethnic groups with hitherto strong matrilineal traditions.

Most studies, some of which were conducted by the government, conclude that ethnic minority women and girls are the poorest, most vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of Lao society. Arguably, the most important institution dealing with gender issues is the Lao Women's Union (LWU), though its leadership in this field varies.

## GIZ Land Program Gender Strategy

The Land Program of GIZ in Laos provides policy advice on governance in the land sector. It is supporting the systematic registration of individual and communal land plots, and provision of land titles. While promoting enhanced quality of investments in land and decentralised development planning, it also supports individual and institutional capacity development for pro-poor, participatory and gender-sensitive development planning and management.



Photo: © GIZ/LMDP

Gender equality is not a standalone objective of the program but rather an issue that all activities attempt to mainstream. Both men's and women's land rights and participation in development planning processes is to be ensured, so that all can equally benefit from economic opportunities that result from the program. This is both in line with GIZ's values, Lao law and internationally recognised human rights. On the other hand, studies have also demonstrated that where women are not included in development efforts, these will likely be less effective and sustainable.

This is why the program tries to ensure that women are adequately represented when land rights are granted and development activities are planned, and that their interests are safeguarded.

**Objectives guiding programme activities include:**

- Enhancing sensitivity for gender issues among staff, government officials and target villages when planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating.
- Improving capacities and knowledge in sector-specific women's rights both with the partner institutions as well as the GIZ staff.

- Improving the involvement and capacity of the LWU as a representative of women's interests.
- Gender aspects are explicitly reflected in indicators and targets of project result log frames.
- Through land registration and legal rights education women improve their tenure security in terms of permanent user rights to land for production and settlements. This enables their access to loans, income generation and greater influence in the household and the community.

## Gender in Land Use Planning, Land Registration and Titling:

- Certifying land use rights through **land registration and titling** is a crucial step. The programme is periodically monitoring the female and conjugal share of land titles, jointly with the staff of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DoNRE) together with the District LWU.
- The land registration process includes a step called "Communication on Systematic Land Titling" (**CSLT)** which provides information and seeks to build villagers' awareness on land rights. There is a specific session for women focusing on the advantages of getting their name in the land title.
- There is still a lack of knowledge among the rural population concerning **land use planning**. All persons involved need to know the participatory process and have awareness of women's rights.
- Trainers and staff should be from the same ethnic minority as the respective target population to overcome facilitation barriers and ensure that particularly women – often not having enjoyed an education – will understand the content of activities.
- Additional training for DoNRE staff may be required for appropriate communication approaches. This refers to presentation and language skills and the ability to actively involve women. It should be mandatory for villages to invite women and every activity should encourage women to participate in meaningful ways.

## Gender in Development Planning and Investment Monitoring

- Gender (and other cross-cutting) issues are to be integrated in the "District Socio-Economic Development Plan" (e.g. through problem analysis tools).
- The process of mainstreaming gender into planning itself will be supported through ensuring participatory involvement of men and women equally, in ways that are appropriate.
- Government core teams receive training on gender for sectoral plan facilitation. The involvement of representatives of LWU in the core team will be promoted.
- Rural women's knowledge and self-confidence will be enhanced by including them in project implementation, trainings and extension services and by strengthening women's roles in decision-making processes.

### HARNESSING DIGITAL DATA FROM WOMEN'S DISCUSSIONS ON LAND RIGHTS

The Land Program is implementing awareness raising on land rights and investment-related topics, seeking to build knowledge and confidence especially among rural women. In order to monitor how much women actually learn from awareness raising sessions, district officials are being trained to facilitate group discussions and voting games, with answers being captured via an app created for the purpose. The app is installed on any mobile device, and analysis across activities can be produced in real-time to indicate to trainers in the field in which areas knowledge is strong, where it is weak and what feedback women have given on the awareness raising session itself. The data is also used for future strategic planning and reporting.

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