

Integrated Rural Development in Poverty Regions of Laos (NU-IRDP)

Gender

1. Content and Goal

“Integrated Rural Development” and “participatory” local processes obviously require *all* people to take part. In reality, however, it is challenging to ensure equal participation, especially of women. Local women tend not to join development activities. . Either they do not participate at all, or they participate more or less passively. The same applies for the quality of their contribution. Next to the gender of a person, the economic status, the ethnicity, literacy, the health condition, the family condition, or other socio-economic factors may hinder a person from actively getting involved in community affairs. Some of these constraints to participation were also observed specifically in our programme activities “Land Use Planning” (LUP), “Land Registration” (LR), and “Village/Kumban Development Planning” (VDP/KDP).

It therefore is our task and challenge to improve the overall participation of disadvantaged groups during local planning and implementation activities, with a special focus on women.

2. Approach, method, scale

From the start of our programme activities the *quantitative* participation of women in LUP and VDP/KDP was intended, promoted and monitored. This is to ensure that the needs of women are equally reflected in the plans. But since mere “presence” in the planning events of course does not suffice, different strategies were formulated and implemented to boost women`s participation, i.e. contributions and benefits:

- Promote the inclusion of gender/participation aspects into upcoming Government strategies such as the Uplands Development Strategy.
- Promote attitude changes and motivate Government staff to actively promote women`s participation both in Government`s technical teams as well as in the villages. And to support these efforts to sensitize staff about gender aspects; e.g. by providing a “Gender toolkit”
- Include Gender into agendas and guidelines, e.g., draft a guideline for Local Development Planning with participation-quality criteria
- Regularly discuss gender aspects with the NU-IRDP advisors team and also with Government partners in order to further develop our support concepts and activities.

To follow up on the progresses of these approaches, gender-sensitive monitoring is applied wherever possible and meaningful, e.g. with the assessment of participation quality.

Next steps will include

- the identification of *local translators* to overcome the language divides between different ethnic groups, in particular women with little formal education and exposure to the outside world;
- a national *workshop* to discuss challenges of local participation and possibilities for improvement
- development of specific training materials and information for multipliers
- Evaluation of the quality of participation in programme activities through an independent study for further recommendations.

3. Impacts

Gender and participation aspects are increasingly included into strategies on the national level (Uplands Development Strategy draft, 5-year-Rural Development Plan, 7th NSEDP, NU DP), but still need more effective strategies. The awareness of the issue is increasing: Planning processes in the villages and on Kumban level proved (once again) to all stakeholders that local participation is a big challenge, but Government partners explicitly have committed to taking on this challenge.

Gender aspects are explicitly reflected in the NU DP as well as NU-IRDP logframe and indicators. The programme's monitoring of actual participation of women and men on local level has increased the awareness and knowledge about progresses and deficits in attitudes, thinking, and action. The main challenge for improving participation is where several constraining factors go together: poverty, gender, ethnicity.

During the drafting of the Participatory Planning Manual (PPM) for VDP/KDP the integration of gender aspects and practical tools for improved participation was an intensely discussed issue and learning process. It now found its way into the published manual. Internal NU-IRDP team workshops on issues of gender in our support activities emphasize that gender always has to be considered. The need for real overall participation in planning and development activities is continuously raised as a topic. The whole team strives for constant improvement through communication, awareness raising and coaching.