



Project Information Document/ Identification/Concept Stage (PID)

Concept Stage | Date Prepared/Updated: 23-Jun-2020 | Report No: PIDC185666



BASIC INFORMATION

A. Basic Project Data

Project ID	Parent Project ID (if any)	Environmental and Social Risk Classification	Project Name
P170640		Moderate	Public Information and Awareness Services for Vulnerable Communities in Lao PDR
Region	Country	Date PID Prepared	Estimated Date of Approval
EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC	Lao People's Democratic Republic	23-Jun-2020	
Financing Instrument	Borrower(s)	Implementing Agency	
Investment Project Financing	Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation	Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation	

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PROJECT FINANCING DATA (US\$, Millions)

SUMMARY

Total Project Cost	2.50
Total Financing	2.50
Financing Gap	0.00

DETAILS

Non-World Bank Group Financing

Trust Funds	2.50
Japan Social Development Fund	2.50

B. Introduction and Context

Country Context

With two thirds of its population living in rural areas, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is an agrarian economy with a low population density that is classified as a lower-middle income country. Since 2000, the country has experienced an average economic growth rate of 8 percent, although this has tapered in recent years, with a 7.4 percent growth rate in 2015 and a 7 percent rate in 2016. Growth in the mid-2000s was primarily driven by the mining sector; however, its contribution to growth has decreased due to the



decline in prices as well as a weak regulatory environment. In more recent years, hydropower projects, largely expected to meet energy demands in neighbouring countries, are the main sources of growth, with Lao PDR increasing installed capacity ten-fold between 2000 and 2016 to above 6,000 megawatts, mostly through engagements with national and international, private-sector actors.

Economic growth has also helped to lower the rate of extreme poverty in Lao PDR. The country met its Millennium Development Goal of reducing extreme poverty to below 24 percent by 2015 and living conditions have improved significantly. Estimates from the most recent Laos Expenditure and Consumption Survey (LECS 5) show that the poverty rate – based on the national poverty line – declined from 34 percent in 2002-03 to 23 percent in 2012-13 (around 1.5 million people). Measuring the international comparable poverty line of US\$1.90, poverty declined from 24 percent in 2002-03 to 15 percent in 2012-13. Reaching the World Bank goal of reducing extreme poverty to less than 3 percent would mean reducing the number of poor people in Lao PDR by more than 800,000.

However, the economic growth has not been inclusive and there are large differences between regions and socio-economic groups. At 29 percent, the poverty line in rural areas was significantly higher than the 10 percent in urban areas, with the gap widening between 2007-08 and 2012-13. Rural areas accounted for 87 percent of the poor in 2012-13, compared to 80 percent five years earlier. Poverty is also concentrated in upland areas and among ethnic communities whose primary livelihoods depend on subsistence farming. Poverty in rural areas and the environment are also linked due to the vulnerability of the poor to faster industrial growth without shared benefits as well as the impact of climate change. The lack of proper preventative measures by developers as well as from smaller-scale activities result in downstream effects from mining and commercial agriculture. The persistence of informal expropriation of natural resources in rural areas is, in part, linked to minimum opportunities for alternative livelihoods, but also to the absence of a strong governance system that can protect the interests of the poor against the interests of proponents of large-scale development projects.

As a part of the Government of Lao PDR's (GoL) process of building opportunities for socio-economic development in Lao PDR, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) is currently implementing multiple policies to strengthen its natural resource management capabilities. To support this process, the World Bank is preparing the Enhancing Systematic Land Registration Project (P169669) to improve and modernize management of natural resources and enhanced livelihood of those in rural communities, among others. MoNRE is also interested in leveraging land registration to address poverty, inequality and other forms of vulnerability.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

Sustainable management of natural resources is crucial for the development of Lao PDR and livelihoods of residents of rural areas. However, this also comes with multiple challenges that affect livelihoods of the socio-economically vulnerable and geographically isolated. These include concessions, contract farming, impacts on forest use rights and watershed rights (e.g. loss of fisheries, water pollution). In this regard, one



of the major challenges is a lack of awareness by local communities and the public of their basic rights, including information on how to work with existing government systems to access services, claim rights and access grievance mechanisms. It is likely that without improved sustainable management of natural resources, the negative social and environmental costs could outweigh the economic benefits of their exploitation. Consequently, improved governance, especially increased levels of voice and accountability, enhanced access to legal services and a strengthened rule of law become critical.

