

Elevating Gender Equality Initiatives in Lao PDR: Advancing through the Continuation of the Emission Reductions Programme

Climate Protection through Avoided Deforestation / Implementation of the Lao PDR Emission Reductions Programme Through Improved Governance and Sustainable Forest Landscape Management
Laos, GGI

Context

In the face of intricate environmental and socio-economic challenges, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), situated in Southeast Asia, grapples with the multifaceted impacts of diminishing forest cover and climate change. This report sheds light on how the forest conservation project “**Climate Protection Through Avoided Deforestation (CliPAD)**” strategically addresses the intricate intersection of these challenges and their effects on gender equality within the region.

As a landlocked and Least Developed Country, **Lao PDR** has undergone a significant **reduction in forest cover**, declining from 70% in the 1960s to 40% in 2023. These forests, crucial beyond their ecological significance, play a pivotal role in the nation's economy and the livelihoods of its population, particularly in impoverished rural communities. Within this vulnerability, women, the impoverished, and geographically remote communities emerge as the most susceptible segments.

Shifting focus to the socio-economic landscape, Lao PDR holds a **Human Development Index (HDI)** value of 0.607 in 2021, placing it in the medium human development category at 140 out of 189 countries. The **Gender Inequality Index (GII)** value of 0.463 in 2021 positions Lao PDR at 120 out of 162 countries, underscoring stark gender disparities in societal fabric.

In response, Lao PDR has proactively integrated **national policies for gender equality** and the elimination of violence against women and children into provincial, district, and sectoral plans.

Project Overview

Since May 2019, the collaborative efforts between the GIZ CliPAD Project and the Government of Lao PDR, have been dedicated to the execution of the “**Implementation of the Lao PDR Emission Reductions Programme Through Improved Governance and Sustainable Forest Landscape Management,**” referred to as the CliPAD/I-GFLL project. Funding for this initiative is sourced from the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and various co-funding partners.

The project's fundamental objective is to **reduce emissions resulting from land use, deforestation,**

and forest degradation through the implementation of sustainable forest management practices. Prioritizing the preservation and improvement of forest carbon stocks, the project strategically implements Provincial REDD+ Action Plans across six northern provinces of Lao PDR, aiming to achieve a mitigation of 11.7 million tons of CO₂ equivalent during the seven-year implementation period from 2019 to 2026.



Here, a woman is seen helping villagers with firebreak preparation in the project area, showcasing her dedication to protecting and preserving the forest.

Starting in 2023 and extending through 2026, the **project's second phase (Project 2) has broadened its target area**, more than doubling the total number of direct beneficiaries from 120,000 individuals in the initial phase (Project 1) to 273,700. Emphasizing a commitment to gender equality, this expansion benefits 136,850 men and 136,850 women, constituting 3.8% of the national population. This strategic expansion aligns with the project's dedication to achieving a broader impact and fostering gender inclusivity.

Promoting Gender Equality of the CliPAD/I-GFLL Project

The CliPAD/I-GFLL Project, working closely with government bodies such as the Department of Forestry and the Environment Protection Fund Office (EPF), is **committed to promoting gender equality in collaboration with partners and**

aligning with GCF and GIZ gender policies. Output 1, with a specific focus on Activity 1.7, explicitly highlights “Knowledge management, FPIC, safeguard, and gender,” underscoring the project’s recognition of the significance of gender equality. The project also draws guidance from Lao PDR’s legal framework on gender equality, which not only sets the tone but also establishes procedural benchmarks for advancing gender equality within its scope.



Women at the village level are involved during the implementation of project activities. The photo depicts women coming together to register as participants for a meeting, eager to receive information about the project.

To ensure a gender-sensitive implementation at the local level and meet GCF and GIZ standards, the project conducts a comprehensive **Gender Assessment during the development of Funding Proposals for both Project 1 and Project 2.** This analysis provides a nuanced overview of gender equality in Laos, covering direct and indirect factors impacting program implementation. The results and recommendations directly inform the project’s objectives, indicators, methodological approach, and results monitoring system.

