

Improved Land Management in the Mekong Region

Securing land use rights for small-scale farmers in the Mekong region

Context

Rapid socio-economic changes in the Mekong region in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam (CLMV) have caused an increase in the need for land for infrastructure, agribusinesses and other development purposes. Across the region, the livelihoods of many smallholder farmers have been affected by investments that reduced their access to land and other natural resources on which they depend, without offering them equivalent alternatives.

Land expropriation is becoming a driving factor of recent poverty and food insecurity, as largescale concessions have reduced the land area available for family agriculture as well as the access to forests by communities. This primarily affects farmers in remote areas, who have little to no documentation of their customary land tenure and practices. The government has been developing various policies for managing investments related to land expropriation, compensation, concession granting, and conflict resolution. The implementation of these policies has been challenging and there is a variety of positive and negative experiences that can be drawn from different countries to help policy makers respond to these challenges.

These challenges and opportunities which are affecting the land tenure security of smallholders and especially ethnic minorities are addressed by the second phase of the “Improved Land Management in the Mekong Region” (ILMR 2).



Project name	Improved Land Management in the Mekong Region
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam (CLMV)
Duration	2015 - 2022

Objective

Smallholder farmers have secure and equitable access to and control over agricultural land and forests in the Mekong Region.

Approach

This project is a contribution to the Mekong Region Land Governance Project (MRLG). MRLG is jointly funded by the Government of Switzerland, through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) with additional co-financing from the Government of Luxembourg and Germany. The project goal of MRLG is: “Smallholder farmers have secure and equitable access to and control over agricultural land and forests in the Mekong Region”.

MRLG aims to contribute to improvements in policies and practices regarding land tenure security for family farmers. These policy recommendations will be developed by alliances of reform actors (influential stakeholders) in each country and also regionally.

These alliances follow regional or national-level work streams facilitating improvements towards policy and practices across 2 thematic areas:

1. Customary Tenure
2. Responsible Agricultural Investment

Presentation of results during the Lao Customary Tenure Reflection Workshop in Xieng Khouang Province. Person presenting is Mr. Bounyadeth Phouangmala, Country Representative of RECOFTC-The Center for People and Forests in Laos. Photos: © GIZ/Bart Verweij

In most cases, influencing policy will focus on improving laws, implementation decrees and regulatory mechanisms. In cases where there is a disconnect between policy and effective implementation in the field, practice influencing will focus on improving the effective implementation of the policy at the local administration level and strengthening of communities so that they know their rights and know how to defend them. Additionally, Land Rights Awareness and Land Conflict Transformation are cross-cutting thematic areas.

Impact

The second phase of the project began in April 2019 and is building upon the results of the first stage. The first year of MRLG-2 was used to set up the program and to form the ten respective alliances in the four CLMV countries.

Overall project implementation remains on schedule and 8 of the 10 workstreams have submitted their “Strategic Work Plans” (SWP) and received endorsement of the Project Steering Committee meaning that contracting and field implementation on the pilot sites already started.

Each workstream aims primarily at concrete policy and practice changes that result from the political advocacy measures. The workstreams will track their activities in terms of political advocacy and a contribution analysis will be conducted, highlighting how those activities contributed towards an overall policy change.

The initial results of the customary tenure workstreams, regarding the two dimensions of improved policies and



Small-holder farming activities in Xieng Khouang Province.
Photos: © GIZ/Bart Verweij

practices, are piloting different modalities of securing customary tenure, and collecting lessons-learned from those pilots for policy recommendations. The piloting of improved practices will result in a sizeable number of anticipated direct beneficiaries with improved livelihoods through improved land and forestry rights for around 44,000 smallholders (22,500 Men and 21,500 Women, with 55% of the beneficiaries belonging to ethnic minorities).

MRLG will continue to produce policy analyses, focus on strategic development and knowledge management in order to achieve its key results.

The production of evidence-based policy recommendations for policy decision makers and lessons learned products will be consolidated and disseminated to target audiences throughout the duration of the project.

Gender and land management

The MRLG program ensures that funded projects and activities specifically target vulnerable groups. A crucial element in securing land tenure for small-scale farmers and ethnic minorities in this region is to ensure that women have secure and equitable rights to land.

Research has shown that there is a strong correlation between improving women’s land rights and reducing poverty. Despite this, women often face discrimination in both traditional and formal land tenure systems.

In response to this situation, most of the activities currently funded by the program are targeted at poor and vulnerable groups, including women.

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Improved Land Management in the Mekong Region
House No. 179, Unit 15,
Sithan Neua Village, Sikhottabong District,
Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR
T: +856 21 316 570
www.giz.de/laos (EN); www.giz.de/laos-la (LA)

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Text Dr. Thomas Taraschewski, Carsten Gloeckner
Contact person Dr. Thomas Taraschewski
(thomas.taraschewski@giz.de)

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On behalf of Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)