Public awareness levels about basic rights are low in Lao PDR, particularly in rural areas. While the Constitution enshrines political, economic, social and cultural rights, their effective enforcement is limited. The flow of information to rural areas is low but civil society organizations (CSOs) have become active in several sectors. For ethnic communities and the poor, who mainly reside in rural areas, their inability to speak Lao is negatively affecting their meaningful access to information and legal services, an issue that was raised as a grave concern by the UN Special Rapporteur for extreme poverty and human rights during his March 2019 visit to Lao PDR. Furthermore, Lao PDR is estimated to have a higher number of individuals with disabilities due to existence of at least 80 million bombs/Unexploded Ordnance (UXOs) and Agent Orange contaminations in rural areas. This negatively affects these vulnerable individuals' ability to protect their basic rights and the opportunity to fully utilize potential benefits and opportunities that will arise as a result of state-led natural resource management.

There remains a lack of capacity in government institutions to provide necessary information and awareness to citizens in general, and in particular to poor, vulnerable persons in rural areas. In response, the GoL has launched multiple efforts to improve governance including strengthening public administration capacity, decentralization of service deliveries, strengthened accountability and an increased number of stakeholder engagements. MoNRE has shown interest in teaming with CSOs to help build capacity and improve delivery of services. The efforts to improve public's legal awareness engagements include the Ministry of Justice's effort to establish legal aid offices in all Districts and the incorporation of the Lao Front for National Construction in information and awareness activities at the village level.

In this context, the proposed JSDF grant seeks to support CSOs in jointly designing and implementing public information, awareness and counselling services, addressing the information gap among poor communities. The grant will support pilot activities in poor rural areas that incorporate relevant innovations, such as training and utilizing local community members to deliver and evaluate services and incorporating modern technologies to deliver services in remote areas. In line with the JSDF's primary objectives, the grant will seek to enhance bottom-up approaches, provide services to those most vulnerable, involve affected communities in the design and implementation of activities, and strengthen local stakeholder cooperation. The pilots will also build capacity of CSOs and poor communities to hold government accountable for delivery of basic services and promote agency of community members.



Relationship to CPF

The CPF is strongly oriented towards to and has mainstreamed inclusion and empowerment, which align with one of the five priorities of the World Bank Group East -Asia and Pacific Strategy. The CPF identifies unequal access to social services as one of the challenges to be overcome, and thus supports *Lasting Accessible Opportunities for All*, which is at the core of this JSDF grant's objective to strengthen legal education and accesses to legal services of those most vulnerable. The grant will be closely aligned with the CPF's cross-cutting theme of strengthening institutions to establish a rules-based environment, which is also aligned with cross-cutting Output 1 of the GoL's Eighth National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) that emphasizes enhancing the effectiveness of public governance and administration. The grant will also contribute to the CPF's Focus Area 3: Protecting the Environment via Objective 3.1: Promoting environmental protection and sustainable natural resources management. It will help to strengthen the legal education and accesses to legal services of vulnerable communities in rural areas, particularly against encroachments by large development projects, and the illegal exploitation of natural resources, which will help grant beneficiaries to protect and strengthen their livelihoods.

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C. Project Development Objective(s)

Proposed Development Objective(s)

The development objective is to build the capacity of CSOs and representatives of poor communities to deliver public information, awareness and counseling services to vulnerable persons.

Key Results

The proposed key results indicators for the grant are:

- Number of poor and vulnerable community members informed about basic legal rights and enforcement mechanisms (of which 70% are women and minorities) (15,000 people);
- Number of mass organization staff and local government officials trained on basic legal rights (of which 70% are women and minorities) (400 people);
- Increased percentage of vulnerable community members with knowledge of basic legal rights and how to enforce them (of which at least 50% are women) (70%).
- Increased percentage of mass organization staff and local government officials with knowledge of basic legal rights and how to provide necessary services (of which at least 50% are women) (70%)

Note: Baseline data will be provided at Appraisal.

D. Preliminary Description



Activities/Components

The grant will provide direct financing to Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation (from here onwards addressed as Helvetas), a Swiss international NGO, and will be implemented in close collaboration with the Land Information Working Group (LIWG), an umbrella working group of local and international CSOs that is part of the International NGO Network (INN) in Laos, and its members. Helvetas and LIWG will work with the Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC) and Lao Women’s Union (LWU), as well as relevant local authorities, with guidance and consultations from MoNRE and other relevant ministries. The grant will complement a Bank Investment Project Financing (IPF), the Lao PDR Enhancing Systematic Land Registration Project (US\$25 million), by strengthening information awareness on existing basic rights related to natural resources. However, the grant takes a step further to include other essential basic legal rights on social issues such as gender and disability as per the Laotian legal framework as part of its overall effort to enhance grassroots information service delivery and mechanisms.

