

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

Local Governance and Development Planning

1. Content and Goal

The centralized nature of governance and public administration in Laos has kept much needed services and programs of government distant from rural populations. Limited participation of people in governance and planning hampers the effectiveness of programs in addressing poverty and the real needs and priorities of the rural population, especially those of marginalized and/or disadvantaged and socially excluded groups like women and ethnic minorities. It therefore is a main objective to improve the process, quality and ownership of local development. Local plans should genuinely reflect the real, expressed needs and aspirations of the local population as well as to provide clear and realistic pathways to equitable and sustainable development in rural areas.

The local development plans are used in decision-making by local authorities, public sector agencies, development partners and the private sector, which provide the impetus and channel investment resources necessary to support rural development.

2. Approach, Method & Scale

Interventions at the central or national level seek to establish and operationalize a planning system that is transparent, inclusive and integrated. A Participatory Planning Manual (PPM) serves as guide on how to conduct local development planning activities in the villages. District Facilitation Teams (DFT) are orientated and trained on facilitation work in village planning events. Technical Sector staff is responsible to provide technical inputs to the village planners for better and informed decision-making. Villagers and village leaders participate actively in the planning events. Women and minorities, including ethnic groups are provided ample opportunities to express their ideas, their perspectives valued and joint decisions respected.

Results of village planning are systematically documented and presented to kumban and district authorities. It is expected that they are reviewed and considered for inclusion into district Public Investment Plans (PIP) which essentially provide funding for prioritized village schemes or projects.

A monitoring and evaluation system with a database application is being developed to assess and report on the status of the village development plans and monitor the results of implementation. Aggregated data from all the villages are collated, analysed and presented to concerned government authorities and others for use in higher or macro level development planning and strategic programming.

3. Impacts

The Participatory Planning Manual was finalized and approved by the Lao government. For all “NUDP-villages” a total of 229 village development plans were completed with the participation of 19,878 villagers, 8,914 or 45% of whom are women. More than 80 district level government personnel from nine districts were mobilized and capacitated to facilitate and technical backstop village planning activities. Provincial and central government personnel from the National

Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (NCRDPE) and the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) provided overall supervision and management of the activities. As a result, more than 4500 village schemes were identified, of which 1,271 (28%) are in agriculture, 937 (21%) are in health, 910 (20%) in education, 798 (18%) in public works & transport, and 252 (6%) in commerce & trade sector. District authorities responded positively to the local development plans, which has resulted in a substantial number of village priority schemes funded and implemented (assessment still on-going).

Village development plans are increasingly considered by district and province authorities, and some non-state actors - as a key input to district public investment programming, budget preparation, and scheme identification. The value of participatory village planning is also increasingly recognized by line departments allowing them to focus their activities in such a way that complementarities of sectoral interventions are ensured.

In the future, in particular the combination of village development plans with land use plans will help to better safeguard peoples` rights to use their land and natural resources and to secure their livelihoods.