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Briefing Paper - Landscape Management

This paper provides a brief overview of the Landscape Management as supported by the Lao-German Land Program in Laos.

The Land Program includes the bilateral "Land Management and Decentralized Planning" (LMDP) project, and the "Enhanced Land Tenure Security" (ELTeS) project under the global project on "Responsible Land Policy" (GPRLP). In pursuit of greater land tenure security for rural households, alongside improved quality of investments in land, the Land Program develops together with its Lao partner Ministries an improved and more integrated approach to Landscape Management.

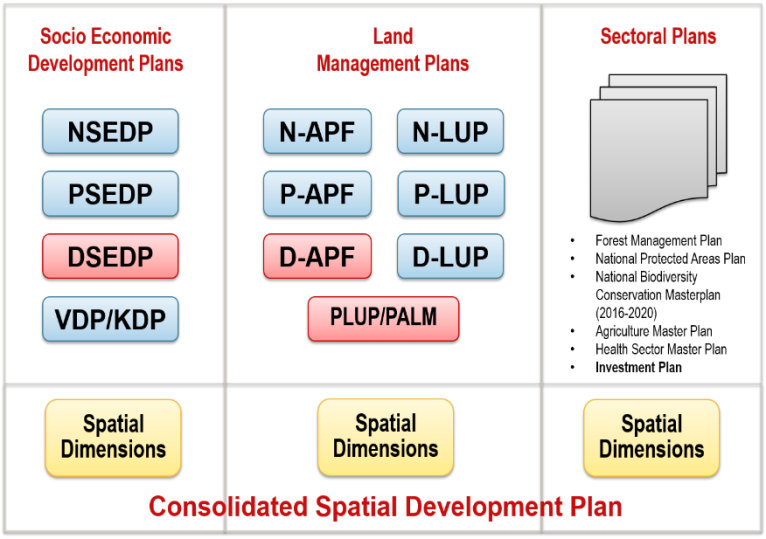
Institutional and conceptual background

Laos does not have a comprehensive or integrated Landscape Management or Planning approach. Planning is rather understood as a political necessity for economic development and sectoral governance. There are three main lines of planning; socio-economic planning, land management and sectoral planning – such as a road & transport plan or an agriculture development plan.

Socio-economic planning is the core responsibility of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and its subnational line agencies. 5-year socio-economic development plans are drawn up at each administrative level to guide the envisioned or desired development. The plans, which are drawn up along sectors, are mostly descriptive without substantial spatial information and without specific and quantitative defined targets.

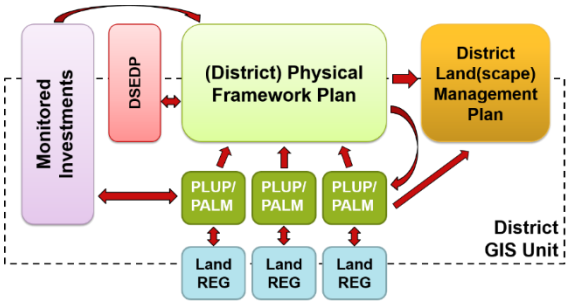
Land Management lies mainly under the mandate of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and its subnational line agencies. A national Land Use Master plan is being developed as a framework document for the spatial distribution of land uses by sectors. Such plans are drawn up also at province and district levels for greater precision. Land Zoning plans are developed at village level, signed as binding documents which clearly distinguish land use categories and boundaries between land uses at village scale. All of the abovementioned land management plans are at this stage work-in-progress, as they are yet to be prepared for major parts of the country and do not fully integrate into other planning mechanisms.

Sectoral plans – spatial and narrative – exist in some shape or form for most technical sectors, at scale also for the different administrative levels. They loosely follow the timeline of the SEDPs, but are mostly not following a specific structure or format.

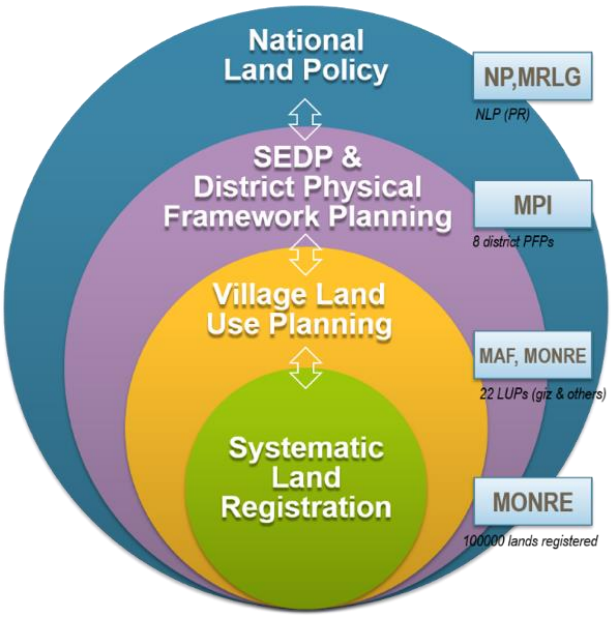


Land Program approach to Landscape Management

Under the Lao-German Land Program, some specific elements of the above described planning framework are supported, primarily in line to promote better land tenure security and quality of investments in land. The individual concepts are linked and promote various aspects of the Voluntary Guidelines on Tenure, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT).



The program supports the drafting and improvement of land policy, primarily through developing sound recommendations for an improved new version of the Land Law, as well as the legislation on investment promotion.



In terms of the use and promotion of planning instruments, the program supports better approaches for district socio-economic development planning and has introduced a new spatial dimension to the process called Area Physical Framework (APF) Maps. These allow better guidance for decision making on the economic and infrastructural development, as well as in strategic area development planning and zonation. At micro level the program promotes and supports Participatory Village Land Use Planning (PLUP), conjointly with Participatory Agriculture Land Management (PALM). These tools help identify realistic paths for development alongside optimal use of land and natural resources. While PLUP already helps strengthening customary rights to land by clearly mapping out the ownership situation within a village, the final and core element of the program is the support to Systematic Registration of Land, followed by titling. Besides individual plots of housing and agriculture land, the program also pilots the registration of large productive communal plots to underline the ownership authority of communities over their productive land resources.

Status of conceptual development

- Bottom line: The Land Program is very well set up to in terms of a comprehensive Landscape Management Approach
- Integration of the "spatial dimension" of planning requires well-functioning GIS units at all levels → this element will be strengthened in the approach
- Village level land use planning is a necessary and integral part of an overarching landscape approach – scaling and full area-coverage is the key!
- APF creates a link between Land Management and Economic Planning
- A number of sectoral plans are being produced and can be utilized based on APF
- Supporting an inter-agency approach to develop "Consolidated Spatial Development Plans" could be envisaged.

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Land Management and Decentralised Planning
House No. 198, Unit 02, Hom 8,
Thongkang village, Sisattanak District,
Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR
Tel+85621313716
E: giz-laos@giz.de

Author(s) Julian Derbidge
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Addresses of the BMZ offices
BMZ Bonn
Dahlmannstraße 4
53113 Bonn, Germany
T +49 (0)228 99 535-0
www.bmz.de
poststelle@bmz.bund.de

BMZ Berlin
Stresemannstraße 94
10963 Berlin, Gerany
T +49 (0)30 18 535-0