Notably, there is a deliberate **focus on observing and analyzing the active engagement of women in various capacities,** including law enforcement, participation in land and forest management committees, and involvement in patrolling groups at the village level. This scrutiny sheds light on the Project’s discernible impact in contributing to an enhanced comprehension of gender roles within the community.

Complementing the Gender Assessment, the **Gender Action Plan (GAP)** serves as the **operational guide for integrating gender perspectives throughout the Project.** The GAP ensures effective gender mainstreaming, minimizes social, gender-related, and climate-related risks, and aligns with GCF’s “Updated Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan 2020-2023” and the “Revised

Policy on the Prevention and Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse, and Sexual Harassment (SEAH)”. SEAH was formally introduced with the implementation of Project 2.

Beyond the specific activities outlined in the GAP, **the project systematically implements broader measures in alignment with the GIZ Gender Strategy.** This encompasses the establishment of a Results-based Monitoring System (RBM), wherein the program meticulously documents both positive and negative effects of its activities on both genders. Additionally, the program ensures the use of gender-inclusive language in all documentation, considers gender competencies in the team hiring process, and adheres to the comprehensive guidelines set forth by the GIZ gender policy. Importantly, the GAP builds upon lessons learned from Project 1, reflecting a commitment to continuous improvement.

The introduction of the **Ethnic Groups Development Plan (EGDP)** in Project 2 recognizes the importance of engaging indigenous peoples in climate change policies. Aligned with UNFCCC agreements, the EGDP safeguards involve free, prior, and informed consultations, community support, and a gender-inclusive framework, emphasizing the unique concerns of ethnic women, youth, and children, aiming to foster further advancements in gender equality within our project.



Villagers from Sayaboury province are engaged in conducting a basic forest inventory, showcasing their collaborative efforts.

Promoting Gender Equality together with the Lao Government

The Government of Lao PDR actively promotes gender equality, periodically formulating five-year strategies to advance women and foster gender equality. Initiatives such as the five-year Action Plan (2020-2025) and the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2016–2025) align with the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, focusing on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls.

Lao PDR also has legal frameworks to protect women and children from abuse and harassment and it is a party to the ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) (1981) and has adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

As a result of the **extensive collaboration between the Project and the Lao Government**, specifically with the Department of Forestry and the EPF, it is imperative for the project to **prioritize adherence to the government's gender plans and frameworks**, ensuring their seamless implementation. Throughout the Program's implementation, support was provided to the EPF in developing a Gender Strategy to facilitate the upgrade and harmonization of key policies and Project Operational Manuals (POM) of the EPF to meet international donors' standards, including the GCF Gender Guidelines, which were integrated throughout the program cycle.

Promotion of Gender Equality at a Local and National Level

Ensuring gender equality at both local and national levels requires collective efforts from all individuals involved in project implementation, regardless of gender. In Project 1, and now in Project 2, **close collaboration with the Lao Women's Union (LWU)** played a pivotal role in effectively engaging women.

Collaborating with the LWU, **the Project integrates inclusive awareness-raising measures specifically designed for women**, acknowledging their role as bearers of traditional knowledge and catalysts for change within their families. These initiatives, delivered in various ethnic languages and adapted for lower education levels, had a broad impact. The LWU's extensive networks facilitated the inclusion of women's voices in public administration at all levels, addressing the need for diverse representation and participating in 75% of all village-level activities.

The Project prioritizes the empowerment of village women through proactive involvement in awareness-raising activities, consultations, training sessions, and dissemination meetings. Efforts are made to enhance women's participation and empower them to assume leadership roles in local structures. For instance, guidelines for the Village Land and Forest Management Committee (VLFM) mandate a quota of at least 30% female committee members. During Project 1, 65% of targeted village forest management committees consisted of at least 30% women. Since Project 2, the guidelines for the Village Forest and Agriculture Grant Management Committees (VFAG) also mandate a quota of at least 30% female committee members. Additionally,

training on business skills development for women is integrated to address participation gaps and barriers.



