

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

Land Use Planning

1. Content and Goal

Increasing pressure on land resources through foreign and local investments, the resettlement of very remote villages and a growing population, as well as partially outdated local knowledge of agricultural production, requires strategic management of land and natural resources. Land Use Planning is a tool to support better land management, while ensuring the recognition of user rights by the local authorities. Intensive participation of the local population, in particular of women and other disadvantaged groups, is promoted. Aims of Land Use Planning in the Northern Uplands are:

- to raise awareness of land related issues,
- to increase the identification of the villagers with their natural resources and environment,
- to help them to recognise and realise potentials and to counter constraint,
- to formalize a negotiated division of their land into clearly defined land-use zones, considering immediate and future needs of the people, development interests and the needs for nature preservation.

2. Approach, method, scale

The programme trains district government personnel, who conduct Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP) in selected villages. Provincial government personnel are trained to provide backstopping support and monitor the implementation, while technicians from the ministries in Vientiane are trained as master-trainers to allow multiplication of the approach.

In each of the participating villages a land management committee is founded to represent the villagers throughout the PLUP-activity of approximately 14 days and to later follow up on the decisions made. Generally, the committee presently consists of mostly men, who are holding key representative functions in the village (i.e. of the village forestry unit, village land unit, village security) and only one woman, representing the Lao Woman's Union. This is quite unsatisfactory and efforts are being made to increase the number of women in the committee to strengthen a representation of the women's interests. The village activity includes the collection of socio-economic data which serves as a basis for a joint problem analysis, the creation of a map of current land use, the planning and drafting of a map for future zoning and so called village action agreements, which guide the management of land. All planning documents and maps are kept in the office of the village head and the responsible district offices.

Until the end of 2013, the programme will have supported land use planning in over 130 villages. It is aiming to expand coverage to some 200 more villages by the end of 2015.

In each of the 9 selected districts at least 6 technicians are trained to support Land Use Planning by using tools such as GPS-devices and Geo Information Systems and databases, to digitize and

store the collected information and produce high quality digital maps. Until now the programme has qualified more than 70 persons, i.e. technical staff of the districts and provinces and trainers from the Ministries in Vientiane.

3. Impacts

Farmers from participating villages showed an increased awareness of their rights and obligations regarding the use of land, an understanding of the importance of negotiating land uses among concerned stakeholders, and an understanding of the need to develop land resources in a sustainable manner.

Evidence suggests that immediate impacts of land use planning are certain improvements of land management with the villages, such as the introduction of higher valued crops, the fencing of animal grazing areas to avoid destruction of crops. It is also evident that demarcated boundaries are now enforced and misuse of land sanctioned.

It is expected that upcoming agriculture development activities, including improved livestock raising, fisheries, gardening, forestry and gathering activities, will be based on these land use plans. The plans help villagers themselves to get organized in a more effective way. The plans also help the Government to effectively provide support services and to guarantee the provision of common goods such as watershed management, biodiversity and natural resource protection, social justice and cohesion.