Component 1: Public Information and Awareness Services

This component will support pilot activities by LIWG members in collaboration with MoNRE and mass organizations’ local branches to improve the quality of public information and awareness activities. The project is expected to build capacities of the LIWG members to deliver support on public information and awareness related to natural resources and other basic legal rights on social issues. Activities will be initiated by CSOs and implemented in cooperation with local community members. User-friendly awareness and information tools will include e.g. village level information/awareness sessions, short video clips, radio talk shows etc. Activities are expected to include information awareness campaigns jointly run by LIWG members and representatives from mass organizations, social media campaigns, and participatory youth engagement outreach sessions targeting schools. The subject matter of the information and awareness campaigns will be based on contextual issues that are raised in general by local communities. Other innovations in the project may include mobilizing local community members to self-evaluate services where possible with the use of ICT.

Component 2: Counselling Services

Local counselling services will be set up to provide vulnerable persons or groups more personal advice on the exercise of rights and access to services. To this extend, volunteer paralegal advisors and VMC members will be trained side by side, to fill the gap in legal advisory services in remote areas with limited access to government services. Selected local community member will be trained on basic legal knowledge on natural resource rights and other rights related to social issues as village focal persons to provide information and advice to their own communities on a voluntary basis. Where appropriate, LIWG member organisations may partner with the district legal clinics under the MoJ and village representatives of the mass organisations to facilitate mediation for situations of conflict.

Component 3: Project Management, Monitoring and Evaluation

This component will provide capacity-building to Helvetas and LIWG for management of the project, including relevant training for staff, including for implementation of activities, general project management



such as financial management and procurement, and monitoring and evaluation. It will also cover i) development of all relevant assessments and audits required by the Environment and Social Framework and World Bank procurement and financial management rules and ii) all relevant monitoring and evaluation reports required by JSDF.

Using the data collected, evaluation guidelines will be jointly developed by Helvetas and the LIWG and in consultation with key stakeholders (beneficiary community members, CSOs and relevant government entities) prior to the first Interim Evaluation report that will be used to review and assess the overall progress of the grant activities. Evaluation reports will be issued along the following timeline:

- Interim Evaluation – 1st year
- Full Evaluation (as part of Mid-Term Review) – 2nd year
- Interim Evaluation – 3rd year
- Final Interim Evaluation – 4th year

Knowledge Dissemination of the outcomes and findings of the grant activities through various forms of media will also be delivered under this component. Every effort will be made to ensure that publications, training programs, seminars, workshops or ceremonial events financed under the JSDF, and all other materials used with respect to the proposed grant activities and JSDF, shall clearly indicate that the activities in question have benefitted directly from this funding source. JSDF’s logo will be displayed on all publications and at all events. In addition to the use of the logo, the Bank will take all appropriate measures to ensure that JSDF’s support receives local publicity.

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Environmental and Social Standards Relevance

E. Relevant Standards

ESS Standards		Relevance
ESS 1	Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts	Relevant
ESS 10	Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure	Relevant
ESS 2	Labor and Working Conditions	Relevant
ESS 3	Resource Efficiency and Pollution Prevention and Management	Not Currently Relevant
ESS 4	Community Health and Safety	Relevant
ESS 5	Land Acquisition, Restrictions on Land Use and Involuntary Resettlement	Not Currently Relevant
ESS 6	Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources	Not Currently Relevant
ESS 7	Indigenous Peoples/Sub-Saharan African Historically	Relevant



Underserved Traditional Local Communities

ESS 8	Cultural Heritage	Not Currently Relevant
ESS 9	Financial Intermediaries	Not Currently Relevant

Legal Operational Policies

Safeguard Policies	Triggered	Explanation (Optional)
Projects on International Waterways OP 7.50	No	Grant activities will not be implemented in international waterways.
Projects in Disputed Areas OP 7.60	No	Grant activities will not be implemented in disputed areas.

Summary of Screening of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts

The proposed grant is TA-type activities which will not fund any construction and physical investments. No adverse direct environmental impacts are foreseeable, and no physical footprint that could cause adverse direct impacts is envisaged. However, the legal empowerment services will target poor communities that include persons living in forest areas. Project will be implemented by CSO (Land Information Working Group (LIWG)), to pilot delivery of legal empowerment services which is a new system in Lao PDR. Inadequate services capacity and legal framework may allow existing unsustainable land management (SLM) practices to continue instead of utilizing the opportunity to promote SLM.

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