Two women, integral members of the VFAG Committee at the village level, are actively participating in financial training, highlighting their commitment to community empowerment.

The project aims for at least a 40% participation rate for women in community meetings. To achieve this, collaboration with the LWU is leveraged to involve and encourage women in project activities, including Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) or Promotion of Sustainable and Deforestation-free Agricultural Practices (PSAP). For instance, VFAG guidelines mandate the inclusion of at least one female member in fund management, ensuring gender representation in decision-making processes.



Women present the Village Forest Management Agreement (VilFoMA) during FPIC 3.

Furthermore, the project is committed to maintaining and improving its environmental and social management system throughout the project's preparation and implementation, facilitated by the **Environment and Social Management Plan (ESMP)**. The project set up the **Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM)** to ensure that all genders and all ethnic groups can raise their voices.

Gender and Result-Based Monitoring

The CliPAD/I-GFLL project has taken a comprehensive approach to integrate gender considerations into its operations. An international consultant has been assigned the task of reviewing both the Gender Action Plan and the project's Master Budget from a safeguard's perspective, with a specific focus on potential negative effects along gender lines for vulnerable populations in the project's target village clusters. To ensure systematic gender integration, gender is now a component within the ESMP Checklist, which is utilized by all project staff and implementing partners before the implementation of activities.

Implementing partners and project staff are provided with training materials that instruct them to assess whether the planned activities could have negative gender-based effects. **If potential negative gender impacts are identified, it is strongly recommended that activities and implementation plans be revised to mitigate these effects.**

Monitoring data indicates strong female participation in all village meetings and key intervention areas. For instance, monitoring information show, that there is strong participation of women in all village meetings and all key areas of intervention. In 2022, the participation rate of women in FPIC-related meetings reached 53%, in PSAP meetings 39%, in VFAG meetings 47% and in VFMP meetings 44%. The project prioritizes female-led households and young households in the selection of PSAP participants, with 7% of PSAP beneficiary households being led by women, approximately double the ratio of female-led households in rural Laos. Additionally, the project's implementors demonstrate gender balance, with 38% being female.



The woman standing in this picture symbolizes the community, posing questions about the project's activities to the FPIC district team during the implementation of FPIC 2.

To enhance monitoring and evaluation capabilities, a **Cloud Database** has been developed by the consultant, following an integrated approach. This database not only collects M&E-related data but also incorporates ESMP and Gender GAP-related information and checklists. **It includes systematic gender disaggregation of data to track women's participation and related gender issues,** ensuring timely identification and resolution to further promote gender equality through improved monitoring.

Additionally, the project has assigned a specific **gender focal point** who works closely with the international safeguard and gender consultant from CliPAD/I-GFLL. This collaboration ensures continuous monitoring and offers guidance on gender-related matters throughout all project activities.

Conclusion

In essence, **the CliPAD/I-GFLL project in the Lao PDR demonstrates a comprehensive approach in addressing deforestation, climate change, and gender inequality.** The project's strategic integration of gender considerations aligns with national policies, evident in collaboration with government bodies, gender assessments, and inclusive activities showcasing a commitment to gender mainstreaming. Collaboration with the LWU and the incorporation of indigenous perspectives enhance its impact, while rigorous gender-sensitive monitoring, facilitated by a dedicated gender focal point and a Cloud Database, ensures accountability and continuous improvement.

The key success factors for gender equality in the CliPAD/I-GFLL project are evident. A clear **gender action plan, effective cooperation with partners, and transparent communication** emerge as crucial lessons learned. These factors contribute to the project's success in fostering gender equality, reflecting a pragmatic and impactful approach to addressing the intricate challenges faced by vulnerable communities in the region.

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