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Securing Land Rights in Forest Areas in Lao PDR

Land Management and Decentralised Planning 4 (LMDP 4)

Context

Laos faces significant challenges related to land and forest rights. Currently, over 3,000 rural communities live in state-owned forests without formal documentation of their land use rights. This lack of recognition makes them vulnerable to land grabs and disputes, especially as the country experiences growing demand for natural resources. Additionally, the absence of clear land tenure systems weakens forest management, contributing to deforestation, biodiversity loss, and increased threats to local livelihoods.

In response, from 2015 to 2024, the Land Management and Decentralised Planning (LMDP) project has collaborated with government and development partners to enhance land management and administration in Laos. Starting in 2025, the current project phase focuses on securing land rights for smallholder farmers and forest users while also protecting forests and biodiversity. This is achieved through integrated land management that protects peoples' land rights as well as the environment. Meanwhile, the project seeks to improve the legal framework for land tenure security and enhance administrative decision-making in the land and forest sector through utilisation of digital Land Information Systems.



Project Title	Land Management and Decentralised Planning 4 (LMDP 4)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
Project regions	Xayaboury, Houaphan (Provincial) and Vientiane Capital (National)
Leading executing agency	Ministry of Finance (MOF) and Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE)
Duration	January 2025 – December 2027

Objective

LMDP 4 secures land rights for smallholder farmers and forest users while protecting forests and biodiversity through integrated land management and improved legal frameworks as well as digital land systems.

Approach

Building on the achievements of previous phases, the project has three main outputs:

- Facilitating the implementation of an integrated land management approach:** The project supports efforts to protect land rights, forests, and biodiversity in Sayabouri and Houaphan provinces, while promoting responsible land use among villagers and government officials.
- Improving the legal framework for land rights in forest areas:** Special attention is given to women's land rights and the involvement of civil society organisations in policy and legal discussions through multi-stakeholder dialogues and sector coordination.
- Advancing digital land information systems:** The project improves tools such as the Land Use Information System (LUIS) and the digital cadastre LaoLandReg to promote informed decision-making in land and forest administration.

Impact

The following results were achieved from the project's first to third phase:

- With support from the LMDP project and other development partners, the National Assembly adopted a Resolution in 2024 to officially recognise land rights in forest areas. This decision strengthens land security for over 227,000 households living in these regions.
- Since 2015, a total of 27,317 land parcels have been registered, with 22,923 land titles issued. Notably, 70% of private land parcels are registered in the name of women only or married couples. In December 2024, for the first time in the country's history, land titles were issued to the residents of a community located in a forest area in Houaphanh Province.
- As part of the LMDP project, participatory land use planning was conducted in 102 communities. Through this process, over 78,000 villagers took part in planning efforts and gained awareness of sustainable land use within their communities.
- LMDP successfully developed the digital cadastral system, LaoLandReg, which was recognised by the Lao government as the official database for land rights. The system was introduced nationwide and continued upscaling is supported by the World Bank and KfW to further strengthen land management across the country.
- In 2024, the interministerial Land Use Information System (LUIS) was officially recognised as the national database for spatial planning in Laos. It includes spatial plans for all provinces and more than 850 communities, supporting data-driven and sustainable land management.



Khmu ethnic women hold their land titles after successfully securing them.

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- Since 2020, a total of 476 government officials, including 65 women, have been trained in land management procedures and tools. To further support this effort, the LMDP project trained 89 multipliers at the national level, who now serve as trainers and share their expertise with others.

Gender and Environmental and Social Management

In rural areas of Laos, particularly women face structural disadvantages when it comes to access to land and forest resources.

In previous phases, the project cooperated with government partners to produce several tools improving land use and land governance in Laos. During the piloting and implementation in the target provinces, the project involved rural communities, including women and ethnic groups, in all planning activities and decision-making processes.

In this phase, the project prioritises equal access to land rights and benefits at every stage of implementation, ensuring inclusivity for all, regardless of gender or ethnicity. The gender perspective is integrated into all project activities, including land management in local communities, multi-stakeholder dialogues, sector coordination, and trainings on land information systems. This commitment supports the principle of "Leaving No One Behind" in the national development process. It aims to systematically empower government staff and partners to raise awareness and mainstream gender considerations in land and forest management.

About GIZ Laos

GIZ, as part of German Development Cooperation, has been active in Laos since 1993, mainly on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Currently, GIZ is implementing numerous projects in four core areas: a) rural development, b) conservation of nature and natural resource, c) sustainable economic development and d) good governance.

Please visit www.giz.de/laos for further information.

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GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.

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